

AN ALGERIAN PRIMER :
MOULOUD FERAOUN'S LE FILS DU PAUVRE,
TRANSLATION COMMENTARY

by

LUCY R. MCNAIR

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
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Professor Vincent Crapanzano

January 19, 2011

Date

Chair of Examining Committee

Professor Andre Aciman

January 19, 2011

Date

Executive Officer

Professor Vincent Crapanzano

Professor Ammiel Alcalay

Professor Lucienne Serrano

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Advisor: Dr. Vincent Crapanzano

My 2005 translation of Mouloud Feraoun's Le Fils du pauvre, Menrad, instituteur kabyle, sought to correct an historical error by presenting this Algerian Francophone classic to an American audience for the first time since its publication in 1950. A central figure of the first generation of Algerian intellectuals to compellingly represent in fictional form the internal lives of native people during the era of French colonialism, Feraoun (1917-1962) embodied a moderate, humanist, culturally situated viewpoint that was ultimately sacrificed by all sides to the extremism and violence of decolonization. Choosing to work from the original edition, rather than the edition edited for French audiences on the eve of the Algerian revolution, my translation restores an entire section of the novel and offers a new glimpse of Feraoun's larger literary project.

The work presented here is dual in form: As a translation commentary, it seeks to evoke, trace and illuminate the wager of Feraoun's first autobiographical novel from its inception to its troubled reception and its continuing impact. As a translation journey, it offers an evocative meditation on the audacity of any writer to pass from silence to authorship and sketches out in a comparative framework the connections and disconnections between Algeria and America. I argue that we have not translated Feraoun because Feraoun's work mapped a territory whose political boundaries imploded, yet whose human parameters were and remain universal. Today, we have much to gain from listening to the astute, ironic and deeply humane interrogations of this Berber-Muslim voice.

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This project took shape over many years. What made it necessary was 9/11 and the stamina of Feraoun's voice. But without key encounters and the trust that evolved from them I would not have been able to listen to that voice.

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“literary tourism” with the humor and generosity I have come to expect of Algerians. From the owner of the Bar des Sports in Montreuil, France to my correspondent in Tizi Hibel to the members of the New York Amazigh community, Kabyles have offered me their contagious pride, their irony, their humanity. May they each know I am grateful.

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List of Abbreviations of Feraoun's Works

A	<u>L'anniversaire</u>
CM	<u>Les Chemins qui montent</u>
CR	<u>La Cité des Roses</u>
J	<u>Journal</u>
L	<u>Lettres à ses amis</u>
PMS	<u>The Poor Man's Son</u>
Si Mohand	<u>Les Poèmes de Si Mohand</u>
TS	<u>La Terre et le sang</u>

Chapter 1: Introduction

How does one write a book about a man one has never met, who comes from a place one has never been?

– Julija Sukys, Silence is Death

Hurry up and speak. You can see it will change nothing.

- Feraoun, L'anniversaire, 9¹

Imagine

Imagine a young schoolteacher sitting at his desk at the end of the day. He looks out over the empty chairs in his one-room school house towards the rugged dry land framed by the room's sole window. Piled next to him are school notebooks, waiting to be corrected. It is spring and he wonders again if this is the full extent of life's chances, all his father's absent years working in factories, his mother and sisters' sacrifices, his education, his arduous ascent from illiterate shepherd to educated elite, his passage from village to empire, and back, will amount to. He thinks of his teachers, those well-meaning idealists who stripped away layers of inferiority, fear and ignorance, who seemed like angels, miraculously free of prejudice. From day one, they had deemed him able to learn and think and even write in a language no member of his family spoke. He thinks of the others he went to school with, boys he shared facilities, exams, teachers with, the privileged ones. Among them a few stood out, the boys everyone envied and knew about in detail, the brilliant ones who would go far. He, of course, returned home. Where else would he have gone? As if his life mattered! He looks out now over the rows of chairs, and back at the pile of notebooks, the writing so laboriously constructed, so tenuously fluent. He had had the chance to learn to think and write with a liberty of spirit no one in his village could imagine. And now he is the teacher, the gardener of young minds, so many of whom will never have his chances. They will follow their fathers to distant factories and come back between stints to marry their cousins and bless the saints for the pittance of

¹ I have translated this and all subsequent quotes from Feraoun used in this commentary and see this as part of the process of working through the transposition of his literary work into our language world.

food the land will yield. If there was one thing he had learned from leaving home it was the power of the published word. "We shall work for others until we are old, and when our time comes, we shall die without a murmur and we shall say in the other world that we have suffered, we have wept, we have lived long years of bitterness. And God will take pity on us." (PMS 1) And the world will know Chekhov! They will know the human drama and dignity of those starving Russian peasants! Imagine the school teacher smiling to himself, telling himself: Why not? What is there to lose? If nothing else, it can be left for the children. He opens a drawer, takes out a new notebook. He folds the cover down with his palm. He begins to write.

The scene above is a very loose translation of the opening scene of the Algerian writer Mouloud Feraoun's first novel Le Fils du pauvre, Menrad, Kabyle Instituteur, which I translated and the University of Virginia Press published in 2005 and which this commentary hopes to bring alive to an American audience. Begun on school notebooks in rural, colonial Algeria in the spring of 1939, during a relatively hopeful period in Algeria yet just as the "storm" of the second great war in Europe was unfurling its force, Feraoun's novel was one of the first written by an educated Algerian to explore native society in a literary mode. As a creative exercise in cultural translation, it was something of a fluke. Written in French to fill a gap in the country's literary landscape, yet produced in a place cut off from the well-trodden and well-heeled paths of literary recognition during a time of racial and ethnic segregation, the book might easily have remained in a drawer or been passed down among Feraoun's offspring as a family artifact if it weren't for a secret ambition, a sense of desperation, and good timing. Due to these conflicting motivations and the welcome reception of many readers, who themselves did not see eye to eye, Feraoun's little book became a repository of Algerian memory and, as we shall see, of the hardship Algerians have faced in working through the conflicts of such memory.

The scene above is also a fiction. It is a liberty I have allowed myself to come closer to Feraoun, to bring him closer to us. For Feraoun's oeuvre is also about the

imagination, its power and its limits. Schooled in the colonial system and imbibed with the ideals of the French Republic, Feraoun was firstly the heir of an ancient, orally-transmitted culture and secondly a child of Islam's syncretic imprint on the cultural and philosophical landscape of North Africa. Although his French education was a powerful determinant on his identity, on how he lived and died, it is one of three poles of influence, of philosophical and social knowledge, which together mark out a kind of dramatic theater of contrasts and conflicts, but also of similarities, ones not often registered. In this context, the literary imagination is both a luxury and a last resort, a means of delaying compromising action and a way to rally the spirit in moments of despair. However humble or self-conscious it may have been appeared or appear today, for Feraoun, it represented a radical projection into a loaded landscape. The words of the Guyanese-British writer and essayist Wilson Harris, who is roughly of the same generation as Feraoun, are relevant:

With the mutilation and decline of the conquered tribe a new shaman or artist struggles to emerge who finds himself moving along the knife-edge of change. He has been, as it were, cross-fertilized by victor and victim and a powerful need arises to invoke the lost generations, in a new creative, visionary light. It is a task which is profoundly personal (and archetypal) and, therefore, accompanying an enormous potency for change – for vision into resources – runs the danger of self-enchantment or hubris.” (Harris 16-17)

In this first book, Feraoun simultaneously told a personal story and an archetypal one that resonated with readers across cultural, racial and class lines. Parallel to the protagonist's adventure, largely based on his own childhood, he presented readers with the character of the Kabyle writer, a narrator who struggles to emerge from the weight of rural, tribal-based tradition and urban, social oppression. To imagine how to write from such a position is part of reading Feraoun. But to imagine how Feraoun began to write, we must simultaneously imagine how an indigenous Muslim colonial subject takes up a pen and presumes to hold the attention of a cleaved society *and* how any unknown writer anywhere begins to walk along that “knife-edge of change.” Feraoun's biography and legacy has both informed and illustrates my understanding of this struggle. His evolving understanding of the place of fiction in human affairs and how he used literary imagination to chart a path through a period of traumatic upheaval, as well as how the

product of that imaginative work was received - read, misread, edited, misremembered, and rediscovered - is a key part of this commentary.

Lastly, this scene is an invitation, a "scene of first permission," to quote the poet Robert Duncan.² I invite you to begin to imagine Feraoun and his world with me, to bring your own readings, your own location to bear. The simplicity of the scene I have painted of Feraoun as a young writer is perhaps glaring, even suspicious; it might strike you as a moral tale more than a historically accurate or psychologically astute portrait. It might look biased or patronizing. Indeed, it is paired down to imperial binaries: privileged boys vs. poor ones; literate vs. illiterate adults, famous writers vs. faceless peasants. I call attention to the so-called oral-written dichotomy by using a quote Feraoun cited as call to arms. In the course of a page, a man changes, acts. Such techniques of reduction by which writers and storytellers elicit our attention and our projection into their imaginative worlds, though perhaps old-fashioned and of disrepute in an increasingly cynical global culture, remain quintessential tools of metaphoric measurement. They allow us to collapse our particularities, the endlessly complex cloth of everyday existences, into a symbolic coherence that can withstand the tumult of crossing between contexts. As I hope this commentary on Feraoun's short first novel will elucidate, literature begins as this gamble, a blind bet on the power of the imagination to grasp the forces at play in our world and shift our vision towards a wiser, kinder, fuller judgment of others and of ourselves. It is an idealistic perspective. But as such, it is not an escape from politics, rather a commitment to grappling with the memories and desires that motivate or obstruct action. For a novel to take root in the minds of people, it must call us to that inner work, reflecting us in our fears and our ambitions, our profound differences and our uncomfortable similarities, and yet still open onto ground we are willing to hold in common – unchartered perhaps, unmapped, but *imagined*.

² From "Often I am Permitted to Return to a Meadow." The Opening of the Field. New York: Grove Press, 1960.

Obstacles

If they have any heart, they should give up writing, because man is sacred, his life belongs to him alone: all who pretend to represent him disfigure or offend him, he requires neither statues nor images and even less discourses that claim to explain the statues and the images. If one nevertheless takes on this delicate task of writing, it should only be out of duty, and only with respect and fear, respect for his equal, fear of hurting him by disfiguring him; and out of hope most of all, the hope of understanding him, of making him understood and loved, to serve the common truth, to plead for the common condition; hope, in a word, to create a work of justice, measure and love.

- Feraoun, « Images algériennes d'Emmanuel Roblès » (A 67)

How does a writer define the parameters of a symbolic common ground? How large is it? How large should it be to travel and touch those who have never seen or experienced the physical and social landscape explored? What part of the surface of the common human ground in Kabylia, Algeria in 1948 – when Feraoun was putting the finishing touches on his first novel and imagining it venturing into the world - covers the same surface in Brooklyn, New York in 2010?

Obviously these are a translator's questions. How do we bring this book over? Yet they also lay very much at the heart of Feraoun's writing, of any writing that begins on the colonial-native "knife-edge of change," what we academics call postcolonial, what Feraoun called "a certain Algerian literature," and what many here in the States would call "minority" or simply "difficult." One technique to establish a common ground that can travel large distances – both international and inter-social - is found in the age-old game of "ring around of roses told," - to quote the poet Robert Duncan again -: a dance of innocence around what is not said but left to be inferred. Call it the ritual of omission. We leave out what would polarize us, distract us, overwhelm us with our differences and thus stop us from proceeding. We give just enough to connect, to bridge the vastness of perspectives with the trope of youth. We use the omissions operating in a school primer, for instance, to write something *like* a bildungsroman. Such mimetic omissions and

echoes can act like bait; as readers, we get excited about filling in the gaps. Thinking again of my introductory fiction, we might ask: Where is the schoolteacher? What time period are we talking about? What constitutes privilege there – race? Religious affiliation? Education? What exactly was going on back then? In such an endeavor, the fictional child can invite the child in the reader to own a common ignorance, to learn. Sometimes this, in and of itself, allows a voice to be heard across a divide.

Yet even as we raise these questions and try to answer them, making historical or cultural connections that offer a sense of panoramic restoration - and perhaps a sense of relief from the weight of ignorance, what Feraoun called the “grey cloth” hanging between people who find themselves on different sides of a divide - we slip across into other meditations: Is this text autobiographical or fictional? What part of this is ethnographic? What textual traditions are informing this work? Does this matter? Are the social or cultural discourses echoing in the text important in their specificity or rather the common, human drama? Here: the apparently universal desire to overcome adversity by going to school, gaining literacy, getting a decent job, and writing one's story? Haven't we all read this before? It sounds so American! So what is new about this one? How do we judge it? Is it even literary? Does it hold up to our expectation of a good read, a satisfying dramatic emersion? Or does the context, the cultural and historical particularity of this writer's world shape the novel - the psychological conflicts of the characters, the narrative structure, the style, the central drama, the overall message conveyed - to such a degree that we start to slow down, we pause, we feel ourselves losing confidence? Sometimes we just stop altogether. It's too “difficult.” When we stop reading, stop journeying towards a writer's imaginative world, especially one that is geographically, historically, culturally removed from our own, what obstacle have we met?

Such questions about why and how we read - or do not read - across cultural divides, and how writers contend with these difficulties through acts of omission - have been posed already in the context of the inception and the reception of Algerian literature and specifically the work of Feraoun and his literary heir, Tahar Djaout. In Autobiography and Independence, Debra Kelly notes :

Feraoun is clearly aware of the subtleties of the political dimension of a work of art that may function by omission. [...] There seems to be a belief that fiction can

bring about an understanding between people, because it works on the imagination, in ways that direct political intervention is unable to do. The power of culture, of cultural understanding, of a multi-faceted cultural memory, are the foundations on which Feraoun based his life-writing project." (Kelly 65)

In his essay "The Cartography of the Nation: Mouloud Feraoun's Le Fils du pauvre revisited" in Experimental Nations, a book devoted to the literary imagination of North African literature and its critical reception in the United States, Reda Bensmaia ponders:

Is [Feraoun's] writing black or neutral? Is it the writing of a schoolteacher or a good student? It seems, rather, to be a writing that offers a choice: to write neutrally is to let one's readers have leeway to form their own opinions, to provide a way of not forcing them into something." (Bensmaia 155-156)

In a chapter devoted to the work of Tahar Djaout, a Kabyle writer born a generation after Feraoun, Bensmaia argues that the writing:

demands a radically new position from the reader. We must still read, and read with caution, but with the clear stipulation that henceforth, "to read" no longer consists merely of searching for a signified hidden behind the words or fragments of narratives that have come from nowhere. Rather, to read is to undertake a voyage more like that of Tarkovsky's *Stalker* than like that of a tourist, even a tourist who appreciated Francophone literature." (Bensmaia 77)

Like Kelly and Bensmaia, I want to consider here a new kind of reading, informed both by Feraoun's text and the process of finding and translating it. Like Djaout, Feraoun invites us to reassess how we read, how we judge, how we ultimately draw the map of literariness and how this relates to how we draw the map of the world, of humanness, of what we hold in common.

Journey

Feraoun's invitation to remap the symbolic through an often ironic and self-conscious neutrality was initially made in a part of the French empire whose dominant European

minority had fiercely and violently resisted *métissage* or creolization between Christians, Muslims and Jews for over a hundred years. During much of that time, the French authorities played native groups off each other in an attempt to legitimize an increasingly racist, apartheid-structured society. The decade in which this first novel was written - 1939 to 1949 - marked a turning point in this history of obstruction to the social intermingling of different, yet interdependent spiritual and cultural heritages. It was the decade of the Holocaust and of the French collaboration in the extermination of Jewish citizens. As I have touched upon above, Feraoun's work, according to his own testimony, was driven by a fear of obliteration. As stated in several essays and letters, including the essay I've translated in the Appendix, "Algerian Literature," Feraoun felt summoned to present a creative testimony to a way of life that until the late 30s had persistently fought colonial oppression to remain to a large degree self-enclosed and self-generating, yet was now increasingly threatened by its vulnerable position "on the margin of a new century." From the Senatus Consultus decree of 1865 that allowed for the full-scale appropriation of tribal lands, to the poverty which forced the emigration of hundreds of thousands of Kabyle farmers into French factories, and then, during World War II, to their precipitous return to a Kabylia facing overcrowding and mass hunger, Feraoun and his family were heirs of a long experience with "progress" that seemed to be reaching a crucial turning point. It seemed possible that the life he knew as a child, the people who populated his memories and had taught him how to survive in an increasingly turbulent world, would disappear without a trace.

It is within this context that his book poses questions: How does a rural, traditional, orally-based culture survive in the 20th century? Is the fear of collective obliteration among minorities something universal? Is this just part of social change, of societal evolution? Will the culture just adapt as it has for millennia? Or does the modern world pose a new kind of threat to culture? What innocence does the child who sits in the school of imperial culture lose? If the eradication of hunger and its underlying causes demands that we change our culture - that we free ourselves from the tradition of our ancestors, that we emigrate or send our kids away to school to learn languages we cannot understand, that we accept American soldiers on our land as liberators from a "land of

wheat and clothes” - as Feraoun describes in this book - how do we shelter its wisdom, its strength? What force will allow our children and our memory to survive and thrive?

Feraoun’s four novels and four works of non-fiction have something to teach us about this process of cultural adaptation, of the resistance of human beings and their stunning evolution. Yet part of gaining this knowledge is accepting to go on a journey: to learn about this historical moment and the collective fears it unleashed from the perspective of indigenous Algerians brought up within Judeo-Islamic and Kabyle traditions. When we consider the concrete and psychological obstacles Feraoun faced in his attempt to write imaginatively about this period and reach audiences both inside and outside of his context, we begin to open new common ground. We can ask: What territory did Feraoun stake out? What obstacles did he encounter? Did he overcome them? What creative solutions did he find? And what obstacles remain between me and his world, between what I know of the human experience and what his words make of it?

An Algerian Memory

An encounter by another Algerian-born intellectual sheds further light on the tricky business of memory and obstacles in the context of colonial and post-colonial Algeria, and helps to frame a rereading of Feraoun.

In 1992, the philosopher Jacques Derrida was invited to give a talk in Baton Rouge, Louisiana at the invitation of the Martiniquan author and cultural theorist Edouard Glissant during a conference entitled "Echoes from Elsewhere/Renvois d'ailleurs." Together with his Moroccan peer Abdelkebir Khatibi, Derrida was asked to treat "problems of *francophonie* outside France." The result of this intervention was Le Monolinguisme de l'autre, a talk both personal and political, historical and philosophical, which centered on the primordial question of identity and Derrida's very intimate experience of the obstacles Francophone intellectuals encountered in their attempt to situate memory and historical truth in what we still seem to need to call “the language of the Other.” Born in Algiers to Sephardic Jewish parents in 1930, Derrida was prevented

from learning Arabic or Tamazight; his access to France and to French, his "only language," was likewise impeded by a geographical, cultural and political divide. Cut off from France by the sea and from French culture by his Jewish identity, he experienced a radical severing of his ties to the French colonial world when Algerian Jews were temporarily stripped of their French citizenship during World War II. Unlike their Muslim compatriots, Algerian Jews had been collectively naturalized in 1870 by the Crémieux decree, leading to an assimilated French-speaking community of Sephardic Jews with little ties to a Judaism uninfluenced by Christian, French culture. Derrida describes these "indigenous Jews" as "strangers to Jewish culture" suffering a "strangely bottomless alienation of the soul: a catastrophe; others will also say a paradoxical opportunity." (Derrida, Trans. 53) The juridical basis of this special status had far-reaching consequences, and equally so when abruptly reversed. In Le Monolinguisme de l'autre, this personal-historical experience of exclusion, or racism, a kind of identity free-fall, underscores Derrida's questioning of language, of who possesses it and why, of who is possessed by it and why. An unobstructed, personal use of French, which would permit him access to the identifications underlying a "pacified autobiography," was denied him:

"In what language does one write memoirs when there has been no authorized mother tongue? How does one utter a worthwhile "I recall" when it is necessary to invent both one's language and one's "I," to invent them *at the same time*, beyond this surging wave of [amnesia] [déferlement d'amnésie] that the *double interdict* has unleashed? (Derrida 57, Trans. 31)

It is within this "déferlement d'amnésie" that the Francophone intellectual must attempt to carve out a voice:

"Where then *are we*? Where do we find ourselves? With whom can we still *identify* in order to affirm our own identity and to tell ourselves our own history? First of all, to whom do we recount it? One would have to construct oneself, one would have to be able to *invent oneself* without a model and without an assured addressee. This addressee can, of course, only ever be presumed, in all situations of the world." (Derrida 95-96, Trans. 55)

Many of Derrida's contemporaries have addressed these questions in a variety of literary and poetic forms. Indeed, they form the basis of much Maghrebian Francophone

literature. The Jewish-Tunesian author and polemicist Albert Memmi's first semi-autobiographical tale of impossible identity, La Statue de sel, comes perhaps the closest in framing them within the particular constraints Derrida describes. Assia Djebar's insistence on and resort to the body, to the sensory/sensual realm as a means of anchoring her position as a writer among the surviving is another echo. Her desire to give her voice to the beloved dead (including Feraoun) in Le Blanc de l'Algérie is a refusal to let the difficulties their memories represent fade from a collective interrogation of identity. One might claim that these questions of language, place and identity are central to any Francophone literary project and lie at the core of much post-colonial theory. But like Derrida's host at the conference, Édouard Glissant, who insists on a concept of identity as a matrix of relations, the place and time within which Derrida encountered these obstacles cannot be dismissed. The reasons for his questions in 1992 – the attempt to form a memory of his encounter with French at a time when the French stood helpless before the bloodshed of an Algerian civil war, having never been able to process the trauma of losing Algeria 30 years before – make them the questions of his generation, but also of a particular life history, of one man's partial truth.

Like Le Fils du pauvre, Le Monolinguisme de l'autre allows us to imagine the author as a child in colonial Algeria, to see his struggle to situate his voice within the cultural, political, historical determinants of his life. There is a partiality to what he says, for it does not hold for everyone; he is similar to Khatibi, but different too, similar to Glissant, but different too, for Khatibi's art resides in the passionate entanglement of French and Arabic, his *amour bilangue*, and Glissant's concept of the Total-World, viewed and lived from the point where one is born, of an open insularity, is a complex reflection on the particularity of the Caribbean experience. As J. Michael Dash has argued, fads in academic scholarship which privilege readings of post-colonial texts as celebrations of hybridity and nomadism tend to marginalize questions of historical and geographical particularity (Dash 236); works by the Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat and the Algerian-born French writer Zahia Rahmani – very much like Feraoun - remind us that we are "always haunted by the need of the individual to be buried somewhere." (Dash 236) People are born and die in a place and time and writers are often involved with articulating memory of that place and time, if only to save the people

who constituted the world of their childhoods from complete oblivion. Yes, there is a debt to pay. And this particularity is also partiality and it is the struggle and the responsibility of the writer to resolve this partiality.

What interests me in contrasting Derrida's late reflection on his childhood encounter with French to Feraoun's early struggle to situate his literary voice, is tracing how the context of their lives led them to their own particular answers, to their own strategy of living and writing – and dying – and how we connect these parts into a remembered whole. Derrida imagined an account of obstacles: "Rather than an exposition of myself, it is an account of what will have placed an obstacle in the way of this auto-exposition for me. An account therefore of what will have exposed me to that obstacle and thrown me against it. Of a serious traffic accident about which I never cease thinking." (Derrida 131; Trans. 70) As we will explore, for Feraoun, like for other Kabyle writers, an authentic "exposition of myself," however fictionalized, remained a necessity due to the socio-political context. The clear connection to a mother tongue and an ancestral culture, to a time and place that displaced the primacy of the French colonial mindset, and the ensuing pressure to represent this localized identity publically or archetypally, distinguishes Feraoun's auto-ethnological fiction from Derrida's philosophical anti-autobiography. I hear an analogy of their differences in James Baldwin's description of an African in Paris in counter-distinction to an African-American expatriate in the 1950s: "His bitterness is unlike that of his American kinsman in that it is not so treacherously likely to be turned against himself. He has, not so very many miles away, a homeland to which his relationship, no less than his responsibility, is overwhelmingly clear: His country must be given – or it must seize – its freedom." (Baldwin 121). Feraoun never had French citizenship to lose, nor was there any question that French was a second, foreign language. He left Kabylia only to return to it and only fled later due to the war. There was never any question, at least at the early point in his career, about where he belonged. The difficulty of overcoming Kabylia's geographical isolation and tightly-guarded traditional, skeptical, male-dominated mores proved as much a challenge as writing in a foreign language for colonial masters. For Feraoun, the obstacle was first and foremost courage to face the boundaries of his cultural identity. At stake was a broader, collective claim on the human map.

Duncan and Si Mohand

The quotes from Robert Duncan's poem "Often I am permitted to Return to a Meadow" are not wholly incidental. Part of translation is making a home for the book in another language's landscape of sensibilities, and this means allowing connections between unlikely sources.

Born in California in 1919, six years after Feraoun, Robert Duncan was a modernist, neo-romantic poet in the era of the Beat generation. He was by all accounts a poetic genius, mystical by bent and by family affiliation. He wrote an unprecedented essay about homosexual rights as civil rights long before there was any gay movement to speak of, yet during the Vietnam war came out strongly against ideologically-inspired anti-war poetry, notably the poetry of his friend Denise Levertov. An American gay poet who believed in Poetry as a calling compared to a Muslim Berber father of six and a school director who dedicated his life to his students, Duncan and Feraoun were nothing alike, yet something brings them closer: the experience of exclusion, of bigotry; a deep pleasure in and continuing interrogation of classical Western literature; the complexity of male desire; an understanding of war as a human paradox and of how politics can silence the space of culture and the saving power of the word... I can imagine them both being delighted to exchange in caustic wit if they had met at a cocktail party. They both knew the power of voice. I recall a reading of Duncan's in a cabin-like building on Bard College campus around the time he emerged from a 15 year self-imposed silence following the Vietnam War, just as he was to publish Before The War. A curious title if one did not understand that Duncan felt we all stand *before the war* as before a tableau of human interaction- carnage or love? (I can imagine them visiting an exhibition of Francis Bacon's bloody paintings, nodding, laughing, staring off.) At the reading, just as Duncan's voice seemed to lose itself in a rush of images, his hand rose like a conductor's and instead of music, a gust of wind blew open a entire wall of windows. We sat there transfixed. The oral performance of poetry, whether conceived through creative transmission or through writing, Duncan seemed to demonstrate, is in its essence mystical and human, incantatory and self-sustaining, a power to open windows, or close them.

Feraoun, son of an oral culture in close proximity to two written cultures – Islamic-Arabic and Christian-French-, knew such rapture from childhood experience. We hear two forms of it in *Le Fils du pauvre* Le Fils du pauvre: The stories told by the protagonist Fouroulou's aunt Khalti and the poetry of Si Mohand. The first is a well-documented oral tradition of storytelling passed down from Kabyle women to their children as a form of cultural inculcation.³ In Feraoun's novel, this heritage is maintained by a grown, single, childless woman whom others view as marginal, yet whom the writer Feraoun clearly gained basic knowledge from:

From whole cloth, [Khalti] knew how to create an imaginary realm over which we were the rulers. I became judge and benefactor of the poor orphan who wanted to marry a princess; all-powerful, I witnessed the triumph of little M'Quidech who overcame the Ogress; I whispered wise answers to Hechaïchi who tries to escape the chambers of the bloodthirsty sultan. My parents' worried brows and sighs are far away on those endless winter nights. The story flows from Khalti's mouth and I drink it avidly. This was my entry into morality and dream. (PMS 39)

Later in "The Elder Son," upon returning from the colonial school in the summer, Feraoun has young Fouroulou spends time with his village friends. He is on the cusp of manhood and will soon experience his first taste of sexual desire and repulsion, an area of social experience that stakes out the limits of his assimilation as well, for Fouroulou, like Feraoun himself, tastes rapture but respects the limits drawn by custom:

He likes to listen to them sing, play the flute, or recite the moving poetry of the tragic Si Mohand. They go out at night far from the village. The hazy light of the moon drowns the hillsides whose tops one can vaguely distinguish. Over the valleys hangs a shadow of mist that conceals the countryside, lending impressive stature to the tall trees, and joins the far-off hills into a dark, lonely mass. The star-filled sky shines with a cold light, unreal and pale as a dream. The melancholy of this half-light, the harmony of voices, the gentleness of the flute, and the colorful imagery of poems with musical rhythms all soften the heart and fill the head with images, the body with gentle rapture. (PMS 121)

During the late 50s, Feraoun returned to the topic of poetry, composing a portrait of Si Mohand, the son of a prosperous clan, left destitute by the colonial powers in the 19th century, who was schooled in the Islamic tradition but who later wandered Greater

³ See especially the work of women ethnographers of Kabyle origin including: Taos Amrouche, La Grain magique, Tassadit Yacine, « Lire les fables kabyles dans le prolongement de Raymond Lulle (Chacal ou la ruse des dominés, 2001) ; Makilam, Signes et rituels magiques des femmes kabyles (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1999).

Kabylia reciting Tamazight verses that captured the memory of his people's suffering at the hands the French. In his essay, Feraoun's portrait of Si Mohand is legendary and tragic, yet also oddly contemporary and personal, as if in imagining Si Mohand he was imagining his own time period and his own position as writer. From his "indifference for the cruel game of life's bitter struggle" that could "sometimes appear like cowardliness, the surrendering of a weak man" to his consciousness of failure that gives him his strength of character "to live as a mocking observer, free of all bias," Feraoun's Si Mohand:

appears like a mirror where the soul of his country is reflected, a generation in profound disarray, brutally striped of its traditions, whose social structures have blown apart even as economic transformations and openings onto the exterior world have not allowed them time to adapt. He's not a "déclassé", but the wise man of a defeated people, the powerless spectator who assists with broken heart each fatal loss. (Si Mohand 33)

In both Si Mohand's poetry and Feraoun's fiction of the early and mid-1950s, a memory of destitution, of loss, of a vision of the end of a world is lodged. This tragic memory, in the words of Abdelwahab Meddeb, connects the two historical periods of Si Mohand and Feraoun through a common trauma: "genealogical interruption and the condition of orphan." (Meddeb 76). In both periods, traditional means of survival failed to register or encompass the enormity of change; parents could not pass on their way of life. Yet political evolution appeared impossible, indeed, an unjustifiable risk. Such collisions produce poetic irony. Here is my translation of Si Mohand's *isfra* "J'avais un jardin dans la plaine":

I had a meadow on the plain
A riot of roses,
Peaches and pomegranates.

Its fence was perfect,
It was protected and safe;
I pampered it like a falcon.

I had but a sterile branch
Where nothing grew;
That meadow replaced me with a vile man. (Si Mohand 51)

Generations of Kabyle quote the lines of Si Mohand, as they now quote the lines of Feraoun, for as one sees in this poem, the memory of paradise and treason is a repository of cultural wisdom and identity. We have known the bounty of this earth, we have known death and dispossession. It is a colonial tale, but also a Kabyle one, indeed, a Mediterranean one. It is ancient. One can sense this in Khalti's tales, in Si Mohand's verse, in Feraoun's close readings of village relations, a way of turning loss into myth.

In Duncan's poem, "Often I am Permitted to return to A Meadow," there is a passage that reads like a map of the poet's first journey. I'm curious how Feraoun would have listened to it. Folding one thought into the next, one breath into the next, Duncan's poem links the personal and the mystical, rolling love, death, and insanity into a balm of renewal:

Often I am permitted to return to a meadow
as if it were a given property of the mind
that certain bounds hold against chaos,

that is a place of first permission,
everlasting omen of what is.

Every poet, every writer, has to take that omen seriously. It is both a gift handed down and an act of possession. They have to enter a place of permission, of initial innocence, and play an ancient game "of ring around of roses told." And then they see where it leads.

Chapter 2: Translation Journey

I read The Plague and I had the impression that I understood your book like I had never understood any other. I regretted that among all the many characters there was not one native and that Oran in your eyes was nothing but a tired French police district. Oh! This is not a reproach! I simply thought that, if it weren't for this gulf between us, you would have known us better, you would have felt capable of speaking about us with the same generosity that benefits all the others. I still regret, with all my heart, that you did not know us sufficiently and that we have no one who understands us, to make us understood, and to help us know ourselves.

- Feraoun, letter to Camus, 1951 (L 203)

“This Gulf Between Us”

When I discovered Feraoun in 1995 while browsing through a library stack at the University of Paris VIII, I had been living for almost a year in Montreuil, a Paris suburb with a large immigrant population, many from North Africa. I had found a job teaching English to young business people and was struggling to learn French, which often appeared to me like lighting a match in a dry field. Every attempt to strike some semblance of sense threatened to get out of control, for I was forever being reminded by the kind, if brutally honest Parisians I met, of what I could not say - being American - or what one does not say – in France – or what I had to learn all over again from the stand point of *la civilisation française* in order to have the authority to merely imply. In the woods of Massachusetts, where I grew up, language had never seemed so fraught with danger. Grammar especially seemed to take on alarming significance; on a par with the American market, the people I met seemed to think it could make or break you. I had spent previous years mastering German, a straight-forward process demanding diligence and persistence, resulting in an acceptable fluency. French, on the other hand, was monarchical, bureaucratic, unflinching. What struck me as particularly different was that

the French people I met seemed driven to correct not only my words but my thoughts, as if speaking their language were a matter of being intelligent, of being fully human.

Montreuil is the second largest Malian city outside of Bamako. It belongs to the "red belt" of communist or neo-socialist towns ringing the western edge of Paris where many of the region's immigrants from former colonies have settled. It draws artists and students as well. An endless number of corner bars are run by Algerians, like *the Bar des Sports* on the Place de la République, which was run at the time by Hafid and Momo, two Kabyle brothers who loved poetry and would sometimes close the aluminum shutter and bring out a big couscous for the regulars as we listened to music and recited poems. Nights I'd exit the metro escalator into a circle of slim officers who would nod their heads, signaling me to leave, while closing in on the Arab and African men exiting with me, whom they would aggressively "controller." In this milieu, grammar was trumped by irony, alcohol, and homesickness. I began to wonder what it would be like to learn French from the perspective of my immigrant neighbors. Who were their writers? What were their stories? A Moroccan painter friend suggested I read Tahar Ben Jelloun, the well-known Moroccan novelist and Le Monde editorialist, but not his best-selling novels, rather his early poetry. When I opened his 1980 collection, A L'Insu du souvenir, I found a prose poem that resonated with me. "Dans l'arrière-pays du silence, une fontaine. Une course d'eau claire, de mots et de paroles." "In the backcountry of silence, a fountain. Source of clear water, of words and speech." "Le mot avance. Nu. Blanc sur fond de desert blanc. Le nommer, c'est déjà le voiler, le nourrir, lui designer une patrie." "A word advances, naked, white against the background of desert white. Just saying it shields it, nourishes it, assigns it a homeland..."⁴

I read like this for a while until I got to a passage that stumped me: "Ecrire c'est veiller sur la fontaine, au seuil de la mort, à la porte du paradis. Epreuve de violence. Il s'agit d'opérer la trahison." Paradise? Treason? Why is writing a form of treason? Towards whom or what? Which paradise does this writer seek entrance to? "To write is to stand watch at the fountain, on death's threshold, at the door of paradise. Trial by violence. The task required in an act of treason." Why did that sound so stiff, so unreal?

⁴ Ben Jelloun, Tahar. A L'Insu du souvenir. Paris: François Maspero, 1980

What was packed in there? What symbolic register can I find in my Protestant New England American English for these terms? I thought of a comment I once heard: sometimes there is no good translation, just a good essay to write. On the library shelf next to Ben Jelloun's slim book, I found other novels, including those by the first generation of native North Africans to master literary French and publish in French publishing houses. I browsed through them. A plan formed in my mind: I would learn French from people who knew first-hand what it means to cross social and cultural boundaries, what fluency in a given historical period costs and offers both personally and socially, and what the ability to communicate in French at the level of publishing houses and literary divans represents for those not born into such circumstances. They must know about treason, and paradise. There must be some relevant connection between this "épreuve de violence" and my tangled woods.

I collected a handful of books: Albert Memmi's La Statue de sel, Driss Chraïbi's Le Passé simple, Mouloud Mammeri's La Colline oubliée, Mohammed Dib's La Grande Maison, Kateb Yacine's Nedjma, and, of course, Feraoun's slim first novel, Le Fils du pauvre. Together they constitute a history-locked literary island, the first novels written by the first generation of indigenous North Africans to use French as a literary vehicle for works with universal ambitions, and to publish these dramas, almost exclusively with French publishing houses, just as the winds of change began to thoroughly transform the landscape in which these dramas unfold.

Perhaps for the most personal of reasons, Le Fils du pauvre, Feraoun's first, short, painfully well-written, at times mordantly ironic tale of a young boy growing up in the poor hills of Kabylia in the first part of the 20th century, touched me deeply. His heartfelt, thinly fictionalized testimony of his family and village community and the arduous ascent of a rural colonial évolué to the position of teacher in the French colonial system became my first primer. The copy I found had an especially welcoming feel to it. It was like Winesburg, Ohio or Catcher in the Rye, a classic you would read for High School but in French, and not for a French class, truly a Francophone primer. Reading through it, I could easily imagine generations of schoolchildren identifying with the archetypal characters of the poor, sensitive, intelligent boy and a series of powerful women, including his colorful aunts, one delicate and authoritative, the other emotional

and funny, enveloping the boy in a protective web of storytelling and seasonal chores, timeless, maternal. I could see the boy losing that home to pressures totally foreign, totally beyond the local logic, and very gradually enter into that other, radical logic of Enlightenment Philosophy, drawn there by the language of textbooks, the schedule of exams, the knowledgeable teachers around him, his father's absence, and his image of him: the poor Kabyle immigrant braving the streets of Paris in his threadbare European suit.

In an effort to domesticate my French *à la maghrébine*, I signed up for a master's program in "living languages." My intent was to translate an excerpt of each book into English and observe the impact of translation from several angles: how the work of translation affected my reading of the original, what the work of the original literary project could teach me about the role of the translator and the act of crossing cultural boundaries in general, and how the English version might resonate in its now Anglo-American skin. The title of my masters – The Written Difference: écrivains maghrébins d'expression française, traductions et commentaries – clearly underscores the post-structural/post-colonial angle of my thesis at the time. Influenced by Deleuze and Guattari, I argued that people who write a “minor literature” in an acquired second language, especially when that language is imposed through colonialism, write differently than those for whom the language is a given, first source. North African Francophone writers were cultural translators for whom French signified a separation from maternal and paternal roots, indeed, a form of treason. The process of writing revealed the impact of this separation in different ways – as a creative distance vis-à-vis the oppressive traditions of one's origins, as a tool for correcting the erasures of the dominant, colonial ideology, or as an exile, a last, literary escape from impossible identities.

In my reading of Feraoun, I was especially struck by a seemingly illogical or elliptical narrative strategy. In the preface to the novel, which I would only later come to learn was one of several versions, an unnamed narrator exhorts the first-person narrator to let him offer the novel to “us.” Later, in a preface to the second part of the book, this brotherly narrative agent – “un ami qui ne le trahira pas mais n’ignore rien de son histoire, un frère curieux et bavard / a friend who will not betray him but who knows everything of his story, a curious, talkative brother,” – takes over the narration to represent what the

protagonist-narrator “se tait par modestie ou pudeur / omits out of sense of modesty or propriety,” namely his coming to manhood and an implied departure from his ancestral home and successful induction into the colonial middle class. Unlike the conclusion of many critics, I saw this strategy as an attempt to negotiate between loyalties, to address simultaneously an outside reader and a native community in all its contradictions and resiliency. “Profoundly personal” and “archetypal,” the author seemed acutely aware of the risk of hubris, of “self-enchantment,” as Harris writes. Here was a writer whose omissions spoke.

Algeria and US

Despite its universal appeal, its tender irony and its unique historical window, Feraoun's book was the only one of these North African texts not already published in English translation. I found this curious. Why was this granddaddy of Algerian literature not a staple on any American university World Literature syllabus? The book had been translated into German, into Italian, into Arabic, why not English? And why not in America where authentic tales of successful social ascent are the bedrock of public culture? The reasons for this lack of an English translation are multilayered and complex. The history of the book's creation, editing, and reception within the French colonial world and that world's implosion, as we will explore, played a fundamental role. But part of assisting the passage between contexts sometimes demands that we outline a territory of disconnection, highlighting the lack of a cultural relationship. How can a novel have any resonance in translation when the context it evolves out of remains opaque, inaccessible, unknown to the target culture? Strangely enough, this is pretty much the situation Feraoun was initially faced with within the French colonial context. Why, I wondered, had it endured outside of it?

A comprehensive history of Algeria and its layered relations to European and Arab centers of power is luckily provided by a number of eminent historians and social scientists, including French writers who lived through the years Feraoun relates, such as

Jacques Berque, Germaine Tillion, and Benjamin Stora. For these French historians and ethnographers French-Algerian relations remain, quite understandably, central. If we search for a bridge between this long colonial history and relations between Algeria and the U.S., Americans stumble upon de Toqueville's forceful support of French conquest of Algeria. His earlier study of the United States, a penetrating examination of a budding society of *colons*, slaves, and natives, and how the American West was brutally wrenched from native populations, lost its outsider's political disinterestedness but none of its force in direct application on Algerian soil, where de Toqueville argued for French military supremacy, forced relocations and brutal pacification. To trace a foundational Algerian-American connection we need, however, to turn to the tales of kidnapping and imprisonment prior to and during the first and second Barbary Wars. These conflicts between pirates, North African Turkish-influenced rulers and the nascent U.S. military in 1801-05 and 1815 offer a glimpse of a cultural encounter that would soon be overwhelmed by the French conquest of the region and by American concerns with expansion West. Yet the history of these wars, and especially of Jefferson's negotiations with North African rulers, as American ambassador to France and as President, nevertheless point to an early geopolitical significance of North Africa in the development of an independent American foreign and military policy. The 1805 Battle of Derna, in which American marines captured territory in Tripoli, represented the first time in history that the United States flag was raised in victory on foreign soil, an action memorialized in a line of the Marines' Hymn, familiar to American schoolchildren — "the shores of Tripoli." Only after the period of French colonial presence, during World War II, would this significance, and American forces, return.⁵

Memory of this early history, as well as the significance of the American presence in Algeria during World War II, has been largely overshadowed by the fitful attempts to come to terms with the 130 years of French rule and the vicious struggles both in Algeria and in France during and after the war of independence. Instead, during my initial exploration of U.S.-Algerian relations, there seemed to be a history of disconnection and

⁵ Lively, if perhaps politically motivated, retellings of this first Algerian-American encounter have proliferated since 9/11. At a recent visit to the book store at Monticello, Jefferson's stately home in Virginia, I found a slew of historical novels and accounts, including Jefferson's War: America's First War on Terror, 1801-1805 by Joseph Wheelan. (New York: Public Affairs, First Carroll & Graf edition, 2003).

isolation, culminating with the isolation Algeria fell into after independence in 1962. This was the year a young New England Catholic, who had spoken out courageously in 1959 for Algerian independence from France, acceded to the presidency of the United States. Senator Kennedy's preface to North Africa: Nationalism to Nationhood, published by Lorna Hahn in 1960, had already pointed to the geopolitical consequences of the Algerian War: "The greatest tragedy of the Algerian War has been the fact that its influences cannot be isolated, but that they have poisoned Western relations with almost all of Africa and at the same time drained constructive energies and unities in the West." (Hahn v)

The attempt to isolate these poisonous influences, to a large degree the result of a "vicious impasse" in the development of democratic reform in the French colonial world during and following World War II, drove U.S. support for independence. Indeed, some have argued that de Gaulle was moved more by geopolitical and national demographic imperatives than any sincere belief in the right of self-determination to call for the referendum on Algerian independence in 1958. Cut loose in 1962, Algeria entered a period of isolation from the West and alignment with the Communist bloc, which lasted throughout the Presidency of Boumediene (1965-1978) when agricultural and industrial resources were collectivized and oil production nationalized. Reliance on an Arabic-centered, communist-inspired, one-party revolutionary political and economic model began to falter only with the end of the Cold War and the subsequent global realignment, which came, as the British political scientist and Algeria expert Hugh Roberts argues, at a very delicate moment for Algeria nationalism, just as it was attempting to address the long-term wounds of colonial and revolutionary violence by establishing political parties and open, democratic elections.⁶

In the mid-90s, at the time of my first reading of Feraoun's book, a second period of isolation occurred when Algeria descended back into the fires of civil war – or a war "against civilians" as the French commentator Andre Glucksman called it. (Sukys 17) It had started in 1988 when youth poured into the streets of Algiers, protesting price increases and the scarcity of basic goods. The result of a population boom following an opening to democratic reform in the late 70s and early 80s, these youth were drawn from two conflicting protest movements: communists, including Berber identity movements;

⁶ Hugh Roberts. The Battleground: Algeria, 1988-202, Studies in a Broken Polity. London: Verso, 2003.

and Islamic *intégristes* or Islamist fundamentalists. Both groups found common ground in demonstrating against one-party rule. When such protest became open riots, the military retaliated, leaving five hundred dead, thousands arrested and many tortured. Although the process of democratization continued on its path toward the collapse of one-party rule by the National Liberation Front, or FLN, in 1989, and the first legislative elections ever held in Algeria in 1991, the *pouvoir* – as the military-financial "power" ruling over Algeria had come to be called - became nervous. The electorate, voicing its discontent, used the first round of elections to fundamentally challenge the authoritarian, revolutionary-bound status quo. The *pouvoir* intervened when it became clear that the fundamentalist party, the Islamic Salvation Front, or FIS, would win. With the cancellation of the second round of legislative elections, a power vacuum grew and a new era of bloodshed began.

It is hard to describe just how horrific this bloodshed was. People were murdered on their way to work, at work, in their homes. Their throats were slit, their relatives raped and dismembered, their buried bones deterred. In one of the letters collected by Phillippe Bernard and Nathaniel Herzberg in their Lettres d'Algerie, a 60-year-old functionary wrote to his former French colleague,

“Death! And what next? I’m scared, scared to die with my throat slit, scared to die with my head exploded. I am scared for my sons, for my daughter, for my wife, for myself, for my brothers and their children. I am scared of my shadow. [...] And at night! It’s a circus. Insomnia! At the slightest noise, we’re up. With the curfew, complete silence. We watch. Even with this fear, “things” happen. At the school gate, teachers with their throats slit; in the school yard, headless bodies. [...] I hesitated for a long time to write to you, to tell you our senseless shit.”⁷

A moment of possible reconciliation seemed to present itself in the return of an exiled co-founder of the FLN, Mohammed Boudiaf, who was elected President and offered to start a dialogue with all sides to bridge the generational divide. His assassination on live T.V in 1993 by a member of the military served as a final detonator.⁸ The astonishing number of murders of innocent civilians by both Islamic terrorists and state-organized

⁷ Bernard and Herzberg, Letter from 8 October 1994, in: Lettres d'Algérie, p. 34-35. My translation.

⁸ Bensmaia, cited by Sukys, 18. As reported in the New York Times (6/30/92), Boudiaf’s assassination was shown on Algerian television. His final words were: “We must know that the life of a human being is very short. We are all going to die. Why should we cling so much to power? Other peoples have overtaken us by technology and science. Islam – ‘His words were then interrupted by gunfire.’” Web. 12 April 2010. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/30/world/algerian-president-fatally-shot-at-rally.html?pagewanted=1>>

paramilitaries, including the willful elimination of prominent Algerian intellectuals - between 100,000 and 200,000 civilians killed, 7000 disappeared, and over a million displaced - received scant press at a time when Westerners were obsessed with the war in Bosnia, a tragedy by all considerations, but one afflicting a European nation. Although the number of refugees and immigrants to France from Algeria soared during this period, they arrived in a country unwilling or unable to face its colonial past nor tend to post-independence trauma. With no place at home or abroad to resolve such trauma, and the difficulty of reconciling generational and ideological divides, Algeria's isolation only grew.⁹

Uneasy relations with France and the United States during this time underscored the isolation. When Mohammed Bedjaoui, Minister of Foreign Affairs of "The Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria," was asked about relations between Algeria and France at a Council on Foreign Relations meeting in Washington in 2006, he opened a diplomatic can of worms by replying with customary frankness, "I don't see there is any kind of relationship." Noting that relations between states are similar to those between individuals, he added,

We expect evolution and changes in those relations. [...] you may have a moment of splendor and later on disgrace. Colonial time was a long night for colonized countries. We have been independent for 44 years only. But you know, we have not yet turned the page. A long historical relationship cannot be so easy to turn.¹⁰

Former President of the International Court of Justice, Bedjaoui was a member of the delegation of Algerian diplomats who secured the release of Americans during the Iran Hostage crisis in 1979, a collaboration few Americans recall, due in part to the insignificant trade and cultural partnership between the two countries and larger geopolitical stakes. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Israel have traditionally carried much more weight in Washington. Though observers have long suspected a desire to displace the

⁹ My synopsis of this period is necessarily brief and thus reductive. For more in-depth analysis of this period see, among others studies, Brahim A., Aux origines de la tragédie algérienne (1958-2000): Témoignage sur hizb franca. Geneva: Hoggar, 2000; Souaidia H. La Sale Guerre: Le témoignage d'un ancien officier des forces spéciales de l'armée algérienne. Paris : La Découverte, 2001 ; Stora, B. L'Algérie en 1995: La guerre, l'histoire, la politique. Paris : Éditions Michalon 1995. For a fictional representation of this period see the works of Yasmina Khadra and Boualem Sansal.

¹⁰Bedjaoui, M. Web 5/17/10.

http://www.cfr.org/publication/10462/algeria_and_the_global_war_on_terrorism_transcript_federal_news_service_inc.html

French as Algeria's leading trade partner, Algerian-American relations have never been easy. After his initial support of Algerian independence and his welcoming of Ben Bella to the White House, Kennedy dismissed ties with Algeria after Ben Bella's alliance with Castro and his nationalization of oil revenues. Americans suffered dearly their engagement in the former French colony of Indochina. Honoring the 130-year "relationship" between France and its former colonial *départementes*, they stayed away from the oil fields of Algeria for decades. Even the move towards democratization did not entice them; there is little evidence of American involvement in Algeria between 1988 and 1992. And neither France nor its former protectorates, Morocco and Tunisia, have since shown enthusiasm about sudden improvement in US-Algerian connections. As William B Quandt, a former advisor to President Jimmy Carter and author of The Algerian Crisis: Policy Option for the West, wrote in a 2002 article in Le Monde diplomatique, "The history of US-Algerian relations is a pattern of steady but often uneasy engagement, punctuated by occasional crises."¹¹

As Bedjaoui's subsequent testimony in 2006 illustrated, this lack of structured engagement began to change shortly after 9/11. Algerian experience with Islamic Fundamentalist terrorism and unheeded calls during the 1980s and 1990s for international attention to the growing rift in Arab countries between the followers of such terrorists and their secularly oriented, military-run governments began to find ears. In an eerie turn around, the Pentagon sought answers to the floundering strategies in Iraq in counterinsurgency pamphlets produced by French military personnel during the Algerian War, one seen now as a tactical success if a political failure. On the economic front, President Bouteflika held high level meetings with President Bush which led to a huge increase in oil and natural gas trade, effectively shifting primary trade status from France to the United States. A 2007 article by the Algerian journalist Hassan Al Mosadak in the North African Times, "US-Algerian Relations: A Pragmatic Politics," lays out the geopolitical issues at stake for Algerians in their increasing ties with the United States and the strategic steps both countries have taken. Consider the 1999 launch of the American Economic Program for North Africa (PEAAN), which works towards the

¹¹ Quandt, W. "Forty Years of Independence, Violence and Impoverishment: US and Algeria: just flirting." Le Monde diplomatique, July 2002.

creation of a Maghreb free trade area, part of the Greater Middle East project and pretext to democratize the Arab world, and the establishment of the joint US-Algeria Business Council (USABC) in 2002. US corporate investments, though somewhat spread out, remain heavily focused on petroleum reserves. US oil companies, particularly close to the neo-conservatives, lobbied the Algerian government for a new law which would give foreign companies up to 100% ownership of discovered oil wells. Large segments of the Algerian society, represented by the FLN and the General Algerian Labor Union, the socialist backbone of the country, objected to this sell-out and President Boutiflika was forced to sign new legislation in 2006 that reduced such ownership to 49%, preventing what was perceived as a "new wave of western colonization to seize the wealth of the country." In an ideological repost, the US State department issued an unfavorable human rights report that negatively compared Algeria's delayed development toward reform to the Moroccan government's increasing embrace of civil liberties.

The relationship has attained particular depth in the area of military cooperation and counterterrorism. In his recent article in Magharebia, "US and Algeria improve security co-operation," Walid Ramzi quotes several North African media and security experts to underscore Washington eagerness "to pursue defense co-operation with Algeria," and the strategic choice of Algerian political authorities "to co-operate with Washington in the defense domain." The motivation to reinforce the partnership between Algeria and the United States "goes along with the war against terrorism" and includes "the exchange of intelligence to update the local armies and provide them with sophisticated equipment for the fight against terrorism."¹² The launching of AFRICOM (the U.S. African Command) in 2007 and now operating in 53 countries in Africa with the exception of Egypt points to what Bedjaoui characterized as "increased security and military-to-military cooperation, increased dialogue and greater consultation with a view to establishing a mutually desired strong and long-term strategic partnership." The elder statesman added in his 2006 report:

The big issue when you are fighting terrorism is to avoid completely losing your own conscience and mind. Whatever the price, one has always to

¹² Ramzi, W. "US and Algeria improve security co-operation." Magharebia in Algiers, 26/02/10. Web 5/17/10
http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/reportage/2010/02/26/reportage-01

make efforts and to endeavor not to apply the same methods or deed that are carried out by the terrorists. [...] Because if we use the same methods and means as the terrorism, we ourselves become other terrorists. During the Black Decade, the decade where Algeria suffered most from terrorism, we also had to adopt new legislation. But we did that in a way so we can maintain our own rules and respect for dignity and freedom. I know perfectly, and I'm perfectly aware that the United States are undergoing the same kind of situation, and special legislation and rules have been adopted here, like the Patriot Act. And I believe we should be vigilant. We should be keen and aware all the time, at any moment. [...] But in Algeria, we have not lost sight that at the same time that while fighting terrorism, we have to keep in mind that we have to build the country, and we have to do everything to prevent the terrorists from coming back. Legislation is not enough to fight terrorism only by force. For that we also have to devise and to construe all sort of steps and measures and means that will [be] applied alongside the fight, to prevent part of the population to be lured and enticed and join the ranks of terrorism.

So we have to give them something.¹³

This whole scenario is not something most Americans are aware of when they read about tourists kidnapped in Kabyle towns in Algeria or of Algerians, arrested in Bosnia or Afghanistan, and imprisoned in Guantanamo, sometimes because their itineraries wittingly or unwittingly connect dots between 9/11, Tora Bora and jihad in Algeria.¹⁴ Most Americans do not know that the Guantanamo prisoner whose case reached the U.S. Supreme Court and reestablished the right of habeas corpus for such "enemy combatants" was an Algerian aid worker, Lakhdar Boumediene. There is a noticeable and negative lack of interest, knowledge, and understanding on a cultural level between Algeria and the United States that, in the face of a massive shift in American political and military investment in the Arab world, and Algeria in particular, cries out for correction. The 2002 portrait Quandt laid out of US-Algerian relations still holds:

"There is no social base in the US to sustain a closer relationship with Algeria. Few Americans, businessmen, tourists, students, journalists or government officials, visit the country. Not many Algerians go to the US. While governments can maintain normal relations without close ties between their peoples, such relations rarely have much depth. So the relationship between Washington and Algiers remains a product of contacts between a few politicians and oil executives whose interests wax and wane."

¹³ Bedjaoui, *ibid.*

¹⁴ Kidnapping of two Austrian tourists in 2008, http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/reportage/2008/10/17/reportage-01.

Doubts

A few years after returning to the States, something happened to my perception of Feraoun. I was asked to submit translations for a special issue organized by the journal of 20th c. French and Francophone studies, Sites. I submitted two – one of the poem by Tahar Ben Jelloun and the Feraoun excerpt. I was surprised when the guest editor chose Feraoun. His novel had been the least experimental, the most normative in its use of French, the least impacted by the difference I had posited. With some distance from my initial reading, I wondered if Feraoun wasn't just a sentimental provincial writer, an assimilated *évolué* with literary pretensions, too self-conscious and constrained by his French Humanist education and the power relations of the time to master the complexity of a real piece of art. This is how he was read by many when his books first appeared, and many critics in France and the United States continued to read him in this manner. Is this why he hadn't been translated into English? Are Americans ever interested in the cultural context of third-world novels or rather the pleasure of championing the protest variety, the radical voice of the European other, the displaced *homme revolté*? If we compared Feraoun to Fanon, what would we learn? Does our continued ignorance of Algeria and a writer like Feraoun reveal something about how we view the world? I asked the Moroccan Jewish writer Edmond Amran El Maleh about Feraoun. A former communist journalist who started writing fiction at age 60 in 1982, incensed by the siege of Beirut and the disappearance of Jewish life in North Africa, El Maleh clearly disliked Feraoun whom he saw as another minority writer who had not chosen the revolution. "He was nothing, an apologist!" I asked Henri Alleg, the legendary editor of the famous liberal newspaper, Alger republicain, and the author of La Question, an account of his torture by French soldiers during the revolution. "A very good man," he mustered, as if fulfilling an obligation to honor ... a poor man.

Having my doubts, I went ahead and contacted the University Press of Virginia, which had bought the translation rights and from whom I needed permission to publish an excerpt. I learned that an English translation of the entire book had been presented to the Press – by an Algerian woman living in the States – but had been rejected as illegible and the Press had just recently decided to give up on the project. But one thing they said

caught my attention: the translation was not of the version known in France and published by Seuil, originally in 1954, but of the original manuscript, published *à compte d'auteur* in 1950. I had heard about this manuscript. I ordered a copy of the one edition existent in the States. How, I now wondered, would the original differ from the metropolitan edition? What would it reveal of Feraoun's initial intentions or how his work was read by the French literary establishment or the burgeoning Algerian resistance at that time – 1954 – the eve of what would become the Algerian War?

The results of this shift in how I perceived Feraoun is The Poor Man's Son, Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher, the University of Virginia's 2005 publication of my translation of Feraoun's Algerian primer. The addition of "Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher" to the American title is significant: With the insistence of the historian James D. Le Sueur, who wrote the introduction for this edition, we chose to translate Feraoun's original manuscript, published by himself in 1950, and not the edition reissued by the French publishing house, Les Éditions du Seuil, in an edited version in 1954. This American edition restores not only the particular cadence of Feraoun's inflected French, but also the peculiar combination of ethnographic exposé, autobiographical fiction and historical chronicle that is to be found in the original and that Feraoun's French editor pushed Feraoun to omit in favor of a stylistically unified, touching tale. Although no outright political censure seems to have occurred, as Le Sueur has documented, the ideological implications of this symbolic restraint on the part of the French editor was especially evident by their choice to remove an entire section of the novel focusing on the impact of World War II. This section signals a demystifying shift in perception among Kabylia's rugged, illiterate peasantry of the declining power of the French Empire and of those whose arrival was heralded as "a sea of wheat and clothes." (PMS 144) Feraoun's description of how the Kabyles kept their skeptical minds open to the rumors of American largesse is classic. The restoration of this section in the American edition is indeed "a revelation." (Ruta 56)

By a sort of global synchronicity, my 2005 translation followed upon the reissuing of Feraoun's text in its original French version by the Algerian press ENAG, and a translation of the book into Tamazight was published in 2006. Understandably, the first mention this American translation received was in the Algerian press. An interview I

gave to the Algerian daily, Liberté, was picked up in discussion forums and commemorative dossiers dedicated to Feraoun and his contemporaries. One had the sense that Feraoun represented much more than a literary figure to Kabyles, more like a legend of refined popular resistance, of self-respect and penetrating foresight. He was one of them and better than them, their brother, their departed mentor. It was a legend the Algerian literary historian Christiane Chaulet –Achour had tried to lay out in 1986, meticulously documenting its creation. Once a staple in school manuals, then erased from the national curriculum due to the colonial and Kabyle context of his oeuvre, Feraoun has gradually returned to the public eye, as the number of commemorative panels, special issues of reviews, conferences and films show, especially since the end of the “Black Decade” of the civil war. The novel's introduction to the Anglophone world reinforced the call for a new reading of Feraoun's work at home, a desire to re-interrogate a writer whose first text constitutes the basis of a contested cultural memory.

As is clear from this brief overview, Feraoun's work today foregrounds the erasures, the ideological omissions, and the derailment of memory in readings by critics and the ideological censures of both camps. In regard to the connections and more pertinent disconnections between this political legacy and the United States, Feraoun's novel points both to a history of isolation and the uneasy position of Algeria in its colonial and neo-colonial relations. In a nutshell, Feraoun was never translated into English because his work, like his social persona, stood at the crossroads, or in the crossfire, of conflicting contexts - local, colonial, and geopolitical. To reread Feraoun today – in Algeria, in America – is to reopen a primer in more than one sense.

I have risked a personal mode of address here to give you a sense of my journey with Mouloud Feraoun's first novel. I believe such journeys, whether transparently documented or left to be assumed by persistent research and scholarly output, are necessary pathways to the understanding and teaching of texts, especially those written in a foreign language and in a bygone political context. Indeed, they are the very life blood

of literary translation, for without such shifts in perception works which may remain unread and unrecognized are given new life in a new cultural landscape.

In May 2008, three years after my English translation of Le Fils du pauvre was published, I received an email from a young man living in Feraoun's native village, Tizi-Hibel. The man wrote in French, here is my translation:

March 21, 2008

before anything let me thank you very much very very much for translating the book by feraoun the poor man's son.

let me say I am a young kabyle I live in mouloud feraoun's village tizi-hibel. I am DEGHOUCHE-LARBI 24 years old member of the mouloud feraoun

Association... it's with great joye an great honor that I write you lucy mcnaïr. I am truly very pleased the day in I saw in the paper the great writer feraoun's book was been translated by an american woman not just any an american woman truly it's a great honor we are proud of what you go did. so if you wanna knowe more thing about feraoun whatever that may be don't hesitate to ask us at the association I hop we're gonna staye in touch since it could make a difference to the memory of Feraoun an to the memory of all the writers. here is my email larbi_deghouche@hotmail.com

larbi1200@yahoo.fr

all the members of the feraoun association congratulate you thank you a lot ya really made a big plus for Feraoun I mean a very very big +. a 1000 thank yous

There are voices you listen to. They rise up and carry you with an impetuous force toward a place they know with craven detail. And perhaps because of the gulf, the chasm dividing that voice and the sound of your name in its tongue, you agree to answer, to move unsurely towards an unknown place, but one that is unmistakably human, a recognizable mix of beauty and boredom, of desolation and dream. The words carry you because they are steady, threaded like beads. They glisten with intelligence. These word-beads seem to know more or better or enough to clear the haze of distraction, the lethargy of ignorance, and provide expansive relief, a panoramic restoration. They carry you forth like a vessel, a means of transporting you from self to soul, from the known to the inside of an unknown home, and for some reason you go with them, you pay the ticket. You go on a translation journey.

A Short History in Naming

Algeria

Size: Almost 3.5 times the size of Texas, which itself is larger than metropolitan France; largest country on the Mediterranean.

Arable land: 3%. (US – 18%, France – 33%)

Population: 35,700,000; some 28% of which are Imazighen or Berber.

Languages: Arabic; Tamazight and French.

Median age: 26 (like Mexico, a middle state between the African nations where the median age is 15 and developed European countries where the median age is 40).

GDP: largely from the sales and exploitation of natural resources: petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, phosphates, uranium, lead, zinc.

President: Boutiflika

Last general election: April, 2009

When Mouloud Feraoun was growing up in the 1920s and later taking on the role and responsibility of an adult, the name “Algerian” did not systematically refer to people native to that land. It did not refer to the people who live there today. It did not refer to him, a member of one of the four major indigenous populations of North Africa: the Imazighen (or Kabyle as he called himself) the Chaouias, the Mozabits, and the Touregs, each with their own language and customs. Nor did it refer to the “Arabs,” either sedentary or nomadic peoples whose heritage drew from native, Arab and Turkish influences. These names, by 1950, according to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, represented ideal identities of distinct peoples who had roots going back several centuries if not millennia to an area of North Africa that the French invaded only in 1830. Unlike Morocco or Tunisia, which enjoyed relative independence from France as “protectorates,” or tutelary monarchies, the area called Algeria became a part – or rather three parts, three *departements* - of the French national territory and remained French for 130 years. It may be helpful to know that 130 years is the length of time that South Dakota has been a state of the Union. And like in South Dakota, the transfer of land and

resources from native peoples to incoming settlers happened over a stretch of that time, at moments with brutal violence, at others with skillful treachery, following a logic that progressively negated the physical and human history of the region, supplanting it with a colony, a fable of willed hardship and fierce individualism.

Yet being discontinuous with the French mainland, laying across the Mediterranean, Algeria did not, like South Dakota, fill a hole in the continuous tapestry of an emerging nation as much as provide a desperately needed projection – a wholly foreign settlement to ease the economic problems in France proper and fill the minds of displaced people with a sense of hope and moral election. To understand Algeria, and French Algeria in particular, we thus need to imagine early America – Northern and Southern Europeans, West Africans, the consecutive waves of colonists and slaves and prisoners and indentured servants that splashed over and eventually flooded the map of the eastern shore, absorbing elements of and finally erasing Eastern American societies, their towns, their agricultural paradigm, their system of exchange and communication, their religious traditions and legal systems, their capacity for self-defense. We need to imagine how conflict broke out within and between indigenous groups, fracturing the political landscape to the invaders' advantage. And when faced with open revolt, the resort to brutal force, smoke outs, and an increasingly clear claim to a right of extermination. Especially here, we need to also imagine the 19th century America West, the signing and gutting of treaties, the mass deportation and resettlement of populations, the terribly definitive desecration of native ways, the catastrophic sense of history in the Ghost Dance of the Lakota.

Yet unlike American peoples, the populations living in Algeria, and especially the most coastally located Kabyles, were quite used to being attacked by technologically more advanced civilizations and pushed into inhospitable areas, in sum, colonized and made outsiders in their own land. Phoenician, Carthaginian, Roman, Byzantine, Arab and Turkish invaders had all passed through, each time depositing elements of their respective cultural practices, their religious, linguistic, jurisdictional, political, economic, social, artistic, and vestimentary customs, which the peoples of North Africa both absorbed and transformed. Their pride in the transformative powers of their cultural resistance is a key character trait seen today in the growing, even globalized expression

of their language and music.¹⁵ Thus, their spiritual tradition was a major world religion, Islam, but an Islam shaped by local beliefs in spirits and amulets and other “superstitions” rooted in older, native, animist and totemic practices. All these peoples had extensive experience in codified law and its co-existence with native custom. Some adopted Islamic laws governing the rights of women to inherit and divorce, yet others maintained older, strictly male-oriented or female-oriented customs. Many became Arabic-speakers and Arabic scholars, especially with the influx of Andalusian, and much later, Ottoman intellectuals; before the French invasion, the system of medersas or Coranic schools was the system of literate education in place and created a relatively high literacy rate among males. This intellectual institution and the gradual Arabization of the Berbers, in the word of the foremost French historian of Algeria, Benjamin Stora, “gave Algeria an indisputably Eastern personality” and the sense of belonging to the *‘umma* – the Islamic community of believers.¹⁶ When not called *les indigènes*, or more precisely yet inaccurately *les arabes*, Algerians were known collectively as *les musulmans*, nativity and religious affiliation as a unifying characteristic that both identified and differentiated the many populations of Algeria from their European rulers.

Through fierce resistance to the Romans, the Arabs and the Turks, and partially due to the Turks’ laissez-faire governing style, which allowed for relative freedom in return for tribute, the Kabyle, Feraoun’s people, from the Arabic term *Al Qabayel* or “tribes,” retained their language, their oral genealogies and fables, their native beliefs merged with Islamic faith, and their elaborate kin-based social networks. Some have seen in this system a home-grown form of democratic jurisprudence where each male “citizen” of the Kabyle village has his say in the collective “djemma” or town meeting place. Indeed, with their mixed traits, mother tongue and mediated relation to Islam, it formed the basis of French perception of a Kabyle exception, leading intellectuals like de Tocqueville to advocate for their protection against early brutal forms of pacification. As Patricia Lorcin has shown, this “Kabyle Myth” was largely forged from self-serving

¹⁵ For an overview of the current Berber music scene as a global form of cultural resistance and an analysis on “how history and aesthetic forms combine to create heritage and cultural identity in the public sphere” see: Jane E. Goodman, *Berber Culture on the World Stage: From Village to Video*. (Indiana University Press, 2005)

¹⁶ Benjamin Stora, *Algeria 1830-2000: A Short History*. Trans. Jane Marie Todd. (Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 3.

misperceptions among the French about the history and customs of the native populations and their interethnic relations: “The genuine religious differences between Arab and Kabyle were given an interpretation leading to a conclusion that the Kabyle, in contrast to the Arab, was indifferent to religion (thus could be a good subject for conversion) and his society was intrinsically secular, hence closer to the French.” (Lorcin 3) “Kabyle” thus came to be used during the French occupation as “a metaphor for any Berber-speaker who had ‘escaped’ the imprint of Arabic culture and the full impact of Islam,” and as such formed a subgroup “co-opted by the colonizer to promote European values and beliefs.” (Lorcin 5)¹⁷

This rivalry between Arab and Berber populations in Algeria dates back to the Arab invasion in the 7th century when native North Africans were forced into submission by conquering Arab invaders; its exploitation during French rule thus built on ancient lore and the more recent history of resistance from the Turks. The colonial wedge was especially successful in the area of education where the percentages of Arab and Kabyle children in French schools, the one access to the middle class, however segregated, was radically disparate. Yet Kabyles, unlike Jewish Algerians, because of their rural poverty and Islamic beliefs, were never granted full citizenship. Held at arm’s length, they became instead a pool of migrant workers, the first to arrive in French factory towns and the first to return with a sober view of the intrinsic racism and philosophical and legal contradictions in France’s “democratic” colonialism. It was a double standard that fell equally hard on Kabyle and Arab alike. This experience of the colonial divide drove a generation of Kabyle sons and daughters to commit themselves early on to the path of revolution.

Others have been less impressed by the so-called “democratic” system of the Kabyle. Women were strictly forbidden to hold public power in a Kabyle village. Inheritance and filiation is strictly patrilineal (unlike the matrilineal traditions of the southern Toureg) and underscores the huge importance given to alliances, ancestral lines, male offspring and the close control of sexuality. Though strongly critical of Pierre Bourdieu’s application of his theory of male domination to the social landscape of the Kabyle, the French anthropologist Camille Lacoste-Dujardin has written of their

¹⁷ Again, Patricia Lorcin gives a fine overview of this complex history.

conservatism: “It’s as if the Kabyle, in their mountain coastline near Algiers, had forever lived in a state of defense against attempted subversions from the outside. Hence, perhaps in reaction to a context of the threat of permanent danger, [we find] this conservative contraction and resistance towards any change concerning women, out of fear of weakening the society’s aptitude for self-defense.”¹⁸ Yet, as several Kabyle writers have explored, and as Feraoun shows us in Le Fils du pauvre, the pressure of French colonialism as it was lived out within the confines of the extended family home in rural Kabylia was especially revealed by the women and how they remained the same or changed: they could become, like the protagonist Fouroulou's grandmother after World War I, the sole guardians of the ikoufans, for instance, the large earthen jugs holding the totality of the family’s food supplies. They could also become, like Khalti, Fouroulou’s crazy aunt, the lost voices of a highly resilient, nurturing past.

The invasion and occupation of Algeria, which began in 1830 and is characterized by all historians as phenomenally brutal, leading at times to outrage among metropolitan politicians, has been broken down into three distinct periods: military invasion and occupation, military administration and pacification, and civilian administration. It was not fully established until 1870 when the Mokrani insurrection in Kabylia was finally disarmed and hundreds of thousand of acres of land redistributed to European settlers. The memory of this final thrust of colonial exploitation long festered among the Kabyle, despite the divide-and-conquer method mentioned above to distinguish between Berber and Arab populations and cement French hegemony, the above-mentioned “Kabyle Myth.” As many historians have noted, 1870 also marked a turning point in French colonial history. The defeat of the French forces in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the internal unrest of the fall of the Second Empire and the experience of the French Commune led authorities in France to reassess the role and scope of France's colonial enterprises. Portugal, Spain, England, Holland had all proceeded the French down this path of merging national prosperity and identity with the conquest and maintenance of far-reaching territorial acquisitions. Between 1870 and World War II, when the second French colonial empire would reach its zenith and then decline to eventual disintegration,

¹⁸ “Entretien avec Camille Lacoste-Dujardin” in: Actualities & Culture Berbère, a wonderful review edited by Arezki Metref at the Parisian Association de Culture Berbère. Printemps/Ete 2008, N. 58/59, p. 23.

France acquired colonies in Asia, North Africa, Central Africa and the South Pacific. After World War I, they would add former territories of the Ottoman Empire, Lebanon and Syria, as well as Togo and Cameroon in Africa. Binding this ambitious French territorial footprint was the hegemonic ideology of the "mission civilisatrice," understood as Europe's duty to bring (European) civilization to peoples they viewed as primitive.¹⁹ In Algeria, as Edward Said and Abdullah Laroui have argued, this mission was a systematic attempt to establish French imperialism through the destruction of the Algerian state and culture, with the ideological justification that such destruction would further a grander plan of human solidarity. To underscore the ideological foundations of this grander plan, they cite Tocqueville's other colonial sociology, On Algeria:

Tocqueville, who sternly criticized American policy toward Blacks and Native Americans, believed that the advance of European civilization necessitated inflicting cruelties on the Muslim indigenes: in his view, total conquest became equivalent to French greatness. He considered Islam synonymous with "polygamy, the isolation of women, the absence of all political life, a tyrannical and omnipresent government which forces them to conceal themselves and to seek all their satisfactions in family life." (Said 182)

Did the French elite want to erase history, to create their own New World, a tabula rasa for the expansion and glorification of French civilization? Or did they want to correct history, save the old world, offer it their stunning revolution in spirit and thought? These conflicting intentions were embodied in such men as General Bugeaud²⁰ - whose brutality, uninterrupted campaigns, and forced marches were aimed at an enemy "to be hunted, tracked down, and destroyed" - and Napoleon II - who in 1852 declared that it was "an impossible and inhumane thing" to inflict on the Arab population the fate of the Indians in North America and fashioned himself the emperor of the Arabs as much as of the French.²¹ Whatever the fable, repressive measures were codified in French law in 1881 with the *Code de l'Indigenat* or Native Code from which issued the expropriation of over 215 million acres of land and the breaking up of major groups. The decimation of local safety nets ushered in a period of penury among the rural Kabyle that would force

¹⁹ See Alice Conklin, A Mission to Civilize. (Stanford University Press, 1997.)

²⁰ The trauma of his presence in Algeria has been memorialized; "Bougeau" is oft cited in Algerian literature as the name parents use to scare children to obey.

²¹ Stora, *ibid.*, p. 5.

generations of Kabyle men, like Fouroulou's father, to emigrate north or to send their offspring to French schools in hope of a better life. This option was limited. In Muslim-dominated lands like Algeria, ascension to French citizenship, when it was finally granted, was stipulated on the subject officially renouncing his Islamic faith, a path fewer than 20,000 would follow.

"Algerians" thus designated for a short time non-Algerians: the *colons* and *fonctionnaires*, the pioneers and prisoners, soldiers and speculators, administrators and primary school teachers who came from the other, northern side of the Mediterranean. Like Albert Camus, they were often the privileged yet poor offspring of the colonial experiment who represented a great mix of French, Spaniard, Italian, Maltese, Greek and other European women and men who had come in waves after 1871 to settle and expand and often enrich themselves from the resources available to them in Algeria. For like the settling of the American West, going to Algeria was first a station of military encampment, then a *bagne* or penal colony, and then a boomtown. Later, it would become a place to escape the Germans, and then, during the Algerian War of Independence, a place to wage civil war. In the end, for European "Algerians," or *Pied-noirs* as they were henceforth called— the African-born European Blackfeet, an odd dream of reverse nativity or simply the children of black-footed soldiers - it became a memory, a home they were forced to flee.

Chapter 4: Feraoun's Territory

“Inhabiting a barren, picturesque country, unable to grow corn or barley in any quantity, every mountain height crowned by their over-peopled villages, they have of necessity been a hard-working, manufacturing race, bartering their produce for the necessities of life. Such an unconquered country, existing in the very heart of the French territory, seemed a strange anomaly.”

Hugh Mulleneux Walmsley,
Algeria during the Kabyle War, 1858

Feraoun was a Kabyle. As his narrator says tongue-in-cheek of Menrad, “it was not his fault.” Born in the village of Tizi-Hibel in 1917²², he grew up speaking Tamazight, which until recently did not have an active written form, though a long history of creative oral transmission. Like a majority of Kabyles, who do not identify as Arab, he did not learn colloquial Arabic at home, rather most likely gained proficiency in classical Arabic in college.²³ He only lived with Arab-Algerians as an adult. With the French language and the French people, his early experiences were varied yet distant, ranging from childhood meetings with gendarmes, to college days at the prestigious, yet segregated Algiers’ teacher’s College, the Ecole Normale of Bouzarea (EN), to professional liaisons with school colleagues, local administrators, journalists and literary figures. He spent two vacations and short research periods in France and made one very special trip to Greece. However, except for his two years at the EN and another three years working as a social service administrator in El Biar outside Algiers at the end of the war, Feraoun spent his entire life in the hilly, dry mountains of his rural, native Kabylia.

The impact of his rural upbringing cannot be overstated. In 1917, Tizi-Hibel was a remote village of some two thousand subsistence farmers and itinerant factory workers located in what is known as the Grande Kabylie, between the imposing chain of the

²² This is incidentally the same year his fellow countryman and acquaintance Albert Camus was born.

²³ For a detailed history of the Kabyles, including their linguistic ties to Arab and French, see: Patricia Lorcin and Pierre Bourdieu.

Djurdjura mountains to the south and the northern hills that descend over circuitous routes towards the sea and the capital of Algiers, some 125 kilometers away. We get a sense of the village's geographical and historical remoteness in Le Fils du pauvre where the narrator describes how "its dwellings cling to each other along the summit of a ridge like the gigantic vertebrae of some prehistoric monster." A passage from Feraoun's second novel, La Terre et le sang, is caustic:

"The village is not pretty, you have to admit. Planted on the top of a hill like a thick skullcap, imagine a whitish and frayed crown of greenery. The road winds with awkward grace before arriving. Departing from the city, you need a good two hours to cover it and that's when your car is in good shape. First you traverse a bumpy stretch, well-maintained, but after that, it's over: you've changed communes. Dust and mud assail you for a stretch as you climb and climb, zigzagging crazily around steep drops. You stop to breath, check the tires, fill the tank. And then you climb and climb some more. Usually, after navigating a series of hairpin turns and narrow bridges, you finally arrive." (TS 11)

Climbing, clinging, zigzagging, this native terrain and the routes which navigate its implacable surface are often employed in his work to illustrate the territory of *la misère*, the hunger that loomed over all Kabyle villagers like a "spiteful ghost:" "One slips on a senseless slope, descending, descending; if one falls into the depths, one doesn't even notice it. Oh! This slope! Who can say he will never succumb to it?" (TS 24)

Like Fouroulou, Feraoun was the first viable son of a family of eight of whom five survived; as such, he was destined to enjoy the remarkable freedom of a Muslim Berber boy and, at adolescence, to take on the grave responsibility for their collective welfare. His family did not own enough land to make a profit farming and his father was forced to migrate at regular intervals to France to seek work in urban factories. In Lettre à ses amis, Feraoun states that the elder Feraoun made some 20 trips to France before an accident in 1927 forced him to return to Kabylia for good where he received a pension until his death in 1958.²⁴ The tale of this accident is recounted in Le Fils du pauvre, where the scar traversing the father's stomach is shown to his speechless children as a mark of his journey across the colonial divide.²⁵

²⁴ See Marie-Helene Cheze's complete biography of Feraoun, Mouloud Feraoun, la voix et le silence.

²⁵ See my essay, "Translation Narratives : reading Mouloud Feraoun's Algerian classic, The Poor Man's Son, in post-9/11 America." Visions, 1.1 (April 2009): 29-37.

Feraoun himself was marked at birth by the aftershocks of defeat: he was registered under the surname of Feraoun, a name attributed arbitrarily to his family by officers of the French Native Affairs service after the successful termination of the final Kabyle insurrection of 1871. Yet this mark of forced assimilation never took hold at home: his name in the village and in Kabylia at large was and remains Ait Chabane, one of the “sons of Chabane” as we can read in *Le Fils du pauvre*.²⁶ In this rural setting, school thus became the vehicle of the deepest penetration of colonial submission and opportunity. Sent to the village school at the age of six, Feraoun acquired literacy in French. Literacy in Classical Arabic, which had long been supported by an extensive network of medersas or Koranic schools in Muslim Algeria, had been dismantled almost completely by the time Feraoun came of age, decimating the institutional landscape for native intellectuals. Feraoun’s generation thus represented a breakthrough in the French colonial policy of social control through assimilation, and later, association, with the induction of higher numbers of Muslim children into newly-built French schools. Although a small minority of Kabyle families in larger urban centers had entered upon this path well before 1920, across a broader swath of the colonial population this initial passage into the French colonial sphere, and the subsequent decisions of families to prolong the experience past the age of 10, was highly unusual: In 1929 less than 6% of the indigenous child population attended school; by the mid-fifties, when the novel is set, that figure will still not have exceeded 10%.²⁷ Due to his father’s astute wager (school offered the family one less mouth to feed until the boy would mature and take on his responsibilities at home), his own intelligence, his sisters’ sacrifice, and a timely scholarship, Feraoun thus became one of the 20 indigenous students to graduate from the EN in 1936.

As the French-Algerian sociologist Fanny Colonna concluded in her early studies of Feraoun and the EN, access to this school signified a hugely transformative

²⁶ “Ces officiers, nous dit Emmanuel Roblès, savaient l’arabe mais non le berbère. Aussi octroyaient-ils aux Kabyles des patronymes fantaisistes en suivant l’ordre alphabétique. Tous les membres des la Karouba des Ait-Chabane, les ancêtres de Mouloud Feraoun, furent voués à la lettre F. et ses parents devinrent les Feraoun. » Ibid., p. 9-10.

²⁷ See: Colonna, Fanny. *Les Instituteurs algériens, 1883-1939*. Alger: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques. 1975.

achievement.²⁸ Firstly, it enabled Feraoun to secure a salary as a public servant (as schoolteacher and principal) and thus raise himself and his family out *la misère* of hunger and forced emigration for good. Literacy in French and translation, playing by the colonial rules of devotion and debt, were thus early on a constituent element of Feraoun's survival. Some have read Feraoun's first novel as a settling of the debt he felt he owed his French teachers and as a means of excusing himself for winning the chance, in the Kabyle writer Tahar Djaout's words, "to pull himself out of misery and be able to express himself to a large public."²⁹ Secondly, it formed his first significant relations with the cleaved society of colonial Algeria and the idealism of his world view. As Colonna shows, the type of Algerian who graduated before the 1930s from this highly structured and competitive school, largely from the ranks of the European and the Algerian urban and rural poor, spent their lives in public combat for civil rights within the colonial framework.³⁰ They founded La Voix des Indigènes, which from 1922 to 1939 provided an uncensored (or self-censored) vehicle for the aspirations of a budding native middle class. Here educated Algerians could argue the merits of equal treatment, influence curriculum, and form the first professional associations in Algeria, serving as a model for all subsequent associations (medical professionals, railway workers, etc), which Colonna argues was a direct product of *l'école française*. The political principle in such assimilation-oriented associations was that one could criticize, organize, and seek the same salary for the same tasks with the understanding that none of this would signify a rupture from the entrenched colonial rapport. The type of Algerian who graduated after the 1930s, for Colonna, was embodied by Feraoun. Politically unaligned, indifferent or neutral, no longer able to pose their problems as essentially distinct from European teachers due to the fact they had shared the same courses, the same professors, the same world view, these graduates were "henceforth members, on the level of aspirations, of the

²⁸ To my knowledge, Dr. Colonna wrote the first academic study of Feraoun and his work, her 1963 unpublished DES at the University of Algiers under the direction Mouloud Mammeri which she graciously let me consult. She subsequently wrote her doctoral thesis on the sociology of the EN under the direction of Pierre Bourdieu, inspired by Feraoun's achievement and his tragic end. Her analysis of the sociological milieu of the emerging Algerian middle class pre-independence informs the present chapter.

²⁹ Tahar Djaout, article published in Tiddulka, n. 14 Summer 1992. Web. 10 June 2010. : <<http://www.tizhibel.net/index.php?page=histoire&liste=0&histoire=7>>

³⁰ "Le type d'homme que produit le cours normal avant 1924, c'est S. Faci, fondateur de la Voix, instituteur laïque, naturalisé, membre de la Ligue des droits de l'homme, dont toute la vie est un combat publique. » Fanny Colonna, Les Instituteurs, p. 192.

middle class." It was a section of a generation that, like his father's, would contribute to the foundation of a modern, industrial, emancipated Algeria, yet, by not overtly seeking its political liberation, would remain an invisible force, and a problematic ancestry.

Deeply marked by the scholastic, French humanist education he received at Bouzareah, Feraoun returned to Kabylia to begin his career. Belonging to a very small elite of educated middle-class Kabyles, Feraoun remained nevertheless located in and committed to rural life, marrying his first cousin, founding a large family, providing for his aging parents and sisters, and involving himself in local politics. Like the teachers who first inculcated a devotion to learning and self-respect, Feraoun resigned himself to a highly respectable, yet limited existence. As the narrator of Le Fils du pauvre summed it up: "While awaiting death, cultivate your garden in order to better cultivate the garden of your children and the other children, who are also yours. You are not a schoolteacher for nothing." (PMS 150)

The Lure of Fiction

Resignation does not always mean the lack of secret ambition. Feraoun initiated a second career when he began a manuscript in 1939 at age 26 that would become Le Fils du pauvre, Menrad, Instituteur Kabyle. Written over twelve years, at night on school notebooks, identical to those used by his young Kabyle students to practice French, it would propel this modest and sensitive man into the role of cultural mediator and native hero. 1939 was an explosively transformative year: it marked the end of the pacified activism of Algerian teachers with the final issue of Les Voix des Humbles, as well as the start of WWII that would usher in the end of the era of European imperialism. It was also the year a young French-Algerian journalist named Albert Camus made his way to Kabylia to research, write and publish his now famous exposé "Misère de la Kabyle" in the leftist and soon anti-colonial newspaper Alger républicain. Camus's unprecedented,

public, sober yet heartfelt call for education as a means “to bring down the walls separating us” fell on very susceptible ears.

In a writing style that was more concerned with an accurate and sincere layering of personal and collective observation than with literary novelty per se, Feraoun’s manuscript responded with corrective testimony: its chapters provided internal witness to the abject yet ignored misery of Colonial Algeria, but also to Kabyle humanity, to this native people’s intelligence and resilience. As such, it was a sort of indigenous lesson plan for Camus and the *École d’Algers*, writers of European origin centered around the bookseller and editor Charlot who had broken taboos by exposing the brutality of colonial life in opposition to the exotic travel journals or stereotyped autobiographies French audiences were accustomed to reading. Though nobly proclaiming the misery and grandeur of *la condition humaine*, these so-called Algerian novels were characterized by a striking absence of native Algerians. For Feraoun, this absence meant two things: Firstly, it was a sad truth of colonial Algerian society, a brutal, ingrained indifference and ignorance between Algerians and European *colons*, the “gray cloth” he saw in all colonial relations, “a sad and sinister barrier between two worlds all too ready to hate.” (J 16) European-Algerian writers had underscored this “hostility bred of proximity” between colonizers and colonized by focusing exclusively on subjects “grounded in the everyday reality of working-class life in Algeria.” (Dunwoodie 223) As Dunwoodie shows in Writing French Algeria, the *École d’Alger* modified the colonial doxa by demonstrating in their works how the inner turmoil and at times racially hostile attitudes of their *Pied-noir* subjects had become a central part of the colonial problem. The ways in which these characters were caught in social, economic and political mechanisms that perpetuated a hierarchical exploitation of colonized peoples as well as their own lack of class consciousness and persistent poverty, their symbolic or metaphysical destitution, underscored the pervasive lack of subject positions for “Arabs” in colonial society at large.

Secondly, this absence as a fictional strategy for exposing racial tensions appeared to Feraoun, as to other Muslim writers, as an invitation, a possibility held open between individuals who managed to overcome such ethnic loyalty and hatred enough to imagine

a common, if ever partially represented, reality. Especially with the heightening of extremist views, Feraoun came to see the novel as:

the most complete vehicle at our disposal for communicating with others. Its register is limitless and allows a man to address himself to other men, to inform them that he resembles them, understands them and loves them. Nothing is greater or more worthy of envy and esteem than the novelist who assumes - honestly, courageously, painfully – his role and succeeds in holding between himself and his public this wide communication.³¹

In this sense, Le Fils du pauvre exhibited the social and philosophical constraints and freedoms of Feraoun's education. Its focus on Kabyle society to the exclusion of Arab, Jewish and European populations, exhibited the barriers of an imperial, race-based society, and the creative ways individuals maintained a sense of integrity in this oppressive environment. Feraoun, like Mammeri, Roblès and Camus, saw in such omissions the elements of a pan-Algerian modesty, a hesitancy to speak about the "other side," about anything not personally lived. In such a context, the writer's function, as Feraoun saw it, is to stay put and to give witness, to speak from experience, to articulate the partial truth he or she is capable of representing. The writer thus avoids becoming a zealot, or an unproductive, suspicious character caught between cultures and political ideologies. As Feraoun went on to write in a seminal essay on Algerian literature: "In reality, we do not find ourselves caught 'between two chairs,' rather quite simply seated on our own. And of all places, it is quite necessary that we should be at our own, in order to dispel fear and deserve credit." (A 60-61)

The concern with credibility here is revealing: Feraoun belonged to the first generation capable of mastering written French, the language of the dominant minority, the colonial Other, but understood - within the educational milieu of the EN and the rural milieu of mid-20th century Kabylia - as the language of universal values, of human rights, of political and individual freedom, *and* literary expression.³² With the gradual, and then

³¹ Vingt Questions a Mouloud Feraoun," text found by this researcher in the archives of the Centre Culturelle Algérienne, July 2008.

³² Scholars have generally seen Feraoun and company as the first generation of Algerian novelists. The earliest signs of the emergence of such literature is explored by Peter Dunwoodie, especially in his essay, "Assimilation, Cultural Identity, and Permissible Deviance in Francophone Algerian Writing of the Interwar years." Ed. Lorcin In: Lorcin, Algeria and France, 1800-2000: Identity-memory-nostalgia. (2006) Here he examines the "évolués" in the years 1900, 1912, and 1920 who developed a style of auto-ethnographic fiction that he

precipitous, slide toward Algerian nationalism and European-Algerian independence, Algeria's radicalized identities in the 1950s and 1960s pushed Feraoun to seek moderation. Out of fear of the paroxysm of violence as much as out of an innate sense of honor and a respect for the benefits brought by contact with the *roumis*, or French, Feraoun was willing to pay the price for accepting the role of cultural mediator or translator between Algerian and European sensibilities and their opposing points of view. Indeed, it was a debt he both accepted and despaired of. "In the eyes of my compatriots, in the eyes of those who struggle, I appear as a lukewarm figure too scared to speak the truth. In the eyes of the political agitators, I'm nothing but a vulgar traitor. To myself, I am simply an ambitious guy who overestimated his strength." (L 122)

As Le Sueur, Hargreaves, Poole and Khadda have argued, to see Feraoun as a complacent assimilated *evolué* – an image many Algerian and French writers, journalists and political activists have drawn both during his life and after - is to misread the lessons of his journey. Inspired and disappointed by writers like Camus, Feraoun first intention in this early work was corrective: to outline the territory of a cultural entity that in the context of colonial Algeria was not fully recognized as human. To make Kabylia known and to condemn its misery, which, in his own words, was just an example. But it was also always more than that. It was Kabylia, that hilly Algerian backcountry and heartland, land of dire irony, of careful economy, of hope and ruse. In an interview with Maurice Monnoyer in 1953, Feraoun summed up the crux of his literary project and the mentoring he required to bring it to fruition:

The idea came to me that I could try to translate the Kabyle soul. Be a witness. I'm a real Kabyle. I've always lived in Kabylia. It's important people realize that Kabyles are men just like the others. And, you know, I think I'm in a good position to say this. My mind made up, someone was always at my heels, pushing a pen into my paw, so to speak. That's my friend Roblès, who I've known for twenty years. Each time: "Where you at?", "Work hard", "I'm waiting for your book." He's come to Taourirt a bunch of times to get me going again and, with a car like his, it's an expedition each time. Friendship, let me tell you, is no vain word for him."

argues had no antecedents in pre-conquest Algeria and appeared as a sign of estrangement, especially because its adoption by Muslims was governed by a "strict conformity to normative French models." Dunwoodie cites Khodja's *Mamous, l'ébauche d'un idéal*, published in 1928, and Rabah and Akli Zenatis's *Bou-el-Nouar, le jeune algérien*, published in 1945.

Reading this quotation, I imagine Feraoun, forty years old, responsible on his teacher's salary for an extended family of twelve, sitting in an Algiers radio station in front of an intelligent, educated, urban French-Algerian avid for this man's generous revelation of an internal world to which few French-Algerians were privy. I hear his French, and the Tamazight tucked into it, the brief phrases, the understated ambition. Though he wrote elegantly upon the same subject elsewhere, his spoken words here resonate. And having read the edition this nice journalist read as well as the original he probably did not, I begin to see where Feraoun got lost, where we lost Feraoun, where anyone who tries to situate their voice between the brutal (or charming) distance of the oppressor and the clamor of one's own people's belly ends up being quite conveniently dismissed.

Exposure

Le Fils du Pauvre is full of intimations that the protagonist-writer wavered between the desire to write, to pierce through and enter public life, and the dread of lacking talent, of undertaking an endeavor that lay beyond his ability, of simply wasting his time: “Menrad was ambitious. He made fun of his ambition. He understood, poor man, that if he tried too hard to soar like an eagle, he would only waddle in the mud like a duck.” (PMS 3) Yet, in the course of the writing, a confident, if sober, assessment of his literary skills emerged, as expressed by the narrator of “The Elder Son:”

Such is the partial confession anybody may read in Menrad Fouroulou’s big lined notebook. In his idle moments, he sometimes rereads what he has written. He fantasizes that with a bit more patience, sophistication, knowledge – he admits this to himself – he would have pulled something off. And this is a consolation in itself. The distance separating him from a writer does not seem insurmountable to him. If he no longer lets himself dream of the future, he can nevertheless turn around and see the path already covered. (PMS 82)

This internal transformation is echoed in Jeanne Adam’s overview of the editing and publishing history of this first novel. Feraoun completed the first version of the novel, entitled Menrad Fouroulou, an anagram of his name, and dedicated to “my

venerable teachers,” between September 1944 and October 1945. It was divided in two parts; “Peace” and “War.” This division was a direct reflection of his experience. As he stated in a 1955 interview, “I am 48 years old. I’ve lived 20 years of peace. What peace! 1920-1940. And 28 years of war- world-wide, mechanized, chemical, genocidal...”³³ His first reader was his former teacher at the EN, Aimé Dupuy, who must have encouraged him, for in 1945 he presented it for the Grand Prix Littéraire de L’Algérie, whose committee requested six copies. Unable to afford the cost or copy it himself, he sent it to Camus and Roblès’s editor, Charlot. It appears that Charlot’s assistant at the time, a fellow Kabyle writer, Jean Amrouche, rejected the manuscript. He was later awarded 5000 old francs to pay for copies and in 1949 his novel was accepted for publication *à compte d’auteur* by the Nouvelles éditions latines for the price of 170,000 old francs. There is no public document explaining how Feraoun managed to pay for this. What is clear is that the title changed to “Menrad Fouroulou, instituteur Kabyle,” possibly at the request of his editor, and the book, published in 1000 copies, did not sell out until it was awarded the Grand Prix Littéraire de la Ville d’Alger in 1950. By then Charlot took over the selling of the book and Feraoun’s renewed contact with Emmanuel Roblès, a fellow student at the EN whom he now met again as a professional peer, helped him establish a correspondence and friendship with Albert Camus and connected him with the Parisian publishing house, Les Éditions du Seuil.

This whole series of events brought him into the public light in ways he both desired and feared. Meanwhile, he continued to produce. His second and third novels, part of an intended trilogy - La Terre et le sang and Les Chemins qui montent - represent the lives of Kabyle emigrants from the 1930s through the 1950s in France and their troubled return to Kabylia, addressing the particular plight of mixed-race individuals and an increasingly outright critique of the colonial experiment. They were published directly in France, where he was awarded the Prix Populiste in 1953. Following were an illustrated essay on Kabylie, Jours de Kabylie, and his posthumous works: a compilation of his correspondences entitled Lettres à ses amis, edited by Roblès; L’anniversaire, a collection of previously published essays, the omitted chapters from Le Fils du pauvre, and an unfinished novel about a liaison between a French woman and an Algerian

³³ Ibid.

teacher; and finally, his Journal. Prodded by Robles and his Parisian editor, Feraoun chronicled in this riveting account the everyday lives of ordinary Kabyles and French-Algerians during the war, honing a poignantly honest, yet sober testimony of the violently shifting ground of colonial relations and the incremental construction of a liberated Algerian identity. His own position as a colonial mongrel, caught between loyalties and yet proudly refusing to flee, is painfully represented, as well as the constant threat of assassination. Hailed at the time of its publication by numerous journalists and intellectuals both in France and in the Maghreb, Feraoun's Journal has come to be seen as the "single most important document from the Algerian war of liberation." (PMS xxx).

As signaled in his letters to his French editor and to Roblès, Feraoun also completed a manuscript he intended to call L'Anniversaire in 1958. It likewise concerns the love affair of a French school teacher and her Algerian school director. Rejected by Seuil on the grounds that it did not sufficiently situate the affair in its historical context, Feraoun decided to not alter or edit the manuscript and put it aside.³⁴ Despite his efforts to protect himself and his family by leaving unrest in Kabylia for a post in Algiers in 1957, Feraoun did not live to see it published. On March 13, 1962, days before the end of the war, he was called out of an educational conference with five other teaching colleagues. While others cowered inside, threatened by armed assailants, Feraoun and his colleagues were lined up in two racially-divided groups and gunned down execution-style by members of the OAS, a renegade group of French-Algerian terrorists. Witnesses say this gentle giant, who for years had imagined, feared and courageously assumed the inevitability of assassination, was the last to die.

Building Stones

This short biography gives you a sense of the territory Feraoun crossed – and created. Reading his novels and essays, I have been struck over and over by Feraoun's conviction

³⁴ This manuscript was published in 2008 by Feraoun's sons, Ali and Rachid, under the title La Cite des Roses (Algiers: Yamcam éditions.)

that, like our social roles and professional ambitions, the imagination itself is situated. There are testimonial limits to fiction. Obstacles exist or arise that cannot be overcome with any flight of the imagination, with ambition or denial, with good intentions. A writer, in the Feraounian universe, has dues to pay, loyalties to navigate, territories to map before the true wealth of his or her fictional craft can be deployed. It's a matter of both honesty and tact, of revealing secrets in a way that allows for collective liberation. And accepting that not everyone will agree.

Part of this lesson came from the countryside of his birth, the treacherous paths to and from his village, its meager fruits, the collective ownership of its rugged fields. It came also from the conservative traditionalism of his family, his ancestral lineage, his religion, his oral heritage. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who sought out Feraoun during his stay in Algeria and for whom he served as informant, described this lesson of limit – and honor – in his classic portrait of Kabylia in Sociologie de l'Algérie:

Cette société a longtemps trouvé son idéal dans le passé, le changement, sans être absent, se trouvant comme ralenti. « Suis le chemin de ton père et de ton grand-père, » dit un proverbe kabyle. Respect du passé qui, chez le Bédouin, prend forme de culte. Sans cesse, il se situe et se mesure en référence à un âge d'or, épopée des nobles conquérants que chante le *maddah* et dont son âme s'enchanté ; l'émigration intérieure, à la faveur du mythe et de l'illusion rétrospective, tache à obnubiler la réalité ingrate du monde présent par évocation de la noblesse et de la grandeur antiques qui sont aussi promesses passées, que la critique ou le refus du présent surgissent encore parfois, non de la vision d'un ordre meilleur, condamnation du présent et du passé, mais de la mémoire exaltante de l'ordre ancien, fondement de l'orgueil et défense suprême contre le doute sur soi. (Bourdieu 85)

On the other side of this conservatism and defensive nostalgia stood the freedoms and limitations of the colonial world, what Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer has *un monde de castes pyramidales* and between them *le monde du contact* – places in the social landscape of French Algeria where races met and mingled. Stretching across the Mediterranean like an impracticable bridge, this world was built on ideological and legal contradictions between metropolitan France and the settler society of French Algeria. It fostered ambition in Kabyle fathers and sons like Feraoun and simultaneously demanded

submission, denying access to a stable existence or access to class-conscious political formations through a system of legally distinct castes:

Mais si chaque caste présente une échelle de statuts hiérarchisés, s'il est permis à tout individu de la caste inférieure de gravir les échelons de sa caste, il est pratiquement impossible de franchir l'abîme qui sépare les deux échelles. L'esprit de caste étouffe la conscience de classe comme le montre l'attitude de petit peuple européen : la conscience et la vie politiques prennent la forme d'un manichéisme. (B 117)

Although Feraoun's third novel, *Les Chemins qui montent*, published in 1957, examines with unprecedented honesty the tragic repercussions of such a Manichean world, Feraoun clearly saw that such dichotomies presented a trap. In part, this clarity was due to his personal luck. A rare success, he found himself at a vantage point that relativized entrenched identities. Indeed, in the course of his short life, he was the graduate of not one, but three, schools of thought: the "school" of his Kabyle village, the French colonial school embodied by the EN, and the *École d'Algers*. An astute, observant, diligent student, no stranger to hunger or to the fear of failure, he mastered each cultural context with ease if also urgency, and each school claimed him as a protégé. Descriptions of him as a child focus on his modesty and his quiet, studious mean. He was never one to "make a fuss," an expression whose translation he has Fouroulou struggle over in his novel, nor did he enjoy the physical or social spectacle of success. When the Algerian writer Tahar Djaout made a pilgrimage to his native village in 1992, his interviews with villagers who had known the writer led him to conclude: "There was hardly anything that distinguished Mouloud Feraoun from the villagers he lived amongst." As proof, Djaout offered this description of the villagers' reaction to such outsider visits:

They are nevertheless a bit annoyed by this endless line of strangers, academics, journalists or curious individuals who come to research him with such seriousness, who disturb the peace and discretion of one of their most modest fellow villagers. Had Feraoun hidden something from them, he who, to the contrary, appeared in all ways the same as others? Had he played a trick on them?³⁵ (*Tiddukla*, N. 14, Summer 1992)

³⁵ Tahar Djaout, article in *Tiddukla*, n. 14, Summer 1992. Web. 20 June 2010.

Djaout's insight into Feraoun's "trick" of multiple belongings, of passing, of doubling or non-unified identity, points less to a personal trait, however, than to a cultural paradigm, the ingrained fear and wisdom of a native minority, as well as to a period of contemporary Algerian history in which that cultural paradigm was seen to pose fundamental obstacles to a promised social equality.³⁶ In Feraoun's creative examination of these "obstacles," he lent depth and coherence to this cultural paradigm's written self, the Kabyle literary character, especially the character of the Kabyle writer, as a "field of first permission" where personal and collective trajectories, stagnant mores and life-affirming traditions, the past and the uncertain future, could meet, collide, and collude. A "graduate" from each school of culture, an adept at each institution's rules, Feraoun ultimately saw within the cultural boundaries of his native Kabylia a larger struggle that did not concern him or them alone. And this larger vision was problematic. It depended on exposure to a fractured public sphere, to a broken vision of universalism.

In such a context, the solutions a writer finds can become a kind of ideological football passed between contentious opponents. The subtleties he or she exposes can be wholly missed or dismissed, often in an effort to confer or deny status through comparison. As we read Feraoun's measured lines today, we can begin to register his understanding of these misunderstandings, these misperceptions, which nurtured his particular irony. His analysis of the impact of social inferiority is thus woven into his struggle for creative license. His omissions are revealing. He seems to say: let us attend to local truths, familiar blockages, the conflicts with those we love. May the very familiarity of these scenes and characters arouse something larger and more kind, more real, than an ideal, a political fiction. What appeared to him at first as obstacles became, in the practice of writing fiction, the building stones of an *imagined* humanity *à la kabyle*: Birth order. Gender. Ancestral affiliations. Maternal forces. Conflict resolution. The social context of seasonal crafts. Hunger. Emigration. Death. Literacy. Each aspect demanded careful attention in order for Feraoun the writer to open up a territory of the mind that until then had not be mapped, neither in his native Tamazight nor in French. Together they constitute the first eleven chapters of his first novel, Le Fils du pauvre.

³⁶ For more on the cultural paradigm of the Kabyle see Fazia Aitel's dissertation on Berberology.

**Chapter 5: « Formatting » Le Fils:
Editorial History, Reception, Synopsis and Cultural Critique**

What matters, you see, is not what you have done or what you presently think. Suppose that notebook is abandoned there on that unstable table and you are eliminated according to your own predictions. What matters then is that notebook, I mean what you've put in it, or more exactly, what others will find in it. What matters, therefore, must necessarily matter to your reader as well. People have such little reason for you they are ready to get rid of you. Which means that your story does not interest them. They are interested in themselves and that's no small thing, believe me. And anyways, they do or try to do what you yourself have tried to do, just like thousands of others. What could you possibly write that would be so important to your peers [...] ? (A, 21)

An Inventory

Shortly after the publication of my English translation of Feraoun's novel, which was accompanied by the historian James Le Sueur's historically focused introduction, Le Sueur was interviewed by Leonard Lopate on NPR, a well-known, intellectually ambitious radio program. Comments by Kabyles living in the United States who listened in were ruthless. They castigated Le Sueur for daring to define Kabyle identity for an American public and for reducing the importance of Feraoun's work to a mere historical allegory. A comment about the translation on Amazon.com, left by a Kabyle living in the States, echoed their rejection. "I would give this book a 5 star rating if it weren't for the translation. [...] I read the book in its published French version and I happen to be from the same area as Feraoun himself, so I am very familiar with the things that Feraoun talks about."³⁷ In the effort to carry this author's work towards our shores and to give him a home in our multi-cultural context, I am reminded of Feraoun's comment about Si Mohand. In his posthumously published essay on this legendary and controversial figure

³⁷ Web. 11 April 2010. <http://www.amazon.com/Poor-Mans-Son-Menrad-Schoolteacher/dp/0813923263/ref=dp_return_2?ie=UTF8&n=283155&s=books>

of Kabyle resistance and oral heritage, he wrote: "If we claim to present Si Mohand as he truly was, we will have to destroy his legend." (Si Mohand 11)

Members of the Mouloud Feraoun Association of Tizi-Hibel and his own sons, Ali and Rachid Feraoun, however, are delighted to see Feraoun's work take root in the English-speaking world, for here he is unknown and they are very savvy about the stakes involved. It is a matter of honoring an ancestor and of ensuring his memory as well as their own cultural freedom by outwitting local censures. Like Lorca in Spain, Feraoun occupies a space writers can come to fill when collective trauma cannot be worked through publically. When an author of a cultural minority comes to symbolize the restitution of lost dignity, when his work is a refuge for conflictual memory, such passage into another language world, especially one that is eclipsing a former dominant power, can be a blessing. His words, refracted through American English, can embolden the cultural, and perhaps political, struggle of Kabyles in present-day Algeria.

A novel, however, can be uncomfortably revealing. One's culture is exposed to the harsh and ignorant or unsympathetic view of outsiders. One's cherished myths or traditional customs can appear quaint, stripped of grounded complexity, even reprehensible, like comforting lies or simple oppression. Before we examine connections between Feraoun's journey and novel and American writers, let us examine the novel's formatting and reception in Algeria and France. How was Feraoun's work intended, packaged, perceived? In counterpoint, which cultural critique is embedded in the narrative structure of the original (and American) version? Is an assimilationist intent evident? What kind of personal, ethnic, or historic inventory does Feraoun first text offer the unsuspecting reader?

Le Fils du pauvre is both a novel and the tale of its many textual emanations. As Martine Mathieu-Job has exhaustively investigated in her 2007 literary exposition Le Fils du Pauvre de Mouloud Feraoun ou la fabrique d'un classique, the history of these texts allows us to see the "enormous incidence of editorial formatting in the reception of the work." (Mathieu-Job 18) As previously mentioned, the original manuscript was written

over a ten-year stretch and only published in 1950 in Algiers by the Cahiers du Nouvel Humanisme in an edition financed by the author himself. The second version of the book was published in Paris under the direction of the *Pied-noir* writer Emmanuel Roblès and the French editor Paul Flamand in the Mediterranean Collection of the Editions du Seuil. This second edition appeared in 1954, the year the Algerian War officially broke out. “Formatting” for this second version, which has come to represent the final version in the French-speaking world, a veritable classic of the *récit d'enfance* and a founding work of North African Francophone literature, entailed significant stylistic, temporal, and thematic changes. However, it did not represent a definitive version for Feraoun himself. Concerned with the coherence of his oeuvre, Feraoun continued to work on the material omitted from the second version for an eventual sequel. Seuil honored this comprehensive vision by publishing the missing chapters posthumously in 1972 together with other unfinished pieces and essays under the title L'Anniversaire. These excerpts were followed, after a long period of silence on the national scene, by a 1992 version of the novel prefaced by the Algerian literary historian Christiane Chaulet-Achour. Finally, in 2002, a version based on the original manuscript provided by Feraoun's son Ali.

Annexed to this publishing history is a scholastic use of the text. Between 1958 and 1965, essentially a bridge period between French colonial rule and an emergent Arabo-Islamic independent state, excerpts of the novel were included in L'Ami fidele, a French-language primer in wide circulation in Algeria and partially edited by Feraoun. As Chaulet-Achour has meticulously documented, Feraoun's representation of a Kabyle boyhood was used here to give literary support to a colonial-republican ideal of a pacifist liberation through education. After independence, this boyhood set in Kabylia, heartland of the revolution, promoted the ideal of a new Algerian identity. Yet after 1965, as Achour shows, Feraoun's portrait of the Kabyle peasant was gradually stripped of its ethnic and historic fiber, eliminating first the colonial and then the Berber context through careful editing. With the very purpose of Fouroulou's arduous social climb displaced, these excerpts came to provide a kind of post-revolutionary sociology of a nation intent on forgetting its past. Oddly enough, it is possible that many Kabyle today who recall the character of Fouroulou know him only through these culturally cleansed excerpts. When the Kabyle protest movement, or Berber Spring, flared up in 1980,

spurred by the official cancellation of a lecture by Feraoun's peer, the Berber writer and ethnographer Mohammed Mammeri, mention of *Le Fils du pauvre* was ultimately erased altogether from the Algerian curriculum.³⁸

As the tale of these versions and emanations of the novel suggest, the work of rereading Feraoun, of reediting and translating his work, is both a work of scholarship and historical-cultural retrieval. Indeed, one is tempted to read the appearance, disappearance and reappearances of Feraoun's name in social discourse in Algeria as a map of its internal struggle to achieve *something like* a nation.

Reception

As with later excerpts, the first version's reception was colored from the very beginning by politics. Algerian nationalists did not look favorably upon the award, interpreting it as the attempt of the French-Algerian bourgeois intelligentsia to co-opt a nascent native literature for the ends of pacification and assimilation. Some criticized Feraoun for accepting. In a correspondence I initiated in 2008 between a French communist teacher who spent the early years of the revolution in Kabylia and was honored by being perhaps the first Frenchman to get thrown out of Algeria for rebellious actions, the late Jean Galland, and his friend Hadjeres Sadek, former editor in chief of the review Progrès, the Algerian communist newspaper, we can see the lines of tension Feraoun's foray into the public sphere revealed: Galland, who met Feraoun and implored him to join the cause, writes with barely withheld contempt – almost 50 years after the fact - of Feraoun resting on his laurels and, upon the pretext of a “neutralité scolaire,” of refusing to publically support striking students. For Galland, Le Fils du pauvre contributed to “le confusionnisme” that obscured the gaping holes in the “mission civilisatrice” and propagated a lack of confidence in the right and the will of the Algerian people to liberate

³⁸ 1980 was also the year the Algerian filmmaker Ali Mouzawi submitted a project for a full-length film adaptation of the novel, only to be rejected. Only in spring 2008, did he finally attain state financing and shoot the film.

themselves from colonial servitude. Turning to his old friend for a more measured formulation, Galland asks Hadjeres to explain his paper's vehement critique of Feraoun and other Algerian novelists publishing at the same time. Hadjeres, affirming Gallard's assessment, places it however within a contextualized history of social relations of the time: in his eyes Feraoun's work expressed the "materialistic" basis of the popular aspirations of rural populations at the time, to live in dignity and in freedom. His literary testimony reflected in real ways, as opposed to the "sacred causes" of many opportunists, the "split" mind and skepticism of many who doubted a radical solution. For this reason, Hajderes understands the renewed interest in Feraoun: his works provide a sociological portrait of frustrated aspirations that foreshadows the deceptions facing Algerians post-independence. His paper's early condemnation of Feraoun's literary cooptation remains in his eyes, however, justified: "There really was a tentative by the colonists (including and perhaps mostly made up of "liberals") to use these works to promote the "gentle" path they all desired (and which for quite a while had already proven itself illusory)."³⁹

Feraoun's "social approach" with its "reformist character" was indeed a "gentle path." It spoke of a "rich Kabyle" with his 6 hectares, but not of the rich *colon* with his thousands of hectares or even the middle-class European settler with an average of 100. Moreover, it omitted direct mention of transformative political events, such as the spontaneous 1945 nationalist uprising in Sétif and its gruesome repression by French forces.⁴⁰ Feraoun's apparent silence on this watershed moment in contemporary history, and his novel's focus on a retrospective view of the humanism of Kabyle villagers, seemed to play into the hands of the colonists, who read it as a welcome relief: here was a "Musulman" finally speaking up but with a captivating, assimilationist work addressed to European readers and devoid of angry, political rhetoric.

The second Parisian version of Le Fils du pauvre, which came about through a kind of cultural appropriation or a literary emigration, gave support for the assimilationist or apologist reading. Emmanuel Roblès, whom Feraoun had met at the EN and who had

³⁹ Personal correspondences of the author, dated 2008.

⁴⁰ Believing that the hour of full reforms had sounded, hundreds of Algerians took to the streets the day the Nazis surrendered to celebrate a victory they shared in; perceived as a lawless mob, they were attacked by the gendarme. This led to indiscriminate violence against the *Pied noir* population, resulting in some 100 deaths. The gendarme responded with overwhelming force. Figures range between 2000 and 45,000 killed; a modest estimate is 6000. In a famous missive to Paris, the head of the gendarmes, General Duvall, proclaimed, "I have given you peace for ten years, but don't deceive yourselves..." (quoted in Horne 28)

visited him in the late 40s and encouraged his writing, was shocked to learn that Feraoun had gone ahead and published the book on his own. “Without consulting me,” he writes in a footnote in Lettres à ses amis, the collection of Feraoun’s letters Roblès edited and published in 1971, “Feraoun had published the book himself. I had been to visit him in May 1950 in Tizi Hibel and he had not whispered a word of this. That autumn I received a copy with the dedication, ‘To ER, at the risk of appearing ridiculous.’ I vigorously reproached him and alerted Seuil.” Paul Flamand, Roblès’s editor at the Editions du Seuil, agreed to publish the novel in the Mediterranean Collection, which was publishing other Algerian writers like Kateb Yacine and Mohammed Dib. By then, Feraoun had completed his second novel, La Terre et la Sang, which Roblès read and recommended to Flamand as well. According to their exchange of letters, the three decided to publish the second novel first, in 1953, and the first novel in an edited version in 1954. Feraoun was adamant that Roblès write a forward to the novels, a request that was not granted.

Whatever motivated this unmediated presentation, it was at this point that Feraoun’s first novel became Le Fils du pauvre, the Francophone classic. It was clearly edited in such a way as to become “classic:” as we have seen, the style was cleansed of colloquial mannerisms and the tenses and overall structure were “fixed” to reflect Metropolitan standards of narration. Moreover, the entire section dealing with the extreme penuries Kabyles faced during World War II and their early recognition of the decline of French power and the arrival of American hegemony was omitted. This omission significantly altered the conclusion and thus the whole thrust of the book: The 1954 edited version is neatly divided into two parts, balancing the tragic end of an otherwise carefree childhood era (the death of the maternal aunts) with the “exaltant tension” (Martine-Job 20) of a possible escape from poverty through education (the now teenage Fouroulou heads off alone to take his exams and symbolically promises the honor and financial stability of his family in the colonial parameters of French Algeria). As Martine-Job has argued, “The escape from the self-denying and moribund world of traditional Kabylia leads directly into Western society, represented by the *École Normale*,

the temple of French Republican values. One can well understand why the novel was read as a novel of acculturation” (20)⁴¹

To return - or to move forward - to the original edition (and the 2002 Algerian version as well as my translation), we find a novel that is not tied up so neatly. “Family” and “The Elder Son” lead not to an imminent ascension into the colonial middle class, rather to “War.” This third, omitted, part presents a fully grown man who has experienced up close the idealism and higher calling of the EN, but who has discovered no alternative to a return home to teach his own kind. Here, equipped with his distanced eye and his colonial tongue, he chronicles village life in the midst of “the storm” of World War II that will fundamentally alter the expectations and aspirations of colonial subjects. Indeed, as Robert Elbaz and Martine Mathieu-Job have argued in their recent rereading of Feraoun, Feraoun’s original privileges an interpenetration of genres and discourses to situate his voice and to represent the “truth” of colonial subjects and his novel becomes embedded in a journal of everyday life. We hear the voice of the mature Mouloud Feraoun emerge, “the complexity, irony, and compassion that dictate the intellectual rigor and honesty of his life's work” as the Village Voice critic Ammiel Alcalay wrote of Feraoun upon the American publication of Feraoun's Journal: 1955-1962, Reflections on the French-Algerian War.

Knowing that Feraoun was never happy with the Parisian version of his first novel and that he worked on incorporating this omitted third part into a sequel even just before his death, it is instructive to consider Feraoun’s analysis of the creative three-part structure he observed in the poetry of his 19th century countryman, Si Mohand, a man on whom he clearly projected his own literary ambition and struggle:

⁴¹ Despite Feraoun’s obvious commitment to the memory and lives of Kabyle men and women and his nuanced critiques of both French and Kabyle traditions, the positive colonial reception of his first novel became, with his subsequent novels, further proof to Algerian nationalists of his political failings. In a famous diatribe in 1957 after the publication of Feraoun’s third novel, Les Chemins qui montent, the French-Algerian journalist Marcel Maschino wrote in his article, “Les Chemins qui montent ou le roman d'un faux-monnayeur: “while the Algerian intellectual carries out the revolution with his comrades, the village idiot writes his intimate journal. [...] The novel of a loser, which is also the story of a loser.”⁴¹ As Sarah Poole and Belinda Jack have noted, Feraoun continued to be the target of this “ambivalent, even hostile attitude;” even twenty years after his death, his lack of revolutionary credentials was cited as a measure of his personal and literary failings. See: Francophone Literatures. Oxford Univ Press, 1996 , p. 82, and Jean Déjeux, “Mouloud Feraoun, le mal aimé .” CELFAN Review 1.2 (February 1982): 16-19.

Like in a ballad, the first stanza is usually imprecise or assigns itself generalities; the second develops, completes, adjusts, focuses. The last three lines constitute the conclusion, sometimes the decisive argument. This last tercet can appear very far from the first. But don't be fooled: it's the one that constitutes the confession, the sensitive spot. The initial parts depend on it. It's the one that withholds the key to the enigma when the poem is obscure.

Same construction: from the general to the particular, the secondary to the essential, the futile to the serious. (Si Mohand)

If we apply this analysis to his first novel, the omission of the third and final “stanza” on war and observation of village life, on how uneducated colonial subjects read their times and react to larger forces, undermined Feraoun’s literary project. Seen in this light, Feraoun’s original manuscript holds a key lost in its migration to the colonial center: the dialogue between common folk, their educated, literate, complicit storyteller, and the mixed society of colonial Algeria. Yet the reference to Si Mohand also teaches us something else: Si Mohand was a bard within an oral tradition whose poems were passed down to Feraoun and his generation through those who reappropriated them, altering them to fit contemporary circumstances and their own poetic gift. In this sense, the poems never had a definitive version, but offered themselves like a “field of first permission,” a place to resuscitate and reclaim ancestral lineage in the context of a conflictual present. Likewise, despite the various versions of his first novel, Feraoun’s characters have taken on a life of their own. A whole generation found access to a contemporary cultural heritage in the voices of Fouroulou, the elder Menrad, cousin Chabha, aunt Nana and aunt Khalti. Their names and stories, whatever their textual emanation, embody the history of 20th century Kabylia and the ways people there remember and valorize their past.

According to Le Sueur’s research, Feraoun offered no resistance to the editing of Le Fils du pauvre. It remains to be considered how Feraoun actively involved himself in the reception of this first book both within the world of French-Algeria and in metropolitan France. How did he negotiate the political and cultural landscape into which his texts emerged? One thing is certain, Feraoun was an ambitious man. In 1936, the year Feraoun graduated from the EN, only 2.1% of Algerian men knew how to write French (Colonna, Instituteurs 56) To have achieved the position of an indigenous teacher put him in a rarified league: of over 8 million Algerians in the early 1950s, only 6000

belonged to the middle-class. This social ambition was matched by his literary ambition. In his Lettres à ses amis, he addresses many European colleagues about his chances of getting coverage for his books, of the chance of receiving an additional prize, of his salary for radio presentations, and was “one of the first critics to notice the absence of the indigenous from the “Frenchified” city Oran” in Camus’s The Plague. (Haddour 143)⁴² So why did he publish the book by himself first without the patronage he knew he could have received and did eventually accept from Roblès? The choice seems to point to an element of freedom at that moment in the public intellectual spheres in colonial Algeria. Especially with the influx of French intellectuals during the war years and the rise of a French-Algerian school of writers centered around Camus and Roblès, Feraoun’s novel, like those of his compatriots Mammeri, Dib, and Yacine, seemed to open a space for a multi-ethnic conversation on local ground. The book could therefore get out there into the hands of readers and attract attention. It could be published, it could be sold and even read and seriously debated, all without prior metropolitan patronage. It was a gamble on Algerian society that Feraoun was willing to take.

Synopsis

Any American reader of The Poor Man’s Son, Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher can quickly feel an inviting warmth. The novel opens upon an accessible, engaging, and tenderly ironic auto-ethnography. Describing the physical and social geography of a

⁴² See my translation of Feraoun’s first 1951 letter to Camus in the Appendix, where he asks Camus why there are no Arabs in this famous novel. Camus responded in an unpublished letter, transcribed and shown to me by Feraoun’s son Ali: “Ne croyez pas que si je n’ai pas parlé des arabes d’Oran c’est que je me sente séparé d’eux. C’est que pour les mettre en scène, il faut parler du problème qui empoisonne notre vie à tous, en Algérie. Il aurait donc fallu écrire un autre livre que celui que je voulais faire. Et pour écrire cet autre livre, d’ailleurs, il faut un talent que je ne suis pas sûr d’avoir. Vous l’écrirez, peut-être parce que vous savez sans effort, vous placer au dessus des haines stupides qui déshonorent notre pays . » My translation : “Do not believe that if I did not speak of the Arabs of Oran it is because I feel separated from them. It is because to represent them one must speak of the problem that poisons the life of us all in Algeria. It would have thus been necessary to write a book other than the one I intended. And to write that book, anyway, requires a talent I am not sure I possess. You will write it, perhaps because you know without effort to place yourself above the foolish hatreds that dishonor our country. “ See Appendix.

Kabyle village, the first chapters explore attitudes to birth, death, gender, food, labor, inheritance, and tribal belonging and honor within the framework of a coming-of-age story that traces young Fouroulou's schooling in the freedoms and limits of a male Kabyle identity. Opening with a sincere, yet ironic invocation, the novel divides his maturation into four sections: *Family*, *The Elder Son*, *War*, and *Epilogue*. At first glance, one is struck by the novel's constant and thorough concern with clarity; it is a well-written essay constructed from typical, telling scenes of everyday life, a classical *récit*. This seems to mirror and be reinforced by the chosen limitation of a child's viewpoint. The reader, who, if Western, quickly assumes the book is written for him or her, is directly invited to understand the present account as a universal portrait, the example of any poor rural family life, any innocent child. Except for the rare mention of culturally specific objects and social relations (gandoura, djema, shiehk, roumi), the story of little Fouroulou could have unfolded anywhere.

Family, the first part, presents the landscape of Fouroulou's world. We visit the houses and fields and the mountainous surroundings of his village and we enter into the close, rigidly controlled patterns of daily life. Within such traditional parameters, Feraoun paints a warm childhood cocoon. Fouroulou's relationship to key figures like his aunts Khalti and Nana are endearingly portrayed, as well as his position as only son in a family of women. We learn of the *djemaâ*, the central square of his neighborhood where public life among boys and men takes place and where clan loyalty is defended. We follow Fouroulou as he enters school. His induction into this foreign world of abstract skills and literate mastery allows Feraoun to capture the particular impact of the colonial teacher on the minds and aspirations of the poor. Yet this discovery is dramatically balanced by the death of his paternal grandmother and the breaking up of his extended family, leading eventually to the tragic deaths of Fouroulou's aunts.⁴³ On the level of an autobiographical reading, these deaths signify the end of the innocent cocoon of childhood.

⁴³ For an analysis of the symbolique significance of these figures, see : Nabile Farès, doctoral thesis, 1986; Naget Khadda, « L'allégorie de la féminité : deuil d'une civilisation et mutation d'identité dans Le Fils du pauvre de M. Feraoun », Peuples méditerranéens, no. 44, 1988 and Représentation de la Féminité dans le roman algérien de la langue française, (Alger : Office des Publications Universitaire, 1991)

The second part of the novel, "The Elder Son," shifts to the impact of colonial economics on individuals in such communities. The first-person is replaced by the return of the extradiagetical narrator of the prologue, who relates what follows in the voice of a brotherly substitute, unfolding events that detail the family's generational rupture: Fouroulou's father, the family's sole bread earner, falls sick, becomes indebted and is forced, like thousands of his countrymen, to save his wife and children by emigrating alone to France and its huge factories. We watch how distance and literacy create a widening rift between father and son. The father's absence is mirrored by the son's, who leaves to continue his education. This experience weighs heavily in Fouroulou's gradual turning away from his traditional role as shepherd towards that of teacher. As his father returns and his sisters are married off, the now educated, maturing son encounters the world of sexuality and the conflict between European and a Kabyle notions of desire and responsible attachment.

"War," the third part of the novel, presents a stark, mature assessment of the ravages of World War II on colonial Algeria. Feraoun's depiction of Tankout, a rations warehouse, is a masterful account of the cruelty of war and the almost superhuman endurance of oppressed people:

Sad beasts, indeed, those seen at Tankout! Men in rags wait at the door. They are all old, even the young. Their faces are pale, deeply lined, with quarter-inch stubble bristling in every direction. Their eyes are wide open yet sunken in deep sockets. In one hand they hold a small sheepskin sack, in the other a worn card and soiled bills, awkwardly folded. Those that have burnouses appear sufficiently clothed, but a young man waiting in line shamelessly reveals to anyone passing behind him a glimpse of his filthy buttocks, while another who is just leaving doesn't even try to hide a blackish testicle freed by the rip in his narrow pants. No one takes offense. The pack is on his back. In the space of a few steps, he will load his donkey, as miserable as himself, then he will wrap himself up in his burnouse. His clothes will be decent. Ten-year-olds await their turn, just as serious and worried as the old men. They shiver from cold and fear. They are mute, gentle, humble. They know they are poor. What they are getting is charity. (PMS 139)

This is as much a historical document as a timeless portrayal of human relationships in the clutch of starvation. Feraoun narrates the shift in consciousness among his countrymen towards the implosion of French colonialism and the arrival of the

Americans. He notes with irony the insignificant knowledge of the colonial teacher compared to the wizened skepticism of villagers.

Though still mediated through a substitute narrator, the *Epilogue* shows us the mature Menrad Fouroulou who looks out over the ruins of war and considers the attempts to account for its savagery. His words are eerily prescient of how Algerians would soon act themselves during the war of independence, and poses questions relevant to the Algerian nation today:

We try to set ourselves up as judges; we end up looking like butchers. Are humans going to forget the nightmare they have just lived through? Will peoples, in general, be charlatans as much as individuals in particular? Then we shall have the peace brought by charlatans and we do not deserve anything else. (PMS 149)

Narrative Structure and Cultural Critique

As this brief synopsis of the novel shows, Feraoun took the urgings of his fellow French-Algerian students at the EN very much to heart – to put his people on the world map and in so doing contribute to an experience of the interrelatedness of peoples. The humble, forthright mode of address, the depiction of family dramas from the limited viewpoint of a child, the attention to informed and uninformed readers - all combine to make Fouroulou's story appear stylistically straightforward. It seems to echo the touching tales of acculturation found in French primers of the period and has often been read and dismissed as an African *bildungsroman*, apolitical in its portrait of distant colonial power and local, indigenous values.

If we consider the narrative structure of the novel, however, we see a shift in emphasis towards a profound cultural critique of Kabyle society at this moment of colonial history and an ambitious literary project. This view underscores that the fates of peoples are very much the fates of individuals and they are inextricably entwined, be they fathers or sons, aunts or cousins, colonized or colonizers, with an historical, rather than a mythical or timeless (or 'primitive') moment. Only recent "revisitings" of Feraoun's work

have highlighted this structure, which reminds us of the obstruction Derrida has spoken of in a colonial writer's attempt to project a convincing narrative voice or unified style.⁴⁴ For one thing, it is not a bildungsroman alone, rather built on a multitude of texts – descriptive passages in an ethnographical style on life in Kabylia are mixed with many letters from public writers, teachers and the main character himself, school essays, newspaper articles, quotes from classic French authors, Kabyle fables, and a journal-like chronicle of village life. In his salient essay on Feraoun in Experimental Nations, Reda Bensmaïa notes that these many texts “little by little constitute a political and social cartography that will serve as an identity card, a map of the heart, a cadaster, and finally an inventory of cultural and geographical sites.”⁴⁵

Secondly, the tale is told by a succession of narrators: Beginning with a second-person exhortation by an extradiagetical narrator to reveal an "aborted manuscript," the first part of the novel proceeds as a first-person account of a boy who learned French, became a teacher and has *already* failed as a writer. In essence, we are reading what the first-person narrator once hoped for, but now assumes will come to nothing. The acquisition of language and literacy yields no confidence that literary efforts based on this acquisition will yield art, because after all, the writer is Kabyle. How can you base a masterpiece, or even a convincing human drama, on an oral culture of colonized peasants? Who will read it? Maybe your own children. The irony of this colonial, rural writer's situation breathes through the text, coloring its detailed and objective descriptions of Kabyle village life, the formative and tragic tales of childhood. This irony is especially striking in the portrayal of the powerful maternal presences which frame this period of supposed innocence. Along with scenes of pottery making, weaving and storytelling, traditional female occupations in a culture dating back millennia, Fouroulou is witness to women's intrigue, jealousy, abandonment, insanity and death. Readers who prefer to focus on a child's innocence or the absence of a direct condemnation of colonial oppression fail to notice a conscious build-up of female portraits that show how individual girls and women become the victims and the vectors

⁴⁴ See Mathieu-Job, Martine, Le Fils du pauvre de Mouloud Feraoun ou la fabrique d'un classique. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007 and Bensmaïa, Reda, "The Cartography of the Nation, Mouloud Feraoun's Le fils du pauvre Revisited," in Experimental Nations. Trans. Waters. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003: 149-157.

⁴⁵ Bensmaïa, p. 150.

of change. Consider the oversized authority of the family matriarch, a widow with power to choose wives for her sons and to distribute the family's stores of food, or the pathetic image of Chabha, Fouroulou's sickly cousin, forced by custom to sacrifice her well-being to her male cousin's stomach. The conniving aunt Helima, who has only daughters and who forces the men, after the grandmother's death, to divide their possessions and enact the shift to a nuclear family with reduced means, is contrasted to Fouroulou's humble mother, who despite his failings, directly effecting the family's ability to survive, continues to cherish him.

These pairings of the sacrificial and the monstrous combine in unexpected urgency in the portrait of Fouroulou's aunts, Nana and Khalti. The orphaned sisters of Fouroulou's mother, these women eek out their existence within the dual boundaries of a fierce tribal sense of scarcity and honor and an equally fierce yet faceless sense of colonial oppression. Feraoun starts early by laying out their hereditary fate in detail in Chapter 3 of *Family*, a section I found difficult to understand and to translate in part because of Feraoun's ironic understatement, yet also due to the complexity and foreignness of the cultural context he presents with critical detachment. It is worth untangling again to reap Feraoun's full insight into how colonized cultures both suffer and survive, how marginalized figures propel change, and how colonial domination was but one of a layer of oppressive forces which particularly impacted on women:

The girls' father senses his imminent death and struggles to act. He has no son. He fears dispossession, the erasure of his name, the misery of his three unmarried daughters. Yet he cannot bring himself to leave his field to his girls for he distrusts women fundamentally due to their complete subservience to male relatives. The fact that he begins to consider this is noteworthy though, for it signifies a loosening of the prescription against female inheritance. Yet he is of an older generation and remains suspicious, trapped in a logic of scarcity. How can he make this break with tradition, with history? His only vehicle for change is to go above and beyond his *karouba*, his family clan, and seek an outside authority. Yet instead of turning to the French authorities who would grant this request as a matter of fact, he turns, as is still the custom, to the *cadi*, a Muslim cleric, whom he instructs to write a will that no *cadi* would write, leaving the possession of a house and field to his unmarried daughters to ostensibly ensure their

livelihood. It is an odd gamble done out of strategic spite, yet also unspoken despair. We have just been told that the mosque is a place no one goes to, that Islam is of little significance. The prescription to provide for woman is disappearing especially in the face of colonialism's impact on Kabyle men, their year-long absences, their fear of returning without the promised fruits of emigration, their abandonment of their wives – realities Feraoun would represent with unflinching lucidity. The man's wealthier cousins have failed to honor him by asking for his daughters' hands in marriage. The poor cousins who do make an offer are rejected. The man is thus left to fear his possessions will be stolen by other men in an act of robbery that comes without the blessings and the obligations of the tribe and that obliterates his memory. Better have a public robbery. By having a will written, he forces the family to call in a sheikh, who translates not what the old man said, but what the *cadi* wrote: according to the dictates of Islamic tradition, the girls have the right to usufruct, to use the field during their lifetime, after which it reverts to the clan. And with this now formalized inheritance comes the public responsibility to watch over the girls, whose virginity acts as a symbolic substitute for the clan's inter-generational worth.

Feraoun does not stop there. How do the women react to this sanctioned robbery?:

Sensing such close supervision, seeing themselves so roughly, so bluntly, treated, the sisters are thankful to their uncles or cousins because, at the same time, they believe they are being protected. They prefer this to the indifference and abandonment that always accompanied scorn. They are proud girls with set ideas. They accept their uncles' cheating and fleecing them as long as nobody pushes them out of the community and they retain their right to the family name. (PMS 14)

Clearly, the omission of the final chapter of the novel does not affect its inherent cultural critique as much as highlight the novels overall construction; as Feraoun says of Si Mohand's poetic structure, the movement "from the general to the particular, the secondary to the essential, the futile to the serious." The story of the old man's girls – the abandonment of Nana by her poor, emigrant husband, her death in childbirth, and her sister's subsequent insanity and violent disappearance – prove that the story of Fouroulou's success comes at a price.

If we look at *War and Epilogue* as the final tercet of Feraoun's novel, it becomes the decisive argument. Again, "This last tercet can appear very far from the first. But don't be fooled: it's the one that constitutes the confession, the sensitive spot. The initial parts depend on it. It's the one that withholds the key to the enigma when the poem is obscure."

The stable is not easy to describe. Each of us could get a sense of the difficulty by trying to probe his own. There can be beautiful thoroughbreds there, but also old hags. In winter, the litter, hay, and animals give off the soft warmth of a loft, but the air smells of mold, the hay makes you sneeze, and the rioting manure irritates you nostrils. Moreover, one cannot see everything in a stable. It is dark. You have to record all the cobwebs, balls of dust and flies, identify the worms teeming in the manure, take note of the rats sleeping in the straw, the snake stalking them, gliding behind the rafters. There is a whole world in the stables. So one can easily understand Fouroulou's difficulty when he tries to see clearly into himself. One would have to go backwards, picking things up by their ends, because in any case this period of troubles and uncertainties had to begin somewhere. That is the method used by the doctor to diagnose an illness. It is also that of a charlatan. (PMS 147-8)

The man has all the required attributes for such a job. You can have no illusions about his morals or his manners. He calls himself Akli and he used to be a waiter at some fleabag hotel in Algiers. He left his hotel to become the trusted man for some twenty thousand people. His trade's duplicity has turned into brutality. His expressionless demeanor at receiving tips has changed into insolence. He wants to make these poor devils pay for all his groveling to the rich. He succeeds. He is all-powerful. He is famous, the man of the hour, Akli N'douk--his job is now known by his own name. He lives happily and carefree with his ill-gotten gains, which are constantly replenished. He laughs at the people's misery. He can be heard from afar yelling at a trembling fellah. At the slightest pretext, he threatens to stop the distribution. He grows red with fury, levels curses, puffs himself up, and struts his fattened torso nervously about, sticking his thick gut out; then, stopping short of blowing his top, calms himself down and sits. (PMS)

When I reread these long quotes now from the original novel, I think of the fragility of initial forays into literature and the public eye. How events such as war can snowball into a reality no slow writing process can absorb. We need time to write literature, and even more to read it. As if he were diving down and coming back up for air over and over, the author of Le Fils du pauvre weaves together as best he can the cloudy, complex past and the brutal present, the society and the individual, the European and the native North

African, the male and the female, the native tyrant and the native teacher, testifying to the complex location of Kabyle reality at a particular moment in history. If we survive, he seems to say, it is because we have all inherited a "stable." There will always be some jerk willing to lead the animals inside to slaughter. If we evolve, however, then we need to take possession of it and such an act begins, not with an outward thrust, but an inward one - an inventory.

In my early work on Feraoun I was struck by the bifurcated narration and read it as an expression of the cultural taboos operating in the novel. The passage of the child into French and the colonial school system, his separation from the economic and social determinants of his birthplace, present a rupture that is in part motivated by dire necessity, but also personal ambition. Fouroulou is *able* to succeed. Why? How does this culture look upon an individual capable of *escaping*? How does that individual look upon himself? Can he really escape? Does he want to? What would that say of his integrity? What conflict did an education and a social climb in the hierarchy of colonial relations present to a man like Feraoun? To his village? To the French? These questions present an act of disclosure that only an extradiagetical narrator, a split within the novel between the autobiographical and the omniscient, yet located, voice of fiction, operates and sanctions. Bensmaïa has come the closest to recognizing and analyzing the significance of this narrative split and the underlining artistic intention, calling it "the non-coincidence of voices and personae". Such splitting is not simply a self-willed act, a stylistic schizophrenia. It is the literary depiction of what Homi Bhabha has called an "edge of experience" or "those iterative instances that simultaneously mark the possibility and impossibility of identity, presence through absence" (Bhabha 52) as lived by people who have been forced, often as children, to cross linguistic and cultural no-man's-lands that ultimately and definitively separate them from the protective enclosure of their childhood worlds.

But the striking thing about Feraoun was that he returned. He never really left. His literary migrancy is not the "blasphemous" cultural translation Bhabha has identified in the work of post-colonial writers like Rushdie, nor the unmoored inner and then outer exile of Derrida. This is not to say that Feraoun was blindly reverent of his Kabyle or Muslim heritage; as we saw in the old man's tale, his critical eye is blistering when aimed

at the failings of his own. Rather, he saw a generation at risk. Writing to his French editor of his most anti-colonialist novel, Les Chemins qui montent [The Paths that Rise], Feraoun clarified, "It is not the love story of Dehbia and Amer, it's the disarray of a generation half evolved, ready to melt into the modern world, a generation worthy of interest, worthy of being saved and that, for all appearances, would soon have no other choice than to renounce itself or disappear." (L 122) As this quote attests, Feraoun assumed the scars of his generation's displacement. How do we survive and remain the same? How do we reap the rewards of education in a system that denies us a public role? And how does fiction offer such individuals a space to make an inventory of the personal and the collective stakes involved in what is clearly a long history of catastrophe? As Bensmaia concludes, "By lending his voice to an anonymous narrator to continue the narrative, [Feraoun] wanted us to meditate on this tragedy and understand that one survivor among millions is not a success story."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 156.

Chapter 6: Context, Ethnography and the Return of the *Amusnaw*

“These eyes are content to claim that everything happens according to an immutable order of things, an order that simply follows its path and could not stop to please anything... But this is not my purpose. All along the route, I was looking at stunted chestnuts and frail fig trees, eroded shale and sand. The landscape that welcomed me screamed its nakedness, poverty, and near hostility. It said to me: “What are you doing here? You managed to escape.” (J 16)

Once you buttress yourself with generalities, you are amazed to discover some very broad horizons. (J, 31)

My teacher and thesis director, the anthropologist and literary theorist Vincent Crapanzano, believes he is a contextual thinker. "I am unable to recall things unless I find myself in the context where my experience originates. Context is crucial for meaning, yet it is exactly what cannot be transported, it can't be translated." He also believes that North African writers have been particularly focused on ethnography, which he defines in part as the detailed rendering of place, and that they have done so in a tragic way. In contrast to the ways Native Americans in the Southwest “read” their landscape, he notes among North African writers a catastrophic sense of history that impacts on how violence – colonial, revolutionary, post-independence - is perceived and remembered. Navaho history, embedded in landscape, “is envisioned [...] as an emergence – a sort of socialization - through underworlds in which asocial acts were first performed and gradually abandoned.” In Morocco, a culture that adores storytelling, the landscape is punctuated with saints’ sanctuaries that only the old visit and seem bereft of healing properties, of living tales; “the sanctuaries conjure the passage of time as ruination and a philosophy of resignation.”⁴⁷ Crapanzano's reflections on context and the French-North African experience in particular, most recently the experience of Harkis, Algerians who fought for the French in the war of independence and were consequently either brutally

⁴⁷ *Imaginative Horizons*, pages 43-45. For a phenomenological study of place and North Africa see also Stefania Pandolfo's *Impasse of the Angles: Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

murdered or callously forgotten, raises questions for me that it seems appropriate to consider here and attempt to connect to Feraoun's imaginative gamble. How does Feraoun's work enter into a dialogue with ethnography? With the particular ethnography of colonial Algeria? How does his fiction alter this "detailed rendering of place"?

Context and the *Amusnaw*

Most of us would agree that our intelligence is embedded in a specific context. Geographical, linguistic, political, historical – our "imaginative horizon," to use a key term of Crapanzano's, is anchored in this context as is our memory.⁴⁸ One does not need to be familiar with Hegel's theory of relations as the basis for identity, or Edouard Glissant's ruminations on it and transposition of it onto the archipelago of Caribbean identity, to recognize, from a Western perspective, how simultaneously the self and our perception of ourselves arise in dialogic relation with a larger, slowly evolving and yet sometimes suddenly transformed, complex organism of interpersonal and institutional relations. Stories emanating from that context are immediately consumable; we need no mediator, no translator, though we are sometimes wholly unable to translate them ourselves to others who do not share the same contextual link. Indeed, we love people endowed with such skills – mimetic expression, dramatic voice, humor, sheer courage – who tell our stories, who hand us a mirror and elevate our everyday relations into a sphere of collective meaning, collective memory. It is a fundamental way we experience *communitas*, the British anthropologist Victor Turner's term for "the spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature" of human relatedness, which "happens" within dialectical rapport with the less personal, more slowly evolving, institutionalized nature of tradition and social structure. Turner quotes Buber who describes it as "no longer being side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but with one another of a multitude of

⁴⁸ Crapanzano's book-length reflection, *Imaginative Horizons*, poses the problem of cultural creativity, an area he feels is often ignored by American anthropologists, who exhibit a failure to address imaginative play and the question of freedom: "My concern is with openness and closure, with the way in which we construct, wittingly or unwittingly, horizons that determine what we experience and how we interpret what we experience (if indeed we can even separate experience from interpretation)." (2)

persons. And this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from the *I* to *Thou*."

In the Kabyle tradition, this figure is the *amusnaw*, a "highly respected sage who blends poetic language with political critique and local savvy, wielding *tamusni* (traditional wisdom) as art and social practice simultaneously." (Silverstein and Goodman 37) The relationship between cultural creators and commentators like the *amusnaw*, their audience, and the larger institutional context or contexts that determine power relations between social groups has been an object of investigation by French ethnographers for generations. Arnold van Gennep's 1911-12 sojourn in Kabylia, Victor Turner's salvaging of his key concepts, and Pierre Bourdieu's research in the 1950s are insightful examples. An examination of these ethnographer's biographies and concepts in relation to Algeria, and the related form of auto-ethnography, can illuminate the conflictual terrain in which Feraoun saw the situated and creative position of the Kabyle writer.

Gennep's seminal work on *les rites de passage* and his critique of Durkheim's mechanistic understanding of social groups – van Gennep's insistence on the active and creative role of the individual in groups, especially those viewed as "primitive" by European social scientists - found confirmation in his Algerian fieldwork during 1911-1912.⁴⁹ Van Gennep was born to Dutch parents in 1873 and moved with his mother to France at the age of 6. A polyglot who spoke some 18 languages, he found an intellectual home in the emerging field of ethnography, although never secured an institutional position, in part due to his protest against German militarism before and during World War I and his critique of Durkheim. As Rosemary Zumwalt has written in her study "Arnold van Gennep: The Hermit of Bourg-la-Reine,"⁵⁰ van Gennep did not see

⁴⁹ Van Gennep conducted fieldwork in Algeria from July to August 1911 and from April to June 1912. This fieldwork resulted in : *En Algérie* (1914), "Études d'ethnographie algérienne," a 112-page article in *Revue d'ethnographie et de sociologie*, Volume 2, 1911. For a detailed discussion of van Gennep's fieldwork, see Zumwalt 1978, chapter 7. Rosemary Zumwalt, "Arnold van Gennep: The Hermit of Bourg-la-Reine" *American Anthropologist*, 84:299-313, 1982 (2)

⁵⁰ Ibid.

evolution in humans, rather in their social institutions, which at times could lead to impasses that only individual actions can avert: “But a human society has for primordial components individual forces each of which can at any moment react... I have too often insisted on this power of the individual, even in primitive societies, to modify the collective situation.”⁵¹ The role of the individual was especially key in van Gennep’s later work on folklore, for which he is considered a founding authority in France and which he saw as a study of practices situated in Europe in counter-distinction to ethnology, the study of non-European practices. Envisaged as a “collective and anonymous creation of people,” folklore in van Gennep’s conception did not negate the creative force of the individual. “Van Gennep,” writes Zumwalt, “was opposed to the romantic notion of the 19th century that the folk create as a communal activity, as a reflection of their *volkgeist* or group spirit. [...] This notion derived not only from a paucity of direct observation, but also from the assumption that the individual was not important in primitive societies. People confused anonymity with lack of individuality.” (Zumwelt 6)

Van Gennep’s contributions to understanding the rapport between the individual and the group in social practices and how European ethnographers and early sociologists based their notions of this rapport on abstractions from field observations in places like Algeria, and his particular critique concerning the “paucity of direct observation,” were long ignored by the established academy in France. Given the political context of imperial France and its dominion over such “primitive” societies as Algeria, it is not surprising that the institutions of ethnographic research did not embrace van Gennep’s ideas.⁵² Nor is it surprising that his concepts were resurrected and elaborated on by a British anthropologist, Victor Turner. Underscoring the creative rapport between

⁵¹ Van Gennep 1920:342, cited by Zumwelt, *ibid* (5).

⁵² It is interesting to note that van Gennep encountered obstacles in this fieldwork that point to a curious and common denial of the cultural impact of previous occupiers in Algeria and the fact that the “primitive” society French ethnographers hoped to study was profoundly embedded in an extremely complex foreign religious tradition, namely Islam. “I counted on doing as one does when studying the Masai or the Australians, the Eskimos or the Indians: going into the villages themselves, staying there for some time and so conducting complete inquiries step by step” (van Gennep 1914:127-128). Zumwalt writes: “His hopes for thorough, detailed research were not fulfilled. To his dismay, he had to contend with the Islamic seclusion of women, and it was the women who made the pottery, wove the fabric, and conserved “with jealous care the magic formulas [and] the superstitious practices” (van Gennep 1914:127). Though impatient with this cultural and religious seclusion of women, van Gennep adjusted. He conducted a great deal of research in the Kasbah of Algiers, wandering the streets and observing the artisans.” *Ibid* (2)

communitas and structure, Turner focused on van Gennep's concept of the liminal stage of the initiate and the marginal during *rites de passages*. A contemporary of Feraoun, and one of the leading members of the transatlantic ethnographic movement of symbolic anthropology, Turner's lifework was to explore the complexity of indigenous practices and the contradictory impulses in indigenous systems of thought. According to Roger Abrahams, whose preface to Turner's The Ritual Process I draw from here, Turner was primarily interested in group life expressed through the lived experiences of participants; in the "betwixt-and-between" state of liminality, he saw ways to teach us about radically different cultures.

Salvaging von Gennep's analytic framework, Turner observed in his fieldwork the three-step process by which the neophyte refashions his very being: separation and passage through a threshold or limen into a ritual world removed in time and space; mimetic reenactment of dimensions of the separation crisis where structures are challenged and elaborated; and finally, return and re-entry into the world of social structure as an active, adult participant. To Turner, the second mimetic stage was key, a subversive and ritually inversive process that he saw as a mechanism for the renewal of culture and the experience of universal interrelatedness. Drawing from his readings of Henri Bergson, who also influenced Feraoun, Turner linked his scientific work with the reading and interpretation of works of art, for like Bergson, and I would argue similarly to Feraoun, poets, artists and writers can be seen to act in the margins of structure to create works that "reclassify reality" and "incite men to action and thought." More than just a biological drive, the desire for an experience of communitas "includes rationality, volition, memory, and the bond between men," giving voice to "all of those contradictory features that [give] lives the ability to laugh and cry together." (Turner, vii)

The relevance of Turner's schema to a reading of Feraoun's novel is evident. Clearly, Feraoun's three years as a boarder and student at the Ecole Normale of Bouzareah outside Algiers, as described in his novel's second part, *The Elder Son*, represented a liminal stage in the evolutionary passage from a lower social group to a higher one. His creative, mimetic echoing of the scholastic, colonial bildungsroman, and his ironic critique of an exoticized, alienated perspective on Kabylia, was for its time "subversive and ritually inversive," with the intention of renewing Kabyle culture

through an embedded critique of its traditionalism and extending a sense of “universal interrelatedness.” Feraoun was never content with the elimination of the third section of the novel by his Parisian editors, just as they were obviously ill at ease with its implications. In light of Turner’s schema, it represented a “return and re-entry” of an elected initiate, as much a personal as a political devotion to shifting relations there between dominant social agents and a now “active, adult participant.” The fact that the novel as it was published in France and continues to be known in French print ends with a coming-of-age that implies separation rather than reintegration, successful ascension rather than the troubled and obstructed path of a mature and committed native observer, created a rift between Feraoun’s first and later works that continues to disorient his readers and disturb his legacy.⁵³

Turner did not, to my knowledge, specifically investigate the liminal location of the colonial subject, the minority, or the immigrant, what Spivak has coined the subaltern, positions that over the years since Turner’s death in 1983 have found eloquent theoretical expression in the field of postcolonialism as well as wide-spread expression in popular media. Yet his notions of marginal space from which new culture can emerge points to broader connections with our subject. Stretched across contexts, having been forced to migrate back and forth between a native and an imposed cultural paradigm, the colonial *evolué*, a kind of 20th century amosnaw, is the heir of what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has called a “cleaved habitus”: his native context is penetrated by another context, which threatens to overwhelm it. Already in 1952, the Martinican psychiatrist Franz Fanon, in his seminal work Black Skin, White Masks, drew from his work in Algeria to outline the intimate violence such penetration does to the notion of the self and the possibility of that self to speak and be heard, to travel between contexts, to make its case in the tribunal of universality. Such subjects are summoned to a forced translation, one that threatens to erase the original. If they have the luck and guts and smarts to face this threat, they must carve out a reliable translation and serve as cultural go-betweens. They are forced or they jump into a schizophrenic space between contexts

⁵³ Both of Feraoun’s subsequent novels, La Terre et la sang and Les Chemins qui montent, focus on the impossible return of two generations of Kabyle men who have tasted the reality of the colonial metropole and end up the martyred victims of internal tensions.

and their success or failure to articulate that dual knowledge, that experience of competing contexts, can have lasting effects. Sometimes this position itself leads them to salvage the past, not from an obvious innate talent, but from the happenstance of position and the recognition of something missed, untranslated, unacknowledged, yet essential to the picture of what makes them human.

One might argue that the stories told from the position of cultural translator are fundamentally different from those told within the cushion of convention, or, sociologically speaking, from an institutional perspective. They are subject to a location outside it "facing the wooded edge," as Benjamin wrote about language in his famous essay, "The Task of the Translator": "Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the centre of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering [...] It intends language as a whole."⁵⁴ Standing outside a given context can give them an experience of it as a totality. They see its boundaries, its blindnesses, its partiality, and its will to omit what does not belong, to chastise those who refuse to comply. This hegemonic nature of context, especially one convinced of its superiority and propelled at you by an occupying army, but also one handed down to you as a possession to protect and conserve, can appear as a force of nature, a kind of power one is helpless to confront.

And yet, writers do confront it. In the works of Kafka, Conrad, Baldwin, Wright – as in the works of Francophone North African writers like Albert Memmi, Driss Chraïbi, Mohammed Dib, Kateb Yacine, Mohammed Mammeri, Edmond Amran El Maleh, Nabil Farès, Assia Djebar, and Feraoun, (Feraoun and Mammeri would add their compatriot Camus), there is a sense of the externality of contexts and the feelings resulting from that experience: torment and humor, a sense of futility and secret ambition, of ultimately having everything and nothing to lose. Mixed with this is a consciousness of isolation and obscurity, of insufficient status, or orphanhood, as if these writers were alone in their experience of ambiguity and sensed no other avenue than the limited strength of their own minds. Whether hidden within a mastery of the target context (à la Conrad) or enacted through omission and disjuncture (à la Feraoun), the fundamental experience of a

⁵⁴ Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the translator." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p. 76.

violent competition of contexts speaks. It is inevitable. It is the very impetus of the literary gamble.

Feraoun and Bourdieu

The writer, having denounced hunger as a profound yet treatable disease in need of immediate attention, desired to make the patient known, not to write prescriptions or propose remedies. That is why he conceded to folklore, to narrow regionalism. Yet for the same reason, in exactly the same logic, he did not concern himself with aesthetics, or irreproachable formal purity. The documentary aspect of his work retains in his eyes the utmost importance, and he devotes all his attention to it because he knows, alas, that the observer who studies Muslim society from the outside has never understood it and that he always has the tendency to stop at the differences rather than at the similarities. The traditions, the mores, the customs, the beliefs and the superstitions, individual and collective morality, in sum the full spectacle of life...

- Feraoun, "La Littérature algérienne" (A 65)

The concept of "habitus" is a charged terrain in sociology, especially since Bourdieu's death in 2002. A recent examination of his fieldwork in Algeria edited by Jane Goodman and Paul Silverstein contends that Bourdieu's "Algerian oeuvre," and the concept of habitus that grew out of it, is predicated on the colonial setting of his observations and his vision of Kabyle society as divided into an original *before* and a violently translated *after*. His studies are also divided into a remembered or reconstituted portrayal of traditional Berber society untouched by colonialism and based on unnamed sources and one of an ethnically mixed, fractured society based on detailed statistical analysis and named informants. A major essay of the first category, "The Sentiment of Honor in Kabyle Society," was based on information gathered in Tizi Hibel, Feraoun's birth place. Indeed, Bourdieu considered Feraoun a "dear friend" who "'read and annotated with benevolent indulgence, my first writings on Kabylia.'" (ix) Silverstein and Goodman confirm that much of the essay was derived from conversations with Feraoun who may have even drafted some of Bourdieu's ethnography himself. (Silverstein and Goodman,

32) They also contend that the split in Bourdieu's ethnography is likewise found in Feraoun's oeuvre: "whereas his early novels and essays afford an arguably idealized portrayal of Kabyle social institutions and traditions, he later wrote a compelling and graphic diary-style account of the French-Algerian war as he experienced it." (33) The two shared political views as well – a condemnation of violence and the Left's embrace of an ideology of the tabula rasa when it came to how the revolution would free Algerians from the "yoke of patriarchal traditionalism and religious authority." (34) Several contributors to Bourdieu in Algeria make note of Bourdieu's own "cleaved habitus;" one wonders to what degree Feraoun, Bourdieu's elder, guided the assistant professor in considering his own *deracinement* as an intelligent rural farm boy who went off to Paris to study, to Algeria as a military recruit, and back to Algeria as a professor of sociology, a man who clearly succeeded, through education, in leaving his traditional peasant milieu behind. The sentiments of guilt and shame, of indebtedness and ambition that we see in the narrator of Le Fils du pauvre have also been noted by readers of Bourdieu.

Yet if both men managed to escape, Feraoun's flight led him back to where he started. He escaped the poverty and forced emigration of his parent's generation, but not the caste system of colonial Algerian society and its institutions nor the visceral pull of his ancestral traditions. At times he saw himself exactly as Bourdieu saw "depeasanted" Algerians: as cultural monsters, divided between two worlds who "lacked the reflexive and critical capacities to navigate successfully between and across these worlds. Their only possible condition was one of alienation." (quoted in Silverstein and Goodman 19) A passage in Feraoun's Journal dated 1955, the year Bourdieu landed as a military recruit in Algeria, illustrates this alientation:

What do I think? I am not thinking of anything at all. Let us say that I would have to dig quite deep down in to myself. Then I would not be able to stop or control the endless surge of ideas, opinions, and conclusions that have always been a part of me and that would surely surface. If indeed these ideas found a way to escape, all of them would emerge like very dense vapors that, as legends have it, wait patiently for a hand to come and loosen the cover of the copper pot in which they have been imprisoned by a powerful genie for centuries. Just like these vapors, the contents of my insides would compress, and once outside of prison, would appear like a crippled, ridiculous devil to the puzzled eyes of those people who think that they know me. An astute and nasty devil whose accusing sneers would know nothing about pity or gratitude, a dreadful character who, immovable and insensible, would demand atonement. What could one hear from the mouth of

such a demon will be exactly what I and my compatriots think. Just like legendary devils, he would limp, having lost some of his vapors: the most understanding and generous parts, the only part capable of friendship and forgiveness. With these parts scattered to the winds, there would be nothing left but hatred.” (J 13 Dec. 1955, 24)

It is striking that the self Feraoun is digging deep down into here is not quite only his own, rather the bed of collective fears and memories of injustice that fuel revolutions. The question such ruminations raises is the choice between a *communitas* of revolution vs. one of literature. For Feraoun, the teacher, the self-styled coward, there was really no choice at first. And ethnography, or the sociology of traditional rural life - as a form of writing, of observing and recording, of girding autobiographical and fictional imagination with a quasi-scientific, culturally non-specific location of critical observation - seems to have offered a stylistic means to anchor such explosive internal tensions in a profound and pacifist rendering of Algerian space.

It was not an uncommon conclusion. Exposed to international literary forms, yet excluded from scholarly institutions that would authorize their description or diagnosis of the social malaise in Kabylia, many homegrown intellectuals like Feraoun, as the American anthropologist Thomas Lyons argues, found in the truth claims of ethnography, and especially of the ethnographic novel, a means of authorizing a new and native discourse.⁵⁵ As educated informants, writing from their own experience about a society few French or French Algerians knew from within, they sought to correct misperceptions, and counter the “paucity of direct observation,” opening a space for constructive exchange where the ignorance and fear that lay at the core of a hundred-year history of colonial domination and segregation might be transformed. As Lyons and Colonna have shown, teaching, teachers’ newspapers, and textbooks were stepping stones towards such literary endeavor. Teacher’s journals like the already mentioned *La Voix des Humbles* were vehicles for launching ethnographic portraits of local communities. Graduates of the EN found here as well a vehicle for their nascent literary ambitions. It was in such

⁵⁵ Lyons, Thomas, “The Ethnographic Novel and Ethnography in Colonial Algeria” *Modern Philology*, 100:4. (May, 2003): 576-595.

reviews that Feraoun published extracts of his fiction and essays on “Algerian” literature. Meetings with sympathetic French teaching colleagues, social workers and budding sociologists like Bourdieu were likewise fruitful. Indeed, they were instrumental in supporting what until then appeared aberrant, unwise, ambitious, unhealthy. Excluded from metropolitan institutions, and often unwilling to “write prescriptions or propose remedies” for political malaise, these native informants and observers turned to fiction to reconfigure the tragic landscape of Algerian society.

In Le Fils du pauvre, as in Feraoun’s subsequent works, Kabylia is both universal and particular, allegorical and real, timeless and historical. Its location speaks intimately about the history of contact between Islam and Christianity, between Africa and Europe, and about the layered impact of foreign domination on rural North African populations. It observes, participates in, represents, parodies and eternalizes the actual customs and practices of the Kabyle. What European ethnographer or novelist could have done this? For what motive? Indeed, Feraoun was not a teacher for nothing. His mission was to inform. Yet his in-depth rendering of place held troubling implications for the political status quo, and perhaps more so, for national liberation. Would the revolution solve the issue of migrant rights? Would women be free to inherit land and have mastery over their sexuality and reproduction? Would the European-Algerians who had passionately fostered the art of writers like Feraoun be able to live in security in this liberated country? Would it even be multi-ethnic? Would the new state speak Tamazight?

Auto-ethnography

In my readings of the period, I have been struck by the long-festering and eventually inoperable compromise reached between French and Muslim Algerian law, and internal to France, between the imperial designs of colonialism and the republican ideal of a secular society built on a history of Catholicism and democratic representation. To understand the apartheid of the period and the ways Algerians of all stripes were trapped in it, it helps to note the shift from a geographical to a juridical divide commonly called

the “status personnel.” This status allowed for the existence of Muslim French subjects in French-Algeria who were locally subject to Islamic law and consequently denied French citizenship. When citizenship finally presented itself as a means of partial integration (and a ploy to obstruct full political emancipation), the few Muslim Algerians granted this right were asked to disown their religious affiliation. To award citizenship to the entire Muslim population, in a country three times the size of *la mère patrie*, the French would have had to accept a demographic as well as a cultural transformation of their country as a whole. As McDougall has written:

After the failed attempts at the physical *cantonnement* – restriction to reservations – of the indigenous population in the nineteenth century, the repressive divide of the *status personnel* served as an effective means of judicial *cantonnement* through the first half of the twentieth century. [...] The status personnel was thus the site in which the colonial oppression of Algerian Muslims was organized and exercised. At the same time, it was the key symbolic space which ‘represents our traditions, our customs and our beliefs’, ‘part of our ancestral patrimony’ – a strictly sacred space whose limits, for most Algerians, marked the boundary between apostasy and belief. (McDougall 88)

When the symbolic and juridical framework of your heritage - the laws of inheritance, marriage, birth right, property ownership and the process for resolving inter-group and inter-personal conflict – is dominated by a religious culture at fundamental odds with a distant yet increasingly influential colonial power, there follows a general breakdown of group cohesion. How families and individuals react is the subject of contemporary sociology. Indeed, it formed the basis of Bourdieu’s examination of social cohesion and disruption, the famous “deracinement” of indigenous Algerians. Yet to get at the “sacred space,” “the boundary between apostasy and belief,” and expose and expand the limits that define identity and the relations between individuals, to speak in essence from the location of a situated self, reveals the limitations of such an institutionally and scientifically mediated discourse.

Autobiography alone can present its own limitations. In the Algeria of the 1940s and 50s, as in America in the 1930s and 40s, internal informants educated in the school of ethnography began to see freedom elsewhere - in what Françoise Lionnet has called “auto-ethnography.” Lionnet’s analysis of the biography and work of Zora Neale Huston is relevant. Schooled in the anthropological tradition of Boas, where the “allegory of

salvage” dominated the representational practice of researchers, Hurston occupied a position of fundamental liminality. At once a participant in and an observer of her culture, busy with the transposition, translation and transcription of her culture into a fixed text, Hurston came to be suspicious of the anthropological mission. “Her skepticism about the writing of culture would permeate the writing of the self, the autobiography, turning it into the allegory of an ethnographical project that self-consciously moves from the general to the particular and back.” (Lionnet 99) Before her writing, Black spiritual autobiographies exhibited a 3-fold pattern of death, conversion and rebirth and strong sense of transcendent purpose. Lionnet notes that, unlike them, Hurston doesn’t seek to authorize herself through religion; her writings are not anchored in any originating myth of racial or sexual difference. Her book Dust Tracks on a Road “does not gesture toward a coherent tradition of introspective self-examination with soul-baring displays of emotion.” Indeed, “it is an orphan text that attempts to create its own genealogy by simultaneously appealing to and debunking the cultural traditions it helps to redefine” (101) The complementary nature of an aesthetic viewpoint on life and a celebration of one’s ethnic heritage led Hurston to reject race as a category for dealing with what she saw as the fluid, diverse reality of social life, and to a literary practice of recording the “subjective realities of a particular people in a specific time and place.” (104) In “Seeing the World as it Is,” Hurston wrote, “I do not wish to deny myself the expansion of seeking into individual capabilities and depths by living in a space whose boundaries are race and nation.” (107)

We will explore the connections between the respective literary practices of Hurston and Feraoun in a later section; for now, let us take note of a fundamental aspect of their self-positioning. Lionnet introduces a key word: “orphan” texts. Both Feraoun and Hurston were early educated minorities in societies cleaved by racial segregation. Both took critical distance from their religious heritage. And both were criticized for their political neutrality or ambiguity, often viewed as condoning the very basis of their own exclusion. Their work did not offer the unambiguous protest novels many sought out to justify hope in a new, liberated man, or the violence employed to create him. Their understanding of cultural transmission and group identity just didn’t allow for such ideological narrowness. What is interesting, rather, is how their vibrant, exploratory

combinations of a salvaging auto-ethnographic practice and an aesthetic viewpoint, their hybrid novelistic enterprise, was received in the midst of revolution and the civil rights movement respectively. Basically, both were misread (or selectively read), dismissed, sometimes castigated, and ultimately forgotten. Their orphan texts have taken decades to reach us.

If writers must risk exposure to the political extremes of their period, their texts remain workshops for the soul. Ethnography, fiction, translation: these practices are entwined in the role of cultural mediator and it is this role that Feraoun informs us about at a distance of some forty years. A writer who strives to fill the role of *amusnaw*, combining the skills of sage, philosopher, and visionary, Feraoun seems to say in this book, is given a time, a place, and a mountain of obstacles. It is up to him or her to climb. The shame of not overcoming these obstacles, of not living up to the pain and hope of people, of not telling their story as he tells his own – of succumbing to the rhetoric or the bitterness of the day - is a motivating factor.

Chapter 7: American Connections

We see things clearly and at a distance. At such a distance that our vision pierces all the mirages, the reflections that they are still trying to manipulate in order to deceive us. At such a distance that we no longer want to debate because, at last, we have mastered our truth, and it cannot be up for discussion. Yes, this truth is different from others' truth. But are we trying to discuss theirs? (J, 31)

If writers must enter into that “place of first permission,” so must their translator. The path of the writing is laid out, but not its resonance nor its reception, which can widen and shift with unexpected turns. As a translator, I have watched texts fall flat or suddenly, after months tucked away, soar with unexpected strength. And over the years I have been preoccupied with a set of questions often asked by ethnographers and anthropologists, but also by poets and artists: In our effort to travel between cultural contexts, how do we strike the balance of a distance necessary to observe, and a closeness, a connectedness, an identification required to understand? Are there limits to translation? Can something that is meaningful in Kabylia – say, the notion of clan honor - find accurate expression in the American cultural sphere? Are there books we should not translate, that are untranslatable? Is this a linguistic, scientific, political, or ethical issue? How do we choose our texts? How do we foster, through translation, understanding of human life in both specific and general terms while taking account of the power relations we cannot escape? And how do we communicate this understanding, how do we present our translations? Does the form of our translations impact on the knowledge, the meaning expressed? Does it reflect something about our limitations?

Literary translation, as I have discovered in my attention to the work of Feraoun, can be considered a form of journeying with a people and the texts that constitute their cultural memory. It is a method of observation that seeks to hear the questions a given historical and geographical location of humanity raises through its mediators, its texts,

and to transmit them across contexts. As the French-Algerian sociologist Fanny Colonna described the sociology of literature in her Master's Thesis devoted to Feraoun, literary translation should not seek to resolve a text's contradictions, rather open them up to a new public and new meaning. Working through one's intentions in choosing a text, one's ignorance, one's insights, one's blindnesses, are part of the process of bringing a text across cultural contexts. It is important in the world we live in today that this process is shown, shared, and embraced.

The quote I have used as a leitmotif in this commentary from Robert Duncan's poem "Often I am permitted to Return to a Meadow" points to a practice of reading, of linking the source language world with voices in the target one, of establishing trails that can be marked out and later retraced. One such trail is the notion of nativity that I would like to now explore through the voices of Native American writers William Apess, Scott Momaday, James Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko, and again, the great African American folklorist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston.

Nativity

Although there is little historical or cultural contact between Algeria and the United States, as we have explored, parallels exist in how writers in both contexts have undertaken an exploration of the question of nativity, of indigenous memory, and its contact with colonial culture.

In *A Son of the Forest*, the first autobiography of a Native American published in 1829, and later essays, the mixed-blood Pequot Indian preacher William Apess used his considerable and by then well-established rhetorical gifts to write both a conversion narrative of his own journey toward Christian faith, a journey of literal salvation and creative adaptation, and a remarkably clear-sighted condemnation of Christian perfidy towards "Natives," a social category he introduces to describe the particular position of all the varied and until then often splintered indigenous American peoples in contrast to Europeans settlers and African slaves. In "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White

Man,” Apess leans on common sense and irony, much like Feraoun, to suggest that White Christians would run Jesus Christ out of town for his dark color: “If he should appear among us, would he not be shut out of doors by many, very quickly? And by those too who possess religion? By what you read, you may learn how deep your principles are. I should say they were skin-deep.” (Apess 100) To write as a Native American was to address the public sphere, in the words of historian Barry O’Connell’s, from “the edge of either degeneracy or complete assimilation,” an “unspeakable contradiction.” (O’Connell xli) Similar to Feraoun, yet over a hundred years earlier, Apess had few if any antecedents to use for models. And in similar ways, he entered upon writing and publication, that “place of first permission,” motivated by the contradictions between an imported ideal of faith in the goodness of mankind and a memory of violent cultural contact and historical obliteration. His self-conscious posture, his irony, his moralism – which speaks of his religious education – remind me of Feraoun. His prescient description of a resurgence in popular indifference towards and/or support of extermination as a means of dealing with the European-Native American encounter echoes Feraoun’s chronicle of Kabylia in his chapter “War”:

Sober-thoughted men, far from the scenes of danger, in the security of cities and populous regions, can coolly talk of “exterminating measures,” and discuss the *policy* of extirpating thousands. If such is the talk of the cities, what is the temper displayed on the borders? The sentence of desolation has gone forth – “the roar is up amidst the woods”; implacable wrath, goaded by interest and prejudice, is ready to confound all rights... these are not the idle suggestions of fancy; they are wrung forth by facts, which still haunt the public mind. (Apess, 68)

Or certainly this quote from Feraoun’s last novel, La Cite des Roses, where the “Arab” protagonist considers the self-serving attitudes of the French during the war for independence:

The best among you figure that we are worth nothing, that without you we’ll return to the void from which you had the gall to pull us. The best cling to us like one clings to a work of long effort that has been hellish to complete. Yes, the best believe that we are their work, that we belong to them, they hold onto us just like the bad ones hold on to their properties, those huge domains they cultivated over the course of generations and at the price of much Arab sweat. Believe me, they too are convinced they have created Algeria and proudly point it out to any who would be tempted to diminish their merit. (CR 114)

Unlike Feraoun, Apess was already a kind of ethnic orphan when he began to write. His parents were a mix of Pequot and African, who abandoned him early to be raised by his grandmother. The chilling scenes he recounts of her near fatal beating of him point to the utter decimation of this native society long before France even occupied Algiers. Coining the name “Native” long before others perceived their unity in a common threat, he also captured a movement of early 19th century American interests that would wipe out the vestigial traces of his ancestry. A bit of a preacher, a bit of charlatan, his words are both miraculous and fleeting. No one knows how William Apess died.

Exile and Return

Over a hundred years later, the work of M. Scott Momaday offers another touching point for a consideration of nativity. Like Feraoun, Momaday was born and grew up among people whose ways were ancient, whose crafts were prehistoric, whose society was tribal, and whose history and knowledge were orally transmitted. Like the Kabyles, the Kiowa were defeated by European invaders, experienced forced relocation and, during the 1930s, fell victim to severe poverty. And like the Kabyle, the Kiowa and the many Native peoples Momaday encountered as a boy were and remain marvelously resilient. In the face of natural and human adversity, resisting both the forces of nature and the forces of empires, they exhibit time and again a flexible capacity for incorporating elements of outside value systems while retaining, cultivating and transmitting the means for collective survival.

An important aspect of such survival is the individual's experience of exile and return, and how the exhilaration and pain of this experience is incorporated into collective meaning and value. Indeed, this subject, as a core story or theme, draws these two "Native" writers together. Feraoun, who was publishing almost two decades before Momaday, is known for his literary treatment of the issues of assimilation in the colonial Eurocentric society of French Algeria. But like Momaday, he later focused on the experience of migrant workers, Kabyle men who starting in the very early 1900s

emigrated to Paris and other French factory towns. Feraoun researched the memory and the history of what became the largest influx of temporary foreign workers into a European country during the 20th century. This was the generation of his father and village men just a bit older than him. Their story of displacement and failed reintegration, of emigration and troubled return, drove Feraoun to write La Terre et Le sang [*Earth and Blood*] and Les Chemins qui montent [*The Path that Rises*]. And Feraoun's research and imaginative emersion in the memory of this generation of migrant workers changed the nature of his creative project. What had begun as an open-hearted appeal to include Kabyle reality in the panoply of human stories became, through his understanding of the itinerant factory worker experience and the trapped, stagnant society at home, a tragic sensibility. Feraoun's workers never return whole or well; access to the larger colonial world, to Europe, leads to a sense of displacement, rejection, failure, and suicide. As if they have become the accidental embodiments of forces that will destroy their heritage. Like Edouard Glissant's reading of Faulkner's work, Feraoun locates the problem of 20th century colonialism, viewed through the lens of these rural native migrants, as an inability to establish a legitimate line of descent, to place themselves in a living continuum.⁵⁶

Often forced by war or economic deprivation to leave home, the return of the Native protagonist constitutes a driving theme of Native American literature. Momaday's Pulitzer-prize winning 1968 novel House Made of Dawn and Leslie Marmon Silko's 1977 Ceremony both recount the journey of a Native American soldier away to the battlefields of World War II and back to the stifling economy of tribal homelands. Whereas Feraoun saw the novel as a means of "making the patient known" but not offering "a diagnosis or remedies," Silko sees the novel as a tool for healing, a means of anchoring novelty, however attractive or horrific, into a core set of beliefs and rhythms, of locating home within a universally inclusive, yet also particular, pattern. In some ways she seems to echo the work of Feraoun's compatriot Assia Djébar whose corrective fiction reinscribes lost memory.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ See: Edouard Glissant, Faulkner, Mississippi, p. 183.

⁵⁷ See: John Erikson, "Translating the Untranslated: Djébar's "Le blanc de l'Algerie". Indiana University Press, 1999.

Whether the story of Native Americans soldiers returning to reservations after experiences in World War II or those of Native Algerian migrant workers returning to the Kabyle bled, as is the major theme of Feraoun's later novels, these Native writers tend to link their "fountain" of language to indigenous relations to place, however desolate. In James Welch's darkly realistic novels, the questioning of the past can be devastating because so much of it remains mysterious, so much knowledge seems to have been lost, but this is no cause for despair. Described in his novels Winter in the Blood and The Death of Jim Loney, Welch has also spoken in interviews about his childhood on the reservation in ways that echo the perspective of Fouroulou and the journey of Feraoun:

I've heard both described countless times as being "bleak," even "hopeless." But to a kid growing up, they weren't bad at all. You had friends, your parents loved you, you loved your culture, you rode horses, you put up hay, you fished and hunted. It was only later, after you had been told that your culture was dying and that you had grown up in a depressed, "bleak" place, that you came to believe that life on a reservation was not what you thought it was.

Hugo, (poet, teacher at college) in his infinite wisdom and generosity, said, "Go ahead, write about the reservation, the landscape, the people." At the moment I thought that was a fine idea, but as I walked home that day, I became more depressed with each block. I knew that nobody wanted to read about Indians, reservations, or those rolling endless plains that turned into Canada just thirty miles north. By the time I got home, I began to think that maybe that country was bleak and that life on the reservation was hopeless. [...] Happily, I was wrong.⁵⁸

Feraoun does not focus on a sense of the sacredness of land, an element readily evident in works by Native American writers, yet the fusion of physical and social geography plays a vital role in Feraoun's stories and essays. We have spoken of its sudden drops, its hairpin curves, the topography of poverty and starvation. Time also etches social divisions onto the Kabylia hillside like the indentations of the "timeless checkerboard" in the village djema. There is a clear sense of the land's hostility and, to outsiders or villagers who have left and return, a bleakness only the native can love. What Elaine Jahner has written about native American writers holds true for Feraoun: "No other novelists have shown so compellingly how the definite geographical horizons of a tribal homeland mark spiritual boundaries which in turn enclose places of transition and healing. To do that requires a carefully trained awareness able to hear and then

⁵⁸ Interview. Web. 20 April 2010. <<http://www.lopezbooks.com/articles/welch.html>>.

orchestrate the many voices in oral traditions which dramatize how time has shaped people in one particular homeland." ⁵⁹

Although, as I've noted, Feraoun does not offer prescriptions for the malaise he details, there is a sense that the very localness or situatedness of the traumas he explores counters their affect. Unlike thousands of his fellow Algerians dispossessed of their lands and uprooted in relocation camps during the uprisings of the 1860s and again during the revolution, an experience Bourdieu would study in detail, Feraoun was not one of the *deraciné*. The village of Tizi embodies the evolution of Kabyle society, the history of filiation and political affiliation, of families and djemaâs, the focus of Kabyle identity and the central square of each neighborhood where the social forces on identity play themselves out:

Imagine at a given moment two alleyways opposite one another, starting from the same point, one to the left, the other to the right. At this privileged spot the road is quite wide. It's a crossroads, a square, or a djemaâ. Is this owing to a strange fluke or a decision for reasons now forgotten? Our ancestors built nothing on the intersection of this crossroads: you are in the village's main square, the 'Musician's Square.' (PMS 6)

The village has three parts and consequently three djemaâs. Each djemaâ has its stone benches and polished slabs. Everywhere, carved into the slabs, you find the same unchanging checkerboard where one can play with pebbles. (PMS 6)

Feraoun goes on to describe the layout of the village – the neighborhoods, the mosques, the Moorish café, the materials used in construction, the house of a rich man with its large and small rooms, its courtyard and benches. Having dismissed the romantic blindness of the nevertheless well-meaning tourist, we are afforded the correction of an informed observer:

It does not matter much that each neighborhood has its ancestor. Marriages between karoubas have existed for a long time, so that today the history of the village is one, like that of a person. There are neither castes nor aristocratic titles belonging to a given family. (PMS, 7)

⁵⁹ Elaine Jahner, "The Novel and Oral Tradition" in: Conversations with LMS, 1981

The residents of the lower neighborhood, for example, descend from Mezouz. Mezouz had five sons, who gave their names to each of the five families of the karouba. [...] As for the "Bachirens," their ancestor is just a refugee from Djurdjura. The Bachirens are not proud of their origin. Deep down they feel inferior to others. (PMS, 7)

Each space, each material, each object so specifically described is combined with observations of social relations. The contradictions between the unifying notion of Kabyle identity and the obvious distinctions between social groups is structurally central to the territory Feraoun is traversing here. He is both an inside informant, driven to defend clan identity, hence its difference from Western social identity. Yet he is a trained eye, intellectually curious about the divisions that operate in the drama of Kabyle life. The fact that his viewpoint is colored with an external class awareness is revealed by the description of the pathetic poverty of material possession. Because all Kabyle live in the same manner, Feraoun's narrator states that "there are no rich or poor." Yet he then enumerates the possessions of a "rich man." He has "many figs, some small olive groves, a hectare of land to plant, and sometimes a spring in one of their fields." He owns "livestock: a pair of oxen, a cow, a few sheep, a mule or a donkey." His house "has many rooms." The omitted contrast to the extravagant wealth of the colons serves to heighten the irony here. In this closed sphere, all wealth is external fruit of exile and return: "A few pretentious houses have recently been constructed thanks to money brought back from France. The immodest facades and garish red tiles of these houses rise amid generalized decay." Yet this luxury is literally "out of place" and this dislocation only reinforces the "spiritual boundaries" that define a common native ground: "We know that inside they look the same as all the others. They deserve the scornful epithet we give them: 'Menaïel's stables: gleaming on the outside, but full of dung and donkeys on the inside.'" (PMS 7)

Crossroads

Although these works by Native American writers offer a natural touching stone for Feraoun's arrival in an American cultural context, it is the work of the American writer and ethnologist Zora Neale Hurston that offers a meeting point of unusual resonance. Born in 1891 in Macon County, Alabama, and growing up in Eatonville, Florida, which Hurston claims was the first incorporated Negro township in the United States, Hurston's introduction to the anthropologist Franz Boas and the study of folklore gave her natural storytelling talents a methodology and an institutional setting. Though it is luckily unnecessary to enumerate here the breadth and depth of her research, centering on Black folktales and Haitian Voodoo ceremonies, and the simultaneous outpouring of fictional, dramatic, and autobiographic writings, such work having been successfully salvaged from the dustbin of history by critics and researchers from the 1970s on, rereading Dust on a Road, Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography, I am struck by how similarly Hurston and Feraoun approach their native contexts and this initial description opens the story of their identity-formation.

Both begin the story of their existence by describing in great detail an aspect of their villages, namely the oral and imagined history concerning the creation of the roads that led through them. I'd like to cite them both at length here:

Hurston:

Roads were made by the simple expedient of driving buggies and wagons back and forth over the foot trail, which ran for seven miles between Maitland and Orando. The terrain was flat as a table and totally devoid of rocks. All the roadmakers had to do was to curve around the numerous big pine trees and oaks. it seems it was too much trouble to cut them down. therefore, the road looked as if it had been laid out by a playful snake. Now and then somebody would chop down a troublesome tree. Way late, the number of tree stumps along the route began to be annoying. Buggy wheels bumped and jolted over them and took away the pleasure of driving. So a man was hired to improve the road. His instructions were top round off the tops of all the stumps so that the wheels, if and when the struck the stumps, would slide off gently instead of jolting the teeth out of riders as before. This was done, and the spanking rigs of the bloods whisked along with more assurance. (Hurston 563-564)

Feraoun:

[Tizi's] dwellings cling to each other along the summit of a ridge like the gigantic vertebrae of some prehistoric monster: two hundred meters long, the main street is just one section of a tribal path connecting several villages, leading to a practicable road and so to towns.

This main street retains its original width in places where it is walled in on only one side: three full meters at least. Since people have then built up on both sides, the street has of course been nibbled away, and now looks pitiful in its stone prison. It would suffice if it did not allow itself to spread out every so often, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, sending out thin, winding extensions, enclosed alleyways escaping towards the fields.

Can one logically expect a street, which is part of a path, to be treated differently from that path? Why should it be paved if the path is not? They are both dusty in summer; it is muddier in winter because it had been traveled more. For the same reason, actually, it is always more clogged with dirt. As for the alleys, they resemble the street; they are its daughters. (PMS, 5-6)

In Derrida's autobiography of obstacles, he writes: "I say route and trace of a return, for what distinguished a route from a path or from a *via rupta* (its etymon) as well as *methodos* from [*h*]odos, is repetition, return, reversibility, iterability, the possible reiteration of the itinerary." And speaking of the never quite inhabitable "language called maternal" he further writes: "There is no possible habitat without the difference of this exile and this nostalgia" (Derrida 58) Both Hurston and Feraoun's tales are initially joyful, exploring the uniqueness of their social position in the landscape of their childhood. Both childhoods are protected by powerful maternal forces, for Hurston her mother, for Feraoun's protagonist his maternal aunts. Both forces allow for an imaginative freedom that instills a sense of power and election to both children. Perhaps because of this combination of protection and imagination, the death of Hurston's mother, like the death of Fouroulou's aunts, is experienced as an expulsion. Death seals them off not only from an innocent, animal-like consumption of their cultural milieu, but from an early taste of the life of the mind, and sets them off on a journey of transformation that ultimately moves them far away from their native context *and back* in the role of cultural translator. This itinerary, this exile and return, would instill in both a skepticism about the writing of culture, a distance from the ethnographical project, but also a skepticism about the writing of the self, that, as Françoise Lionnet has noted of Hurston, "self-consciously moves from the general to the particular and back." (Lionnet 99)

Derrida also notes that “all expatriations remain singular.” (Derrida 58) Hurston ended up destitute and forgotten when she died in a welfare hospital in 1960 and was buried in an unmarked grave. Feraoun’s death was a national tragedy. Schools were closed across Algeria and France, well-known writers published wrenching articles, and hundreds attended his burial. His assassination has come to overshadow the oeuvre of this rural intellectual in ways that even he would be suspicious of. In his final, unfinished piece of fiction, written in the first-person, he drew a portrait of the location he and his country had arrived at, one far from the rural crossroads of the “Musician’s Square” in Tizi-Hibel, his native djemaâ:

I have the sense of living in fact on a lush, savage island, prisoner of the modern world whose tall cement towers isolate as much as the gigantic walls of my strange "domain," located incidentally on the frontier between two enemy neighborhoods. Exactly where a meeting could take place. Each time I am tempted to forget my contemporaries, a burst of gunfire, an explosion, or simply the cries of war come to remind me at whatever time of day or night that the killers are roaming around or that one part of the population is passionately claiming its intention to massacre the other one." (A 29)

Journeying with Feraoun and the people of Algeria fortunately does not end here. Like the rediscovery of Hurston’s life and work by the African-American writer Alice Walker, the resurgence in readings and republications of Feraoun’s work has helped us release him from the “domain” of the martyr of the revolution. The recent surprise publication of his final novel, La Cite des Roses, edited by his son Rachid in Algiers and written very much from the location described above, which I would now like to examine, unleashes a dry, outrageous irony at times that I can imagine Hurston and Feraoun would genuinely share.

Chapter 8: Algerian Lessons : Feraoun's La Cité des Roses and Zahia Rahmani's France, Récit d'une enfance

The French-Algerian War has been pried open in recent years like a treasure chest found on the bottom of the Mediterranean. After so much silence, the words echo with stunning courage and pain. From a distance of almost 50 years we are hearing the full spectrum of viewpoints on the unraveling of French-Algerian relations and the civil wars it unleashed. From the contested memoirs of General Aussaresses and his embrace of torture techniques during the war to Jean-Pierre Lledo's documentaries putting in question the revolutionary, Arab/Islamic-centered narrative of post-independence Algeria, this outpouring of testimony and creative responses to a shared history of trauma offers lessons, especially in generational evolution and dialogue.

La Cité des Roses, Feraoun's final novel, is a case in point. Published in 2008, 45 years after its completion, Feraoun's wartime novel relates the self-interrogation of a Muslim évolué who grows increasingly infatuated with a visiting French schoolteacher. Autobiographical, provocative, revealing, La Cité des roses is a fictional study of sexual and political infatuation, a fantasy of liberation even as real bombs are exploding in the street. France, récit d'une enfance, an autobiography by Zahia Rahmani, stands in counterpoint. Born in Algeria to a family of Harkis who fought on the French side during the war and fled to France after independence, Rahmani's tale, also published in 2008, is a lyric of atonement addressed to her mother. She writes to liberate her generation from the stigma of betrayal and the abandonment and racism she encountered as a child. Feraoun was killed in 1962, the same year Rahmani was born. Their works, from different ends of the spectrum, push the limits of acceptable memories, acceptable desires, underscoring the rigid and violent social maps we traverse.

The depiction of such violent maps in the context of historic conflicts raises concern. I am led here by questions that have haunted the practice of art and history since the Holocaust and especially occupied trauma theorists: How does art represent violence? Are these representations clearly fictional or nearly indistinguishable from reality? When

the lines between history and fiction, between testimony and art are blurred, there is a fear of losing one's bearings within a pathos of victimhood, in what Vincent Crapanzano calls "frozen discourse," a monologue that foregrounds the deep inferiority and resentment created through abuse and repeats rather than elucidates the profound societal and political malfunction and violence in war, freezing them in place. It begs the question: How do we respond creatively to trauma? Is there an ethics or, to follow Michael Rothberg's line of thinking, a politics of traumatic memory? How do we judge the aesthetic solutions writers find?

Feraoun's Journal and La Cité

With the recent publication of La Cité des Roses, we can begin to see how Feraoun approached the rupture of the war by distinguishing between two uses of memory - historical and fictional. We have briefly explored the genesis and format of Feraoun's wartime Journal. Begun in 1955 at the urging of Emmanuel Roblès, written on school notebooks and practically smuggled out for later publication, here Feraoun chronicled the lives of ordinary Algerians during the war, honing a poignantly honest, yet sober testimony of the violently shifting ground of colonial relations and the incremental construction of a liberated Algerian consciousness. Anecdotes related by neighbors, articles in the press, radio broadcasts, politician's speeches – all are chosen and recorded by an author who weaves them into an ongoing, internal commentary on the deeply personal and inevitably political evolution rewriting the social maps of colonial society. Many have agreed with the historian James Le Sueur's assessment that the work represents today "the single most important document of the Algerian war of liberation." (PMS xxx)

Whereas the Journal is presented as historic testimony, an incremental folklore of the moment, where memory accumulates, embedded in daily events, and hopes to participate in the construction of public discourse about the period, La Cité des Roses is a fiction based on a true incident that builds forwards and backwards unchronologically

towards an emotional, aesthetic resolution. It follows an individual's internal negotiation with a public space where discourse has been reduced to silent suspicion and manuals of false fraternity. Although there is much ammunition for reading the novel as an allegory of the tragic love affair between France and Algeria – from the name of the female protagonist, Françoise, to the depiction of the Muslim boycott as a lover's dispute – this text is one of many circulating in the novel and works to heighten the novel's sense of the real, its stubborn partiality. As the narrator states half-way through: "For my part, I did not want to vex anyone, nor give testimony in any form. Quite simply, I needed to situate my affair and make it understood to what point I had committed to it." (CR 76)

Written between 1957 and 1960, a period of the war that saw a huge surge in interrogations, torture, rapes, murders, the passionate uprising of the *Pied-noirs* and the collapse of the 4th Republic, the novel is provocatively situated on the outskirts of open revolt. Beginning in the third-person in a realist mode, we watch the arrival of a rural Berber teacher and his family to an Arab Algiers slum in the summer of 1957. He has been hired to direct a school at the Centre Sociaux, a last-ditch effort to salvage French-Algerian integration through social and educational welfare.⁶⁰ We learn that the move was precipitated by numerous written death threats and hundreds of senseless acts of brutal violence carried out by both French soldiers and Algerian nationalists. And we are quickly warned that the teacher has a penchant for distancing himself from this reality:

Once out of danger, though, certain things abandoned in the upheaval, deemed accessory or of little value, returned to mind. The teacher had abandoned half a century of habits [with as little gravity as precipitation and now he found himself unable to stop looking back, resuscitating memories, regretting everything: the best and the worst. Sometimes, he climbed all the way to the top and from there all the way back down to the bottom of the beautiful edifice he had constructed over many years as if he wanted to show it to some curious stranger and could still summon the will to brag. In fact, if everything was now ruined, torn apart, obliterated, he still had this mental construction in which to take refuge at times. A dream in reverse that definitively marked his limits. (CR 17)

This "dream in reverse," a kind of self-conscious nostalgia, is met and matched by a fantasy of liberation in the form of a smart, pretty, deeply unsatisfied French teacher who

⁶⁰ Initiated by the Algerian governor, Jacques Soustelle, and created by the French ethnologist Germaine Tillion, the Centres Sociaux was a valiant effort by liberal reformers that came much too late. See Le Seuer, *Uncivil War*, 55-86.

arrives in Algeria with her macho husband and two children and selfishly takes up a post teaching at the Cite under the director of the protagonist. He and a reactionary *Pied-noir* colleague take up her “education,” vying for her affection and affiliation, scheming to undermine her neutrality, both political and sexual. Switching from third-person to first-person, the novel’s allegorical mode is gradually invaded by a sense of historical presence and the threat of violence. When the children go on strike, paratroopers round up misfits and transport them by force to school. French-Algerian colleagues become suspicious of the “Arab” protagonist’s reticence, his inability to join in their delirium following demonstrations in May 1958 that bring down the 4th Republic and which they believe have kept Algeria French. He is denounced, his office searched and finally arrested. Locked in a dark cell awaiting aggressive interrogation and torture over four days he succumbs to the war, which he defines as the inevitable confrontation of one hatred with another. Yet he is no actor here, rather an obedient victim:

“I had nothing inside me to oppose that hatred, which, anyways, left me no time, its violent irruption, finding me defenseless, shattered me and made me lose my mind, so completely that I believed to the contrary to be more lucid than ever. Lucid, cold, indifferent to the torture I awaited with vague curiosity, which was to come at any moment ... Everything appeared clear and precise. It was clear that they wanted to get rid of me. It was clear that they had powerful motives to demand my elimination. And this inevitable death, I needed to give it to myself. It all seemed dictated, indisputable, inevitable and urgent. In my muddled brain, a blinding window of light opened onto the early morning of the fourth day. And, in this window, the order was written in letters even more luminous:

“Take that bottle, break it, push a shard into your gut!” (CR 129)

War here, for those who are neither heroes nor hypocrites, those who will leave no trace, follows an inexorable text, indeed, destiny is written, and it demands anonymous submission. It is unclear whether this injunction comes from the national discourse of colonial France or the religious discourse of Islam. For the individual, it does not really matter. What does matter is life, survival, and the bonds that help people withstand the cauldron of war. These bonds are built not only on obligation, but also out of the capacity to write their own texts, to communicate desire, to risk intimacy. Through an exchange of notebooks in which the lovers reveal to each other their inner desires, an epistolary exchange that constructs an “intimate addressable other” in Rothberg’s words, a politics of memory takes form that refuses to let the historical situation define interpersonal,

interethnic bonds.⁶¹ The intimate violence Feraoun's protagonist discovers in his relation to Françoise gives him a taste of emotional, sexual liberation:

I wanted to kill myself, beat myself, bite, run, hurl my huge pain made of surprise, shame, hope, impatience, rage, and joy too perhaps. My heart wanted to explode, it seemed to grow out of all proportion, invade the office, spread everywhere, cover the world with its boastful existence, negate everything that did not concern it, destroy everything that was foreign.

[...]

I asked myself: so this is my prudish passion! Well then! So much for her wanting to surrender to the other. Now it's clear, she can't refuse me. Look out! I'm going to give her a slap across the face, stomp on her, bruise her, then squeeze her in my arms. Down there, in her classroom, in front of her students. And during recess I'll sing to everyone that she's mine, that no one will ever again be able to tear her away." (CR 138)

The infatuation of an "Arab" teacher, a servant of France's "mission civilisatrice," – in identity stigmatized on both sides - with an educated, yet politically naïve French woman during the heat of the revolution was controversial to say the least. There is no question we are dealing here with what Michael Rothberg has called a "dissident sexuality," an expression of repressed fantasy and desire that puts the status quo in question. Feraoun's French editor sent the manuscript back to him requesting significant revision, insisting on the need for historical and cultural contextualization to situate and explain the character's motives. Feraoun refused. A mark of the divisiveness of the time or of the writer's maturation? What is clear is that Feraoun, now 42 years old, withheld his work rather than "format" it. In a letter to his French editor Flamand in March 1959, Feraoun wrote:

Everything you did not find I omitted intentionally. [...] I continue to believe that if politics can give love a certain hue, it can neither nourish nor modify nor impede it. [...] I believed it was important to allow such a sentiment to blossom in the midst of hatred and that it was enough to mark in counterpoint that this hatred existed, translated as anger, hypocrisy, suffering and death, but of this historical situation, on which I need not insist, I wanted my characters to escape by giving themselves to each other. (*Lettres* 150)

As we have seen, the crossing of the colonial divide leaves a wound. In Le Fils du pauvre, based on Feraoun's own experiences, the father receives a near-fatal stomach

⁶¹ The use of the epistolary form and the intimate journal are constants in Feraoun's fiction: in Le Fils du pauvre, letters represent the sole means of communication between the father and his family during his absence in France as well as a testing ground for the son's new-found role as translator; in Les Chemins qui montent, the main protagonists write and share their journals, a space for the exploration of social tensions in identity formation and a lasting testament of their memory.

wound while working in a French factory. Once the danger of death is overcome, this wound becomes a means of escape and survival, for it leaves a healed scar *and* a life-time pension. In La Terre et le sang, it leads to interethnic bloodshed (when the protagonist accidentally kills a member of another clan in France) and to miscegenation (when this protagonist sees a means of overcoming the inevitable vendetta by marrying and later conceiving a son with the man's half-French daughter.) In La Cité des Roses, the trauma of colonialism and war is again represented as a stomach wound, but a *self-inflicted* one, healed through the fire of sexual desire. It becomes a metaphysical wound - or memory - not of trauma, of oppression and violence, but of a mutually chosen, and mutually ended, affair. It is a fantasy, for never did the Algerians choose to be subjected to the apartheid of French-Algeria; but it is also an act of creative liberation, risked at great cost. Feraoun seems to say it is ultimately all we have - the stories we tell ourselves, not just the way we fight wars, but the way we imagine them. For Feraoun, the ability to possess one's own version - however partial, however delusional - is more than liberating. It is salvational. It defies the dread of violent death, the paroxysm of hatred. As Feraoun's protagonist concludes:

“It was a moment that had passed, it would thus not return, but I knew that it would inscribe itself in me, and mark my existence, becoming a physical part of me not like a definitive scar but more like a calming source of consolation and dream.” (CR 163)

Rahmani's Moze and France, récit

Published before La Cité yet written 45 years after it, Zahia Rahmani, autobiography also examines scars and the way we read or write them. Born in 1962 in Algeria, Rahmani was 5 when her father fled an Algerian prison and took the family to exile in France. Now an art historian, she belongs to the so-called “hinge generation” - the children of Harkis who since 2000 have broken the silence surrounding their parents' “stigmatized identity” collectively as activists and individually as memoirists. The central issue for

these second-generation victims of the Algerian war is the questions of bonds, which Rahmani first explored in her first work, *Moze*. Written ten years after the suicide of her father on Armistice Day in 1991, this passionate, experimental work wrestles with the impeded memory of her parent's generation, their powerlessness, given the political context of post-independent Algeria and post-war racist France, to transmit a moral legacy to their children. A member of a minority of pro-French Kabyles, Rahmani's father was an educated indigenous mayor and regional counselor, who, at the outbreak of hostilities, was conscripted as a civil servant into the French army. After the war, he escaped the fate of thousands of Harkis who were tortured and killed (possibly 70,000⁶²), was rendered stateless (declared non-citizen by France, person non-grata by Algeria) and imprisoned. Exiled in France, the family was shuttled between resettlement camps, sometimes the same used by the Vichy government to house French Jews, lingering for over a decade before moving into a independent housing in rural France. Rahmani shows how, unlike the other actors in this tragedy, her father's life was a living death:

Moze was not killed. He was arrested, tortured, sold, displaced, harbored, bought, displaced. (*Moze* 22)

Yet unlike the survivors of the Holocaust for whom a public discourse of memory validates their wounds, the Harkis never returned:

- He did not return from the horror, he never got out. He wasn't liberated. He is the horror, the horror that endures. [He must be saved! It's the dead men one has a right to recall. We'll wake them up if need be.]
- He's not a survivor. He doesn't have that legitimacy.
- Who must say that he is one?
- You have to convince the civilized world! (*Moze* 92-93)

Rahmani's first text thus echoes Feraoun's *Journal*, offering a public testimony of the war, contrasting personal testimony with dominant discourses. But her poetic "I" confronts a broader array of discourses and modes of address in an attempt to render the surface of history non-hierarchical, egalitarian. Memoire, imagined dialogue, testimony, official documents, American literature, music, Kabyle oral history all become a testing ground for narrative resolution. Attempting to liberate a "stigmatized identity" – here that of Harkis – she develops an ethics of memory that asks: what are the bonds that

⁶² See Crapanzano, p. 164.

perpetuate war? Which bonds obstruct the emergence of testimony in the public sphere? What narrative can help the survivors, especially the children? Unable to forgive or escape her father's crime, she takes on his failed testimony in what Alison Rice has called Rahmani's "striking mission:" to show that intimate violence on family bonds continues to inflict damage long after the war is over. Echoing a telegram sent to the family, she relates the war's message to the children of Harkis:

Man living down there.
 Child who watched his father die.
 Killed by that hero once brother.
 Daughter, son, of deadsoldier-father, of false-French-traitor, same
 pain.
 Your father, French-forgotten, Arab-native, must be killed.
 Let him be killed. (Moze 21)

This directive to submit to violence echoes the text "read" by Feraoun's protagonist in prison:

Let the battle of war begin!
 Let the final hatred come! (Moze 21)

Whereas Moze seeks to shatter such frozen discourses and reveal how they continue to echo in social violence in France and in Algeria, impeding the sense of connectedness needed to resolve long-term trauma, France, récit, like Feraoun's Cité, takes an inner turn. Initiated by her Kabyle mother's illness, the narrator "falls," not into a sexual liaison, but into the memory of her mother's arms. A dead leaf held and dropped by the narrator, repeating an image used in Moze, symbolizes that the work here is of separation and differentiation: between death and dream, between abandonment and limits, between what hurts and what teaches. It is a work of corrective memory that revolves around the narrator's adolescence, to which she returns and returns, allowing the two sides of her identity to spar: her parents seen by the French, the French seen by her parents, a war of perception the girl unwittingly colludes in and is scarred by, hurtling over questions rather than resolving them. Punctuating this aborted or precipitated maturation are reflections of the mature female narrator on the unconscious fortification gained through her mother's refusal to assimilate, that of a "passeur sans bruit"

“You were nothing there but a silent *passer*, one of those who leave no trace. Believing firmly in your heritage, you transmitted to your children an uncontaminated patrimony and you filled the void over which our feet found affirmation/sought to stand firm.” (43)

Passeur – ferrywoman, smuggler, coyote - The shifting ground of this word is a bridge inheritance of colonialism. France, récit investigates who has legitimacy to tell its story. It courageously questions the validity of the fictions people live by, ones that can impede the legitimacy not just of testimony, but of whole cultural genealogies, especially those of immigrants. “Unwritten” by a French or Algerian national discourse, the narrator is drawn to American literature and art – the works of Faulkner, Rauschenberg, and especially Richard Wright. It is a call to arms she willingly ingests: “Write this life that strikes you down. Escape them.” (60) Yet the legitimacy offered by birth holds her in check. She is drawn to her mother’s voice, her refusal to translate from Tamazight, her tales of legendary figures. “You like to repeat that without them history confers us a shipwreck.” (40) As the story moves, the work of memory turns, joining again and again the mother’s ahistorical oral memory, offering fabulation as a cultural bond that counters the shame of historical betrayal. This “transmission of genealogy as fable” (52) cannot explain what happened – the family’s guilt – but sustains the living.

Whether or not Rahmani succeeds in this autobiographical mode to escape frozen discourses, her insights have a singed quality, as if each truth were lived in the flesh. At age 16, infused with the power of African-American literature and her own emergent sexuality, the narrator becomes the focal point of a French geography teacher’s wrath. At one point he physically attacks her. At another point, she succumbs to the war around her and swallows a bottle of pills. Like the lessons of war taught to her in *Moze*, lessons she must publically claim and embody, the geography lesson here, the final lesson of colonial wounding, is jarring. Rahmani writes:

And that is also the end of colonies. There will be no other one than the one where you live. And no more enemies to face. And it’s alone that you will have to negotiate this end. The death of your enemy. (90)

“What other fiction”

Both La Cité des Roses and France, récit d'une enfance were inspired by actual incidents: in Feraoun's case, the tale of an Algerian teacher's affair with a French woman; in Rahmani's, the illness of her mother and the 2003 death of two teenage African-heritage boys in France who were chased by police into an electrical tower. Yet their choice of narrative is different: Feraoun pours the depth of his own experiences into a fictional construction; Rahmani uses autobiography to reconstitute the foundation of a multicultural interpersonal, cross-national discourse. I believe this difference in narrative approach has to do with the question of legitimacy. For Feraoun's generation, autobiography and fiction were both necessary to forge legitimacy as writers. They were perceived as representatives of an oppressed people on the verge of assimilation/obliteration, an extremely fraught position. Entering the public sphere, they had to answer to several audiences – Kabyle, Arab, French-Algerian, and metropolitan French. To write as an individual writer about the experiences of individuals – as Feraoun attempted in his last book, the whole book an attempt at the personal in a time of impersonal extremes – was a radical departure, a pure fiction. His awareness of this irony bleeds through the book, heightening its dramatic tension: how do people dream of love, ever singular, in the midst of collective tragedy? How do they not?

In contrast, Rahmani grew up the child of a colony she never knew in a country that denied her a cultural past. She was in effect silenced by both sides. As she has said, she felt authorized to write only at the death of her father, whose historic role as a traitor she suddenly glimpsed. Only by speaking as the daughter of a traitor, through autobiography, can Rahmani hold us to the fire. What would we do under the pressure to choose sides, to betray, to choose survival over filiation, or exile over loyalty? As readers, how do we choose which memories to listen to? Perhaps the insight for us here is the focus on the voices and texts that lead us, that we let lead us. From different ends of this historical spectrum, between fiction and fact, past and present, Feraoun and Rahmani seem to speak to each other. It is a conversation about guilt and innocence, about parents and children, about how we live with the people we become. It is about the freedom of memory. Feraoun's fictional protagonist asks:

How to escape an apparently incurable despair, the teacher incessantly asked himself? The children, perhaps. Okay, the kids had to be saved. But considering everything together he wondered if it was worth the effort and sure of success. Why the kids? Why them in particular? What exactly was the difference? For them too wasn't everything equally ruined?" (CR 15)

In Rahmani's autobiographical mode, she offers an answer. I do not think Feraoun would mind if I allow a hard-working daughter the last word here:

We cultivate our imagination where we are born. When adversity, war, uproots us from this place, we are tempted to imagine what our life would have been like without that rupture, if only to forget for a time how others view us here. In this case, what other fiction is possible than resorting to the word "I"? (France, recit exergue)

Conclusion: Portraits of a Puzzle

It is hard to criticize a writer gunned down in his prime. We just do not know what he would have done. This colors our reading of his work as much as his realist and autobiographical mode blurs the distinction between author and text, writer and narrator. Like Tahar Djaout, the writer and journalist, or Matoub Lounès, the singer, Kabyle Algerians killed during the civil war of the 90s, we are faced with a memorialized persona who embodies collective memory, trauma and hope. As we have seen, Feraoun's life also invited this blurring of distinctions, this "trick" of being both a published author and a simple villager, a rare success and a man among millions. How he dealt with the fear of hubris, of self-enchancement, as Wilson Harris says of those writers who have the chance to lift themselves out of the endless repetition of tradition and walk along "the knife-blade of change," was to clearly state his ethical debt – a dual debt: to his French teachers and supporters and to his Kabyle father and female mentors. The story of Fouroulou is the story of a colonial education, but the story of Tizi and the people who call it home occupies its gravitational center.

My main intention in writing this commentary was to open a place of permission: the permission to imagine Feraoun, the boy, the teacher, and especially the writer, to bring him closer to us and to bring us closer to him. Rather than repeat the answers this commentary has provided to my opening questions, I would like to examine a final question: Why translate Feraoun today? What relevance could his life and work hold for us here in the United States? Is there a Feraounian point of view that can inform our perceptions? For me, another turning point in my reading of his work, and some answers to the above questions, came in 2008 when I had the luck to meet and interview four Algerians in Paris who have experienced what he chose to avoid – forced migration. One had left Algeria at the age of 11 in 1959, and the others as adults in 1993 during the near decade-long civil war. Two were of Muslim-Berber origin, the others French-Catholic and Jewish-Berber-Spanish. One was a woman, the other men. Each of them gave me a piece of a puzzle.

Identity: Fanny Colonna

When I asked the Algerian sociologist Fanny Colonna why she decided to write a thesis on Feraoun in 1962, she said: “It was March. I was pregnant with my third child. I was in Paris where I had decided to bring my two other children to stay in safety with my mother. I was in a bus, reading the newspaper: Feraoun assassinated. I was *electrocuté* – shocked to the bone.” Her motive in writing the thesis was not to explain his work, rather “to inhabit it in its incompleteness.” She believes that Feraoun had seen, even then, “what would happen to us, he saw the catastrophe,” and that for him the existence of Algeria in literature signified “access to the world of the speakable, to language, that Algerians would henceforth no longer be covered by silence, that they would exist in broad daylight, would be known and even speak.” (Colonna 59) She told me in sum, “He was the first authentic Algerian writer.”

Colonna went back to the Algeria of her birth, the independent nation of her adult life, raising her children, working with Mammeri and Bourdieu, becoming a well-known sociologist in her own right, a specialist on colonial education in Algeria and a critic of the theory of indigenous and especially of religious “*déracinement*,” trekking by herself for extended research periods in the mountains of the Aurès. Once in the 80s an *ouali* or prefect told her, “I don’t know how you have the gall to call yourself Algerian!” A week later she was picked up by the police and forbidden to do work in the region. She has lived in a modest apartment in Belleville, Paris since 1993 when the death of Tahar Djaout, a good friend, “electrocuted” her a second time. She left for a week, “the sheet still drying,” and hasn’t returned for 13 years, leaving an extensive library and document collection behind. Colonna is a woman of her era and her upbringing; her mind is the fruit of privilege and courage. I’m sure her father adored her spunk and instilled her with a sense of mission. And that after his death in her twenties she fought an internal battle as well as a daily external one - what she called several times during the interview “*le pris a payer*,” “a Christian notion” - to remain in a country that over one million of her like had fled. Going over my notes of the interview I come across this:

Colonna: Identity, I don't know what it is. It gets decided.
 Me: It's a given.
 Colonna: No! *Ça se fabrique* – You create it!

And:

Me: My family settled in the States in the early 1800s.
 Colonna: We've got that in common, you and I.
 Me: I feel profoundly the daughter of colonists.
 Colonna: Not me! Functionaries. We despised the *colons*.

« Les blancs de mon père »: Arezki Metref

As I look over my notes of these interviews, I keep thinking about the word audacity: like the audacity of Areski Metref, the writer and director of the Berber Cultural Association in Paris and former friend and colleague of Tahar Djaout. Also a refugee of the 90s, Metref has returned to Algeria as a voice of constant critique and biting humor on blogs and online articles ever since. When I asked him about Feraoun he said that reading the book, “*J’ai mis les mots sur les blancs de mon père* – I found words for my father’s silences.” A soldier in WWII, he came home silent, never speaking a word of what went on there or how it might have altered his sense of the future. The family lived in Algiers, far from his rural, ancestral roots in Kabylia, and as silent as his father was on the subject of his war experiences, he was mute when it came to transmitting his ethnic heritage. Le Fils du pauvre, when he discovered it as a young man, opened a world for Metref, the world of his silent father, his distant cousins, his dead forbearers. Today he is the heart and soul of the Berber Cultural Association in France, editing texts, holding conferences, inviting speakers, a political orphan with many orphan friends, a huge spirit and constant critic.

At one point in my interview I quoted from Emily Apter’s article, “Untranslatable Algeria: The Politics of Linguicide”: “In the marketing of Third World difference, what sells? A writer who appeals to universalism or nonsecular religious philosophy? A dissident author? A subcontinental writer who capitalizes on exoticism or one who

explores post-colonial identity? [...] A traditional African writer or an Afro-futurist?” (Apter 100). I summarized her questioning of international prizes as a holdover from imperial times, of whether certain writers consciously write to be translated and successful on the world market, and why Algerian writers seem to have missed this boat completely. Is this due to its own “violent sectarianism, anti-feminism, intolerance, *ressentiment* and ambivalence toward the West” or the insidious commercialism of larger markets? What language does one use in Algeria today? What voices are heard? Of Metref’s dear friend, Apter says, “Tahar Djaout’s death stands as a testimonial to the dangers of becoming translatable, but it also stands as a tragic injunction to the West not to collude in walling off Algeria behind a fortress of untranslatability. [...] Efforts must be made to keep Algeria...” (Apter 108) To this summary, Metref was “assez d’accord.” But he wanted to add that Algerian reality was no doubt untranslatable within American parameters:

Americans have a simplistic idea of social development and need a binary, schematic discourse for the sake of mass consumption. In contrast, Algerian society is marked by a chronic malaise that is also the motor of artistic creation, and that’s what writers try to portray, because they are at the heart of this malaise. How do we write this malaise and make it visible? None of this kind of work is linear, simple – which is what large developed countries always want small backward one’s to fall into.

Viewed as either too complex, or in Feraoun’s case, as too simple, Metref seconded my sense that it takes time to read literature. If we are patient, it is a means of transport. “I don’t know the United States myself, never been there, but Faulkner, I feel at home in his books. He could make a foreign place real for us Algerians. To get back to Apter, there really is nothing better than a novel to make places translatable. I’m writing a book now about Kabylia...”

“Literary Tourism?": Jean-Pierre Lledo

I met up with Jean-Pierre Lledo, a documentary filmmaker, in Montreuil. The son of a Berber Jewish mother and a Spanish father, Lledo was born in Tlemcen in 1947. He was

a dedicated communist, attending the VGIK film school in Moscow, graduating in 1976, and became a filmmaker and screenwriter of fictional films, navigating the waters of the Arabo-centric one-party rule until 1993 when he was forced to leave during the civil war that unleashed a surge of violence against intellectuals. He has recently become a controversial figure both in France and in Algeria for producing a trilogy of documentary films that seek to portray the memories of the Algerian war for independence from all sides. As is clear in these films, Lledo is committed to a multiethnic, tolerant, open society in a way that offends the sentiments and undermines the ideological power of those still wedded to a revolution-based, nationalist, univocal view of Algerian history and contemporary society. Interviewed during the Toronto Film Festival last year, Lledo claimed that there are no documentaries in authoritarian Algeria, no public investigation of textual or living archival materials; "filming my mother in her kitchen would be seen as a form of pornography." Like the autistic children he filmed years ago whom he says suffer from an inability to represent themselves, Algerians cannot work through the traumas of the past because political and cultural taboos deny them a public sphere to process memory.

"So you're planning some literary tourism?" Lledo asked me with a grin as we sat around his kitchen table. He had cooked a simple and delicious Mediterranean meal in his 19th floor kitchen whose small window offered a spacious view of the city, bathed that day in brilliant white sunlight. Oddly enough, it stood above the Square of May 19th in downtown Montreuil, the date of the ceasefire that ended the Algerian War of Independence (I had asked for directions from a Kabyle café-owner down below who had pondered, "...or is that the Square of July 14th? I always get them mixed up.") Lledo had invited Barkahoum Ferhati, a visiting scholar and friend who studies the history of prostitution in Algeria. She had only a vague recollection of Feraoun, an author she obviously considered regional. "Why would he interest an American?" they both wondered, "Why Feraoun?"

So I threw my *Stalker*'s ribbon⁶³: I talked about Massachusetts, about the woods, where centuries earlier contact between European settlers and native Americans had played itself out in cultural borrowings, bloody combat and abductions, that one of my

⁶³ From Andrei Tarkovsky's remarkable 1979 film, *Stalker*. See quote of Bensmaia in the Introduction.

earliest memories was of building "wigwams" with my friends over a rock where Mary Rowlandson, the daughter of a prosperous Protestant family, had been ransomed by King Philip, the great Algonquin Indian chief, in 1676. I told them about her bestselling testimony, a woman's attempt to ransom herself back into the strict confines of Puritan society after a bruising collusion with the foreign. I said that there are traumas at the heart of American life, the traumas of displacement and cultural encounter, of abandonment and revelation. That Americans gorge themselves on documentaries, on memoirs, on personal narratives, but often fail to register the weight of history, its impact on their ability to act. As if being an empire of immigrants released us from the slow and careful work of understanding time.

But why Algeria, why Feraoun? I told them that I had first come to France years ago and spent a time as an illegal alien in Montreuil watching Africans get controlled by the police as I exited scot-free from the subway, an obvious example of my white privilege and one I could very well have experienced at home, but which awakened questions in me. Was racism different in France? Was white privilege different? I encountered Algerians and wondered suddenly who the heck Camus had been... I started taking Arabic lessons. It was romantic, to say the least, for I was living in France and did not know the language. At some point I decided to see if I could learn French from an African perspective. And that's when I discovered Feraoun's autobiographical novel, *The Poor Man's Son*, which became my French primer and subsequently the first novel I translated.

The idea that an Algerian had taught an American French really tickled Lledo and his friend. The connections between American colonial history and French-Algerian colonial history was a left-field lob that clearly surprised them. Sitting in France, speaking in French, a direct exchange between us as Algerian and American did not seem possible. So I told them about the emails I had received from a young man in Feraoun's hometown thanking me for translating Le Fils du pauvre. He and his friends had made me an honorary member of the Mouloud Feraoun Association of Tizi Hibel. What should I know about them if I want to travel there and meet them? Who is Feraoun for them? And what do they know or expect of an American translator?

Soaking in his presence, his view over Montreuil, enjoying his avocados and tomatoes and fried fish, I sensed Lledo was a critical, energetic, courageous man, surprisingly generous, and impatient. Not with the normal obstacles to personal ambition, the reason most Americans are impatient, but with the deliberately slow metabolism of power, with the ways official ideology gets imbedded into the minds of citizens, their reluctance or inability to think for themselves. It did not seem relevant or smart to ask about the Berber movement, as if the issue of their political rights were obvious or perhaps another orthodoxy. Lledo walks a fine line between ethnic groups that have each accused him of collapsing historical grievances, if not of a *Pied-noir* racist liberalism. It was the man Feraoun, the individual, for whom Lledo held sincere respect. It was the example he had set: in a country where thousands have been murdered, hundreds tortured, more than a million exiled, how does a man or a woman take a pacifist stance? How do we envisage a multi-ethnic society? I think Lledo is one of Feraoun's children, maybe even unbeknownst to him, one of the many young people Feraoun saw as his charge, his burden. In the social erosion that erupted in revolution, Feraoun wrote ethnographic fiction from the inside out, drafting tales of failed emigration and failed return, of unrequited love across social barriers. He dared write about the lures and barbs of seduction, both cultural and sexual. And he was branded a coward for refusing to fight, for not taking sides, for remaining a teacher. At a time when no one wanted to listen, he asked all the people living in Algeria: how do we hold ourselves accountable? If there is no accountability, is there freedom? These were questions Lledo was clearly asking himself and for which he was bearing the brunt of criticism. My daughter hates it when I tear off her band-aid; Algerians are not at ease with their pain.

« Ma mère se lève »: Mohand Dahmous

Both Lledo and his friend suggested I find people who knew or cherish Feraoun like Feraoun's sons Ali and Rachid and the filmmaker Ali Mouzawi. They saw no reason not to make my journey of literary tourism. Though I have since had correspondences with

all three, the words of Mohand Dahmous confirmed Lledo's invitation most generously. My email correspondent in Tizi-Hibel had given me his name and I had come across it as well in an issue of Metref's magazine, Actualités & Culture Berbères, where he had contributed to a commemorative panel on Feraoun. A computer specialist and unstoppable promoter of the Association Tizi-Bibel in Paris and at home, Dahmous met me in a café in Menilmontant, the neighborhood in the north of Paris where Feraoun went to the Goutte d'or to visit Kabyle migrant workers and young nationalists in 1947. It remains a richly diverse immigrant stew and a center of Berber life in exile. Dahmous first entered its narrow, crowded streets as an 11-year-old child in 1959, fleeing starvation even more than the war. "I remember going into my father's restaurant and standing there amazed at all the food people were eating, all the meat. It was the first time in my life I could eat all I wanted." He came to join his father, who soon returned to fight; according to his own research, in 1962 the entire male population of the village at that time were either in exile or in the *maquis*. A self-taught sociologist and historian, he remains amazed by Feraoun's clairvoyance in his Journal and his extraordinary ability to navigate the fraught political terrain, the internal cleansing inside the FLN in Kabyle villages in the late 50s, especially in light of the struggle Dahmous has seen his people fight from afar over the last decade between the forces of the Arabo-Islamic centered government and military and the outlawed forces of Islamic fundamentalism. Though careful to state his reservations about the militant Berber rights movement, he noted that the young man whose death at the hands of the police in 2004 ignited thousands to demonstrate for the rights of Berber culture in contemporary Algeria was a native of Tizi. He also noted that the insidious appearance of a mosque in the village, which he swears never had one, inviting the children to enjoy books and films and electronic media the municipality cannot afford, and the award of tourist visas to over 70,000 young men since the beginning of the "Black Spring" in 2001, which has emptied the village to a mere 750 souls, threatens once again the lifeblood of Kabyle identity.

As he laid out the ancient, medieval, early modern and modern history of the Kabyle for me, especially the support he offers young people in Tizi-Hibel to resurrect the defunct Mouloud Feraoun Association, Dahmous kept repeating that Feraoun was not "in contradiction with his culture." He was proud of him. "We are an oral culture, very

little Arabized, so there are few learned people who can describe our life.” He referenced Feraoun to underscore the absence of organized religious education and practice in Tizi. Religion – Islam - came from “above,” from wandering marabouts who often learned Berber and took on local customs. It was and remains a state and an individual affair, not a village one; like Latin mass, women his mother’s age pray in their houses, men on the edge of the djemaâ, often without understanding the Arabic they piously recite. It is one practice within a fundamentally pluralistic cultural paradigm. “I can’t accept one book as the sole ideological reference for my life.” Cultural education thus resides in oral transmission, in poetry, song, fable and tale.

As Feraoun portrayed with his aunt Khalti, women are the transmitters, the barometers of this heritage. Whenever I asked Dahmous questions about cultural conflict or change, he would return to the subject of his mother. With no mosque, no formal religious education, how is religious belief and practice handed down? Do people still worship the saints? Shaking his head, “You should see my mother. Every day she gets up at dawn and the first thing she does? Her ablutions. She can see 360 degrees around from her roof and she bows to each of the saints.” Like Lledo and Colonna, Dahmous felt the idea of the saints losing power was a *mythe reçu*. What did Dahmous think of Feraoun’s critical portrayal of traditional sexual mores, both Islamic and Kabyle? The insane jealousies and destructive intrigues to produce male heirs in *La Terre et le sang* ? His critique of repudiation in *Les Chemins qui montent*? Wasn’t this an instance where he was in conflict or contradiction with his native culture, where he documented the suicidal traditionalism of Kabylia in its confrontation with Western mores and the inevitability of change? “Yes, love has always been a taboo; there is no room given for romantic alliances. Our relation to others is codified. I myself was promised in marriage when still a boy. It’s a question of preserving our patrimony. Women did not inherit in order to safeguard the continued existence of our culture. This has changed somewhat with the new *Code de la famille*, they can inherit a portion.” Dahmous did not want to budge. Are there at least women members in the Mouloud Feraoun Association in the village? “You really need to meet my mother. She can neither read nor write, but she has a formidable intelligence.” After 49 years in France, Dahmous held to his heritage like a fig tree’s roots in dry sand. “I am the product of my mother’s teachings.”

Feraoun's Audacity

Although Dahmous was cautious to say the least on the subject of women, they make up 70% of lawyers in Algeria today. This is a huge transformation in a society where only 15% of the male indigenous population was being educated at the end of World War II. As Colonna has noted, the rates of literacy actually went down between WWI and the 1930s when Feraoun made it to the Ecole Normale, forced towards French schools like thousands of Kabyle boys by land sequestration and extreme poverty. And it was here that Feraoun found his audacity to break with the traditions of his parents: The audacity to share information and decisions with his wife, as related in the later section of Le Fils du pauvre and in my correspondences with his sons. The audacity to bring his first-born, 16-year-old daughter to Paris in 1959 as a present for passing her baccalaureate. And the earlier audacity to write and self-publish an Algerian novel in which the roles of women hold key importance. This opening is part of an ideological shift in perception of ethnic stereotypes, of literary protagonists, starting with the figure of the Kabyle school teacher who was a stock figure in *Pied-noir* literature of the thirties. Feraoun made that figure his first novel's central subject, the Kabyle village as a whole the dramatic protagonist, and omitted any overt racist distinction between good Kabyles and the "uneducatable Arab hordes" so common to all colonial and colonialist literature before him. Indeed, the very absence of Arab figures in the novel, not to mention French ones, underscores the presence of an indigenous intellectual, the extradiagonal narrator, free of both village and colonial oppression, who is unnamed yet speaks, cajoles, demands – and ultimately takes on the task of narration for an ethically ambiguous "we."

The task of writing this Algerian novel, with Kabylia as its center, was one Feraoun long hoped someone else would take on. At one point he tried to convince Roblès that he could do it. As he wrote in "Images algérienne d'Emmanuel Robles," Roblès refused, "When are you going to understand that that's your job? It's your voice we need to hear. Get to work!" Roblès implored him to be audacious in this effort, a notion Feraoun says he did not understand at first:

To have audacity, for an author, means first of all believing oneself capable of creating. Then to not stop before all the difficulties that pop up on the path of creation. I don't know if there any happy creators: they would have to be

insensible to their tormentors but then, they wouldn't know how to create a thing. They must, to the contrary, suffer from their incapacity, their indulgence, their weaknesses, to feel and be incapable of expressing all their feelings, to see and be unable to show what they see. (A 66-67)

Clearly, part of what Feraoun saw was that the audacity to write creatively required more than education. It required support, relations, inextricable ties with European-Algerian and French intellectuals – both traditional, in a Gramscian sense, such as his teachers, his professors, Monsieur Lambert and the *père blancs* who ran the boarding house he stayed at during his studies, mentors and protectors committed to republican values and social equality; but also organic intellectuals, journalists and novelists like Camus and Roblès who moved across ethnic and class boundaries and demanded that the society change and the *évolué* with it, forging new bonds. Feraoun also saw that ethnicity was a viable and valuable object of observation. If approached from an insider's viewpoint, it was an act of cultural salvage and of social transformation. Building on an ethnographic model, Feraoun employed an acquired distance to see and represent contemporary problems of filiation and the consequent pressure to seek and produce new forms of affiliation. On the cusp of a new era, his works asked: How are we tied? If we change, as we must, what will unite us? Do we have a choice in this or will it be imposed? By whom? What leaders should we choose? Critical of his own belonging, curious about social and sexual relations with the French, Feraoun embodied what Edward Said has called a “critical consciousness” as espoused in “Representations of the Intellectual” and especially in his essay on “Secular Criticism”:

On the one hand, the individual mind registers and is very much aware of the collective whole, context, or situation in which it finds itself. On the other hand, precisely because of this awareness – a worldly self-situating, a sensitive response to the dominant culture – the individual consciousness is not naturally and easily a mere child of the culture, but a historical and social actor in it. And because of that perspective, which introduced circumstances and distinction where there had only been conformity and belonging, there is distance, or what we might call criticism. (Said, Reader 230)

For Said, this critical consciousness is “a part of its actual social world and of the literal body that the consciousness inhabits, not by any means an escape from either one of the other.” We see this inextricable, and for that reason invaluable, position in Colonna's central question about the native elite:

How it could have interiorized so completely, and expressed so directly, in its practice and in its own system of values, an ambiguous and inextricable rapport, critical yet equally legitimizing, with the colonial situation; how, at the same time, the education it received allowed it to formulate a demand, unusual at the time, and to play the role of political and cultural mediator. (Colonna 11)

Yet what Feraoun seems to have seen most poignantly and presciently, what he suffered the most from and eventually was killed for was the audacity to represent what Metref calls Algeria's "chronic malaise" and what Crapanzano describes as a tragic Algerian sensibility. It is a topic that many Algerian writers have tackled from Mohammed Mammeri to Rachid Mimouni to Tahar Djaout to Assia Djébar. From Metref's "les blancs de mon père" to Djébar's book on Algerian conflicts with memory, Le Blanc de l'Algérie, we see that persistent and painful, even tragic, gaps in memory and critical consciousness have prevailed throughout recent Algerian history. In this sense, Feraoun's tale meets Derrida's, as we have quoted in Le Monolinguisme de l'autre: "Rather than an exposition of myself, it is an account of what will have placed an obstacle in the way of this auto-exposition for me. An account therefore of what will have exposed me to that obstacle and thrown me against it. *Of a serious traffic accident about which I never cease thinking.*" (Derrida 131; Trans. 70) We have seen how Feraoun portrayed the rupture of forced emigration as an accidental wound traversing the stomach of Fouroulou's father. His attention to the consciousness of the accidental, to the ways in which an individual experiences trauma of a collective nature, his ability to put words to what are often near-fatal scrapes with death, are also evident towards the end of La Cité des Roses. Indeed, they show the evolution of his Kabyle-Algerian sensibility into a form of writerly craft: As the Algerian protagonist arrives at his French lover's apartment to finally consummate his passion, he finds that a bomb has just exploded on her doorstep. A man lies fatally wounded on the sidewalk: "His mouth was opening and closing automatically and slow, slow death circled us as if it felt some loathing reluctance to take its victim." Another man lies in black blood on the street: "He had perhaps knelt before collapsing and now his joints refused to obey. That one too hung to life by a pitiful, taught thread that death had perhaps forgotten to snap." He goes on to describe how what at first appeared as "an ordinary spectacle" only becomes "solemn and full of threat"

when policemen and ambulance attendants arrive. “The incident became official and took on its true name: I had just witnessed a terrorist attack.” (CR 155-156)

What strikes me most in such passages is the combination of a rural peasant’s acceptance and clear-eyed vision of death and the critical consciousness of an educated passerby. Death’s familiar, if repulsive, sensuality and senselessness collides with the anonymous forces of human power that make it mean something far more threatening in the theater of social forces. The accidental nature of a larger, Algerian malaise affecting the society’s ability to digest and register events consciously is also captured in a 1957 letter to Camus. Following the latter’s acceptance of the Nobel Prize in Literature, the first time an African-born writer had received this prize, and, in protest, “the silence of the Muslim writers,” Feraoun recounts here an anecdote also noted in his *Journal*. Having attempted to lay out his affection for and affinity with Camus in counterpoint to the “historical situation” of inter-ethnic hatred and war, a divide very few at that point were willing to or could traverse without putting themselves at risk, Feraoun turns at the end of the letter to what one can imagine remained a sure space of détente for these two deeply humanist chroniclers - village news. “From time to time, here in Algiers, I get news from the village. When it's important, I note it down. Here's what I noted for example on November 9th.” What follows is a story that comes, as he states, “a dime a dozen,” yet captures an entire slice of history - its reality, its intimate impact, its symbolic resonance:

Why His Daughter was Mute:

The story is more tragic than Molière.

The daughter fell from the top of our fountain and hit her head, lost consciousness, and fell into a coma; her father had been stopped an hour before and brought to B. to be tortured to death. They both fell into a coma at the same moment. The mother, out of terror, went into labor, giving birth to another daughter and losing consciousness as well. So there you had the whole family in a state of unconsciousness. A helicopter was sent to the village to get the daughter, who was placed on the knees of a soldier, who himself was ordered to remain immobile for the duration for the trip. What patience, what care – I was told – the young soldier, the pilot, the doctors, must have had to save the life of the young girl! She was saved. They had to save her and leave her father for dead because the father was a terrorist and the girl was innocent. Yes, everyone knew who the father was and hence who the girl was. So the girl was saved, but she remained mute. I saw her leave the hospital on her way home. She could smile at her mother but she could not speak to her. If she were ever to recover speech, it would be to first ask for her father. (L 206)

As Rahmani's recent work proves, daughters do "recover speech." It takes time. I have not yet had a chance to interview Rahmani, but I imagine she would wince if I read this letter to her. From YouTube video conferences I can see she is a corpulent woman, mid-forties, dark wavy hair framing a wide light-skinned face. She leans on one elbow on the podium, shifting her strained feet, laying out her intellectual journey across the painful maps of silence left strewn over France and Algeria in the wake of the "catastrophe." Not your typical art historian. I wonder if she would agree with the late Tahar Djaout that the revolution, the exodus, the reprisals, the early stages of a liberated Algeria, left all concerned in a deep coma, which the country did not awake from until 1988, the year it first held free multi-party elections. Like 1939, the year Feraoun began his literary journey, it was a year of hope and transition, and a year that ushered in horrific bloodshed. Was that an accident too? Does collective slumber always end – or return – to tragedy?

As illustrated in the anecdote above, Feraoun's symbolic craft drew from a situated field of perceptions. A childhood accident, state torture, a precipitous birth: He gave himself permission to imagine events from the fluid and simultaneous vantage points of those directly concerned, directly observed - the child and the parents, the victim and the bystanders, the local villagers and the French soldiers. In the upheaval of mid-century Algeria, Feraoun managed to circumscribe a tragic vision with irony, compassion, and a critical consciousness of the future. It is this aspect of the Feraounian universe that can benefit us directly. Residents of New York City on September 11, 2001 not directly injured witnessed on the East River shore of Williamsburg, on the Brooklyn Bridge, on the streets of Manhattan, "a serious traffic accident," a "spectacle," with morbid fascination and then, later, watched transfixed as this spectacle gave precipitous birth to another, "official" event, replayed in endless news cycles, a "terrorist attack," "solemn and threatening," that set in motion political and military machinery that remains in many ways outside of our control today. What cultural forces anchor our experience of that day, our sensual perception? What keeps us from falling into a collective slumber? What consciousness do we have of the battles now being waged in Afghanistan? In secret

CIA prisons? In immigration detention halls across our own country? Do we have a chronicler like Feraoun to find words for our silences?

As I finish this commentary, my own young children interrupt me. It is late. "Mama, when are you going to finish? Tell me a story!" Translating a book is one thing, giving it a home in your language world is another. I hope Feraoun will not be offended if I offer one last loose translation. At the risk of blurring boundaries, let's imagine chapter II of Part Two of Le Fils du pauvre as an oral tale for American children:

Once upon a time, the world was ruled by a country named France. It was a very wealthy country with a 1000-year history. In that country lived a little boy who did not speak French, who knew nothing about Napoleon or Revolution or madeleines. He spoke Tamazight and lived in the hills his ancestors had always lived in, even before the Kabyles, the tribes, learned about Muhammad. He knew a little bit about the mosque and the Moorish café, about figs and pottery and ikoufan and kanouns, the big pots holding food and fire. He knew what he should and shouldn't do – and also what he could get away with, being a boy. He knew he had rights at the djemaâ, the village square. Then his parents decided to send him to school, not his sisters, just him. The teacher was like him but he spoke French. Je m'appelle Mouloud. Je suis Kabyle. Little by little, as gradually as the family's ikoufans ran dry, the little boy began to understand the new language and it was like a window opened to him, a window onto unbelievable things. Napoleon. Revolution. Love. It was like he was made to daydream, an illicit yet required fantasy involving actors he could not touch, people who seemed more intelligent, more confident, more worldly. It was a language, a world, which he himself would never achieve anything in. How could he? He wasn't French!

And then one day he woke up and his father was gone.

Months later a letter arrived. A letter! Lord, that requires a reader! Who could read? Not him, of course. So he went to get a real

reader, a boy who had graduated from fifth grade. And as the little boy listened to the words – Tamazight words spoken by his father in Paris to a man who translated them into written French in a letter read by an older boy in Kabylia who then translated them back into Tamazight – he understood, if not what French was, what it would be, what France represented, and why his father had sent him alone into that fantasy land. He understood that he and his father would together bridge a terrible, exhilarating divide, a wedge struck deep into his family like an ax into an ancient, resistant tree.

APPENDIX

Translated excerpts of works by Mouloud Feraoun

From Lettres à ses amis, 1969

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From Les poèmes de Si-Mohand, 1989

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From Lettres à ses amis

To Albert Camus

(L 203)

TaourirtMoussa, May 27, 1951⁶⁴

Dear sir,

I just received a visit of my friend Roblès here at Taourirt-Moussa. He told me all the good things you had to say about my little book and gave me your address, which I have long wished to know. Last winter I asked Pierre Martin from the SCI⁶⁵ to give you a copy of Le Fils du pauvre. He also could have given me your address but I didn't have the courage to write to you then.

I am very happy to have succeeded in interesting you because I've known you for quite a while. I saw you in 1937 in Tizi-Ouzou. Back then we were still young. You wrote articles on Kabylia for the Alger républicain, which was our newspaper of choice, and then I read The Plague and I had the impression that I understood your book like I had never understood any other. I regretted that among all the many characters there was not one indigenous person and that Oran in your eyes was nothing but a banal police headquarters. Oh! This is not a reproach! I simply thought that, if there was not this gulf between us, you would have known us better, you would have felt capable to speak of us with the same generosity that benefits all the others. I will always regret, with all my heart, that you do not know us sufficiently and that we have no one who understands us, to make us understood, and who help us to understand ourselves.

I intend to write, to speak of our countrymen as I see them but I have no illusions. My viewpoint is bound to be short-sighted and my skills overly limited for it is not true

⁶⁴ Both were 38, born same year.

⁶⁵ Service Civile Internationale.

that good sense is as commonly shared as one says it is. If one day I manage to express myself dispassionately, I owe it to your book – to your books, which taught me to know myself and then to discover others, and to recognize that I am like them. Shall I not therefore brave embarrassment: make my own attempt to explain the Kabyles and show that they are like everyone else? Like all the Algerians, for example? This gulf that widens stupidly with each day, should we not try to bridge it? Of course, there's no harm for me in trying. I am a good teacher; I have lots of students; I enjoy my class. I ask for nothing and dream fitfully. I succeeded in drawing the attention of Audisio, Camus, and Roblès to our existence. The result is splendid. You are each Algerian, all three of you, and needn't remain unaware of us...

Please grant me your indulgence for this lengthy letter. Perhaps you feel I have taken too much liberty addressing you in this manner. That would be proof that my words fail to express my thoughts and that I was wrong to write.

Please retain nothing from all this but my deepest gratitude for the precious encouragements Roblès brought back to me from Paris.

M. Feraoun

To Albert Camus
(L 204)

Algiers, November 30, 1957

Dear friend,

Attach no importance, no significance, to the silence of the Muslim writers. As for me, I believed I had to express my satisfaction to you simply because I place myself much closer to you than the others. When Roblès, our mutual friend, speaks to me of you, he tells me everything, even those secret thoughts you never conceal from him and I have

thus learned of your opinions, your distress, your suffering. Do you believe that your compatriots know you this way even if they understand and appreciate you more than I ever could?

What has happened to you undoubtedly concerns us all and all of us know it. But we are living moments of grave difficulty where the temptation is great to renounce friendship in order to make it possible to hate, where suspicion or hatred appears to both sides as the only sentiments possible in this country's inevitable human commerce, where in the end, it matters more to delude oneself, to lie to oneself, than to trick one's neighbor, adversary or enemy, precisely because this enemy is above all else a neighbor. Yesterday, he was a brother; one fears he'll become a brother again and as such he will return; in fact, each of us has long been convinced of this; each holds within himself, with an unacknowledged, shameful fear, a flicker of hope that might be capable one day of reigniting the flame. Let us grieve therefore dear friend our country's misery and wish that it will soon end.

I've wanted to write to you for a long time and this long letter is one I have written and rewritten many times in my head: each time a man close to me dies, a child I taught, a French or native friend who was full of life – at least they have all ceased to suffer. Little by little, the initial stupefaction has lost its violence and its effects on our hearts have become bearable. We've ended up accepting all the deaths that were not our own. I mean to say that each one of us at present has accepted seeing anyone at all die as long as it is not himself. The day will perhaps come when we will cease to feel fear. We wait, that's all.

So if you did not receive news from me during these tragic years lived in the heart of my mountains, it is because to my eyes everything lost importance and this stage, which many Kabyle peasants have reached, was one I already had found last year. Then, when I heard about the movement of the teachers, I had to shake the torpor out of my head to try to save my kids and I asked for Algiers. And now here we are, in the middle of the shantytown Arabs, lost in a world where we cannot adapt ourselves but sheltered from the contradictory and imperious demands that would not have failed to put my irreplaceable existence in peril!

Yet, from time to time, here in Algiers, I get news from the village. When it's important, I note it down. Here's what I noted for example on November 9th.

Title: *Why His Daughter was Mute*:

The story is more tragic than Molière.

The daughter fell from the top of our fountain and hit her head, lost consciousness, and fell into a coma; her father had been stopped an hour before and brought to B. to be tortured to death. They both fell into a coma at the same moment. The mother, out of terror, went into labor, giving birth to another daughter and losing consciousness as well. So there you had the whole family unconscious. A helicopter was sent to the village to get the daughter, who was placed on the knees of a soldier, who himself was ordered to remain immobile for the duration for the trip. What patience, what care – I was told – the young soldier, the pilot, the doctors, must have had to save the life of the young girl! She was saved. They had to save her and leave her father for dead because the father was a terrorist and the girl was innocent. Yes, everyone knew who the father was and hence who the girl was. So the girl was saved, but she remained mute. I saw her leave the hospital on her way home. She could smile at her mother but she could not speak to her. If she were ever to recover speech, it would be to first ask for her father.

Stories like this or that, come a dime a dozen, as you must know. They all have the same characteristics, the same look: the face of your country. And one morning I saw drawn across this chiseled face an imperceptible smile that was not one of pain, it was the announcement of the Nobel Prize. I went right to the post office to send my telegram without whispering a word to anyone. Hoping it would bring to you too this imperceptible smile. And thank you again, I was not fooled.

Maybe I could see you this year and chat with you: I'm almost ashamed of this endless, yet terribly empty letter. I wanted most of all to include my fond thoughts and to tell you that in spite of the high cost and perhaps because of it, people here will succeed in building that fraternal world you have always thought possible. I have a deep conviction. A world that will be ours and where you will be the best guide.

M. Feraoun.

From Les Poèmes de Si-Mohand

excerpts

There is a name in Kabylia that everyone knows, a poet whose life is legend: Si Mohand ou Mehand des Ath-Irathen. His popularity is even more remarkable given that Si Mohand's oeuvre was transmitted, among a people then illiterate whose own language had no written form, only through speech and song.

One might ask why a profane poet could become the incarnated representative of a people whose reserve is not the smallest of virtues and who consider all love music immoral. When a musician is hired for a party, one expects him to create an jubilant, easy-going atmosphere, a moment of relaxation during which it is allowed to let go; then, once the party is over, he is paid his arranged fee and hurriedly forgotten.

Si Mohand did not suffer this reprobation. Because he never sought to interest, never expected anything from anyone: what he says of himself, he says to himself.

One day, it's told, an angel appeared to him and presented him a choice: "Rhyme and I will talk, or talk and I will rhyme." Si Mohand chose to talk. That's how divine rhymes came to serve profane words, because the whimsical poet, having received this precious gift, worried less about glorifying angels than translating his own woes. (7)

If the educated man who has studied in the school of the West finds himself forced, at the price of successive renunciations, to submit himself to the demands of a civilization sure of its superiority and destructive of traditions, the women stay recognizably the same, as well as the peasants, the village people, who have learned to write a letter, to decipher a page, but for whom such baggage can serve no other purpose than to make themselves approximately understood on the rare occasions that put them in contact with the French: those are the guardians of tradition and of poetry.(9)

If we claim to present Si Mohand as he truly was, we will have to destroy his legend. (11)

I followed the sun

setting over my country
 as the boat put sail for the west
 (22)

His philosophy, if one can hazard this word, takes its source from experience. Like it, it takes shape, transforms itself, develops but never attaches itself to a fixed point; it continues to enrich itself right up to the moment when he glimpses his death. At that moment, it will be possible to say his life was noble and beautiful: it will rehabilitate the poet in the eyes of the most severe. (27)

The conception of love is special among the Kabyle. It is not a question of capturing a citadel after having scrupulously followed the direction on the Beloved's itinerary, nor of a vaporous Elvira ready to console the sensitive heart. The mores are pitiless, the senses demanding. One has to reconcile the ardor of physical needs with the fear of scandal or retaliation. It's not so much the beauty who is hard to seduce. When it comes to marriage, one has to surprise the vigilance of one's own family or capture their consent. (28)

His indifference for the cruel game of life's bitter struggle can sometimes appear like cowardliness, the surrendering of a weak man; his self-esteem must have suffered from it the same way he suffered his failures in love... He thirsts for the absolute or more exactly, he is very conscious of it. And it's this consciousness, in the end, that gives him his strength of character and allows him to live as a mocking observer, free of all bias, independent in body and soul... It's because during his life he could identify with everyone that we see in him the exceptional man who incarnated a world, an era, the authentic poet, full of sensibility, tenderness, and emotion whose revolt was not a cry of hatred, whose pessimism is rarely a blasphemy... As for his contemporaries, they accept his teasing and sarcasm with good grace because he also knew how to move them, and his friendly criticisms were more effective than advice. It was evident right down to his way of speaking, which was just how everyone spoke, frank and neither affected nor pretentious.

This role of arbiter that he takes on by putting himself outside the game, proves precisely that he intends to situate himself among his people. [...]

Si Mohand hence appears like a mirror where the soul of his country is reflected, a generation in profound disarray, brutally striped of its traditions, whose social structures have blown apart even as economic transformations and openings onto the exterior world have not allowed them time to adapt. He's not a "déclassé", but the wise man of a defeated people, the powerless spectator who assists with broken heart each fatal loss. (32-33)

Like in a ballad, the first stanza is usually imprecise or assigns itself generalities; the second develops, completes, adjusts, focuses. The last three lines constitute the conclusion, sometimes the decisive argument. This last tercet can appear very far from the first. But don't be fooled: it's the one that constitutes the confession, the sensitive spot. The initial parts depend on it. It's the one that withholds the key to the enigma when the poem is obscure. [...] The same construction: from the general to the particular, the secondary to the essential, the futile to the serious. (38)

From L'anniversaire

Algerian Literature⁶⁶

(A 53-58)

A few years ago critics heralded the flowering of a particular Algerian literature as the birth of a cautious spring. In France, it was received with the anxious interest aroused by trusted messengers in times of trouble. For the first time, a particular Algeria had raised its voice, a true voice, in a language that came from the heart and touched the hearts of others. A few writers, Muslim by birth and heritage, enjoying this warm welcome, set down firm roots in the literature of France.

But where does such interest come from and why this flowering of good omen?

In the cruel drama that has been tearing us apart month after month, it may appear childish and vain to pose such questions when the single issue confronting us is our shared anxiety, our common sorrow. Condemned to a painful mutism, in the course of a tragic confrontation, we continue to believe that the writer can look back and try to discover, in the more peaceful past, the promises of a fraternal future that he wanted to help prepare, if only to justify himself and declare without embarrassment that he did not fail at his task, and at the same time reiterate his hope.

The interest, no doubt, comes from the fact that some were ready to hear us and awaited honest testimonies; the reason for the flowering lay in our pressing need to testify honestly, entirely, to grasp our living reality in all its detail in order to dispel stubborn misunderstandings and deny clear consciences the excuse of ignorance.

We did not start out, in any case, by claiming that we had found the right path, nor to have gone all the way, but we did our best. The path had been marked out by those who had broken with an artificial Orient in order to describe a less attractive, yet truer humanity, a land of colors less sparkling but richer in nourishing sap, men who struggle

⁶⁶ Revue française, 3^e Trimestre 1957, Paris.

and suffer and who are the exact replicas of the men we see around us. We found all this in the works of Gabriel Audisio, Albert Camus, Edmond Brua, Jules Roy, Rosfelder, Claude de Fréminville, René Jean Cot, Marcel Moussy, Emmanuel Roblès. This familiar milieu, where we find neither bias nor excess, remains nevertheless foreign to our own: next door, if you will, juxtaposed, well distinct. One can encounter warm sympathy for the native here, sometimes even friendship, but in general the native is missing and if we deplore this deeply on both sides, it is not due to the writer nor a regrettable literary lapsus; it is rather quite simply a sad Algerian truth - one that has assured the senseless permanence of initial hostility by cultivating indifference and more often contempt.

Thus, if we know Mersault to the point of being able to put a name to his face because he is very much from home, it's not by chance that The Stranger kills an Arab and is sentenced to death. Trial records could perhaps reveal just how many Europeans have been condemned to death for killing an Arab. And it is not by chance either that an Arab, in Les Hauteurs de la Ville, gets tortured by a Vichyiste, thus incarnating the Algerian resistance, or that the Muslims, within the whole generous literary world of Roblès, remain in their place, evolving effortlessly in the particularly demanding world this writer has created.

We therefore know what we can assume: if we are absent in a work of Camus who does not cease to nobly proclaim the misery and the greatness of the human condition, if Moussy's Algerians, whom we cannot imagine more authentic and close to us, pass by us without seeing us, it is because neither Moussy nor Camus nor almost any of the others could come close enough to us to really know us. Having assumed, however, the role of the Host's teacher, today they watch, powerless and bereaved, as the Arab heads towards prison.

This deliberate refusal to testify in our favor, which could at first appear disappointing and unmerited, finds its justification in an honorable modesty much more than in a prudent reserve. In any case, it spawned a vocation by encouraging us to testify in our turn and on our own account. Everything transpired as if the writers of European origin had summoned us to an frank confession after having given us their own, with the understanding that this contest of sincerity would become the blinding affirmation of an

indestructible fraternity, needing then only to be loyally translated into action. Such was our hope...

Our most noteworthy books each contain this essential testimony: one finds it more or less everywhere, discrete or vehement, always expressed with equal fidelity and the same intention to move. Each writer spoke of what he knew, of what he saw or felt and perhaps to be certain to tell the whole truth, each put a large part of himself into his book. Yet since the vision remains the same under different angles, identical dramas could be observed; social dramas ending in joblessness or emigration, political dramas with internecine power struggles, scenes of administrative bullying or the inhumane opposition of race; dramas of ignorance, in the end, which are just as cruel as the others and to which one might impute the origin of all our woes.

The witness who attended this endless spectacle of misery first of all voiced men's hunger: in the crowded city or the arid mountain. Such is the poignant theme of La Grande Maison, more veiled in Le Fils du pauvre, La Colline oubliée, Nedjma... "The hunger that keeps you from sleeping is also the hunger that makes you think," goes the Kabyle proverb, and this reflection allows the poor man to preserve his sentiment of human dignity, to maintain his moral health, and to be able to speak like the character in Mohammed Dib's novel: "Maybe the people who eat are right to dislike those who don't."

The writer, having denounced hunger as a profound yet treatable disease in need of immediate attention, desired to make the patient known, not to write prescriptions or propose remedies. That is why he conceded to folklore, to narrow regionalism. Yet for the same reason, in exactly the same logic, he did not concern himself with aesthetics, or irreproachable formal purity. The documentary aspect of his work retains in his eyes the utmost importance, and he devotes all his attention to it because he knows, alas, that the observer who studies Muslim society from the outside has never understood it and that he always has the tendency to stop at the differences rather than at the similarities.

The traditions, the mores, the customs, the beliefs and the superstitions, individual and collective morality, the full spectacle of life, in sum, this was the spectacle, whose script the writer Moussy scrupulously tried to edit, that the writer wanted to bring to life in his books.

But for those who chose the grueling role of lawyer, objective observation did not suffice, however exact. It was necessary to touch deeply and convince, to summon one's full intelligence, to draw arguments up from the heart, to find the accent suitable for one's own inner turmoil. And such an approach imposed itself on many who, in effect, drew their novels out of themselves, when they did not simply tell their own tale.

For our tale is well known. Easy to imagine, at least: we are intellectuals who come from a world apart and we possess French culture. Our paradox – or our drama, as one collectively calls it – is quite understandable. Attached by all the fibers of our being to a frozen, ignorant and miserable society, on the margin of the new century, we have the clear conscience of what we lack and the duty to demand it. The protest aspect of our work is thus not surprising. What may surprise and at the same time reassure is the absence of passion that marks almost all of our words.

For the rest, our position is not as paradoxical as one thinks. In reality, we are not caught “between two chairs” but well installed on our own. And it is crucial that we remain exactly at our places in order to dissipate fear and deserve credit. The credit we need, all of us, to have the most banal of human truths inscribed in filigree in all of our works finally accepted: we are men, nothing but men, we need friendship, tenderness, fraternity. If we possess all that, our bodies will no longer feel hunger, our spirits will no longer thirst, our hearts will beat like all hearts do: we would no longer have anything particular.

This is what the Muslim Algerian writers have put into their books, books that garnered much sympathy, and even more curiosity. People are amazed we don't write in Arabic when we have never learned Arabic and if no one denies us the right to write in French, they exclaim before our works that are no masterpieces, “What's it like to be Persian?”

No, truly, North African writers have not failed at their task. Let men of good faith hurry to complete their own! Perhaps the future will show we were right.

The Algerian Images of Emmanuel Roblès*excerpt (A 59-62)*

A quarter century ago we students at Bouzaréa already embodied the Franco-Arab community!

I see myself on that long-ago first day of school when I arrived with my new suitcase, in my new suit, holding a huge new joy that I was barely able to control because it weighed more than my suitcase and it was imperative to quickly dispatch it, crowd into the school, and be absorbed by my new classmates, dispersed in this large domain that would soon be mine. I was well received by a "veteran" because he had no choice but to receive me well, to accompany me to my dormitory, to show me my spot, to help me unpack my bags, so well that he appeared like an older brother, conscientiously avoiding trampling on my dreams or destroying my illusions.

But, God help me, I couldn't have fallen into worse company. I was dealing with the red lantern of the juniors, the most facetious, the worst layabout, whose fantasies misled the older ones and caused the younger ones to suffer. Those who remember classmate Roux will be able to say whether I exaggerate, but I bless the happenstance that inspired him that first day when he gave me the unforgettable impression of being introduced into a friendly world that accepts you as you are, simply because you have taken the trouble to show up.

No doubt, eventually, this community of junior high students revealed to me its imperfections, its prejudices, and its castes. But since we were children, we paid no attention to hatred, animosity even less; instead of disdain we chose common respect. And when we separated we found ourselves moved by deep regret that adults with hardened hearts cannot imagine: the regret of those who shed their innocence in order to gain access, eventually and despite themselves, to hypocrisy and egoism, that sole and indispensable motor driving us towards staking a place in this cruel world built by our countrymen.

This world that was waiting to grab each and every one of us - we knew it existed, we referred to it as "life." We knew life would separate us. For how long? Perhaps permanently.

I saw Emmanuel Roblès fourteen years after he had left us. I met him in my high mountain village where the *roumis*⁶⁷ rarely ventures but, as I went towards him, the image of the Normalien, conserved within me for years, began to stir, to take life, to separate, and little by little to liberate itself with each step that brought me closer to our meeting, so that it ran ahead and made the greetings itself before fusing altogether with my friend, who was now already famous and whom, without it, I would have hesitated to address.

From that instant, I no longer had before me the author whose resounding success had reached all the way into the bled, rather my old buddy, dressed in a spotless black shirt, barely marked by the years, as simple, direct and frank, as sure of himself and you, as fraternal as I had known him at school.

To tell the truth, school had not brought us that close, nor had we belonged to the same graduating class. But we had lived side by side in the same place and in the same atmosphere, adopting the same spirit, following the same courses with the same teachers; and Emmanuel Roblès had been a brilliant student and an irreproachable classmate, a thing often repeated, distinguishing him above all others, so that if he himself did not know me in particular, I knew him well myself and already, without him knowing it, I observed him, admired him, and saw in him a honorable model and one that would some day make his teachers proud.

I am well aware that this is an admission that could ruin my reputation. However, I invent nothing here and, besides me, others more qualified to make such assertions openly predicted that he would go far. Such pythonesses were none other than our teachers, who watched over us tenderly because of our modest origins and who were attached to our poor boy's school with every fiber of their souls! Yes, they loved discovering depths of merits in us and did not despair of succeeding one day, with one of us, in astounding the world. They found some in each graduating class but only let on timidly, after solid reflection and successive confirmations. Often, they kept their crazy hope to themselves, which became their secret or in the end their private disappointment. And due perhaps to an accumulation of such deceptions, when it did occur to them to

⁶⁷ French or Europeans.

predict, they did it always in a doubtful tone that relinquished them of their responsibility and underscored their false indifference. We never misled ourselves: they never suggested anything lightly.

The Anniversary

excerpt (A7)

One day, you got it into your head that common sense was the most widely shared thing on earth. And since then, you've never wanted to face the facts. Simply because this luminous truth was followed by an even more luminous piece of evidence: yup, the philosopher wrote, common sense is so widely shared that never has a person complained of not getting enough. Everything was just fine in Descartes' day, everything is just now.

That's just an example. You always believed it sufficed to go to school, to work hard, to study all the questions in the curriculum point by point in order to successfully pass your exams. Your children go to school, work hard, conscientiously study the whole program and fail each time they take the exam. Hit your head against the wall. That's not going to make them succeed.

Do you recall what a friend told you one day? He was younger than you, though, so you didn't want to believe him.

"My dear brother, it's not enough to get a scholarship to study and succeed. You need lots of chances: parents, a scholarship, intelligence, courage... many chances combined give you a big stroke of luck. Perhaps that's what you encountered. As for those who cannot succeed, you have to pity them, or help them if you can."

You continued to believe otherwise, though. You pitied no one, helped no one, and yet, inside you, blamed them for not knowing how to take advantage of the wealth that, according to Descartes, they equally possess.

Truly, what kills me at the moment is the poisoned atmosphere we keep living in while continuing to play the same old game. Get to the office on time, pretend to work,

discuss the troubles, go to the butcher or the barber, put the correct blinker on to indicate your intention to those behind you, move to the right to let him pass, smile at the pretty lady used to such flattery. It's impossible to behave otherwise even in this poisoned atmosphere.

From La Cite des Roses**The Teacher⁶⁸**

(CR 13-23)

The truck carrying their belongings arrived by the back road to Algiers and turned onto a dusty road that a motley construction crew was in the process of digging open, an impressive pallid trench cutting like a deep gash into the hill. Through a curtain of dust, from one side to the other of the trench they overlooked, one could make out a vast chaos of tiny shacks, multi-shaped and individual, like the honeycombs of an immense hive abandoned by the bees and overrun by vermin.

The scene was pitiful and the teacher, open-eyed, stared at this gigantic malignant growth revealed to him by the capital perhaps because it was welcoming him for good that day and had decided to no longer hide the things it systematically withheld from visitors entering from the front or by the grand coastal routes. To them, Algiers offered its wide avenues, its imposing architecture in all its striking, elegant or audacious detail, first-class luxury with full access to the sights and sounds of a modern Western city bathed in Oriental clarity, the sun and sky a continuous pure echo of the blue, barely ruffled sea.

No, what the teacher saw was a hideous slum where one could well imagine a swarming mass of miserable, hostile people sheltered in tarps, reeds, old planks and rusted metal sheets – draped over them like a Harlequin's coat - their garbage a menacing threat to any ill-placed curiosity, any hypocritical sympathy. This rude protuberance, located along the town's southern edge, hid itself under the flanks of a wooded hilltop dominating the bay of Algiers, which itself offered a glimpse of one of the most splendid views around. An observatory, a fort with a blockhouse, and some immense radio and television pylons had also been erected there. On the woods' edge stood an educational center for slum children, innocently named *La Cité des Roses*, where the teacher, who

⁶⁸ First chapter of La Cite des Roses.

had just been appointed, was arriving to occupy his new functions. He had come from the mountains.

When the truck stopped and his sturdy wife extracted herself not without some difficulty from the cabin, she found herself nose to nose with a goat tied to a stake near the gate. Thin droppings like young olives were strewn over the sidewalk in a puddle of greenish slime. The lady, who had never set foot outside her *bled*, knew goats, their droppings, their greenish urine.

"This is Algiers?" she asked disdainfully.

"You haven't seen everything yet," the teacher timidly replied.

"It's not pretty," she concluded, definitively and self-assured.

There was nothing left to do but move in. The truck took off after depositing their boxes of dishes and books, their unpretentious linens and an oil-run refrigerator, pride of the family and destined, they believed, to favorably impress the onlookers and perhaps surprise them as much as the washing machine, a small model, already an older one, which everyone in the village back home knew about, if only a few friends had been allowed to observe it running. But the Arabs passed back and forth, supremely indifferent and the kids, high-strung and vulgar, circled around the unfamiliar objects, bitten by the desire to steal. The prosperous concierge, embarrassed to have to serve under the orders of such a school director, blocked the entrance to the house, determined to first compile a detailed inventory of the man's mediocre riches, which he spread out with a complaisant air of unsuspecting good faith.

The director, it must be said, had lost all appreciation for humor. But he had retained his pride intact, an exacerbated pride that was quick to take offence and transform into scorn. This scorn would invariably be turned against his wife and children whom he had not succeeded in terrorizing except at the beginning, for they had gradually become familiar with his fits, his tantrums, his evil looks to the point that they did not worry a bit anymore and even took to mimicking him. Thus the petty annoyances of each individual became everybody's affair and the whole family headed off for Algiers infected with an apparently incurable despair, which had to be hidden from strangers at all costs and from which they needed to escape as soon as possible. Or so the teacher reasoned when he found a moment to think.

So they carried their belongings in, barricaded themselves in their new lodgings, and began to detest the Cité. There was nothing else to do, as they waited for the first of October. And until then the Cité des Roses forgot them, as well as the authorities, the soldiers and the teaching establishment. But the local merchants, surprised by their windfall, quickly took to profiting from their extravagance. One by one and at each opportunity, they duped the shy, fearful children, the lady who wanted to put on airs and the sir himself, who feigned to know better.

How to escape an apparently incurable despair, the teacher incessantly asked himself? The children, perhaps. Okay, the kids had to be saved. But considering everything together he wondered if it was worth the effort and sure of success. Why the kids? Why them in particular? What exactly was the difference? For them too everything was equally ruined!

Honestly, one could miss the kitchen in that new school where he had spent the last four years, because of the white porcelain tiles that covered the walls as high as the hand could reach. There had also been toilets and water closets, clean, spotless, white and green like an eternal springtime next to which the symbolic roses of the Cité ceased being ridiculously comical and became instead a humiliating hoax. Right next to this tenacious regret, which failed nevertheless to develop into any shape other than a mere regret, rose quite often the pitiful face of his old colleague, killed in a ditch by his former students for reasons unknown. This ghost would automatically trigger other apparitions, a parade of ghosts where he could recognize ten, a hundred, a thousand faces. They were of all kinds, all origins, all ages. And, speaking of age, they all resembled the small bullet-riddled body of Malik. Malik had been fourteen and a primary school graduate. Hadn't prevented a thing. A soldier paraded him around the area an entire day and then shot him at point-blank range. He spent the night in a narrow ditch on the side of the road. A ditch his body filled, made to measure, you might say. This is why no differences exist anymore between boys and adults. Malik had lost his father six months earlier, struck down in the middle of the road at the same spot, as if by fluke.

When all these faces, all these bodies rose up, they invariably made one forget the kitchen and its shining porcelain. The teacher, his wife, his children were glad to be in Algiers, far from Kabylia, safe and sound, him especially, or so claimed his wife and

kids, for he had almost stayed there like ten, a hundred, a thousand others they knew. To hell with all the porcelain fixtures and the green tiles!

Once out of danger, though, certain things abandoned in the upheaval, deemed accessory or of little value, returned to mind. The teacher had abandoned half a century of habits with as little gravity as precipitation and now he found himself unable to stop looking back, resuscitating memories, regretting everything: the best and the worst. Sometimes, he climbed all the way to the top and from there all the way back down to the bottom of the beautiful edifice he had constructed over many years as if he wanted to show it to some curious stranger and could still summon the will to brag. In fact, if everything was now ruined, torn apart, obliterated, he still had this mental construction in which to take refuge at times. A dream in reverse that definitively marked his limits.

He missed, for example, his former students with their lively, intelligent eyes. What had become of them? He had just learned by accident that, in such-and-such a village where he had begun, not a soul remained. As for the most recent ones, in other places, who were not yet men, they were no doubt preparing themselves to submit to the inexorable destiny imposed on their generation. And this was just an example, anyways. A poor example in all frankness for the destiny of our fellow creatures escapes us by definition if, in a certain measure, we can influence our own. But the teacher had long been in the camp of those who believed in their mission, who sought to fulfill it with a laudable good faith and build upon it precisely that fine edifice that had cracked apart.

All the schools where he had sown this basic knowledge, as indispensable as daily bread and yet which continued to be a luxury in this country, had burned one after the other. However much one cried out against the sacrilege, the criers had done everything for the sanctuaries to be violated, for this knowledge as indispensable as bread had grown bitter, a poisoned dish one spits out in rage. School became a prohibited place, French a cursed language, the teacher a suspect one had to closely monitor. The teacher was not a traitor, rather a hybrid. No one wanted any more of him, he was good for the knife, the machine gun or the prison at best. Bravely, he had chosen to flee. He left amidst a jeering crowd. Before letting him depart, the soldiers had thoroughly searched his belongings and taken a few books.

"Drive," they shouted at the truck driver.

"Drive," repeated the teacher softly.

And chest forward, seated in the cabin next to the truck driver, he crossed his arms like a well-behaved pupil. With that he wrapped up twenty-five years of good and loyal service in a country he loved with all the fibers of his being! He had to show a brave face in front of the wife and kids.

When the little captain who smelled of corpses would one day squeeze his throat to strangle him, if he had to suffocate without making a gesture of defense, it would be solely because of the wife and kids. But the other day when the adjutant spit in his face and the teacher shot his fist at the officer's bony nose, it was because of the captain. Only later did he think of the wife and kids. The captain had been standing behind him, the adjutant in front. The later spit spontaneously because the teacher lied. He might have had a reason to lie. That's why the captain allowed the punch and dragged his subordinate away with a discrete smile. But it was nevertheless unfortunate to have offended a soldier when one was a civilian in the enemy camp. That day the captain stopped smelling like a corpse. He got all nice. But the staff officer started looking like an evil scarecrow and the teacher began to smell like a corpse. At least, so he believed.

He said to himself constantly, "That one? He's going to shoot me in the head. His soldiers are going to drag me into a vacant lot where people throw their garbage. Then he'll go say the fellahin brought me down. Upon which the villagers will find a hundred and one reasons to justify the fellahin's reasoning and the captain, who is now a nice guy, will nevertheless profit by [expletive] my wife and kids by throwing them on the street. He'll be able to give my apartment to a colleague."

All this, a story among hundreds, to show that it is not pleasant to have a wife and kids who constantly serve you as alibi and whose lucky star constantly saves you from peril. Because it was their lucky star, right, that made the adjutant change?

It was the same lucky star that protected him when other fellahin stopped the bus in a deserted place to check the contents. That time they only found Hocène, the local police officer. None of the others interested them at all. They killed Hocène in the bus while the passengers trembled on the side of the tarred road. But before killing Hocène, they had knocked the teacher out with a club. A single blow to the head.

"Give him one," the leader had shouted. And the very irritated young man had obeyed. Simply because he, the teacher, was convinced he could explain. To say, for example, that the local cop had a loose tongue but also eight children. He'd earned a bang on the head and hadn't been able to explain a thing. Contrary to normal.

And this incident almost had bad results. Thank God the wife and kids had still been there to fix things without it seeming obvious.

"Give him one," the leader had shouted. And the young man had obliged. "Enough, don't kill him, we know him."

"Aha," the captain had whispered, the one who had not yet become nice. "Congratulations on your narrow escape from death. I was told of your courageous intervention... and that the fellahin know you."

And the teacher began to shake without being able to hide it because he knew the nonsense everyone told the captain and that all the soldiers would also congratulate him on his narrow escape from death. Like the time the terrorist had thrown a grenade at the grocer who could not fail to succumb. One of his colleagues had been present. He had not been able to explain or stop anything but the shrapnel had not touched him; to the contrary, it had shot directly towards the grocer.

"Now, wait here," the captain had wondered, "You saw him? Not a cut at all?"

"No, captain, none."

"Impossible! He's got to be sending them money," the captain concluded, "French money! Teachers don't spit on French money. But that one, I'm keeping an eye on him. I'm not going to let him get by."

"Yes, captain, I'll tell you everything I learn about the guy. He must be giving money."

And even as people were struck down around him, things became more complicated for him, as if sudden death stalked him, each day a bit closer.

It was after this incident that everything in the beautiful edifice he had erected began to crumble. Death seemed to appear in every face he saw: future victims, future murderers who were sure to become victims in turn. Yes, truly, he smelled like a corpse but the same odor emanated from everyone equally and except for this evidence, nothing else mattered.

"So-and-so was killed."

"Oh dear, the poor guy. And his kids? They've got no one now!"

Normally it went no further than that because the next day there were more orphans who had equal claim on your platonic compassion. So pity disappeared first, simultaneously with surprise. Then went trust, faith, friendship, the big emotions. It all turned sour from day to day gradually leaving room for something more certain that was part of you, something you did not need to borrow from any fancy speaker or newspaper or book. *You* were this something in you. And it even told you exactly what you needed to do, not to stop smelling like a corpse anymore but to stop actually being one. The difference was huge. You had to listen to yourself, period.

It said to you, "Be careful, don't get involved in anyone's business. Go out as little as possible. Your best friend happens to be a snitch? Stop talking to him. Forget him. Smoking is prohibited? Stop smoking. Your house gets burned down? You were out and you saved your skin. Your brother gets killed? You're free to cry. And even to feel proud or ashamed depending on the circumstances..."

The voice droned on and on and slowly everything disappeared around you. All that remained was to swell up like a monstrous goatskin gourd, that nameless you. But there you were nonetheless. And if death surprised you at that exact moment, the gourd would pitifully deflate, hemorrhaging all your cowardice, and you'd become a dead man like a thousand others. At least there would be nothing to blame yourself for. As for your wife and kids, they would have to miss you, honor your memory and then get clean as best they could.

The teacher left before being reduced to that extremity, haunted alone by the menacing shadow of the captain who had ceased being nice. He wasn't scared of him from a distance and believed in his vigilant lucky star. Better to forget it all, he reasoned. Oblivion could save him, he reasoned. Start from scratch. In any case, try loyally, desire to succeed. Yes, for the children, the chances of a better life were huge.

His wife deeply regretted her spacious village kitchen, the good healthy mountain air, the spring that made the soap bubbles rise, the fresh fruit picked from the tree and the warm eggs gathered from the hens. She was already homesick. But she did not want to understand that, in any case, these things were lost for everyone; they belonged to the

past. And her regrets appeared to her husband like the sole mark of affection that she was henceforth able to give.

"Look, I sacrificed all of this for you, my husband," she seemed to cry at him, each time, in her fits of temper, ever more frequent and uncontrollable. She did not realize, poor woman, that her voice could no longer reach her husband, that something between her and him had likewise definitively cracked. She did nothing to fix it. To the contrary. A huge amount of perseverance is called for, reasoned the teacher when he took time to reflect, but we have got to free ourselves of this despair. It was under these fine conditions that he watched the approach of October and met Françoise. That damn lucky star, no doubt.

Francoise
(CR 25-27)

November 1957

On first regard, Francoise's attitude was perplexing. She visibly enjoyed the school, devoted herself to her students, and remained simple, polite, amenable with all her colleagues, male or female. She melted in quite naturally, being neither ostentatious nor excessively shy, joining along in the banter, especially as a listener, smiling at everyone with gentle indulgence or, at times, if the comment had been truly uplifting and free of spite, bursting out in an honest, naked laugh.

She clearly liked this sordid shantytown, made fun of the difficulties, and seemed determined to commit every ounce of her patience and intelligence to succeeding at the ungrateful task. Before the end of the first month, she had already won her bet: the Cité des Roses began to suit her fine, she had tamed those cruel devils enrolled as her students and some of her colleagues were almost friends. Friends, nothing more, she told herself, while her heart beat a touch more quickly.

What was perplexing, precisely, was the human warmth one could feel emanating from her, flowing out equally and indifferently towards everyone, as if she had not yet made any choice of object, instead lazily waiting for some man or woman to take the pains to fix her. You had to be receptive to notice it. But those who caught this appeal felt disturbed and ashamed by it. It was as if Francoise had unveiled to them, in an awkward moment, a fascinating intimacy that they had no right to violate. The attraction of the young woman had visible effect on two of the men, and when she took notice of it, she was no doubt the first to be surprised. She didn't think to hide her surprise nor the newfound happiness that seeped into her insidiously and that she had never imagined finding at the Cité des Roses. All her emotions were projected upon her small expressive face, the same that held the open look she gave people, direct as a luminous sun. One could sense in her, along with a thirst for happiness, the spontaneity of a kid, though there was no question, at the same time, of her honesty, her loyalty, and, standing face to face with her, you felt intimidated.

Francoise appeared as such to M.G. and, especially, to the Director. To the latter, she was worthy of being loved. M.G., used to good fortune, set his mind on courting her. What no one surmised were the chimeras, the world of illusions, the forbidden garden, which she had populated with all the unemployed resources of her soul. One could sense her confidence, her accessibility, her generosity, and see that she possessed a crazy, imprudent will to abandon herself. Head bowed, one lunged forward to grasp this, only to watch it escape. Something lucid kept vigil in her, deep within her being, some part that withdrew, refused, infusing her with an obscure rancor towards us and towards herself. Then the mirage would evaporate, it was over. All one could do was wait until, far off, it flickered up again, and one could try in vain to get near.

Her husband had been the first victim, and the first to worry. His worry soon became a stubborn passion to pierce through her secret, mystical character, to master her chaste, reticent nature, to understand why she refused to be "herself," a woman, in other words, like any other. But far from meeting his impulsive demands, she recoiled, instinctively, often despite herself, gripped by dread and annoyed at her inability to hide it.

Little by little, she came to regard physical love as a trap. In evading it, her inner world became inviolable, a source where she could draw forth, when necessary, the sense of balance and strength demanded daily of each of us living in a civilized society whose implacable system is based on the fundamental principles of hypocrisy and conformity. This sense of balance and strength allowed her to lead a clean, almost austere, existence, irreproachable in the eyes of the world, and in total accord, incidentally, with an intransigent conscience.

After ten years of married life, woven with inexpressible illusions, superficial deceptions and futile misunderstandings, Francoise arrived at acceptance. Though it took some effort, she resigned herself in the end, tucking away deep down inside her a tenacious hope that she would one day come fully into her own and enjoy a taste of happiness. She accepted this kind of unmerited punishment without a fight, forcing herself only to appear well-mannered and dignified, transferring her fears and concerns onto her children, standing a more or less worried guard on the perimeter of their existence in order to ward off all menace, poised to respond and fight for them, because of herself, there was nothing more to expect.

[Politics]

(CR 113-122)

Another area where we enjoyed risking ourselves for the pleasure of quarreling was, of course, politics. An unstable terrain where you could sink in at any moment and where wisdom told you not to enter. We entered a bit by bravado, in order to prove that even politics was incapable of separating us, that this trench about which everyone talked and whose depth they all deplored, concluding that, alas, nothing could ever fill it again, did not well stand between us. This made us think that reality was less afflicting than the idea we made of it, that enmity, evil in its pure state, existed no more than goodness or

justice in its pure state. We told ourselves that neither the past nor the future belonged to men: we were simply toys of the present.

“Consequently, we cannot be punished for the past,” she would say.

“Nor be exterminated for fear of the future,” I would reply.

Of course, all this was open to debate. We knew it the very moment we said it. It was like a prior agreement that allowed us to then speak freely about the war, the terrorism, the repression, independence. Must one note that Françoise was the only one with whom I could talk like this?

We had numerous occasions to speak about that independence; Françoise could not bring herself to believe in it.

“As if that would benefit them somehow,” she said, “when we aren’t here anymore, they’ll be a little less unhappy, that’s all. And you along with them, Mister Direhard.”

“It’s your pride that is direhard,” I would respond each time, “your superiority complex! The best among you figure that we are worth nothing, that without you we’ll return to the void from which you had the gall to pull us. The best cling to us like one clings to a work of long effort that has been hellish to complete. Yes, the best believe that we are their work, that we belong to them, they hold onto us just like the bad ones hold on to their properties, those huge domains they cultivated over the course of generations and at the price of much Arab sweat. Believe me, they too are convinced they have created Algeria and proudly point it out to any who would be tempted to diminish their merit.”

“If you are trying to give me a guilty conscience, you are wasting your time. I came here to do a bit of good but I have no pretensions. Pride, racism, look for it on your side, with lots of susceptibility and fanaticism mixed in. We aren’t blind for God’s sake. And those who have given the best of themselves, that’s supposed to be worth nothing? You reject everything, you condemn everything, with the same disdain, the same hatred. Oh, yes, how lovely your revolt is!”

“It’s no less ugly than yours, I know my history. And you, Françoise, are you going to condemn us too?”

“Come on, it’s the Arabs who condemn us first.’

“So you approve?”

“No, sir, I don’t approve of anything. Calm down: I do not condemn you, certainly not when you speak in this tone. I love seeing you get angry, the vehemence in your eyes removes the mask of hypocrisy you usually wear.”

“Thanks.”

“Get angry, sir. That doesn’t mean that I say you’re right. You have your opinion and I have mine. They are not quite the same.”

“Your opinion! After a couple months in Algeria, is that right? You received it ready-made, your opinion. Wake up, lady. Wake up before it is too late.”

I was sure that if I one day joined the resistance, Françoise would be proud of me. It is precisely because I did not that she refused to admit my verbal violence. One has to show by example, she’d repeat. In that she was right. Yet she knew that, like her, I was incapable of violence and, to tell the truth, my tantrums were rare. Both of us would try to understand and take hope, me putting myself in the shoes of the French, and her putting herself in the shoes of the Arabs. Most often, she saw the powerlessness of honest people that truly no artificial barrier separated and we deplored together the official lies, the sectarian or stupid lies, the prejudices and the ignorance that wanted to make of us different beings when the heart of man was everywhere one and the same.

“Just two months ago I didn’t even imagine that you could exist and now...”

“Now?”

“I love you like a brother.”

How I wanted to cut that phrase short: that Françoise loved me, period. But her voice broke that day, and her eyes became moist.

I blushed from simple pleasure and we laughed hard to conceal our emotion. Our political discussions always ended like this, with mutual concessions that washed away all the passion and transformed them into a trusting exchange of ideas, opposed sometimes in a confrontation of absolute sincerity, like a two-voiced confession at the end of which the confessors mutually absolve themselves and promise to love. Each time, we came to the conclusion that love is the true essence of man but that we give in to

hatred because we don't know how, and finally aren't able, to love. Hatred, in any case, was nothing but a negative form of love, requiring us first and foremost to teach our children how to love, to give them a taste for it by surrounding them from the start with unremitting affection. And adults? Adults as well, Françoise contended.

"I wish I could love all of humanity," Françoise claimed while her eyes burned like a mad woman.

"But sometimes you still feel distain?"

"Yes, no doubt. I suffer when I am hurt. In the moment, I am capable of hitting back. Pure reflex. After, I think better of it. Nothing can resist reflection. Especially the heart."

I would not want anyone to take this discussion with Françoise literally. Maybe it never truly took place. However, there were many in this vein: sometimes serious or pedantic, sometimes banal or ridiculous; we did not even notice for what mattered to each of us was to rediscover at each instant that we stood side by side and to let our hearts wander together, secretly far from our dark or futile comments.

Today, alone in my office where since the beginning of the vacation I try to recreate and lock her inside this notebook, detached from her as if by error; the strand of hair, the piece of chalk, the little blouse - must I admit that she becomes ever more elusive, that sometimes I start to embroider, to mix parts of scenes together, to betray the chronological order of events and conversations, in sum, to write a novel? I apologize in advance and hope she does not blame me too much. But there is one thing she would admit, I am certain, which is that all during this last week of the first trimester, she was overflowing with affection, bubbly and confiding, gay like those rare rays of sun that sometimes pierced the sullen sky, despite those torrents of rain that poured over us and the cellar-like chill of her damp classroom. She was happy and I was happy too. We felt this came from the fact of being together, and at the same time we had to ignore, to forget reality, to twist the rules, and remain under its charm.

I feared that she would eventually catch on, that she would be put off, be unable to put herself together and definitely distance herself from me. I had come to wish that

she would resume her pacing with M.G. Yet we avoided talking about him and spoke of no other colleague. We lived in a kind of dream that was born the day she asked for my friendship and that we were determined to prolong indefinitely, under the cover of our rapid tête-à-têtes. When we found ourselves in groups, we did not enjoy addressing each other but one did not have to be too smart to notice our discrete affection.

It is since that time I believe that our concierge began the habit of discovering me in Francoise's classroom, when I was not to be found in my office. One must know that I never remained more than a few minutes and that I went there for professional reasons. I always found a reason. It was always that moment precisely, on an urgent business, that the concierge chose to seek out my orders or to solicit my advice. She would come waddling in on her short legs, open the door with a knowing look and make a beeline between us, throwing me a look full of reproach. I would head out before her while she held back a moment with Francoise, ripped by a violent desire to warn her, to protect her from the terrible dangers with which I continually threatened her. For Josephine, whom everyone called Nennette, our concierge, I could nourish only dark designs for the young women of the Cité. I was in any case only half guilty, given my race, but all my education could not prevent my blood from rising. And in the blood of an Arab, Lord, she did not have much confidence! She no doubt wished that everyone took heed of what she had to say and took precautions, but since she did not dare accuse me openly and directly, she contented herself with, on each occasion, warning one and then another of our particular, brutal, even frightening habits. Yet Nennette was an ardent forty-year-old and, when she got talking, all the fire that consumed her inside since the death of her husband rose up towards her eyes and her fat cheeks and the warnings she distributed left her panting, unsatisfied, misunderstood.

The fact was she disliked each and every one of those young women, who were "easy, curious, shameless" and distained her confidences. She would hold me as witness to prove that they only cared about their looks, that they neglected their work and malevolently complicated her own. Girls of the new generation who deserved to be skillfully supervised if only to have the right to speak ill of them, proof at hand and with no remorse. I am persuaded, besides, that Nennette knew each one of us better than we

knew ourselves and that at the Cité, for over a decade, she had stumbled a ton of small secrets like ours.

These secrets would be easy to learn if one day I made her talk. She would start by placing me apart, I imagine, like someone irreproachable, she'd say all the bad things she thinks about Françoise and start to embroider the facts about all the others for the sole end of proving that I, the director, in fact, understood nothing of what went on and directed only in name.

When Nenette is planted behind her *jealousies*, behind her glass door or closed curtains, one can loiter, arrive late, exchange a questionable sign, whisper in secret. One can do all that without fear of scandal but with the certitude that, for the concierge at least, the Cité is a house of glass. If Nenette never sees things straight, she always knows where to find each thing and stands ready to inform you if needed.

The knowing air of this woman sometimes bothered Françoise; as for me, I only wished that her suspicions were one day proved and when she blocked the door with her unparalleled mass, I saw in it a generous sign of good tidings. I told myself that after all Nenette had common sense and that if something was not possible, she would never have thought of it. This gave me reason to hope that Françoise was in love with me, that Nenette told her friends about it when she went to the market.

Unfortunately, if I often took pleasure in these happy dreams, the reality was different. Since the day my friend signified her categorical rejection as much as her sincere regrets, she had put me in a difficult situation and obliged me in some sort to play the role of bashful lover who has no right to fully divulge his heart. Without losing face, I could neither turn away from her to try to get over it, nor clearly demand what she could not offer me. I adopted an attitude that was indubitable, affectionate and gruff all at once, a bit protective too, like the donkey who decided to give the benefit of his vast experience to someone and denied himself the right to guide them with a sure hand.

I must admit, though, that Françoise never took me too seriously and that, sometimes, I sensed my remarks of a purely professional kind vexed her, almost making her disagreeably inclined. But most often, she acted submissive, listened to me with her big stunned eyes, and stood too close to me, for example brushing her breasts against my

shoulder, pushing lightly and succeeding in troubling me, making me lose in one minute that authoritative, magisterial tone that annoyed her.

If, imprudently, I looked like I understood and sketched out a precise remark to one of these unexpected gestures whose meaning she had suddenly discovered, which should not have meant anything even while they engaged you to respond, then, she would act surprised, stand back scandalized and ask you for explanations:

“Sir?”

“Well, Madam, I was saying that...”

All that remained was to strike her with one of those loaded pedagogical truths that she received full-face, this time without raising her eyebrows. If I were clever, it would have been at that period that I should have played indifferent for as much as she remained formal, she took such pleasure in making herself loved. I was not clever, of course, but I began on my side to grow attached to her for real and it repulsed me to fake it.

Then came the Christmas holiday and New Year’s which would separate us for much longer than I expected. I saw her again, however, December 31st, a Tuesday, I recall, around ten o’clock.

She knocked on my door, came into my office and sat there facing me for a few minutes. She timidly gave me her best wishes. It was nice of her and touching, so touching that I was very moved and became timid myself, more awkward even than Françoise who rediscovered her senses and smiled maliciously. No one else would have thought of presenting themselves, of speaking a word to me, a little card, the concierge had locked herself in all day to avoid wishing me a thing.

“These people must think” I surmised “that their holiday is not mine, they might assume that it’s up to me to go to them. I’m not moving. I’m going to ignore their New Year. The contrary would be hypocritical.”

What was going on between me and Françoise that New Year’s morning? No doubt she spoke of her children and asked after my own. The only clear thing I recall is her little face as smooth as a medal but marked with gentleness and constant joy, the delicate string of pearls that glittered around her neck and her pocketbook set on the filing cabinet, my eyes never stopped looking at her. In my disarray, I arrived at no valid

subject of conversation and soon had to content myself with staring at her with a smile. Then she got up, skirted around this massive desk, and leaned down to let me kiss her.

“You don’t object, do you, to celebrate the New Year? “

If I objected? I stood up like a robot and held her to my chest. I felt her lean against me, her knee sliding between mine, her eyelids closing. I kissed her several times, slowly, again and again, almost counting. At one point, she opened her eyes and smiled. I leaned towards the lips she held up to me so sweetly...

No, I did not kiss her on the mouth, my lips, again, grazed her eyes and Françoise murmured, hugging me tightly, “Oh! How I love you...fondly, sir.”

“Darling,” I murmured imperceptibly. For myself alone.

And we separated with as much gravity as surprise. No, I did not kiss her on the lips and I sometimes regret it. I regret my timidity, my reserve, my idiocy for its own sake, because if I had reacted this way with the most wonton woman I would have been ridiculous. But I don’t regret having respected Françoise.

Vacation ended January 4th. The 3rd, at midnight, they came to arrest me.

When the *parachutists* succeeded in waking me after having banged violently on the door and almost smashing it to bits, I immediately thought of that captain who had stopped being nice.

“He must have sent in his report,” I told myself.

With a sharp cramp in my bladder, I felt a mad urge to pee.

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