Neither from here nor from there: The Alienation of the *Evolué*(*e*) in Anglophone and Francophone African Literature

by

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Abstract

This thesis studies the literary depiction of colonial education and its cultural legacies for the indigenous population in both French and British former colonies. It focuses particularly on the complex role of assimilation and colonial education in shaping the identity of the colonial elite. Based upon cases studies of literary works from the African continent, it demonstrates that the clash of indigenous and Western cultures is most effectively expressed in the figure of the *évolué(e)* whose cultural alienation was proportional to the depth of the assimilation process he or she was subjected to. Focusing on the alienating but also the potentially emancipating effects of assimilation and colonial education, this thesis argues for a nuanced and qualified understanding of the position of the *évolué(e)* in late colonial and early postcolonial societies. Drawing on and engaging with theoretical works in the fields of postcolonial studies, African feminism and psychology, this thesis concludes that colonial education and assimilation policies remain a complex issue for they often result in a paradoxical image of the figure of the *évolué(e)* who is emancipated and recognised from the one side, but confused and alienated from the other.

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INTRODUCTION

> Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty.[1]
>
> Kobena Mercer

European colonialism has left a lasting mark on history, changing the very essence of both the imperial nations and the colonised countries.[2] During and after colonisation, African colonies underwent several changes: political, economic, social and cultural. After centuries of colonisation, which involved suffering and violent contact with the coloniser, subjugated people found themselves unconsciously adopting aspects of the coloniser's traditions in their own identity and culture. In their commitment to 'civilise' the indigenous peoples (which in many cases was window-dressing for economic exploitation), the colonisers distorted indigenous cultures by imposing their own, through acculturation processes.

One of the pretexts of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the creed of '*la mission civilisatrice*'. Imbued with a Hegelian vision of history based on the notion of progress, European nations used to believe that anyone who was not white was inferior. For these nations, 'Africa was irreducibly "other" and in need of exposure to their superior cultures and languages'.[3] In the French case, this meant that some believed the country had the duty to 'civilise' such peoples, and reshape indigenous cultures to align them with French traditions, presented as a model. The idea was that 'French civilization was the ideal civilization, and therefore French people had the divine duty of instilling French values in the Africans, thus

[1] Kobena Mercer, 'Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 43-71 (p. 43).
[2] For a detailed study on how European colonial past affects today's global politics, history and culture see: Kalypso Nicolaidis, Berny Sèbe and Gabrielle Mass, eds., *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Global Legacies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).
[3] Gordon Cumming, 'Exploring the Republican Model? A Critique of France's Historic Mission in Africa', in *Redefining the French Republic*, ed. by Alistair Cole and Gino Raymond (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 156- 174 (p. 156).

considered uncivilized'.[4] Therefore, in an attempt to justify multiple invasions, the Western coloniser claimed to be undertaking a 'civilising mission' to save the 'natives' and take them from a state of supposed inferiority to one of 'civilisation'.[5] Like the French, the British believed that Africans were still at a 'backward' level of civilisation and needed to be 'uplifted'. They were led by the idea that Africans belong to 'less favored' races which 'needed supervision by advanced peoples in order to proceed to higher levels of civilization'.[6] Thus, they claimed to be pursuing a project of 'improvement' and sharing 'moral and material progress' with non-white populations. The Anglo-Indian arch-imperialist writer Rudyard Kipling shares the notion of the civilizing mission with the French in his poem 'The White Man's Burden' (1899) where he calls for spreading the said civilisation:

> Take up the White Man's Burden
> Send forth the best ye breed
> Go bind your sons to exile
> To serve your captives' need. [7]

According to Palestinian-American theorist, literary critic and founding figure of the academic field of postcolonial studies, Edward W. Said 'every empire, […] tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate'.[8] Said's comment points to the combination of delusion and greed at the heart of the colonial enterprise.

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[4] Stephen M. Magu, *Explaining Foreign Policy in Post-Colonial Africa* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 164.

[5] The term 'native' is placed between inverted commas because it is controversial and has increasingly come under scrutiny in recent years in postcolonial studies. According to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 158, the term 'native' was initially used to refer to indigenous inhabitants of colonies but was later overtaken by a pejorative usage when it was employed to categorize those who were regarded as inferior to the colonial settlers, savage and uncivilised. This thesis is aware of the problematic colonial undertones that the term 'native' carries. Thus, it will be using the term 'indigenous' instead.

[6] Robert Heussler, 'British Rule in Africa', in *France and Britain in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, ed. by P. Gifford and W. R. Louis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 571-592 (p. 574).

[7] Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden', *McClure's Magazine*, 12.4 (Feb. 1899), 1-2 (p. 1).

[8] Edward W. Said, 'Blind Imperial Arrogance', *Los Angeles Times*, 20 July 2003.

For a European empire to operate effectively, military power alone did not suffice to control a territory: it needed the support of the populations encompassed in the empire and at least some leaders of the occupied country (those whom Robinson called the 'collaborative elites').[9] In order to legitimise the occupation of a country, European empires needed an excuse to convince the empire's inhabitants and especially the elite of the colonised countries, that the real aim behind colonisation was not to exploit people and resources of the occupied country, but rather to 'rescue' oppressed people and to 'civilise' them, as Said has argued. However, this was often rejected by subjugated peoples whose values, ideas, and perspectives were different and who did not want to be 'liberated' and educated by Western standards.

Both the French and British Empires used integration policies to control and exploit African colonies, however, historians tend to believe that the French colonial policy was more aggressive than the British. This assumption stems from associating French colonialism with assimilation and the British with indirect rule. While the French policy is believed to brainwash and uproot colonial subjects through French language and culture, the British indirect rule is described as a system where colonies are governed through pre-existing traditional local power structures. Historians such as Toyin Falola, Guy Martin, Martin Welz and William Muck often portray the British indirect rule as diametrically opposed to assimilation because it considers the French to be more culturally arrogant than the British. The French 'assumed that Africa was a *tabula rasa,* a clean slate on which entirely new things could be written' because they regarded their culture as 'the only truly valid culture in human history'.[10] Thus, they developed an assimilation policy which aimed to destroy local cultures, replacing them with French culture

[9] Ronald Robinson, 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism,* ed. by Roger Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (London: Longman, 1972), 117-141.

[10] Ali Al'Amin Mazrui, 'Francophone Nations and English-Speaking States: Imperial Ethnicity and African Political Formations', in *Power, politics, and the African condition,* ed. by Robert L. Ostergard, Jr., Ricardo Rene Laremont and Fouad Kalouche (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), p. 84.

and then at least theoretically creating French citizens. The British, conversely, did not seek to undermine African culture and social life directly. They 'neither intended to transplant their entire value system on the acquired territories nor to assimilate the native population into their culture'.[11] Unlike their French rivals, they acknowledged the fact that Europeans and Africans were culturally distinct. They inspired their colonial policy from the belief that 'the British culture and those of their subjects were different and hard to reconcile'.[12]

At the political level, studies suggest that British African colonies had a slightly better political experience compared to the francophone ones because the British political and administrative system was less centralised than the French one. They argue that the French were more interested in the idea of unification of francophone colonies via linguistic and cultural assimilation, thus, they opted for a highly centralised system.[13] The British, however, were more interested in colonial expansion and economic profit than in incorporating Africans into the British nation, and therefore, they used a decentralised system.[14] Influenced by Frederick Lugard's philosophy, the British followed a strategy that consists in leading 'the backward races, by their efforts, in their own way, to raise themselves to a higher plane of social organisation'.[15] They instituted a system whereby external and military control was operated by the British coloniser, while other aspects of life were left to the local rulers. As the main aim was economic profit, not cultural dominance, the British government 'relied on chiefs and later on locally recruited elites, for managing and commercially exploiting the colonies. Wherever

[11] Res Schuerch, *The International Criminal Court at the Mercy of Powerful States* (Netherlands: Asser Press 2017), p. 50.
[12] Toyin Falola, *The Power of African Cultures* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2008), p. 5.
[13] Jan Záhořík, *Inequalities and Conflicts in Modern and Contemporary African History* (Lanham: Lexington Book, 2018), p. 04, Roland Anthony Oliver and Anthony Atmore, *Africa since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 224, William Tordoff, *Government and Politics in Africa* (Macmillan 2016), p. 32, and William Muck, 'Colonialism and Postcolonialism', in *The Routledge Companion to Race and Ethnicity*, ed. by Stephen M. Caliendo and Charlton D. McIlwain (London: Routledge, 2011), 29-37 (p. 32).
[14] Guy Martin, *African Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 45. See also: Leigh Gardner, *Taxing Colonial Africa: The Political Economy of British Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[15] Frederick Dealtry Lugard, The *Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*, 5th edn (London: Frank Class, 1965), p. 215.

possible, Britain kept intact local systems and developed an "advisory relationship" with the chiefs'.[16] The French on their part used direct control over their colonies. They governed the colonies directly from Paris or a regional capital because they considered their colonies as an extension of the homeland: 'in the French African colonies, there was a tendency to see *métropole* and *outre-mer* as part of an unbroken continuum in relation to administrative structuring and urban planning'.[17] Based on the republican ideology, the French centralised system did not allow indigenous people to govern under the French administration. Unlike the British indirect rule, the French system dismantled traditional political and social structures and replaced them with colonial bureaucracy to protect France's interests.[18]

Scholarship shows that France's colonial and integration policies are more assimilationist and direct than Britain's. This assumption seems reasonable but can be challenged because assimilation and indirect rule were not consistently applied in French and British territories. Both imperial powers employed aspects of direct rule in certain colonies and indirect rule in others. The French policymakers championed assimilation in most of their colonies until the First World War. After the war, however, they made a radical change to their colonial policy. They shifted from a doctrine of assimilation to association: a strategy similar to the British indirect rule which 'allowed for more flexible patterns of administration'.[19] In North Africa, for example, the French tried both direct and indirect rule. They favoured assimilation policy in Algeria and association in Tunisia and Morocco. The French considered Algeria as the jewel of their Empire; therefore, they attempted to make it a French department

[16] Martin Welz, *Africa Since Decolonization: The History and Politics of a Diverse Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 20.
[17] Moradewun Adejunmobi, *Vernacular Palaver: Imaginations of the Local and Non-native Languages in West Africa* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004), p. 18.
[18] Muck, 'Colonialism and Postcolonialism', p. 32.
[19] De-Valera N.Y.M Botchway, and Kwame Osei Kwarteng, *Africa and the First World War Remembrance, Memories and Representations after 100 Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), p. 44.

by integrating it territorially, administratively, and culturally into metropolitan France. [20] A few years after the arrival of the French, the French republican constitution of 1848 declared Algeria as 'an integral part of French territory'.[21] Later, in 1881, the French administration divided northern Algeria into three interior departments of France: Oran, Constantine and Algiers, with the same status as departments of metropolitan France.[22] Transforming Algeria to a French territory would not have been possible without assimilating its inhabitants culturally and linguistically. Thus, to create French citizens out of Algerians, the colonial government imposed the French language in all public spheres: education, public life and administration. They launched an attack against Islamic institutions and attempted to eradicate the Arabic language. The suppression of Arabic became so successful that by 1938, it was officially declared as a foreign language in Algeria.[23] Despite France's efforts to create a community of French citizens out of Algerians, the assimilation policy failed for two main reasons. The first one is the resistance of most Algerians, who were not willing to renounce their culture and religion for those of the coloniser's. The second is the racism of this ideology which 'corrupts human relations, preventing the assimilation of the colonized into the colonizer's culture'.[24]

During the First World War, particularly during the peace conference ending the war, the assimilation policy faced a lot of attacks and criticism, leading France to shift away from its policy of assimilation toward one of association.[25] Instead of trying to integrate indigenous

[20] Stephen M. Magu, *Explaining Foreign Policy in Post-Colonial Africa* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 164.
[21] James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 103.
[22] Saliha Belmessous, 'Assimilation against Colonialism: The Struggle of the Muslim Natives in French Algeria', in *Assimilation and Empire Uniformity in French and British Colonies, 1541-1954* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 117-204.
[23] Mike Holt, 'Algeria: Language, Nation and State', in *Arabic Sociolinguistics, Issues and Perspectives*, ed. by Yasir Suleiman (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1994), 25- 41 (p. 29).
[24] Azzedine Haddour, *Colonial Myths: History and Narrative* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 150.
[25] Mathew B. Gwanfogbe and Mathew Gwanfogbe, *Changing Regimes and Educational Development in Cameroon* (Denver: Spears Media Press, 2018), p. 49.

societies administratively and culturally into the French nation, France was 'to pursue a more flexible policy which would emphasize retention of local institutions and which would make the native an associate in the colonial enterprise'.[26] By preserving the sovereignty of local rulers, the Hafsid bey and the Alawid sultan in Tunisia and Morocco, the French were, in fact, imitating the British policy of indirect rule advocated by Lord Lugard. Influenced by Hubert Lyautey, the architect of the protectorate system and the first resident-general in Morocco, the French colonial government believed that the preservation of the Alawid dynasty was a cornerstone of the French policy in Morocco. Ruling through local dynasties 'legitimized the idea of France's occupation of the country, based on the theory that Morocco was a sovereign country that needed the tutelage of "French protectrice", the protecting power that would restore stability and help modernize the country'.[27] French indirect rule was not exclusively applied in Tunisia and Morocco. France used the same strategy in regions governed by powerful rulers in Upper Volta and Cameroon: 'in Upper Volta where the Mossi people had strong chiefs or in northern Cameroon where the Moslem emirs were quite powerful, the French had to make serious political concessions and govern through the traditional rules'.[28] Despite following a seemingly decentralised policy in some of its colonies, historians argue that association is not really different from assimilation because they are 'elements or factors in policy, present in varying degrees and combinations in the same colonies at the same time'.[29] Association is often considered as 'a disguised form of assimilation because both concepts sought to serve the same purpose.[30]

[26] Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890 – 1914* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), xv.
[27] Joseph Chetrit, Jane S Gerber, and Drora Arussy, *Jews and Muslims in Morocco: Their Intersecting Worlds* (Lexington Books: 2021), p. 51.
[28] Vincent Khapoya, *The African Experience* 4th edn (London: Routledge: Taylor & Francis, 2015), p. 120.
[29] M. M. Knight, 'French Colonial Policy--the Decline of "Association"', *The Journal of Modern History,* 5.2 (June 1933), 208- 224 (p. 208) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1875341> [Accessed 10-09-2021].
[30] Krishan Kumar, *Visions of Empire: How Five Imperial Regimes Shaped the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 437.

Like their French rivals, the British mixed both policies in their colonies. Although they favoured indirect rule in most of their colonies, the British policymakers found themselves practising direct rule in some parts of the Empire. Indirect rule was an overarching form of administration because 'it was supposed to facilitate a cheap and effective ruling strategy'.[31] The British sought to run their colonies on the cheap, thus, they adopted a strategy where most of the colonial governance was done in collaboration with traditional African authorities. They were aware that financing an effective direct rule required vast expenditures and a large number of personnel, thus, they went for the cheapest option: 'indirect rule was an appealing form of administration for colonial authorities because it was cost effective and administratively convenient. This system allowed the British to minimise the number of staff on the ground and relied on a select group of colonial subjects to cooperate with colonial officials'.[32] In addition to minimizing administration costs, indirect rule proved also to be efficient because it legitimised the colonial government, avoided direct confrontation with the indigenous population, and helped to further Britain's global commercial interests.[33]

The British indirect rule was efficient in most of the parts of the Empire, however, not all parts of the colonies could be ruled indirectly. In stateless societies where there were no precolonially centralised institutions, indirect rule proved difficult to implement because 'the degree to which British administrations could integrate traditional institutions crucially

[31] Atul Kohli, *Imperialism and the Developing World: How Britain and the United States Shaped the Global Periphery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 150.
[32] Ellen R. Feingold, *Colonial Justice and Decolonization in the High Court of Tanzania, 1920-1971* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 56. See also: Sara Berry, *Fathers Work for Their Sons: Accumulation, Mobility, and Class Formation in an Extended Yoruba Community* (California: University of California Press, 2021), p. 26.
[33] Stan Chu Ilo, *The Face of Africa: Looking Beyond the Shadows* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012), p. 95, Adekunle Adeniran, 'Personalities and Policies in the Establishment of English in Northern Nigeria During the British Colonial Administration, 1900-1943', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 9.2 (June 1978), 105-126, (p. 110); and Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 118.

depended on their degree of precolonial centralization and pre-existing hierarchies'.[34] The lack of powerful traditional chiefs and a centralised system in some parts pushed the British to adopt a mode of governance that was similar to the French one. To rule efficiently in places, the British ended up employing a substantial number of British personnel and spending huge resources to run these parts of the colonies. In areas such as Igboland, Southern Nigeria, where political power was in the hands of fragmented institutions, the British had to appoint warrant chiefs and local agents to enforce their system of governance.[35] The same strategy was followed in the Gikuyu district governed by councils of elders and lineage heads. New chiefs in this region were 'a phenomenon of colonial rule. They were created by the colonial government and thus wholly illegitimate in the eyes of ordinary Kikuyu people'.[36]

This thesis makes an original intervention into this field by challenging the assumption that French cultural legacies on African colonies are more significant than those of Britain.[37] Through an analysis of the literary depiction of colonial education and its consequences on the indigenous population in Algeria, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Morocco, this study questions the established differences between French policies of assimilation and the British policy of indirect rule. I argue that, unlike what is often believed, both the British system of indirect rule and the French policies of assimilation are equally damaging and that colonised peoples in French and British colonies suffered similar immediate and long-term cultural consequences.

[34] Carl Müller-Crepon, 'Continuity or Change? (In)direct Rule in British and French Colonial Africa', *International Organization*, 74 .4 (Fall 2020), 707-741 (p. 713). See also John Gerring and others, 'An Institutional Theory of Direct and Indirect Rule', *World Politics*, 633.3 (July 2011), 377-433.
[35] April A. Gordon, *Nigeria's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2003), p. 79.
[36] Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Pimlico, 2005), p. 19.
[37] Ali Al'Amin Mazrui, 'Francophone Nations and English-Speaking States', p. 84, Falola, *The Power of African Cultures*, p. 5, Muck, 'Colonialism and Postcolonialism', p. 32, and Martin, *African Political Thought*, p. 45.

Education was a crucial vehicle for the civilising mission and the coloniser often implemented measures to educate the local populations in line with the standards of its metropolitan system. Yet, by imposing their educational vision and relying on different policies of assimilation and acculturation, the coloniser caused a psychological malaise within the local population. This paradoxical situation caused by colonialism led to the rise of a new category of educated elites within the dominated population who became Europeanised, accepted Western values and patterns of behaviour, spoke the coloniser's language, followed European laws, held white-collar jobs and lived in urban areas of the colony. This social stratum, with its complex and ever-changing cultural dynamics, is at the heart of this thesis.

The exploration of the themes of education and alienation in a corpus of late colonial and postcolonial novels (from 1955 to 2010) reveals the hybrid culture of postcolonial societies and the paradoxical, and often uncomfortable place of the *évolué(e)* – the educated member of the indigenous population. Six Anglophone and Francophone novels approach this question in depth within my corpus: Mouloud Mammeri's *Le Sommeil du juste* (1955), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965), Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), Buchi Emecheta's *Head Above Water* (1986), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Fouad Laroui's *Une année chez les Français* (2010). These novelists, who came of age as writers during the special period of decolonisation in the history of their respective countries, were marked by what they felt and witnessed, playing the role of spokespeople for their countries' experiences of colonialism.[38]

[38] By coming of age as a postcolonial writer, I refer to the moment when these writers gained recognition and legitimization by virtue of being published by metropolitan publishing houses. Through publication, colonial publishing houses prized the literary and aesthetic value of writing by African elites and helped create a readership for it. For more on the publishing of African literature see: Caroline Davies, *Creating Postcolonial Literature: African Writers and the British Publishers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) and Ruth Bush, *Publishing Sub-Saharan Africa in Paris*: *1945-67* (Unpublished doctoral thesis: Oxford University Press, 2013).

This thesis posits that in the six novels, the figure of the educated colonial subject is consistently depicted as being alienated from the rest of his or her local society. After spending their school years in the colonisers' institutions, the protagonists are shocked by the confrontation of local and colonial value systems. They find it difficult to adapt themselves to the life of their people as their family and those immediately surrounding them fail to understand them. This is what largely paves the way for their alienation.[39] The six main characters are alienated because they experience a dilemma which results from the conflicting values of their indigenous societies and those of their education, which are originally not their own. Yet, as this research will demonstrate, the alienation of the educated subject, a process strongly aided by assimilation policies and education, is not always destructive but could also be emancipative. While some characters under study end up completely alienated and suffering from identity crises as a result of the full assimilation of Western culture and values, other characters make use of the coloniser's language and culture to emancipate themselves and cast off the burden of traditions, poverty, gender and race.

Framing the *Évolué(e)*: Colonialism and Acculturation

Education was a major way in which the colonisers attempted to exert long-term control over their colonies and to eliminate African cultural norms and institutions. They attempted to manipulate the thoughts and ideas held by the younger generation by instilling colonial ideologies in their minds. Consequently, a pattern which is regularly demonstrated and analysed

[39] The theme of alienation has recently become trendy in postcolonial fiction. Writers and publishers seem to value the idea of representing the colonial subject as inevitably alienated, most probably because these works are making more commercial profit and gaining a large readership in both Africa and the West. The figure of the alienated protagonist seems to be appealing to African readers because it calls for the return to traditional African societies, and to Western audience because it represents a wider existentialist issue – the psychological and spiritual malaise of the individual in modern society. For more on how the African literary market is controlled by Western publishing houses and how African fiction is subjected to Eurocentric literary canon, see further down the chapter on Buchi Emecheta's *Head Above Water*.

in postcolonial culture and postcolonial theory is the process whereby the educated colonised subject who received education in the colonial school lost their sense of belonging, turned against their African culture and thereby became alienated.

The themes of colonial education and alienation are then, unsurprisingly, prominent in postcolonial studies and literature. According to Frantz Fanon, colonialism is not simply the economic exploitation and political domination of the colonised territories but also the cultural and the psychological degradation of the colonial subject. The Martinican writer, theorist and psychiatrist, known for his writings on decolonisation and the psychopathologies brought about by colonisation, argues that it is also the separation of colonised peoples from their individuality and culture which was a traumatic experience.[40] As Fanon argues in his canonical work about the Algerian War, *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961), colonialism is **'**une négation systématisée de l'autre, une décision forcenée de refuser à l'autre tout attribut d'humanité, le colonialisme accule le peuple dominé à se poser constamment la question: "Qui suis-je en réalité ?"'.[41]

In his first book, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), which draws heavily on his experience growing up in Martinique, and as a student in metropolitan France, Fanon diagnoses the superiority complex of the white and the inferiority complex of the black. He argues that the Western coloniser attempts to assimilate dominated people by creating 'a divided world, in which the coloniser is separate from, and superior to, the colonised'.[42] In his view, the dependency and inferiority complexes which black people are forced to feel are the result of

[40] For more details on Fanon's life and his evolution as a psychologist see: Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*, trans. by Nadia Benabid (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (London: Verso, 2013) and Jock McCullock, *Black Soul, White Artifact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[41] Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte & Syros, 2002), p. 240.

[42] Jane Hiddleston, *Decolonising the Intellectual: Politics, Culture and Humanism at the End of the French Empire* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), p. 126.

devaluing the colonised subject and destroying his cultural origins through the creation of the Manichean binaries white/black and civilised/primitive.

Fanon devotes an entire chapter to analysing how language is used to differentiate between sophisticated European culture and the culture of the colonised, perceived and represented by the coloniser as 'primitive'. In this chapter, 'Le noir et la langue', which opens his first book, Fanon discusses how language choice can affect black people's thinking and behaviour. According to him, colonialism destroys the notions of success and achievement, makes the colonised forget about himself and his local culture completely and attempt instead to become another – a white person. Consequently, black people who develop an inferiority complex will associate European culture and whiteness with humanity, and at the same time reject their blackness and assimilate the coloniser's language to feel more human: 'le noir Antillais sera d'autant plus blanc, c'est-à-dire se rapprochera d'autant plus du véritable homme, qu'il aura fait sienne la langue française'.[43] Thus, by assimilating the language of the coloniser, the black person is also assimilating the culture of the coloniser: 'un homme qui possède le langage possède par contre coup le monde exprimé et impliqué par ce langage'.[44]

Fanon writes that the indigenous intellectual has a strong will to escape his blackness and to make European culture his own by succeeding in the colonial school and by adopting the cultural tool of the coloniser's language.[45] However, his attempt to belong to the coloniser's culture or to follow both the cultures of the coloniser and that of the indigenous population is in vain because he will end up abandoning one of the cultures:

> Également on ne sera pas étonné d'entendre certains colonisés déclarer: "C'est en tant que Sénégalais et Français... C'est en tant qu'Algérien et Français... que je parle." Butant sur la nécessité, s'il veut être véridique, d'assumer deux nationalités, deux

[43] Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), p. 14.
[44] Ibid., p. 14.
[45] While Fanon tends to gender the colonial intellectual as male, I acknowledge in the coming sections that we need not take the masculine experience as the sole baseline here.

> déterminations, l'intellectuel arabe et français, l'intellectuel nigérien [sic] et anglais choisit la négation de l'une de ces déterminations.[46]

To put it another way, the colonised subject who operates within two cultures and whose traditional universe is devalued by a colonising culture imposed on him or her is a person who suffers from estrangement. He becomes so accustomed to identifying with the colonisers and their culture, that when faced with reality, it is alienating and traumatic. This alienation, as Renate Zahar argues in her critical study of colonialism and alienation, is directly linked to the coloniser's superiority complex: 'the superiority of the colonizer's, manifesting itself through brute force and legitimized in their own view by the alleged racial inferiority of the natives, is acknowledged by the oppressed themselves through the process of alienation'.[47] The experience of the Martinican *évolué* is a case in point. The Martinican, in Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs,* who has just returned home from France and forgotten Creole has developed in turn an innate conviction of the superiority of French culture and has become critical of his compatriots back home. He ends up feeling alienated within his society and isolated from his friends and relatives: 'Le Noir évolué, esclave du mythe nègre, spontané, cosmique, sent à un moment donné que sa race ne le comprend plus. Ou qu'il ne la comprend plus'.[48]

While addressing the issue of colonial alienation, Fanon refers to the member of the colonial elite as an *'évolué*' which translates roughly as a 'sophisticated [colonial] subject'. He borrows this term coined by the French during the colonial era to refer to members of the indigenous population in African and Caribbean territories who 'evolved' culturally - those who 'sought to escape from grim realities of oppression and exploitation into French society by being assimilated through education and assimilation'.[49] The term 'évolué', the past participle

[46] Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 208.
[47] Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation*, trans. by Willfried F. Feuser (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. 14.
[48] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 11.
[49] Bethwell A., Ogot, *Africa and the Caribbean* (Kenya: Anayage Press, 1997), p. 90.

of the verb *évoluer* 'to evolve', connotes gradual progress and development. According to *Larousse,* being an *évolué* means reaching a certain degree of independence of mind, acquiring broad ideas, and being enlightened thanks to the exposure to, and the acquisition of, the culture of the coloniser (implicitly considered as a benchmark to gauge cultural progress). Its racist connotation is revealed in the dictionary's suggested synonyms (*cultivé* and *éclairé*: educated and enlightened) and antonyms (*arriéré*, *primitif*: backward/retarded, primitive). The concept is deeply influenced by the notion of the civilising mission and the nineteenth-century evolution theories such as Hegel's and Darwin's which considered non-white people as savages and inferior species. Its meaning reactivates the racial and cultural hierarchy within the colony's social order. It places the European master, a figure that African subjects are expected to look up to, on the top of the developmental ladder, whilst Africans sit at the bottom, with the *évolués* as the various stages in between. Although the term is used to refer to a colonised person who has become 'civilised' - who '[has] become sufficiently "Europeanized" in manner and dress as to win some kind of recognition from the colonial state', it underlined that the *évolué* has 'not yet' fully developed, but in time he/she would develop and evolve further.[50] Thus, the *évolué*s were identified by the white authorities as superior to the mass of colonised society but not exactly 'like us'. By adopting the concept of the *évolué*, associated with strong connotations, Fanon is condemning colonial education and psychological violence exercised on the figure of the educated. The *assimilé* or the *évolué* under study in *Peau noire* who tries hard to evolve to an almost complete state of whiteness suffers from acute alienation or a massive psychoexistential complex as a result of his contact with European civilisation. For this reason, as will be discussed in the coming sections, Fanon calls for an anticolonial education system

[50] Isabelle de Rezende 'Hisory as Spectacle', in *Lumumba in the Arts*, ed. by Matthias De Groof (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), p. 28.

that promotes African languages and cultures to counter the Western cultural hegemony whilst contributing to the anticolonial political struggle.

This thesis is aware of the racial connotations that the term 'évolué' carries, in particular in relation to the Hegelian vision of progress, with the underlying principle of a linear evolution from less sophisticated to more sophisticated definitions or views. Whilst acknowledging the dialectic element at the heart of the term 'évolué' – the connotation of an evolution from an 'inferior' to a 'civilised' level of development, we are adhering to this concept because it encapsulated the perceived situation of the narrators or characters featured in this study, at the time when these works were produced. By adopting the terminology in use at the time when the works were published, we can follow the development of the fictional colonial subjects and their personal and cultural trajectory. Rejecting this concept altogether would expose the work to the risk of anachronism, and we have therefore decided to use it in a qualified and historicized manner in this thesis.

These *évolués* were supposed to be treated as *élites* – as a privileged group, destined to rule locally, by the French coloniser. Yet, they ended up experiencing a different reality and suffering from colonial racism because they would always be regarded as 'poor imitations' or 'bad copies' of the white, as demonstrated by Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin.[51] Consequently, students and intellectuals who were once washed over by French culture (such as Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon-Gontran Damas) became aware of the issues of race and identity and launched a cultural movement called 'Négritude' to reclaim their original identity and to fight French imperialism.

[51] Paul S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin, *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (California: University of California Press, 2002), p. 328.

The négritude movement was crucial for the struggle for independence in the French colonies not only because it defended black identity but also because it acted as a vector of cultural nationalism. Harnessed by a coherent set of political ideologies, the literary movement was created as a reaction against colonial racism by the black educated elite. The Martinican Aimé Césaire and the Senegalese Léopold Sédar Senghor, those very people whom French assimilation and acculturation policies created, understood that the only way to overthrow stereotypes and the negative image of blacks in Western discourse was by showing 'black identity to be other than that which the colonizer supposed', as put by Jane Hiddleston in *Understanding Postcolonialism*.[52] Thus, they devoted their writing to defend collective personality and display black culture and its specificity.

Fanon points out that in the colonial situation, another reason for the acquisition of the occupier's language is that of upward mobility in race and social class. The educated colonial subject acquires English or French to become white or to assimilate into Western culture because it creates opportunities for him for personal advancement and for rising from a lower to a higher social class or status. As Fanon comments: 'Historiquement, il faut comprendre que le Noir veut parler le français, car c'est la clef susceptible d'ouvrir les portes qui, il y a cinquante ans encore, lui étaient interdites'.[53] In the colonial situation, the colonial language is widely believed to give power and status to those who master it well, so that in the Martinican context, 'dans un groupe de jeunes Antillais, celui qui s'exprime bien, qui possède la maîtrise de la langue, est excessivement craint'.[54] This emphasises the internal social importance of using the occupier's language, the feeling of inferiority experienced by the colonised and how language civilises 'le Noir' and makes him 'un Blanc'. Moreover, colonised people tend to imitate the

[52] Jane Hiddleston, *Understanding Postcolonialism* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), p. 45. For a deeper discussion on Négritude see: Abiola Irele, Négritude et condition africaine (Paris: Edition Karthala, 2008).
[53] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 30.
[54] Ibid., p. 16.

coloniser's language and accent in the hope of achieving the status of being French. The Antillean bourgeoisie, for example, believes that the French language spoken by Frenchmen is a noble language that allows respect, dignity, admiration and they consider it as a magical tool that opens the way to social success. As a result, they speak only French, except when addressing their servants, and forbid their children from speaking Creole.[55] There is also a tendency among some Martinicans to speak with a French accent rather than their local accent. This linguistic mimicry, although a bit exaggerated, proves to be essential for the assimilated subject to secure a better social and economic status, as we will see in the coming chapters.

Fanon observes that people from the French-speaking Antilles used to change their pronunciation by rolling the 'r' to differentiate themselves from other black people and sound like Frenchmen. In fact, he ridicules their obsession with pronouncing the letter 'r' as well as the tendency to exaggerate the pronunciation. Fanon gives the example of the Martinican customer in Le Havre who asked loudly for a beer: 'Garrrçon! un vè de biè'.[56] Instead of rolling each 'r', this Martinican put too much pressure on the first 'r' in 'Garrrçon' and omitted the other two instances in *verre* ('vè') and *bière* ('biè'). This linguistic anecdote reveals the extent to which Martinicans could try to become assimilated and in so doing alienated themselves from their original culture – whilst failing to master completely the coloniser's culture either.

It is undeniable that Western education was an effective tool in the cultural conquest of Africa. Ironically, however, it was also crucial for the eventual decolonisation of Africa. Although colonial education led to the production of assimilated elites who became alienated from their societies as Fanon argues, it also led to the emergence of elites who were independent from the coloniser. These elites had a great impact on the emergence of nationalist movements,

[55] Ibid., p. 15.
[56] Ibid., p. 16.

and the struggle for independence. Ali Mazrui argues in his study of the African educated class that colonial education in Africa 'served the purpose of creating not only a reservoir of qualified people which the government could use, but also a pool of potential qualified nationalists who came to challenge the colonial presence itself'.[57] French and British colonial education resulted in unintended consequences for the Africans who received it. While it was supposed to alienate indigenous people, make them abandon their own cultures and embrace Western values, it helped to train colonial elites who became aware of political theories which led to nationalism and, ultimately, demands for full independence. In his recently published work, *Our Civilizing Mission*, Nicholas Harrison discusses the relationship between education and nationalism and confirms that anticolonial leaders emerged from colonial education: 'The image of turning your "arm" on your "masters" and/or on your supposed allies did not appear wholly metaphorical; and the anxiety that educated "natives" might speak out or rise up against their former masters was starting to prove well-founded'.[58] In Algeria, for example, nationalism started with a small but influential group of *évolués* who had been Europeanised through education and assimilation. Among them were Messali Hadj who fought for the French in World War I and became later the president of the 'Etoile Nord-Africaine', and Ferhat Abbas, the leader of the Algerian liberal movement whom Horne describes as 'the essence of the Westernised, middle-class Arab évolué'.[59] These nationalists employed political concepts and tactics they learnt from

[57] Ali Al'Amin Mazrui, *Political Values and the Educated Class in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 1. Despite acknowledging the positive impact of colonial education on anti-colonial struggle in Africa, Mazrui insists that assimilated African elites are 'still cultural captives of the West'. He illustrates his point by providing the example of Samora Machel whom he considers as 'a captive of Marxism as a Western ideology', Léopold Senghor as 'a captive of French philosophical traditions', Charles Njonjo whom he presents as 'a profoundly Anglicized Kenyan' and Wole Soyinka 'the angry westernized rebel with a Yoruba accent' (Ibid., p. 13).

[58] Nicholas Harrison, *Our Civilizing Mission: The Lessons of Colonial Education* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), p. 49.

[59] Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 40.

the French coloniser to mobilise the masses into action and to rebel against French colonial rule.

Like Fanon, the Tunisian-Jewish writer Albert Memmi calls for the rejection of Western ideas and for a radical break with colonial culture. He explores in his works the effect of colonialism on North African countries, including the depersonalisation and dehumanisation of the colonised subject. In his *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de Portrait du colonisateur* (1957), Memmi argues that those members of the indigenous population who have been educated by the coloniser, adopted Western education and culture and encouraged a gradual approach to decolonisation, are in fact a weapon for the white coloniser to control and exploit the colonised. A similar idea is set out by Margaret Majumdar in *Postcoloniality: The French Dimension* where she argues that schools of empire were used as a tool to ensure colonial domination:

> For this elite group, the schools could just possibly open doors to assimilation. At the same time, by peddling the same version of homogeneous national culture throughout the schools of the empire, it ensured that the real relations of domination remained in place, so that even those who constituted the small elite and were allowed a measure of assimilation would continue to know their place.[60]

In his chapter entitled 'Portrait mythique du colonisé', Memmi states that the coloniser creates a mythical portrait of the colonised in an attempt to justify the colonisation of the indigenous population. The colonised man is dehumanised, mystified and deprived of his freedom by the coloniser. He is led to believe in his mythical portrait as drawn by the coloniser: he is lazy, weak, dirty, primitive, with no history, no culture, no memory and no language. To quote Memmi: 'rien ne pourrait mieux légitimer le privilège du colonisateur que son travail; rien ne pourrait mieux justifier le dénuement du colonisé que son oisiveté'.[61] This leads the colonised to self-hatred, which comes hand in hand with respect and admiration for his oppressor. The colonised subject's disdain for his own society and the feeling of self-hatred is

[60] Margaret A. Majumdar, *Postcoloniality: The French Dimension* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 21.
[61] Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de Portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Payot, 1973), p. 109.

accompanied by admiration of the oppressor and attempts to resemble him and to assimilate to the new culture. This image is a good excuse for the coloniser to justify his actions, to praise himself and humiliate the colonised.

In order to control the colonised and detach him from his history and community, the coloniser follows a variety of strategies. For instance, at the political and historical level: 'la carence la plus grave subie par le colonisé est d'être placé hors de l'histoire et hors de la cité'.[62] The colonised does not have the right to participate in political life nor to make decisions. When it comes to the ability to govern, the colonised is believed to be incapable of governing and to lack experience in this domain: 'le fait est que le colonisé ne gouverne pas. Que strictement éloigné du pouvoir, il finit en effet par en perdre l'habitude et le goût'.[63] The coloniser also tries to dehumanize the colonised by making him lose his history. By placing the emphasis on official written documents to the detriment of other forms of historical sources, history written by the colonisers ensures that the colonised is removed from history and forced to forget how to participate in it: 'il [le colonisé] dispose de moins en moins de son passé'.[64]

Another effective tool that the coloniser employs in order to disempower and control the colonised is education:

> (Rien non plus, bien entendu, dans son éducation scolaire, où les allusions à la cité, à la nation, seront toujours par référence à la nation colonisatrice.) Ce trou pédagogique, résultat de la carence sociale, vient donc perpétuer cette même carence, qui atteint une des dimensions essentielles de l'individu colonisé.[65]

The educational system designed and imposed by the coloniser makes references to the metropole, and hardly develops any local content. The coloniser's curriculum was aimed at brainwashing indigenous people by exposing Africans to what was supposedly a 'superior'

[62] Ibid., p. 121.
[63] Ibid., p. 124.
[64] Ibid., p. 131.
[65] Ibid., p. 126.

culture. In schools, indigenous children's traditions and experiences were subsumed by those of a foreign culture. They had no formal access to history, poetry or songs but those of their coloniser. In rare cases when there was a reference to their local culture, the goal was to demean African populations and to show how inferior their culture was. Prior to the colonisation of the Maghreb by the French, for instance, education in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco was Koranic-based. However, with the arrival of the French, Western education was imposed, *madrasas* were replaced by French schools, and Arabic was soon replaced by French. As Danièle Joly puts it:

> In a concerted effort to reduce the population to total submission, French colonisation made a deliberate attempt to obliterate any trace of indigenous culture. The closure of Koranic schools corresponded to other measures intending to control Islamic religion and to eradicate Arabic language.[66]

After independence, the governments of the three countries decided to forge an identity partly or entirely emancipated from Western influence. The most important reform was the curriculum reform and the Arabisation of education, which started with the training of indigenous teachers (mostly by Egyptian masters) who were to replace the European tutors. Ironically, though, the substitution of the French language by Arabic led the local population to suffer. Because Arabic was neglected for decades during the colonial period, it was difficult, if not impossible, to raise it as the sole language for instruction immediately after independence.

Erin Twohig elaborates on this idea in her recently published work *Contesting the Classroom*, where she argues that the complete erasure of the cultural elements inherited from French colonial education confused students who received both French during colonial times and Arabic education in the postcolonial era. Taking the experience of Ali, a fictional character in Maïssa Bey's *Bleu blanc vert* as an example, Twohig argues that memories of French

[66] Danièle Joly, *The French Communist Party and the Algerian War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p. 88.

education keep surfacing in the Arabised postcolonial classroom, despite the government's effort to erasure.[67]

> When Ali's teacher tells him that he has to "forget France. The French flag. And the *Marseillaise*", Ali recalls being forced to sing the French national anthem every day. When he notices that his new teacher rolls his Rs when he speaks, it reminds him of how, in the colonial school, he was required to speak "correct and careful French".[68]

This passage reveals the difficulty that post-independent governments faced in erasing the long-term effects of colonial education and their struggle to shape a national identity that is free from all Western influence.

Culturally, as regards language, the mother tongues of the North African population were not recognised by the French. Despite the effort of some scholars, who continued using indigenous languages and worked on developing them, such languages tended to atrophy as they were not used in everyday life or government. Thus, 'ces formes [les langues maternelles] subtiles ont perdu, depuis longtemps, tout contact avec la vie quotidienne, sont devenues opaques pour l'homme de la rue'.[69] In other words, the mother tongue of the colonised had no importance in colonised societies. If the subjugated person wanted to get a better-paid job, enjoy a more secure place and exist in colonial society, he or she would first have to accept the language of his masters, and the worldview conveyed by that language and culture. It is worth noting, however, that despite the superior training of the colonial elite and the mastering of the French language, Westernised African elites were never treated as equal either. They were only allowed to hold subordinate positions in the colonial administration and were 'often frustrated in their attempts to bring about changes they desire or find positions that fit their training'.[70]

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[67] Erin Twohig, *Contesting the classroom: Reimagining Education in Moroccan and Algerian Literatures* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), p. 33

[68] Twohig, *Contesting the classroom*, p. 31.

[69] Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*, p. 135.

[70] J. Robert Wegs and Robert Laddrech, *Europe Since 1945: A Concise History*, 5th edn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 81.

Memmi argues that the colonised subject's efforts to adopt the coloniser's values are in vain because assimilation will never be complete. The colonised person will ultimately be rejected not because he is 'required to make unacceptable changes and turn his back on his own community, but because the colonisers will not permit him to join theirs'.[71] Moreover, he will be humiliated, scorned and ridiculed by the colonialist who 'will always find the telling sign, the lack of taste, the note that jars'.[72] Memmi argues that colonised people who seek assimilation become alienated from their own people because of their French education but at the same time they still feel rejected by the French themselves because of racism: 'le moment est dramatique où il comprend qu'il a repris à son compte les accusations et les condamnations du colonisateur; qu'il s'habitue à regarder les siens avec les yeux de leur procureur'.[73]

This was also the case of the assimilated elites in Senegal and other French West African colonies who thought that by assimilating to the French culture, they would be accepted and treated as equals. Obed Mfum-Mensah argues in his *Education Marginalization in Sub-Saharan Africa*, that French assimilation policy 'helped to create a mentality of superiority among some native Africans because they were made to understand that through French acculturation, they would assimilate and become French citizens'.[74] Yet, this was not the case because when driven into the company of Europeans, these Westernised Africans faced hostility and rejection – an idea which supports Leonard R. Koos' statement that 'the rhetoric of assimilation and the civilizing mission was rarely translated into real or effective colonial policy with respect to indigenous populations'.[75]

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[71] Majumdar, *Postcoloniality: The French Dimension*, p. 77.
[72] Ibid., p. 77.
[73] Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*, p. 151.
[74] Obed Mfum-Mensah, *Education Marginalization in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London: Lexington Books, 2018), p. 46
[75] Leonard R. Koos, 'Colonial Culture as Francophone? The Case of Late Nineteenth- Century Algeria', in *Francophone Post-colonial Cultures*, ed. by Kamal Salhi (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003), 17-27 (p. 19).

In the same context of the cultural legacy of imperial rule, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o echoes Fanon in his seminal study entitled *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), in which he challenges the custom of imitating the coloniser. Ngũgĩ calls for the rejection of the coloniser's linguistic and cultural forms, a move which he considers as the first step towards achieving freedom. This Kenyan author, writing formerly in English and now in Gikuyu, has produced influential literary and critical works in postcolonial studies that alert readers to the effects of colonialism in Africa.[76] In this book, he examines the effect of teaching colonised people European languages and cultures at the expense of African languages and cultures. He posits that European languages should not be used in education because language is a tool used by the coloniser to reinforce colonial domination. Ngũgĩ argues that the purpose of a coloniser's language in a colony is taking the colonised subject further and further from himself, from his own world to other worlds.[77] For colonialism, this involved two interrelated consequences: the destruction of the indigenous culture (its art, religions, history, education, orality and literature); and the domination of local vernacular languages by imposing the language of the colonising nation.

In his early works, Ngũgĩ himself used to write in English. He appropriated the colonial language and used it as a tool to write back to the coloniser. Later, however, particularly after he was jailed without a trial for a year because of his play *I Will Marry When I Want* (1970), he decided to shift from an English-speaking audience to a local audience.[78] In an interview published in *Research in African Literatures,* he states:

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[76] For more details on Ngũgĩ's emergence as a novelist and his contribution to African culture, literature and criticism, see: Simon Gikandi, *Ngugi Wa Thiongo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Simon Gikandi and D. Ndirangu Wachanga, *Ngugi: Reflections on His Life Writing* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2008) and Oliver Lovesey, *The Postcolonial Intellectual: Ngugi wa Thiong'o in Context* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

[77] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*: *The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986), p. 12.

[78] One of the concerns African writers faced after the independence of their countries is whether to write in African languages or in Western languages. While Ngũgĩ insists that African literature should be written in African

> When I used English, I was choosing [an] English-speaking audience…. Now I can use a story, a myth, and not always explain because I can assume that the [Gikuyu] readers are familiar with this…. I can play with word sounds and images, I can rely more and more on songs, proverbs, riddles, anecdotes…. I maintain multiple centers, in a sense, simplify structures.[79]

By shifting the medium of expression from English to Gikuyu, Ngũgĩ has moved from a large overseas audience defined by the oppressor to a local audience composed by Kenyan workers and peasants who are unable to read in English. This linguistic shift, whilst it had a nationalist agenda behind, affected Ngũgĩ's production and reception and brought him much criticism. Kwame Nkrumah, for instance, advocated Ngũgĩ's nationalist endeavour but at the same time criticised him for limiting his literature to those who speak Gikuyu and excluding the majority of Africans.[80] Other critics such as Simon Gikandi, accused Ngũgĩ of radicalism and criticised him for being so obsessed with using Gikuyu to the extent of giving 'conference presentations to European and American audiences in Gikuyu', and publishing a 'critical essay in his mother tongue in the prestigious *Yale Journal of Criticism*'.[81] Ngũgĩ's decision to write in Gikuyu - for the suppressed peasant/worker class of Kenyan society- is understandable. However, one should not ignore the role of English language and overseas audience in the author's literary career. If Ngũgĩ is famous and widely read today, it is not because he had written in Gikuyu but

languages, other contemporary African writers seek to appropriate the colonial language and to use it as a tool of resistance to the hegemony of European language and culture. Among these writers, Chinua Achebe who declares in his essay 'The African Writer and the English Language', included in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 62 that for him 'there is no other option. I have been given this language and I intend to use it'. Achebe sees no harm in writing in English as far as it is 'a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings (Ibid., p. 62). Like Achebe, Emecheta believes that English is able to carry her African experience and advocates writing in an 'indigenised' English because of the latter's wide appeal: 'Most people in Nigeria speak: English; even though it is an alien language we speak it. You can't write in a Nigerian language, because Nigeria has something like 249 languages. If you write in one, you just write to a small group of people.' Retrieved from Joyce Boss, 'Women and Empowerment: An Interview with Buchi Emecheta', *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 16.2 (1988), 93-100 (p. 94).

[79] D. Venkat Rao and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 'A Conversation with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o', *Research in African Literature*, 30.1 (1999), 162-168 (p. 163).

[80] Kwame Nkrumah, quoted in Fongot Kini-Yen Kinni, *Pan-Africanism: political Philosophy and Socio-Economic Anthropology for African Liberation and Governance* (Cameroon: Langaa Research Publishing, 2015), p. 301.

[81] See Simon Gikandi, 'Travelling Theory: Ngũgĩ's Return to English', *Research in African Literatures*, 31.2 (summer 2000), 194-209 (p. 194).

because had written in his inherited colonial language in the first place – which is more prestigious and more commercially lucrative.[82]

In section three of *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ refers to his early education, when Kenyan folk stories, the wisdom of which centres on cooperation and hard work were replaced in colonial schools by English language, classical literature and Western philosophy. He contrasts the education he received in his indigenous language, Gikuyu, in his village, where language was magical, powerful and musical; and education in the colonial school, where he was forced to learn English and witnessed racism against children who did not master English: 'English became the measure of intelligence and ability in art, the sciences, and all the other branches of learning'.[83] On the other hand, people who were caught speaking Gikuyu were humiliated and punished:

> Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment… or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY.[84]

The above passage reveals cruelty and humiliation in teaching methods in British colonies. It also involves a sadistic paradox: the sign rewards an understanding of English with a mocking indictment of those who eschew it. Students in colonial schools were subject to harsh punishments such as being hit or publicly mocked. Most of the punishments were associated with speaking African languages, and were intended to emphasise the uselessness of vernacular languages. In French colonies, teachers also treated colonised students without due regard to their cultural roots. They imposed the French language and prohibited the use of mother tongues. Albert Memmi narrates his experience in the French colonial school where teachers

[82] See also Robert Elliot Fox, 'Engaging Ngugi', *Research in African Literatures*, 34.4 (Winter 2003), 115-128 <http://www.jstor.com/stable/4618331> [Accessed 23-07-2020].
[83] Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 12.
[84] Ibid., p. 11.

followed the French Government curriculum, and French was the only language of instruction: 'J'ai détesté l'école primaire où j'étais sujet à de brusques angoisses parce que je n'y comprenais pas le français'.[85] In French colonial schools, students also suffered from class distinction. Memmi further recounts his school days in the colonial high school where he felt an outsider because he came from a poor family background: 'J'ai détesté le lycée, parce que je m'y sentais, parce que j'y étais un étranger parmi les enfants de la bourgeoisie'.[86]

In Martinique, as well, indigenous students were harshly treated and often chastised when they used their mother tongue. Patrick Chamoiseau referred to this situation in *Chemin-d'école* when pupils were punished by the School's headmaster because they were caught speaking Creole: 'Qu'est-ce que j'entends, on parle créole?! Qu'est-ce que je vois, des gestes-macaques?! Où donc vous croyez-vous ici?! Parlez correctement et comportez-vous de manière civilisée'.[87] The Martinican author known for his work as part of the 'créolité' movement illustrates the culturally discriminatory nature of the colonial school where speaking Creole is synonymous with 'backwardness'.

Ngũgĩ explains that the coloniser understood that it was not enough to control African territories and economies, but also sought to control the minds of its people. Language was used as a weapon against resistance to control and manipulate colonised people. In Africa, the English language was used to destroy people's belief in their names, languages, environment and in themselves:

> But the most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceive themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relation to others.[88]

[85] Albert Memmi, *Le Nomade Immobile* (Paris: Arléa, 2000), p. 25.
[86] Ibid., p. 25.
[87] Patrick Chamoiseau, *Une enfance créole II: Chemin- d'école* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 65.
[88] Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 16.

Ngũgĩ notes that language expresses and carries the culture of a people and forms the 'basis and process of evolving culture'.[89] For him, language is not only a means of communication but also carries ideas, wisdom, experience and history. It ties the individual to his people, it becomes part of one's identity and shapes the way in which one looks at the world and at oneself. Therefore, devaluing the home language of African children and imposing a foreign language on them will systematically lead to breaking the harmony between language and culture. Indeed, African children who grew up using their mother tongue and who received their higher education in a colonial language, were taught Western literature, philosophy and art in the process and as a result became influenced by European thinking, changing their way of thinking and leading them to cultural alienation. Consequently, the colonised educated became torn between their local culture and that of the coloniser, cut off from their people, and experienced bitterness and despair.

Like Fanon, Memmi and Ngũgĩ seem to have overlooked the emancipatory side of colonial education in their analysis of cultural domination in African colonies. While considering imitating the coloniser as an inescapable condition of the colonised's subordination and powerlessness, both critics seem to have emphasised the psychic and symbolic violence of colonial education rather than its potentially subversive agency - an idea that Homi K. Bhabha attempts to encapsulate in his notion of mimicry. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha calls for a redefinition in how we approach identity in postcolonial societies. He challenges the idea that individuals in postcolonial societies are solely defined by their original ethnic traits. Instead, he argues that individuals can only be described through cultural hybridity, the mixture of cultural influences which shapes humans and affects their identity.

[89] Ibid., p. 14.

In his essay 'Of Mimicry and Man', Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as 'the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite'.[90] In other words, he states that the coloniser wants to improve the colonised and to make him like himself, but at the same time desires to keep the difference between the colonised and himself. Thus, the Other becomes 'almost the same' as the coloniser, but never fits with 'le portrait du colonisateur' or with the hegemonic culture. In fact, like Memmi, Bhabha argues that assimilation can never be complete. He believes that mimicry, the attempt of the colonised subject to imitate the coloniser, can never be successful because of racism, cultural backgrounds or educational systems. However, Bhabha asserts that mimicry can be a subversive tool in the hand of the colonised and can lead to the coloniser's disempowerment because it allows the production of 'mimic men' rather than a complete transformation of the 'native' into an 'Englishman'. As Bhabha puts it: 'to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English'.[91]

Bhabha further argues that in colonised nations such as India, the British coloniser forces the colonised subjects to work on their behalf and teaches them the English language. These educated elites who are trained to be imitators, learn to act like English people but do not look like them. For Bhabha, these mimic men are not disempowered; rather they are a threat to the coloniser: 'mimicry is at once resemblance and menace'.[92] To put it in another way, mimicry can actually be empowering when it involves imitating Western concepts of justice, freedom and law. Once the mimic man learns enough of the principles of the coloniser's law, he realises that those principles should be applied to colonised people as much as to the French or the British. When the coloniser comes face to face with these accomplished, educated mimic men,

[90] Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man', in *The Location of Culture (*London: Routledge, 1994*),* p. 89.
[91] Ibid., p. 87.
[92] Ibid., p. 86.

he has to acknowledge that they are not the 'Other' beings that the colonial discourse has claimed.[93]

Bhabha's work on mimicry provides a useful paradigm for exploring the issue of the *évolués* and their ambivalent position as mediators between the metropole and Africans in the colonies. The colonial *évolué*, this prototype of the 'mimic man', illustrates the process of ironic imitation and the creation of a paradoxical group who is trained to look like Europeans but never treated as equals. Bhabha's notion of mimicry as an ironic imitation is important to challenge Fanon's view which emphasises the destructive impact of colonial education rather than its possible subversive agency. To this end, I will show the complex interplay between alienation on the one hand and the emancipation that it could allow on the other. I argued that, although used to create assimilated elites who would support the coloniser, colonial education often gave the opposite result. It gave rise to a category of *évolués* who, despite being alienated, managed to reassert the validity of indigenous culture and linguistic forms, reject assimilationist rhetoric and turn towards integral anti-colonial nationalism.

Challenging the Forgetting, Misrepresentation and Appropriation of Female Experience in African Literature

Fanon, Memmi, and Ngũgĩ and Bhabha can all be criticised for not giving as much attention to gender as to race and class. In fact, there is little doubt that Fanon's, Memmi's, Ngũgĩ's and

[93] A similar idea is put forth by Aimé Césaire in his play *Une Tempête* (Paris: Seuil, 1969), p. 25, a postcolonial response to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where he provides a salient example of how colonised subjects learn from their oppressor to defend themselves, rebel and ask for their freedom. In Act I, scene 2 of *the play*, Prospero tells his slave Caliban that he should be grateful to his master who educated him and saved him from 'barbarity': 'tu pourrais au moins me bénir de t'avoir appris à parler. Un barbare! Une bête brute que j'ai éduquée, formée, que j'ai tirée de l'animalité qui l'engangue encore de toute part!'. At this, Caliban delivers an eloquent speech rejecting Prospero's colonialist domination: 'Ce n'est pas vrai. Tu ne m'as rien appris du tout. Sauf, bien sûr, à baragouiner ton langage pour comprendre tes ordres […] parce que tu es bien trop fainéant pour le faire'. This scene encapsulates the use of colonial language to assert one's identity and call for freedom. It reveals that the oppressor's language can possibly become a means of empowerment for the educated colonized subject.

Bhabha's analyses of cultural oppression and colonial alienation are centred on the experience of the colonised man. If we look closely at their analyses and the examples they provide, we find that colonised women are not mentioned among those yearning for freedom, and that their experiences as intellectual subjects are not addressed. The colonial subject is assumed to be a male subject. A good example of this comes from Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* where he writes only about and for black males, excluding women:

> Vers un nouvel humanisme…
> La compréhension des hommes…
> Nos *frères* de couleur…
> Je crois en toi, Homme…
> Le préjugé de race…
> Comprendre et aimer…
> [...]
> Que veut *l'homme*?
> Que veut *l'homme noir*?[94] [emphasis added]

One can assume from the above passage that Fanon is talking only to his fellow colonised men. By not addressing both brothers and sisters, Fanon excludes women from the dialogue of freedom leading to the misrepresentation of the colonised woman in his works. Like Fanon, Memmi neglects women by presenting his analysis of oppression only from a masculine stand. While addressing the issue of colonial education and the acculturation of the colonised intellectual, Memmi illustrates his points by providing examples of male educated subjects: 'S'il veut obtenir un métier, construire sa place, exister dans la cité et dans le monde, il doit d'abord se plier à la langue des autres, celle des colonisateurs, ses maîtres'.[95] Fanon and Memmi's use of gendered terms and pronouns such as 'il', 'frères', 'l'homme' and language that encodes the masculine as normative reflects their position as colonised males in a society that oppresses women.

[94] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 5.
[95] Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*, p. 125.

Homi Bhabha sees the use of masculine terms as normal and believe that these terms refer to 'a phenomenological quality of humanness, inclusive of man and woman and for that very reason, ignores the question of gender difference'.[96] Feminist critics such as Anne McClintock disagree with Bhabha and consider his claim as an apology for Fanon's blindness to women's position. For McClintock, Fanon's texts do not support this claim because almost each time he uses terms that are 'syntactically unmarked for gender', these terms are 'immediately contextually marked as male'.[97] She further argues that the generic category 'native' does not include women; 'women are merely possessed by the (male) native as an appendage'.[98] Thus, the use of universal nouns such as 'L'homme', 'le Noir', 'le colonisé' or 'l'évolué' to refer to both males and females can be read as a deliberate omission of women. It may also reveal a tendency towards a patriarchal focus on masculinity, especially as these masculine terms can be replaced by feminine pronouns or simply by other neutral words such as 'person' or 'one' for example.

Feminist critics such as Gayatri Spivak, Carole Boyce Davis, Elleke Boehmer and others believe that women are not only misrepresented in postcolonial theory but also in oral and scribal culture. They believe that African male writers, storytellers and singers deliberately omit their female counterparts by depicting them as less heroic, with no identity and no story to be heard. They condemn male writers and artists for portraying women in a derogatory fashion and insist that the battle lines between the genders should be removed. Before the colonisation of Africa, the overwhelming majority of sub-Saharan African literary culture was oral and not scribal. In a context where the cultural heritage took shape primarily through orature, the

[96] Homi Bhabha, 'Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition', foreword to *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press 2008), p xxxvi.
[97] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 362.
[98] Ibid., p. 362.

significance of gender dynamics, and the social prestige associated with various cultural activities, cannot be overplayed. The rich lineage of female orature does not prevent the genre from suffering a gender imbalance, with male writers, storytellers and singers seen as contributing to a more prestigious type of orature than their counterparts, and therefore being given extra credit and credibility. Women used to tell tales, create proverbs, compose and recite poems, and sing songs to voice themselves and 'condemn social problems, immorality, unfaithfulness and idleness – and make demands'.[99] Male storytellers, by contrast, presented themselves as 'the creators of society, treating women as living commodities to be bartered in the interest of enhancing the greater glory of male status'.[100] Consequently, feminist critics such as Herbert Chimhundu and Ciarunji Chesaina argue that (male) literary production reinforces masculine dominance in society and reveals embedded stereotypes in the depiction of women. In his analysis of the representation of women in Shona songs, Chimhundu observes that song-makers tend to depict women in an idealised way as beautiful, moral and the symbol of family stability. The picture is altered significantly when these women challenge these stereotypes: male storytellers, poets, and singers then portray these women as 'deviant and punish them by ridicule, marginalisation, ostracism and sometimes even death'.[101] A similar idea is expressed by Chesaina in her reading of Kalenjin and Maasai oral literature from Kenya. In this study, Chesaina argues that the images that come through are those of women as 'voiceless individuals who have little intelligence and therefore have to be totally dependent on men'.[102]

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[99] Mary Ebun Modupe Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1997), p. 77.
[100] Mineke Schipper, *Imagining Insiders: Africa and the Question of* Belonging (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999), p. 132.
[101] Herbert Chimhundu, 'Sexuality and Socialisation in Shona Praises and Lyrics', in *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature,* ed. by Graham Furniss and Liz Gunner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 147-161 (p. 148).
[102] Ciarunji Chesaina, 'Images of Women in African Oral Literature: A case study of the Kalenjin and Maasai Oral Narratives', in *Understanding Oral Literature*, ed. by Austin Bukenya, Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, and Duncan Okoth-Okombo (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1994), 85-91 (p. 87).

From colonial times onwards, African literary cultures started to become more scribal. African writers who emerged during the colonial era became influenced by Western literary tradition, introduced the written word as a form of self-expression. Those writers who received colonial education and came from patriarchal societies told their female counterparts' experience, but from their own patriarchal perspective:

> Much of this early literature deals with the social and political implications of colonialism and man's struggles within, and away from its confines. Women are usually made peripheral to all of that and function either as symbols or as instruments for the male hero's working out of his problems.[103]

Despite the adoption of Western scripts and literary forms, certain patriarchal attitudes persist in African literary culture. Contemporary African literature which has been largely written from a male-orientated point of view, depicts African men as heroes who stood against the coloniser and ignores African women's role in the fight for freedom. African male writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o portray female characters in a stereotypical way as oppressed, subjugated and always defined by their relationship to men, be it a daughter, a wife or a mother: '[female characters] have ultimately been shaped by a certain limited and imitating idealism that assumes that marriage and motherhood per se are unequalled routes to female fulfilment and redemption'.[104] They depict women as voiceless with no story to be heard, no control over their life, no will to change their destiny or to rebel against their oppressor.[105]

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[103] Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves, 'Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism', in *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1986), p. 3.
[104] Lloyd W. Brown, *Women Writers in Black Africa* (Connecticut, Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 7.
[105] For more on gender issues in African fiction see: Gloria Chineze Chukukere, *Gender Voices and Choices: Redefining Women in Contemporary African Fiction* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Pub. Co., 1995), Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), Charles Smith and Chin Ce, ed., *Gender Issues in African Literature* (Oxford: African Library of Critical Writing, 2014), Charles Smith and Chin Ce, ed., *Female Subjectivity in African Literature* (Oxford: African Library of Critical Writing, 2015), and Sadia Zulfiqar, *African Women Writers and the Politics of Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholarship Publishing, 2016).

Gayatri Spivak is one of the leading feminist figures who have dealt with the issue of women's marginalisation in colonial societies and their literary misrepresentation. Her main concern in 'Can the subaltern speak?' focuses on the double oppression of Black and brown women who are under the yoke of both patriarchy and colonialism. Spivak states that women are oppressed by the colonised man who is his turn oppressed by the coloniser: 'if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no story and cannot speak, the subaltern as a female is even more deeply in the shadow'.[106] They are silenced and do not have any voice of their own: 'there is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak'.[107] Spivak also insists that the subaltern cannot be represented and condemns the appropriation of female experience because she believes that speaking for oppressed women will add to their marginalisation and voicelessness and robs them of their own voice.[108]

In the same context, Carole Boyce Davis argues in her *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* that women's voices are muted and their images are misrepresented in a literary context dominated by male writers. Davies examines the representation of female characters in work by one of the most famous African male writers, Wole Soyinka. She argues that the Nigerian playwright, poet and Nobel Prize winner (1986) often depicts women through stereotypical images that fall into one of three categories: the foolish virgin in rural settings, the *femme fatale* in urban settings, and the masculinized matron.[109] For Davies, Soyinka's works reveal a 'definite sexist bias against women' because they either portray female

[106] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), p. 287.
[107] Ibid., p. 307.
[108] A similar idea is advocated by the South African writer and activist Stephanie Urdang in *Fighting Two Colonialisms: Women in Guinea-Bissau* (London: Zed Press, 1979) where she studies gender implications of liberation struggle in Africa. Like Spivak, Urdang believes that male discourses on colonisation are biased and that women's colonial experience is expressed by the idea of duality. She argues that African women had to fight in a two-sided battle: one against the Western coloniser and the other against African men.
[109] Carole Boyce Davies, 'Maidens, Mistresses and Matrons: Feminine Images in Selected Soyinka Work', in *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1986), 75-88 (p. 76).

characters in a stereotypical way or they do not treat them in depth.[110] Davies admits that Soyinka sometimes depicts women in a positive light but notes that throughout his works 'one finds the kernel of positive portrayal of the female image which is never fully realized'.[111] Another feminist scholar who has criticised Soyinka's appropriation of female experience and misrepresentation of women is Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. In her *Womanism and African Consciousness*, Kolawole acknowledges the fact that women in Soyinka's creative production are 'very visible' but at the same condemns him for portraying women as 'caricatures and embodiments of certain conventional images of women that are not much of a departure from the usual stereotypes'.[112]

Soyinka is not the only seminal black African writer who has been criticised by feminist scholars. Chinua Achebe, the father of modern African literature, has also been attacked for decentring women in his historical novels. Among these scholars, Rosa Ure Mezu who criticises him for endorsing the sexist treatment of women in his novels and declares that his 'sexist attitude is unabashed and without apology'[113], and Andrea Powell who accuses him of dismissing women's issues in his works and depriving them of the possibility of selfhood:

> Achebe's novels reveal real blind spots when it comes to important gender issues that continue to plague many postcolonial African countries. In his two historical novels, Achebe consistently sidelines the place of postcolonial woman in order to focus on postcolonial manhood. Women's lives often serve as little more than fodder for the exploration of masculinity.[114]

Ngũgĩ, too, has come in for similar criticism for his characterisation of women in his novels. In her discussion of the intersections between nationalism and gender in selected works by African male and female authors, Elleke Boehmer (2005) argues that post-independence male writers

[110] Ibid., p. 76.
[111] Ibid., p. 85.
[112] Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness*, p. 97.
[113] Rose Ure Mezu, 'Women in Achebe's World', *The Womanist,* 1.2 (Summer 1995), 15-19 (p. 16).
[114] Andrea Powell, 'Problematizing Polygyny in the Historical Novels of Chinua Achebe: the Role of Western Feminist Scholars', *Research in African Literatures,* 39.1 (Spring 2008), 166-185 (p. 167).

engender national narrations by excluding women, the daughters of the nation, who have not been in a position to generate their own narratives: 'the daughter of the new nation in male-authored texts is predominantly pictured, as ever, as homebound and tradition-bound. She inhabits either private spaces or the peripheries of public, national space'.[115] Studying Ngũgĩ's female characters whom she believes are 'pioneers' in male-authored Anglophone African fiction; Boehmer argues that Ngũgĩ 'fits his women characters into the thoroughly well-worn stereotypes of mother and of whore'.[116] For her, these stereotypes are predictable at this early stage of the author's career: 'the young Ngũgĩ had not yet come out in support of sexual equality'.[117] Boehmer acknowledges, though, that Ngũgĩ's recent works give a more prominent role to female characters and portray them as 'heroines who have made a decisive break with a former life of mothering and/or whoring in their commitment to a revolutionary cause'.[118]

These feminist discussions on the misrepresentation of women and the appropriation of female experience in African literature show that there is a clear attempt from African female writers and critics to write back to African male writers and to depart from the male traditional canon of writing. Making use of these black feminist studies, this research aims at highlighting the experience of African women in their respective colonial and postcolonial societies, particularly their position as female intellectuals.

Research Questions

The literary works and theories I have discussed reveal again the complexity of colonial education and its paradoxical effects on the educated colonial subject. It shows that there is a

[115] Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 108.
[116] Ibid., p. 46.
[117] Ibid., p. 47.
[118] Ibid., p. 48.

tendency among theorists and critics to focus more on the alienating effects of assimilation rather than on its subversive agency. They seem also more interested in exploring the experience of the male colonial subject than that of the female and the question whether the colonised woman can see herself in their analyses remains open. The aim of this study is to shed light on how the experience of African intellectuals is represented in selected works by male and female authors, as well as to trace their evolution as *évolués / évoluées* in their respective colonial and postcolonial societies. Throughout the six chapters, I address the following questions to explore the limits and gaps of existing scholarship: How did the clash between African and Western cultures give rise gradually to the group of the *évolué(e)*? What does the figure of the *évolué(e)* reveal about the condition of the colonised subject? How does the experience of female intellectuals differ from that of male intellectuals? And how did Francophone and Anglophone literature end up developing non-canonical works influenced by the hybrid nature of late colonial and early postcolonial societies, fuelled in that process by the hybrid experience of the *évolué(e)*?

Approach and Methodological Framework

Thematically, the thesis is centred around the concept of the *évolué*, which has often been used to refer to the male intellectual only, but will be used here to encompass both genders. I will study the position of the colonial and the postcolonial *évolués/évoluées* by following their trajectory as they move from a state of assimilation, to a state of alienation to a state of self-assertion and recognition. Based on the selected works, I will show that the effects of colonial education on the characters under study vary from one person to another depending on the type of education they receive, their economic background, their gender, and sometimes their race. Relying on key concepts in postcolonial studies related to the issues of cultural encounter and

colonial alienation – such as assimilation, in-betweenness, third space, *métissage*, and the double oppression of women – I argue that colonial schooling can have three different consequences. It can be destructive leading to tragic consequences (the case of Arezki, Waiyaki, Muthoni and Nyasha), alienating and emancipative at the same time (Assia Djebar and Tambu), or a road to social mobility and international recognition (Buchi Emecheta and Mehdi). I must emphasise here that the order in which the chapters appear does not defend assimilation or imply a model of progress, where characters gradually become better able to negotiate the competing influences on them. The content is presented in chronological order to avoid anachronisms and overlaps between the events while following the trajectory of the figure of the *évolué(e)*. As the analysis moves through the literary texts, characters do not learn how to assimilate but learn from colonial education to become more confident in their own position.

Given the nature of my topic, I will rely on two literary approaches: historical and psychoanalytic. Exploring the theme of colonial education and its complex consequences on the educated colonial subject would not be possible without employing the historical method; especially as most of the events in the novels are inspired by the lives of authors who lived through the special period of decolonisation in their respective countries. Thus, to give the topic its relevance, I will attempt to look beyond the novels themselves to the broader historical and cultural events and circumstances in which the authors and their works were situated. The study will also draw from psychological approaches to estrangement, cultural shock, trauma, racism, oppression and identity crises to analyse the multiple aspects of colonial alienation as a phenomenon. I will use these studies to explore the mind of the educated colonial subject and the way in which colonial schooling affects the psyche, leading to experiences of linguistic, religious and cultural alienation.

The novels under discussion provide a fictionalised account of what it means to be a member of the paradoxical group of the *évolué(e)* in late colonial and early postcolonial societies and can be read as sites of identity and resistance. At the same time, they also contain certain autobiographical presences, that is they occasionally blend fiction with reality. The incident of 'la corvée de la soupe' where Arezki faces hostility at the hands of European soldiers, for example, the opening scene painting the 'fillette arabe allant pour la première fois à l'école' in *L'amour la fantasia*, as well as Emecheta's failed marriage and the subsequent hardship of raising a family by her own are all inspired by the authors' own experiences. As such, reading them to illuminate the position, dislocation and alienation of the *évolués(es)* may thus involve weaving together approaches to both autobiography and fiction.

This thesis is aware of the difficult relationship between fiction and truth, expressed for instance in the debate over the generic classification of autobiography that started in the 1970s when poststructuralist theorists such as Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur, Roland Barthes, and Louis Montrose problematised the definition of autobiography and called for blurring the demarcation between fact and fiction, history and story. For theorists associated with post-structuralism such as Paul de Man, the distinction between fiction and autobiography is 'undecidable' because it is not possible to decide what is truth and what is fiction in an autobiographical text and therefore autobiography, as distinct from fiction, does not really exist.[119] The presence of fiction in autobiography, in Paul John Eakin's view, is not something to apologize for as many writers and readers of autobiography persist in suggesting, for 'it is reasonable to assume that all autobiography has fiction in it as it is to recognize that all fiction is in some sense autobiographical'.[120]

[119] Paul de Man, 'autobiography as De-facement', in *Modern Languages Notes* 94.5 (1979), 919-930 (921).
[120] Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 10. For more on the questions of authorship and authority, the difficult relationship between fiction and truth, memory and authenticity, see, for instance, James Olney, *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and*

Two issues arise from these points: first, the category of fiction can hold explicit or implicit autobiographical presences. Secondly, although it is certainly possible to interpret these texts without biographical knowledge of the authors' lives, I would contend that making occasional reference to the authors' own lived experiences of the situations and dilemmas of the *évolué(e)* usefully elicits the broader cultural and psychological experiences of 'evolving' in a colonial and a postcolonial context, thereby providing one approach to the question of the representation of the *évolué(e)* in postcolonial literatures. There are certainly risks associated with reading literature as a straightforward rendering of an author's biography, and not all critics will embrace this approach. Nor do I mean to suggest that authors cannot represent the *évolué(e)* without a first-hand experience. However, my readings suggest that these African writers, exposed intensively to Western culture through either education or assimilation, sometimes blended fiction with reality, or narrativized biographical experiences, as a creative way of expressing identity crises not necessarily afforded by conventional autobiography. Read this way, the literary works provide valuable insight, always mediated by literary techniques, into the experiences of educated elites in colonial schools, their ambivalent position in society and their state of alienation. In my analysis, I thus make use of autobiographical sketches to show how African elites have struggled to maintain their distinct local cultures, while at the same time bearing in mind that these literary works require methods of literary interpretation that reckon with the effects of language, voice, narrative technique and so on.

As mentioned earlier, this thesis builds upon existing theories of colonialism and its complex legacies, and especially on Fanon, Memmi and Ngũgĩ's reflections about the alienating

Critical (1980), the work of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001), Julie Rak, *Negotiated Memory: Doukhobor Autobiographical Discourse* (2004), and the essays and interviews in J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point* (1992). Its permutations in a postcolonial context include the politics of autobiography as a Western-associated practice, the tendency to overlook life-writing from the colonial and postcolonial worlds, and questions of political self-representation. See, for instance, Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics and Self Representation* (2009).

effects of acculturation and assimilation on the mind of the educated colonial subject. Yet, to develop a more nuanced understanding of the position of the *évolué(e)*, and their particular dilemma, the thesis will rely on postcolonial theories which defend hybridity as a subversive agency for the postcolonial subject. Using Bhabha's notion of resistance and its related concepts of ambivalence, mimicry and hybridity, I will demonstrate the complexity of the condition of the *évolué(e)* and the ways in which assimilation policies and education could be converted from a tool of control to a tool of rebellion. To fill the gap left by male postcolonial theorists who have overlooked women's alienation and their experience as *évoluées*, I will also make use of postcolonial feminist theories developed by Gayatri Spivak and Carole Boyce Davies. Using Spivak's famous essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' where she analyses the extent to which women can reclaim their voices from oppression, and Davies' studies of black women's writing which redefine women's identity away from exclusion and marginality, I will highlight the position of female intellectuals in colonial and postcolonial societies and the ways in which their experience as *évoluées* differs from that of male intellectuals.

Chapter Breakdown

I suggest that in each of the texts under consideration, alienation of the colonial and postcolonial *évolué(e)* is manifested in a different way, depending on the type of education received and the circumstances surrounding the character's life. I argue that the consequences of colonial alienation are complex, nuanced and cannot simply be qualified as positive or negative. In the first chapter, I explore the issue of intergenerational conflict as a destructive consequence of colonial education in Mouloud Mammeri's *Le Sommeil du juste* (1955). I argue that full assimilation of the coloniser's culture through schooling in colonial institutions often contributes to the widening of the generational gap between the elders who remain faithful to

ancestral customs and the youth who have been converted to modern ideas and lifestyle. I conclude that the *évolué*'*s* efforts to adopt the coloniser's culture are in vain because assimilation will never be complete and that the colonised will end up rejected in all cases: by his own people because of his French education and by the French themselves because of racism.

In chapter two, I turn to another effect of colonial alienation: in-betweenness and cultural *métissage*. Revising Bhabah's concepts of in-betweenness, hybridity, third space and Glissant's *métissage*, my reading of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965) posits that negotiating a middle ground between traditions and modernity is not always successful but can sometimes be tragic. Focusing on the tragic end of Waiyaki and Muthoni, who try unsuccessfully to harmonise some aspects of Christianity received in the Siriana School with traditional Gikuyu values, I argue that there is no happy ending for cultural and religious *métissage*. I conclude that Waiyaki and Muthoni's failure to unify local and Western cultures sharpens the division between the traditionalists and the Christian converts and deepens their intolerance for each other's cultures and beliefs.

While the first two chapters deal with the destructive effects of colonial education mainly on the male colonised intellectual, the third and the fourth chapters argue that colonial education, when received by indigenous women as *évoluées*, can be both alienating and emancipating at the same time. In chapter three on Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), I explore the tensions between the alienating process of colonial education on the one hand, and its emancipatory element on the other. Focusing on the character of Tambu who successfully uses education to escape the environment of inequality and poverty and her cousin Nyasha who manages to rebel against patriarchy but suffers as a result from the nervous conditions (bulimia), I argue that mission education is a double-edged sword. On the one hand,

it can be empowering as it enables female characters to challenge African patriarchy. On the other, it can be regressive as it alienates them from their culture, and sometimes leaves them with acute psychological conditions.

In chapter four, I examine the issue of bilingualism and biculturalism in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985). I focus on French education not only as a manifestation of the colonial condition but also as a complex expression of what it means to appropriate the language of the coloniser. Focusing on Djebar's own cultural and linguistic evolution in colonial Algeria, I argue that being caught between two cultures or two languages is not always a trap but can also be a way out. Although the French language pushed Djebar away from her mother tongue and culture, the same language helped her escape the confinements of the *harem* and transgress the taboos of the Algerian society. I further argue that it is thanks to French schooling that Djebar learnt how to adapt the French language and use it as a tool to give voice to muted Algerian women to tell their own version of Algerian history.

In the two final chapters, I move away from the colonial era and focus instead on the position of the *évolué(e)* in two more recent contexts. I shed light on the long-term effects of colonial education on newly independent countries by examining the experience of the postcolonial intellectual in the ex-coloniser's boarding schools. I argue that despite the impossibility of full integration, postcolonial education can be a road to recognition and social mobility. In chapter five, I follow Buchi Emecheta's experience as she evolves from a poor Igbo girl struggling for education in Nigeria to an internationally renowned female writer in England. I focus on her different experiences at the Methodist Girls' High School and the ways in which these experiences have contributed to her personality formation and her development as a postcolonial writer. My analysis of Emecheta's *Head Above Water* suggests that if African male writers are doubly burdened by both poverty and skin colour, their female counterparts

are triply burdened: in order to be recognised, a black female writer must overcome not only economic hardships and the weight of blackness but also the weight and social restrictions of womanhood.

In the final chapter on Fouad Laroui's *Une année chez les Français* (2010), I follow the protagonist's experience in a French boarding school in Morocco and its effects on his identity formation. I focus on the challenges Mehdi faces integrating in the French community and the ways in which his experiences at the French boarding school and at his French friend's place have contributed to his development and maturity. Tracing Mehdi's evolution as he moves from a state of alienation to a state of assimilation and eventually to self-assertion, I conclude that, despite the cultural and economic differences, Mehdi succeeds in integrating with his colleagues and wins intellectual and social recognition without becoming 'French'.

As the analysis moves through the different literary texts situated in both French and British former colonies, it demonstrates that the clash and broad interaction of African and Western cultures are most accurately – and acutely – expressed in the figure of the *évolué(e).* Focusing on the alienating and the potentially emancipating effects of assimilation and colonial education, this thesis argues for a more nuanced understanding of the position of the *évolué(e)* in late colonial and early postcolonial societies.

CHAPTER ONE

Intergenerational Conflict, Amnesia and Awakening in Mouloud Mammeri's *Le Sommeil du juste* (1955)

> Un jour il reviendra et, tu vois, quand les égarés reviennent, ils sont plus purs que ceux qui ne sont jamais partis, parce qu'ils sont plus déchirés.[121]
>
> Mouloud Mammeri

Le Sommeil du juste (1955) is Mouloud Mammeri's second landmark novel, after *La Colline oubliée* (1952). The novel has had a very long intellectual legacy on both sides of the Mediterranean. It was first published in France by Plon and was republished by the Algerian publishing house Dar El Othmania in 2010.[122] The novel invokes the exemplary figure of the Algerian *évolué* who is imprisoned within the colonial ideological assumption regarding progress and cultural hierarchisation. This figure who is seduced by Western education and values, who believes in the superiority of French culture and expresses the desire that Algeria be fully integrated and Algerians granted French citizenship. It sheds light on the tension that the process of assimilation engendered between the young generation which has converted to Western ideas and lifestyle and the elders who remain faithful to ancestral customs. It questions the rhetoric of assimilation and epitomises the disillusionment that the majority of the *évolués* have to go through when they discover that despite renouncing their ethnic community, they continue to be both compared with other *indigènes* and contrasted with Europeans.

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[121] Mouloud Mammeri, *Le Sommeil du juste* (Paris: Plon, 1955), p. 74.

[122] This government-sponsored publishing house reflects a clear commitment to promote and spread Algerian literature by making the great works of renowned Algerian authors like Mouloud Mammeri available to the Algerian youth and a whole new generation of readers. See: Sihem Ammour, 'Dar El Othmania, une jeune maison d'édition et de grandes ambitions', *Djazairess,* <http://www.djazairess.com/fr/latribune/71008> [Accessed 06-10-2017].

In his first novel, *La Colline oubliée*, Mammeri records the painful experiences of his Kabylian compatriots under the colonial regime. The novel takes place on the eve of the Second World War, particularly from 1939 until 1943/1944, in the village of Tasga and tells the story from the perspective of the main character, Mokrane. The novel begins as a group of French-educated friends comes back to their *village natal* due to the outbreak of World War II. However, as a result of the war, this union of friends is disturbed as men of the village are called to fight for France. This massive mobilisation destroys families and disrupts the daily routine of the village. With *Le Sommeil du juste,* the scene shifts from Kabyle society to the larger world: the focus is not only on life in a Kabyle village and the suffering of the villagers but also on the confrontation of Berber and French culture, the hostility and indifference that Algerians experienced abroad, and the trauma of the Second World War.

Le Sommeil du juste records the clash between Berber and French cultures in the context of colonial Algeria, in a Kabyle village called Ighzer. The novel is set in the 1940s and highlights the conflict between the old generation and the young one. The older generation is still clinging on to ancestral law, such as the male code of honour, filial piety, and as the critic Djoher Amhis-Ouksel points out in her close reading of the novel, the vendetta, that is to say 'une dette de sang qui ne s'éteint que par la mort de la victime désignée'.[123] By contrast, the younger generation has assimilated to Western cultural practices and thus become alienated from their traditional society.

The novel depicts this constant tension through four parts: 'le père', 'le fils', 'l'ange' and 'tous au vert paradis'. In the opening pages of the novel, Mammeri introduces his main characters, the father and his three sons: Mohand, Arezki and Slimane. Mohand works in France

[123] Djoher Amhis-Ouksel*, La voie des ancêtres: Lecture de Sommeil du Juste de Mouloud Mammeri* (Algiers: Casbah, 2010), p. 106.

for the Renault factory until he contracts tuberculosis and dies. Arezki is the educated son who has received a French education, and Sliman, the youngest, the nationalist who wants to be involved in politics. The focus of this chapter will be on the complex development of Mammeri's protagonist, Arezki, a Western-educated young man who is traumatised by the confrontation of Berber and French cultures, who experiences alienation back at home, and faces hostility and indifference abroad. The chapter will particularly emphasise the issue of cultural estrangement as a generational issue, analysing the cultural and the linguistic clash between Arezki, the young *évolué*, and his conservative father and the traditional society that the character represents.

Little research has been conducted on Mammeri's *Le Sommeil du juste*. Much of the existing criticism and interpretations of Mammeri's works are focused on orality and language: Jane Goodman's *Berber Culture on the World Stage*, Jean Déjeux's 'Hommage à Mouloud Mammeri écrivain algérien de la berbérité', Mohamed Benrabah's *Language Conflict in Algeria: From Colonialism to Post-Independence* and Charles Bonn's 'Littérature et oralité au Maghreb: Hommage à Mouloud Mammeri'. Critics often deal with him as an anthropologist rather than as a novelist, with a particular focus on his attachment to the land (Kabylia) and on his interest in ancestral myth and legends. For example, in her chapter entitled 'Collecting Poems', Jane Goodman emphasises Mammeri's commitment to the restoration of Berber Identity and to developing the Berber language as a modern means of communication. In this context, she declares: 'with a background in literary studies, Mammeri […] was not formally trained as an anthropologist, but he was well versed in the ethnographic literature'.[124] Goodman focuses on Mammeri's ethnographic research through his projects to compile and thus preserve

[124] Jane E. Goodman, 'Collecting Poems', in *Berber Culture on the World Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2005), 97-119 (p. 112).

the legacy of Kabyle and Tuareg poetry. She argues that Mammeri's decision to compile corpora of Berber poetry is the result of both growing up listening to his father's poems and being exposed to Western education.

Similarly, Jean Déjeux examines Mammeri's writings as well as his pedagogical career in the context of his efforts to promote and protect Berber culture in the Maghreb. In his chapter 'Hommage à Mouloud Mammeri écrivain algérien de la berbérité', Déjeux praises Mammeri for his contribution to the preservation of the Algerian popular heritage through his research into poetry, tales and language of 'Grande Kabylie' and 'Gourara'.[125] In this tribute to Mammeri, Déjeux refers to Mammeri's contribution to Berber poetry, namely: *Les Isefra, poèmes de Si Mohand* (1969), *Poètes kabyles anciens* (1980) and *L'Ahellil du Gourara* (1984), and the influential role he played in promoting Berber grammar and linguistics through his work *Une grammaire berbère kabyle* (1976).

One of the critics who has tried to revive the interest in Mammeri in Algeria in the recent years is Djoher Amhis-Ouksel who produced two critical readings: one on *La Colline oubliée* (2004) and the other on *Le Sommeil du juste* (2015). Amhis-Ouksel is a professor of French literature and an education inspector who has devoted her long career to education and to bringing the great texts of Algerian literary heritage to the attention of the younger generations. In both her works, Amhis-Ouksel undertakes a critical commentary of salient passages from *Le Sommeil du juste* and *La Colline oubliée,* calling upon young Algerians to discover Mammeri's great works. The aim behind this educational strategy is to promote the practice of reading so that it becomes a pleasure, rather than a constraint, and to highlight the quest for origin and identity in the works of Algerian writers such as Mouloud Mammeri and Mouloud Ferraoun.

[125] Jean Déjeux, 'Hommage à Mouloud Mammeri écrivain algérien de la berbérité', *Hommes et Migrations,* 1121 (April 1989), 16-19 (p. 17).

Another possible motivation behind Amhis-Ouksel's works is to re-instate the legitimacy of Francophone Algerian literature. Being written in French does not necessarily mean 'not Algerian', as the defenders of *l'arabité* might argue. Robert Phillipson defends Algerian writers of French expression in his work *Linguistic Imperialism*, as he writes: '[French-language writers] became familiar with a literary tradition which contained potentially subversive ideas that could be at variance with colonial interests'.[126] That is to say, these writers wrest the French language from the coloniser and turn it against him, by giving voice to their fellow Algerians and expressing Algerian identity.[127]

During fieldwork carried out in the course of this thesis, my independent archival research has revealed that most of the material held in the Algerian libraries on Mouloud Mammeri is about Mammeri as an anthropologist and a linguist. This consolidates Taieb Si Belkacem's view in his book *Decolonizing Indigenous Education: An Amazigh/Berber Ethnographic Journey*, where he describes his visit to a library in Kabylia:

> Upon entering the library, the end of the first row on the right side was reserved for Berber literature. One of the writers represented was Mouloud Mammeri, an anthropologist as well as a linguist […] Mammeri is now a major cultural icon for the Berber people of Algeria. I found in the House of Culture a little bit of Mammeri's work consistent with what the House of Culture was to some extent dedicated to.[128]

Si Belkacem's journey in the *Maison de la Culture* (House of Culture) reveals that Mammeri has not been studied seriously from a literary perspective. The works that do exist are concerned with Berber culture, Amazigh language and the oral tradition of Kabylia.

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[126] Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 127.

[127] Some North African writers, particularly Algerians, have considered the French language as a 'butin de guerre' and advocated using it as a tool of liberation. Among these writers were Assia Djebar, Mohammed Dib, Yasmina Khadra, Leila Sebbar and Kateb Yacine – the latter declared that he wrote in French 'pour dire aux Français que je ne suis pas Français'. Retrieved from Kateb Yacine, *Le poète comme boxeur* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1994), p. 192. For more on appropriating French in North Africa, see: Patrick Voisin, 'Quand les Africains firent du latin une langue butin de guerre!', in *Eduquer en pays dominé (Afrique, Amérique, Europe)*, ed. by Franck Collin, Jean Moomou and Caroline Seveno (Paris: Karthala, 2019), 95- 125.

[128] Taieb Si Belkacem, *Decolonizing Indigenous Education: An Amazigh/Berber Ethnographic Journey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 75.

The literary perspective of Mammeri's *Le Sommeil du juste* does not seem to have attracted much attention and criticism; very few critics have addressed the literariness of the novel. Among those critics, Eric Ellin focuses on Arezki's bookburning scene, Dalil Slahdji considers the clash of cultures and rite of passage, and Benjamin Jack Sparks analyses the effects of suffering on the narration and character development.[129] Criticism of his work is still, therefore, a minor strand in the analysis of Algerian postcolonial literature. Therefore, the present analysis makes a valuable contribution to fill this historiographical gap through studying the depiction of intergenerational contact in Algeria on the verge of decolonisation. Moreover, in methodological terms, my study is deliberately positioned at the intersection of Europe and Algeria, as it draws on existing criticism undertaken across the world which is not widely available in Algeria, while also deriving added potency from my first-hand knowledge of Berber culture, the Islamic heritage, and my understanding of the cultural memory of a wide range of symbols, images and quotations. In my reading of the novel, I add another layer of analysis by highlighting the significance of terms and concepts that are typical to Berber culture and which have not previously drawn scholarly comment.

The Second World War: Algerian Society in Crisis

In an interview with *El Moudjahid culturel,* Mammeri declared that, '*Le Sommeil du juste*, c'est la préparation de la libération, une société coloniale en effervescence; on sent que quelque chose se prépare, une société en crise'.[130] *Le Sommeil du juste* takes place during the

[129] Eric Ellin, 'Arezki's Bookburning in Mouloud Mammeri's Le Sommeil du Juste', *The International Fiction Review*, 10.1 (1983), 3-7 <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/13589/14672> [Accessed 22-11-2017], Dalil Slahdji, 'Cultures en conflit et rite de passage dans Le Sommeil du juste de Mouloud Mammeri', *Multilinguales*, 3 (2014), 111-124 <https://journals.openedition.org/multilinguales/1614> [Accessed 25/11/2017], and Benjamin Jack Sparks, *The Plagues of Colonialism: Representations of Suffering in the Colonial and Postcolonial Francophone Algerian Novel from 1950-1966* (Unpublished doctoral thesis: Louisiana State University, 2015).

[130] Mohammed Meftah Hammouche, 'Entretien avec Mouloud Mammeri', *El Moudjahid culturel*, 92 (7 July 1973), p. 10.

Second World War and the exposition explicitly situates the action: 'on était en 1940' (p. 7). After a successful French school career, Arezki, the main character of the story, is conscripted into the French army during the Second World War. He takes part in the campaign in Italy as a French officer, and then heads for France where he is confronted with injustice and discrimination. This opens his eyes to a bitter reality: everything he learnt in the French colonial school was merely a lie. No matter how educated, a man regarded as an *Imann*[131] - *indigène musulman algérien non-naturalisé* – continues to be treated as such even if he contributes to the victory of France. Arezki's experience in metropolitan France is similar to that of Frantz Fanon. Just like Arezki, Fanon attended French colonial schools in the Caribbean and learnt to consider France's history as his own. He joined the Free French forces and fought in the later days of the Second World War, yet he too experienced humiliation and racism.

Young Algerians knew that taking part in the Second World War was dangerous but substantial numbers of them considered this conflict as an opportunity to escape their suffocating life in the villages: 'la guerre, en même temps qu'elle perturbait, faisait naître de grands espoirs'.[132] Arezki's youngest brother, Sliman, for instance, envies his brother because he escapes paternal domination and customs by joining the French army: 'Arezki était mobilisé mais au moins il échappait à toutes ces contraintes qui étouffaient la vie des hommes et des femmes d'Ighzer' (p. 110). Aware that he may face death in the battlefield, Sliman wishes that he could be in Arezki's shoes and 'mourir à sa place, jeune mais…savant, heureux et libre (p. 113).

Mammeri depicts the bitter reality experienced by Algerian people during the Second World War including poverty, the injustice of the colonial system based on violence and the

[131] In practice, a form of second-class citizenship that was affixed on the identity cards of Algerians in the column 'Nationality'. See: Jean Déjeux, *Littérature maghrébine de langue française* (Ottawa: A. Naaman, 1973), p. 191.
[132] Latifa El Hassar-Zeghari and Denise Louanchi, *Mouloud Mammeri: Classiques du monde* (Paris: F. Nathan 1982), p. 5.

denial of full human rights, and the mobilisation of young Algerians to defend a cause which was not their own. Life in colonial Algeria was turned upside down with the conscription of young Algerians for this global conflict. Young Algerians or 'les Français musulmans'[133] as they were called by the French, who faced death in the battlefields of Italy, France and Germany and contributed to the liberation of France, hoped to regain their own freedom in return. In fact, *Le Sommeil du juste* opens with this hope: that politically everything would be changed as a result of the Algerian participation in WWII. Arezki's elder brother, Slimane, seems enthusiastic and believes that after the storm comes the calm. In a dialogue with his brother Arezki and their cousin Toudert, he says: 'cette guerre est la providence des malheureux […] quand la tempête, l'avalanche et l'ouragan auront tout emporté la terre de nouveau sera vierge. Tout sera remis en question. Ce sera comme aux dominos: on fera une distribution nouvelle' (p. 7).

The pivotal participation of colonial troops in the effort to liberate France led General de Gaulle, in his speech opening the Brazzaville conference (1944) to broach the possibility of granting a greater level of autonomy to colonial peoples: 'il appartient à la Nation française, et il n'appartient qu'à elle, de procéder, le moment venu, aux réformes impériales de structures qu'elle décidera dans sa souveraineté'.[134] This speech was a turning point in the history of France and its colonies, and the first sign of the possibility of decolonisation in 'French Africa'. However, these hopes were never fulfilled and ultimately led to bitter disappointment. On 8 May 1945, thousands of Algerians took the streets in the towns of Sétif and Guelma to celebrate the victory of the French over Nazi Germany and started to wave Algerian flags, implicitly

[133] Kamel Kateb, 'Les séparations scolaires dans l'Algérie coloniale', *Insaniyat*, 25-26 (2004), 1-30 (p. 22) <http://insaniyat.revues.org/6242> [Accessed 06-10-2016],

[134] Charles de Gaulle, quoted in Martin Shipway, *The Road to War: France and Vietnam 1944-1947* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2003), p. 29.

supporting the cause of independence. Guy Pervillé recalls this event in his book *La Guerre d'Algérie* as follows:

> Le 8 mai, jour de la capitulation allemande, les AML [Amis du Manifeste et de la Liberté] furent autorisés à défiler sans drapeaux ni slogans politiques. Mais en plusieurs endroits la police intervint pour enlever des drapeaux et des banderoles interdits; à Sétif, à Bône et à Guelma il y eut des morts parmi les manifestants, à Sétif une partie d'entre eux massacra une vingtaine d'Européens dans les rues.[135]

The French authorities reacted to the first wave of casualties among settlers with extreme violence, escalating promptly into a bloody repression which led to the massacre of thousands of demonstrators. This violent tragedy urged many Algerian nationalists to favour the option of requesting full independence.

At a cultural level, the impact of the Second World War on Algerian society is clear. Algerians who had never left their village and whose knowledge of the colonial power, France, was limited to academic and theoretical understandings, were suddenly brought into abrupt, first-hand contact with another continent, other people and other ways of thinking. Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer examines the scale of cultural change in her book *Aux origine de la guerre d'Algérie* as she writes: 'Le système colonial a réussi à créer des Algériens en apparence identique aux Français. Ils en endossent en effet l'habit, les habitudes de vie et les pensées, les références intellectuelles et politiques'.[136] Internally, Algerian society was breaking down as harmony between the old generation and the young one was disrupted. Mammeri's novel depicts a society in which everything has changed: many young people headed for France to earn a living, and others who stayed in the villages experienced depression and low self-esteem. While the old deplored abandoning their original values and traditions, the young rebelled

[135] Guy Pervillé, *La Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007), p. 33.
[136] Annie Rey-Goldzeiguer, *Aux origine de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Edition la Découverte, 2006), p. 78.

against their ancestors' way of life and wished that *le vieux monde* would disappear sooner rather than later.

Colonial School as an Alienating Institution

Francophone Algerian writers such as Mouloud Mammeri often treat the problem of alienation by depicting characters who have attended French schools, revealing the role played by colonial education in the production of this psychological and sociological phenomenon. The French educational system in Algeria during the colonial era was primarily conceived to 'Frenchify' indigenous students. This process subsequently resulted in elevating French culture and systematically demoting Algerian culture. The colonial school was therefore an alien institution in the sense that what it taught often had little to do with the society and culture of the colonised. In colonial schools, indigenous students learnt nothing about themselves or their country of origin: no provision was made for teaching of the mother tongue, culture, history, or religion. From the earliest years of schooling, French was the only language and textbooks said little or nothing about Berber culture or Islamic heritage. The whole program consisted of learning about French history, which Memmi describes as *les Gaulois, les Francs et la Marne.*[137] Consequently, Algerian students acquired more knowledge about the history of their colonial oppressor than about their own. In this context, one may quote Albert Memmi: 'il [the colonised student] sait qui fut Colbert ou Cromwell mais non qui fut Khaznadar; qui fut Jeanne d'Arc mais non la Kahena'.[138] Algerian students had little and superficial knowledge about their history and heroes. Not surprisingly, they had no idea about the history of Numidia, the ancient Berber North African kingdom, nor about *la Kahena*, the Berber queen and military leader who

[137] Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé,* p. 123.
[138] Ibid., p. 123.

resisted the Muslim Conquest of the Maghreb. To give a clear example of the role of the colonial school in marginalising Algerian culture and destroying its past, we may refer to Mohammed Dib's *La Grande Maison* (1952). When the Algerian teacher, Hassan, asks his students about the meaning of *la patrie* all of them answer in chorus 'La France est notre mère Patrie'.[139]

The French colonial curriculum did not only refer extensively to French history but also to Christianity, Western art, literature and philosophy that had nothing to do with the indigenous culture of Algeria. Indigenous students found those subjects strange and unfamiliar and often needed a long stay in the metropole to grasp them fully. As a result, those students were alienated from their language and culture. Memmi highlights the torment of bilingualism suffered by indigenous students and the fact that they were torn between the written nature of French and the orality of Berber. To quote Memmi: 'Ils ne disposeront jamais que de leur langue maternelle; c'est-à-dire une langue ni écrite ni lue, qui ne permet que l'incertaine et pauvre culture orale'.[140] The cultural hybridity of indigenous students was compounded by the fact that writing in Tifinagh, the Berber alphabet, required more training than in the Latin alphabet used by the French, as was highlighted by Memmi.

The influence of the French colonial syllabus, particularly the courses on French and universal (i.e. Western) classic literature is reflected in the works of French-educated Algerian authors such as Mouloud Mammeri, Mohamed Dib and Moulud Feraoun who were inspired by the French authors and adopted classical realism:

> Tous trois [Mammeri, Dib and Feraoun] présentent une trajectoire sociale proche caractérisée par des expériences socialisatrices réalisées au sien de l'école française dont les enseignements valorisaient alors les écrivains « Classiques » de la tradition littéraire française, à savoir, Balzac, Stendhal ou encore Flaubert.[141]

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[139] Mohammed Dib, *La Grande Maison* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1952), pp. 18-19.
[140] Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*, p. 124.
[141] Wenceslas Lizé, Delphine Naudier, and Séverine Sofio, *Les stratèges de la notoriété: Intermédiaires et consécration dans les univers artistiques* (Paris: Editions des Archives Contemporaines, 2014), p. 35.

French-educated Algerian authors such as Mammeri, Dib and Feraoun were greatly influenced by the French language and its literary movements.[142] Their works give a socio-realistic view of the daily activities and experiences of the Algerian population during colonisation. They depict in detail the Algerian society with its cultural and religious aspects and the tensions arising from the encounter between indigenous traditions and the version of modernity introduced by the colonial order. These authors are also referred to as *les évolués*, a label that has specific colonial connotations as it is used to show upward mobility in race. Indeed, it invokes the idea behind the civilising mission that these people are not civilised rather they have been civilised.

Attending the French school was not easy for indigenous students. Mammeri mentioned the inherent culture clash represented by the French high school for young Algerians coming from their villages; the difficulty they faced in learning the language, the long candle-lit nights they spent alone studying, the effort to learn a foreign language and the mockery of their classmates because of their Arabic or Berber accents. In this context, Mohamed Benrabah's chapter 'Writers and Language as a Battlefield' is particularly helpful, where he evokes the difficulties encountered by Algerian educated subjects to become proficient in the French language and declares: 'as an alien language, French proved difficult to acquire'.[143] In his analysis, Benrabah refers to several novels where characters talk about their experience in learning to speak, read and write the colonial language. Regarding *Le Sommeil du juste*, he

[142] The influence of French literature and authors on Mammeri, for instance, can be witnessed at the level of the novel's title. The expression *sommeil du juste* refers to Victor Hugo's masterpiece *Les Misérables*, notably the famous passage in which Jean Valjean steals Bishop Myriel's silverware. Valjean takes advantage of the calm and deep sleep of the latter to commit his theft, and nicknames the slumbering Myriel *le juste*. Mammeri's use of this expression hints clearly at Valjean's exploitation of Myriel's deep slumber in order to steal: the novelist is drawing a deliberate parallel with the French coloniser's exploitation of the Algerian people before the outbreak of the Algerian Liberation War in 1954.

[143] Mohamed Benrabah, 'Writers and Language as a Battlefield: "Authenticity" versus "Hybridity"', in *Language Conflict in Algeria: From Colonialism to Post-Independence* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2013), 126-156 (p. 133).

argues that Mouloud Mammeri uses his protagonist Arezki as 'a mouthpiece for his own struggle with French at the beginning of his secondary education'.[144] However, one should note that Mammeri never admitted that *Le Sommeil du juste* was autobiographical.

The novel includes substantial passages on schooling and education. Arezki describes his experience in the colonial school where he faced indifference the majority of the time, or even hostility from some pupils and teachers. He also evokes his communication problems with his European schoolmates who made him experience linguistic inferiority: 'Rien dans le monde nouveau et jadis désiré où j'entrais n'était fait pour moi' (p. 132), 'je ne savais pas ce que mes camarades disaient: ils ne parlaient pas le français de mes livres. J'avais l'accent trainard d'Ighzer. Ils se moquaient de moi' (p. 131). This cultural and linguistic conflict between Algerian students and their *pieds noirs* colleagues, Benrabah says, is due to the fact that the latter 'are brought up in the myths of language superiority and the Gallic-authenticity syndrome'.[145] That is to say that only teachers of 'pure' French origin can own the language, keep it 'pure' and transmit it to others.[146] This snobbish attitude, that the French are the only legitimate owners of French while the Other is contaminating the language, reveals the cultural snobbism of the French in the colonial era.

Just like Mammeri, the French-educated Yasmina Khadra reveals through his masterpiece *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (2008) the alienating effects of colonial education and the psychological violence that Algerian students had to go through as a result of the cultural uprooting inflicted upon them by the French school. Khadra narrates through his protagonist, Younes, the difficulties and the discrimination he witnessed in colonial schools. Like Arezki who felt hostility when joining the French school, Younes witnessed the humiliation of Algerian

[144] Ibid., p. 133.
[145] Ibid., p. 133.
[146] Ibid., p. 115.

students while receiving his education in an elementary school in Río Salado (now El Malah), near Oran. Younes narrates how an Arab classmate was humiliated and scolded because he forgot to do his homework:

> Nous avions rendu nos devoirs, et Abdelkader était confus [...] L'instituteur l'avait saisi par l'oreille, fait monter sur l'estrade et présenté à la classe. « Pouvez-vous nous dire pourquoi vous n'avez pas de copie à me soumettre à l'instar de vos camarades, monsieur Abdelkader? » L'élève pris en faute gardait la tête basse, écarlate de honte. [...] Pourquoi n'avez-vous pas fait votre devoir? » N'obtenant pas de réponse, l'instituteur s'était adressé au reste de la classe: « Quelqu'un peut-il nous dire pourquoi M. Abdelkader n'a pas fait son devoir? » Sans lever le doigt, Maurice avait répondu dans la foulée: « Parce que les Arabes sont paresseux, monsieur».[147]

This passage reveals how Algerian students could be embarrassed, humiliated and often associated with laziness. Maurice's accusation against an entire people of being lazy is the result of the stereotypical image that the French coloniser constructed for the Algerians. Through his analysis of selected works by Western writers who represent Oriental characters as cowardly, lazy and uncivilized, Edward Said argues that the West tends to define itself in contrast with an essentialized 'Orient'. In other words, the West built its self-image by constructing and generalising an opposite image for the Orient. That is to say, if the orient is lazy, irrational and uncivilized, the European automatically becomes active, rational and civilized:

> On the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are (in no particular order) rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things.[148]

This mythical portrait of the colonised (or soon-to-be colonised in some cases) allows the coloniser to legitimise his privileged situation in the colonial context and to justify the power exercised on the colonised. For Albert Memmi, the colonised will, eventually, accept these negative characteristics: 'ce portrait mythique et dégradant finit, dans une certaine mesure, par

[147] Yasmina Khadra, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (Paris: Éditions Julliard, 2008), p. 47.
[148] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 49.

être accepté et vécu par le colonisé. Il gagne ainsi une certaine réalité et contribue au portrait réel du colonisé'.[149]

Said's conceptualisation of the representation of Africa by the West has been mirrored by the Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe in his book entitled *On the Postcolony* (2001). In this theoretical work, Mbembe explains the management of violence in postcolonial Africa and uncovers the structures that have persisted from colonialism into postcolonial Africa. Analysing the violence that created and sustained colonialism, Mbembe argues that to convert violence to authority, the coloniser had to create systems that justify colonialism:

> Its function was […] to provide self-interpreting language and models for colonial order, to give this order meaning, to justify its necessity and universalizing mission – in short to help produce an imaginary capacity converting the founding violence into authorizing authority.[150]

Thus, to legitimise colonial violence, the coloniser needed to craft an image of the colonised, a narrative of justification in which the colonised subject is 'a simple, unambitious creature who liked to be left alone'.[151] This image portrays Africa as 'a vast dark cave', 'a bottomless abyss', a place of 'absolute otherness', 'threatened with madness' where confusion and chaos dominate.[152] It also others its inhabitants, objectifies them, denies their existence as fully human and relegates them 'to the status of animality'.[153] In the light of these narratives, the colonised subject can only either be destroyed or 'domesticated' – that is brought to a place where they can enjoy 'a fully human life'.[154] Like Said and Memmi, Mbembe believes that while othering the African, the Western coloniser is, in fact, defining himself: 'Africa still constitutes one of

[149] Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*, p. 107.
[150] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (California: University of California Press, 2001), p. 25.
[151] Ibid., p. 33.
[152] Ibid., p. 2-3.
[153] Ibid., p. 236.
[154] Ibid., p. 2.

the metaphors through which the West represents the origin of its own norms, develops a self-image, and integrates this image into the set of signifiers asserting what it supposes to be its identity'.[155]

Both Arezki and Younes are victims of what Benjamin Jack Sparks called 'violence of the classroom' in his thesis entitled *The Plagues of Colonialism: Representations of Suffering in the Colonial and Postcolonial Francophone Algerian Novel from 1950-1966*. In his analysis of the theme of violence in colonial Algerian literature (particularly in Mohammed Dib's *La Grande Maison*, Mouloud Feraoun's *Fils du pauvre* and Mouloud Mammeri *Le Sommeil du juste*), Sparks argues that the 'violence of the classroom extends beyond physical suffering as it imposes restrictions upon the interior, the mind'.[156] Consequently, this violence leads to the suffering of the indigenous students as 'it alienates them from their cultural heritage, clouding their minds with European culture and values'.[157] Indeed, this education affects both Arezki and Younes' thoughts and actions and 'brings them closer to the mindset of the colonizer while still keeping them at a distance'.[158]

Admiration of the Other and Hatred of the Self

In *Le Sommeil du juste,* the extent of Western influence is clear. *L'Ecole Normale de Bouzaréah,* created in 1865 for the training of *pieds-noirs* and a select group of Arab teachers, moulds Arezki into a champion of humanism who is ready to fight for 'civilisation'. Having received a French education, the protagonist admires the Western ways of thinking and violently rejects the ideological system of his ancestors founded on traditions and paternal

[155] Ibid., p. 2.
[156] Sparks, *The Plagues of Colonialism*, p. 52.
[157] Ibid., p. 56.
[158] Ibid., p. 66.

domination. This leads him to a feeling of revolt and to a process of profound alienation. Once in the French colonial school, Arezki starts to develop profound feelings of admiration for the French coloniser, particularly for his educators. In fact, the third section of the novel, entitled 'l'ange', reveals that Arezki is educated to respect and admire the French coloniser, his civilisation and his culture. He admires his master and eagerly desires to resemble him and to assimilate to his culture 'quelle que soit désormais la destinée qui m'attende, je vous devrai, mon cher maître, d'être né à la vie' (p. 119).

In the colonial context, it is common for the oppressed to admire his oppressor and seek to become like him. This psychological phenomenon can be referred to as a colonial version of the Stockholm syndrome where the hostage develops ambivalent feelings and even sympathy for his or her captor. *Le portrait mythique du colonisé* created by the coloniser through the process of mystification, is believed and accepted by the colonised who demonstrates admiration for his coloniser through the desire to assimilate. This admiration for the oppressor which often comes hand in hand with the colonised subject's self-hatred is a confirmation of the inferiority of the colonised and the coloniser's superiority at the same time. The paradoxical attitude of the colonised towards the coloniser as highlighted by Albert Memmi is created by the colonial condition: 'La relation coloniale [...] enchaînait le Colonisateur et le Colonisé dans une espèce de dépendance implacable, façonnait leurs traits respectifs et dictait leurs conduites'.[159]

Arezki expresses in rather pedantic French – conveyed through the cumbersome tense of the past historic – his respect towards his schoolmaster, whom he believes has saved him from his people's ignorance and brought light to his life: 'Vous brisâtes les portes de ma prison et je naquis au monde' (p. 120). Convinced by the principles of '*la mission civilisatrice*', he

[159] Ibid., p. 12.

sees colonial education as a benefit, bringing so-called inferior people out of 'savagery' to progress. Before joining the French army, Arezki writes a letter to M. Poiré, his philosophy and French professor, and declares:

> Car avant vous je n'existais pas. Vous savez que je suis né dans un petit village d'une montagne perdue, où les élans de nos esprits sont à la mesure de nos horizons qui rencontrent tout de suite le ciel. […] Et puis vous êtes venu, mon cher maître, et je vous ai connu, au monde qui sans vous se fût écoulé à côté de moi, sans ce moi dont vous nous avez souvent répété qu'il fallait l'aimer comme la plus irremplaçable des choses (p. 119).

Arezki owes what he considers to be his enlightened existence to his teacher, and depicts his indigenous culture as a savage one. Before meeting M. Poiré, life for Arezki was a prison, where the indigenous population held on to an archaic system of values. However, thanks to colonial education, new doors are now opened for him. This can be seen in the passage where Arezki expresses his joy to leave Ighzer and his excitement to join the colonial school: 'Quand j'ai quitté pour la première fois Ighzer pour le vaste monde (pour l'école primaire supérieure de Tizi Ouzou), je me souviens, la joie riait dans l'air clair et froid d'octobre' (p. 131). Arezki's statement when leaving his *village natal* reveals the first phase of cultural shock that students often experience when entering a new culture or environment.

The phrase 'cultural shock' was first used by the Canadian anthropologist Kalervo Oberg in the 1950s in his article 'Cultural Shock' to describe the confusing experience that people face when entering different cultures.[160] Oberg suggested that four stages took place during cultural shock: honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adjustment. The first stage refers to the first period of contact with the host country where the sojourner is fascinated and excited by the new culture. This phase, which does not last for a long time, is often followed by a crisis phase where the traveller feels hostility and stress. However, in the third phase, the tourist or

[160] Kalervo Oberg, 'Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments', *Practical Anthropology*, 7 (1960), 177-182 (177).

the student tries to assimilate into the new culture and to learn the appropriate ways to interact and communicate. In the final stage, the individual overcomes the shock by adapting to the new culture, accepting the customs of the host culture and embracing its differences.[161] According to the above-mentioned passage, Arezki is undergoing the first phase of cultural shock, 'the honeymoon stage', otherwise known as 'the euphoria stage'. He feels excited to enter the new world and he has exaggerated feelings of joy. He seems to have positive expectations about the French culture but, unfortunately, he has not taken into account that this euphoria is temporary and that he may face hostility and racism in what he calls *le vaste monde*.

Arezki's love for and loyalty to the coloniser is such that he leaps at the chance of joining the Algerians mobilized to fight against Nazi Germany in the Second World War. Aware that he is fighting for a cause which is not his, he promises his teacher that he will do his best: 'Je vous promets, mon cher maître, que je m'y battrai sans faiblir pour le triomphe d'une cause que je sais être, malgré vous, la vôtre' (p. 121). Arezki knows that this war is not his people's, yet he is eager to participate in it because he wants to defend the ideals taught by his master and is convinced that this war is holy: 'j'entends encore, mon cher maître, la légion mesurée mais implacable de vos arguments acculer la guerre à la bêtise et à la vanité. Mais vous me laissez croire que celle-ci est sainte, parce qu'elle vise à détruire les forces mauvaises' (p. 120).[162] The expression 'mon cher maître', used by Arezki throughout the letter, reinforces the admiration of the colonised student for his professor and for Western knowledge and civilisation. It is not only a mark of respect for teachers who enjoyed professional prestige and uncontested authority

[161] Michael Winkelman, 'Cultural Shock and Adaptation', *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 73 (1994), 121-127 (pp. 121-122).

[162] Just like Arezki, Mammeri specified in an interview with Ahmed Ben Alam (July 1988) that he thought he was defending *une cause juste*: 'la cause pour laquelle j'étais censé me battre…D'un côté la liberté, la démocratie, de l'autre l'oppression, le totalitarisme…un système abject, le nazisme'. See: Amhis-Ouksel, *La voie des ancêtres*, p. 111.

but it also strengthens the relation of power between coloniser and colonised as it places Arezki in the role of submission and dependency, echoing the wider colonial project where the white European man was designated as 'le Maître' or the Master.

A possible reason behind this love of colonial education and admiration of Western culture is the desire to escape colonial circumstances and enjoy a better life. In colonial Algeria, education was regarded as the most important asset, not only because it allowed *évolués* to access better jobs and escape life in the villages, but also because it determined one's position in society. Under colonial circumstances, young Algerians had no other choice but to receive colonial education and they could expect upward mobility through education. Muslim parents who were for a long time against their children's participation in the French educational system, decided later to send their children to French schools because they became convinced that 'Arabic was the language of religion, while French that of bread: 'Apprends le Coran pour l'au-delà et le Français pour ici-bas'.[163]

Indeed, education was a decisive factor for upward mobility and the level of education in French schools was a critical criterion used in determining membership in the new social classes formed in colonial Algeria between 1900 and 1962. For instance, according to Peter R. Knauss, in his study of class formation in Algeria, 'an individual is considered to be a member of the new middle class if he or she has passed the *baccalauréat*' and 'if an individual earned the *brevet d'enseignement général,* the diploma awarded after ten years of schooling […] he or she is considered as a member of the new petty bourgeoisie'.[164] Of course, the chances for such mobility were rare under colonialism, as access to education remained extremely limited, available only to a small category of the indigenous population. Only children who lived in

[163] Aida A. Bamieh, quoted in Zahia Smail Salhi, *Politics, Poetics and the Algerian Novel* (Lewiston; Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), p. 8.
[164] Peter R. Knauss, *The Persistence of Patriarchy: Class, Gender, and Ideology in Twentieth Century Algeria* (London: Praeger, 1987), p. 33.

urban areas could have access to colonial schools along with the *colon* children. Children, who lived in villages such as Ighzer, did not have the opportunity to study in French schools simply because there was none nearby. The main reason behind limiting access to education for indigenous students, according to Knauss, was the fear of 'being swamped by an educated class of Algerians'.[165] However, one should note that there is a discrepancy between Knauss' argument and the official discourse of assimilation. Since assimilation was one of France's priorities, it seems more likely that it was a lack of means available. In a context where the schooling of all children in metropolitan France was still not entirely achieved, it could simply be the chronic underfunding of the colony which made it impossible to provide education for all Algerians.

In Arezki's case, colonial education proves very useful not only because it has helped him escape life in the village but also because it has given him the chance to change his own standing within his local society. Before attending colonial school, Arezki is regarded by his family and village as useless and incapable of doing anything. Interestingly, this difference is constructed in specifically gendered terms. He is described as having 'des traits de petite fille, un grand corps qui grandissait si vite mais si fluet' (p. 14). He is different 'par ses yeux doux, sa voix morte, sa peau rosée…sa figure de petite fille' (p. 15) as his father describes him. As a result of his uselessness and inability to contribute to his society which is based mainly on manual labour, his father decides to send him to live with an aunt in Tasga where he can receive a French education: 'pour se débarrasser de cette petite fille qui ne servait à rien et qui, quand on lui confiait quatre ou cinq brebis à faire paître, revenait les yeux rouges d'avoir pleuré: c'était trop pénible' (p. 14). More generally, he is an object of ridicule to his friends and relatives: 'Le

[165] Ibid., p. 48.

vent souffle aujourd'hui disait le grand frère Mohand, accrochez Arezki, il risque de s'envoler' (p. 14), 'il était peu encombrant, on le déplaçait comme un meuble' (p. 14).

During his childhood and before joining the French school, Arezki seems already estranged from the rest of his society because of his physical appearance and his sensitivity. Comparing him to a girl reveals the position of women in the patriarchal Kabyle society, where '[s]ocial life […] was characterised typically by rigid sexual segregation and stratification',[166] and where women were confined to reproduction, nature, and their sensibilities. Women were subjugated by dominant males and expected to be totally obedient and submissive, and serve the male members of the family who were considered superiors. At an early age, mothers began training their daughters to help around the house (through household chores such as cooking and cleaning, pottery, weaving and embroidery), so that they learnt their duties quickly and were prepared to be wives and mothers. Moreover, Kabyle women could not enjoy Quranic rights. They were denied the right to inherit anything and the dowry paid by the husband was her father's property. Sometimes, they were married without being consulted, did not have the right to initiate divorce and were forbidden to marry again by their ex-husbands. The conditions of Kabyle women are similar to those of Indian women. Both are doubly oppressed: the former by French coloniser and patriarchal Berber society, while the latter by the British coloniser and the male-dominated Indian society. Spivak has made the double oppression of colonised women her main concern in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* as she declares: 'if, in the colonial context production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as a female is even more deeply in shadow.[167]

[166] Peter R. Knauss, *The Persistence of Patriarchy: Class, Gender, and Ideology in Twentieth-Century Algeria* (London: Praeger, 1987), p. 4.
[167] Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', p. 287.

However, once Arezki attends colonial school, he develops an understanding of the French language which proves useful in later years when he can read and write letters for the villagers of Ighzer. Arezki is no longer the 'inutile extravagant', he becomes productive and contributes to society through '[un] métier utile' (p. 14) as described by the narrator. Thus, Arezki finds a form of refuge in colonial education and an escape from the continual mockeries of his people. Accordingly, he finds it in his heart to praise M. Poiré, thanks to whom Arezki's purpose in life is found and horizons are widened. In her book *La Voie des ancêtres: Lecture de Sommeil du Juste de Mouloud Mammeri*, Djoher Amhis-Ouksel highlights the process of cultural capital acquisition that Arezki benefits from as a result of going to the colonial school: 'Ce qui le distingue, ce qui fait 'sa force' c'est la possession d'un savoir acquis à l'école française'.[168] Arezki's 'cultural capital', as coined by Bourdieu in 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction', provides him advantages in achieving a higher social status and promotes his social mobility within his community.[169] His academic achievements (knowledge and intellectual skills) within the educational system of France change his status from a 'useless' to a 'useful' person in Kabyle society.

Behind the mask of his character, Arezki, the novel's author Mouloud Mammeri alternately praises and criticizes the colonial educational system and his schoolmasters. Just like Arezki, Mammeri evolved culturally through colonial education and admired Western culture in his youth. Like his protagonist, Mammeri was born in the small Kabyle village of Taourirt Mimoune, in Tizi-Ouzou Province, on 28 December 1917. He attended primary school in his local village and continued his studies at the *Lycée Bugeaud* (now Emir Abdelkader High School in Bab-el-Oued, Algiers). He attended the *Ecole Normale Supérieure de Bouzaréah*

[168] Amhis-Ouksel, *La voie des ancêtres*, p. 102.

[169] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction', in *Knowledge, education and cultural change: papers in the sociology of education,* ed., by Richard Brown (London: Tavistock Publications, 1973). 71–112 (p. 71).

where he was greatly influenced by French values and humanism. He subsequently became one of the few *indigènes* to attend the prestigious *Lycée Louis-le-Grand* in Paris. In an interview with Tahar Djaout, an Algerian journalist, poet and writer, Mammeri expressed his gratitude to his French tutors who awakened his love for learning: 'Après tant d'années écoulées depuis ce lointain passé, je sais encore gré à mes maîtres […]; j'en ai eu d'éminents'.[170] He also acknowledged the benefits of classical education he received. Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein expand on this and say: 'while studying Greek and Latin in school he simultaneously immersed himself at home in traditional Kabyle poetry, in which his father and uncle were both considered among the last specialists (*imusnawen*)'.[171] However, this praise for French tutors, which seems unequivocal in *Le Sommeil du juste*, does not amount to an unreserved endorsement of colonial education. As will be argued in this chapter, through his protagonist, Mammeri accuses French tutors of deceiving Algerian students and blames French schools for alienating the Algerian intellectuals from the rest of their society.

Arezki's admiration for the coloniser and his culture is followed by hatred for his society. The more he assimilates to the French culture, the more distanced he becomes from his people and culture. After spending a long time in Tasga, Arezki does not want to go back to Ighzer anymore because he has had enough of the old-fashioned lifestyle there: 'j'en avais assez d'étouffer à Ighzer, de mourir à petit feu, un peu plus chaque jour' (p. 116). Arezki describes his hometown, Ighzer, as a remote village whose people still hold to their old traditions and live a very primitive life. After receiving French education and culture, the educated Arezki is unable to understand how his people can hold to such outmoded values and customs. Fanny Colonna elaborates upon this as she declares:

[170] Tahar Djaout, *Mouloud Mammeri: Entretien avec Tahar Djaout* (Algiers: Laphomic, 1987). p. 50.
[171] Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein, ed., *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), p. 36.

> Celui qui est trop loin de l'Occident est trop près de sa culture d'origine, il est 'resté arabe' (ou kabyle). Mais celui qui est trop près de l'Occident et trop loin de sa culture d'origine, il est désislamisé, selon le mot de William Margais, déraciné selon le lexique des délégués-colons: il se prend pour un Français.[172]

The colonised intellectual or the *évolué's* admiration for the coloniser, as Memmi argues, is very often followed by disdain for his own society, and even by a feeling of self-hatred. Once the colonised subject starts to assimilate to the western culture, he will distance himself automatically from his original traditional culture.

Addressing his father, Arezki says: 'j'ai lu les livres, un monceau, et, si dans la masse des livres que j'ai lus, ni Ighzer ni Hand ni votre misère ne sont cités, ce n'est pas malédiction, c'est justice: vous n'en valiez pas la peine' (p. 135). Arezki, through comparing the French colonial school to his *village natal*, presents his familial, local world in an unfavourable light. In fact, this passage about literary representation reveals a kind of irony and *mise en abyme*. Arezki says that neither Ighzer nor its people are mentioned in the books he read, and that they are not even worth writing about. Yet, this comment is uttered in a novel written by Mammeri which aims to grant such people representation, and to shed light on their lifestyle, values and traditions.

Cultural Conflict between the Older Generation and *les Assimilés*

As a result of assimilation, Arezki abandons his local culture and becomes a stranger within his society, as unity between himself and his people is broken. This can be seen in the first part of the novel where Arezki denies the existence of God in the village square, in the presence of the old men and villagers. At this juncture, a more detailed understanding of knowledge of Berber culture is invaluable, for this situation, while described only in French, is

[172] Fanny Colonna, 'Verdict scolaire et position de classe dans l'Algérie coloniale', *Revue française de sociologie*, 14. 2 (1973), 180-201 (p. 189) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3320188 > [Accessed 11-05-2017].

clearly portraying a situation which would be referred to in Berber as a *djemâa*. This tribal council, composed of male heads of clan lineage only, has considerable control over the tribe. Its main duty consists of controlling the lands of the tribe and allotting the harvest according to the needs of each family. The *djemâa* also decides about problems and disputes between clans, and exiles individuals who violate the code of the tribe, primarily matters of honour. It is therefore all the more shocking to a reader familiar with this traditional *djemâa* structure when Arezki declares: 'j'ai lu dans les livres que Dieu n'existe pas' (p. 12) and 'je me moque du diable et de Dieu' (p. 9). When Arezki's father hears from the villagers that his son apostatised openly, he cannot believe his ears, and prefers to hear from Arezki himself. In an attempt to convince his father that God does not exist, Arezki enters into a heated debate using logical arguments he learnt from his teacher of philosophy:

> - J'ai dit que Dieu n'existait pas.
> - Ce sont peut-être tes livres que le disent. Explique-moi ça.
> - Eh bien! Dieu même ne peut rien contre la logique.
> - Je suis ton père. Tu pourrais m'expliquer ce que veut ta logique.
> - Non pas la mienne, celle de tout le monde… de tout le monde sauf des gens de Ighzer.
> - Et qu'est-ce qu'elle dit, la logique de tout le monde?
> - Eh bien! la logique de tout le monde enferme dieu dans un dilemme, couic, attrapé comme dans une souricière … (p. 9 - 10)

Transcribed as a long dialogue which is almost a theatrical exchange, this discussion between the conservative father and the confrontational, provocative son has become a drama, an extremely violent conflict. The father is unable to accept his son's new ideas about metaphysical problems, the truth and God: 'Le diable parle par ta bouche. Maudis Satan pour qu'il parle de toi' (p. 9). Furious at his son's declarations, Arezki's father takes a rifle and shoots at his son (an act which he regrets later), but fortunately misses him and leaves him unscathed. As a result, Arezki who is experiencing cultural estrangement feels that his father and society are unable to understand him, and he escapes to Tasga, the small village where he once received

his primary education in a French school. Ultimately, Arezki is considered a troublemaker who disturbs the tranquillity of villagers by sowing the seeds of doubt within their minds.

This incident shows the impact of the values and worldview imparted by French schoolmasters on the Algerian students. In fact, before attending French school, Arezki was not that eloquent and daring. He was calm and obedient: 'Si quelqu'un avait besoin de la place où Arezki s'était par hasard assis il n'avait qu'à le toucher à l'épaule. Il était poli, disait toujours oui à tout' (p. 14). The impact of French teachers is also seen at the level of Arezki's arguments. Indeed, all his arguments to convince his father that God does not exist are not his but rather his tutors. The idea of *dilemme de la souricière*, for instance, was actually an idea of M. Destouche, the anarchist teacher in Taszga. Arezki would never have thought about this idea that, God is not almighty, that God is trapped in a mousetrap because he created evil and made it 'nécessaire à l'ordre du monde' (p. 11), if he had not heard it from M. Destouche or read it in the French philosophy books. In Arezki's case, colonial education proves to be an emancipatory tool. Arezki has clearly gained autonomy through his experience at the French school. Getting a Western Education has allowed Arezki to challenge his subalternity in his own local village. In fact, it is in school that he developed courage and dared, thereby, to debate his father on taboo topics.

Arezki's father has noticed the influence of the French education on his son and blames the tutor for his son's religious renunciation: 'Il se rendait pourtant compte que le départ de son fils ne résolvait rien. C'est cet instituteur de Tasga qui lui tournait la tête' (p. 17). In his view, it is the tutor of Tasga who is trying to lead his son astray. Moreover, the father does not seem to believe in the educational mission of the French school. When Arezki buys from Tasga a pair of sneakers to wear in Ighzer, on the pretext that pebbles hurt his feet, Arezki's father becomes

concerned and declares: ‘on ne lui apprenait déjà pas à être un homme à l’école; si on ne lui apprenait pas à être sage non plus, à quoi lui servait d’y aller? (p. 16).

Throughout the novel, Arezki is described as different from the others. When he comes to Ighzer for holidays, he physically sets himself apart from his peers: he prefers wearing Western pumps or sneakers rather than the traditional ‘sandales de peau de bœuf’ (p. 16) and lets his hair grow long, a cultural taboo in rural Algeria. The father’s response, who thinks that ‘comme s’il [son fils] n’avait pas assez l’air d’une fille à l’ordinaire’ (p. 15) is to intervene with physical violence ‘[en lui envoyant] une volée de coups de bâton’ (p. 16). The father also notices that his son has changed and became a stranger within his society: ‘tu n’as pas d’amis pour te réjouir avec eux, pas d’ennemis à haïr, tu es mort aux choses et les choses mortes à toi’ (p. 134). Arezki became an *Aroumi,* an interesting dialectal alteration that took shape in the colonial context, derived from ‘Roman’ which means a foreigner or an indigenous son who has assumed to foreign culture and ways of life, as declared by Sliman in a conversation with his friend Lounes: ‘Mon frère qu’il a nier Dieu sur la place, c’est un Aromi’ (p. 74). Lounes rejects the term *Aromi* and prefers *égaré* instead because he is convinced that one day *les égarés,* and Arezki among them, will return to their villages and people with conviction.

Indeed, Arezki himself admits that he gains the courage to rebel thanks to his tutors. He declares that it is his ‘neuve science’ (p. 135) which enables him to face his peoples’ mockeries and to challenge his father’s authority:

> Tous se moquaient de ma peau de petite fille, de ma voix frêle […] il me devint impossible de le cacher plus longtemps et tant qu’à faire, le jour où Sliman sortit une fois de plus son argument des dominos, je commençais par Dieu…C’est le plus gros morceau! (p. 135-136).

Arezki, who seems persuaded by his tutor’s ideas, not only rebels against the religious beliefs of his people but also mocks the most sacred traditions and values of his ancestors. He opposes his father when he plans to murder his cousin Toudert because of an old vendetta going back

three centuries, and declares that 'l'honneur est une plaisanterie' (p. 8). When having a chat with his friend Meddour before being mobilised to fight for the French in the Second World War, Arezki ridicules the idea of killing Touder because of an old *dette de sang* and declares:

> En plein XX^{e} siècle! Un scandale, pis…un crime! Heureusement que le petit frangin s'est présenté sur ma route avec son argument des dominos. Il m'a délivré. Sans lui, tu te rends compte? À peine sorti de l'Ecole, j'entrai dans la grande vie. Le père voulait tuer le cousin Toudert (il le veut toujours, j'en suis sûr), et à sa suite et malgré moi j'étais jeté pour toujours dans le drame, un drame stupide, vain, perdu pour tout le monde et qui n'a même pas l'avantage d'être exaltant (p. 116).

Arezki believes that his father's shots, which nearly killed him are providential because they have freed him from paternal domination and traditions. Without this *coup de fusil*, he would still be living a suffocating life in Ighzer. He would also find himself involved in the 'stupid' blood feud, maybe planning for the murder of his father's cousin for the sake of vengeance, or what Amhis-Ouksel referred to as 'œil pour œil' and 'dent pour dent' – the law of talion.[173]

When his father obliges him to marry his brother's widow, following local tradition, Arezki, who is greatly influenced by French culture, rejects the idea: 'Le plan du père était simple: quand Mohand mourrait (Dieu seul est éternel), laissant sa femme et ses trois petits enfants, Arezki, comme c'est la coutume, épouserait Mekioussa, la veuve du frère ainé' (p. 19). In the same conversation with Meddour, Arezki mocks the idea of marrying his brother's widow and says: 'pour comble de joie je devais attendre la mort du frère ainé…à peine quelques mois, quelques semaines peut-être… et parce que mon frère laisse des enfants jeunes, épouser sa veuve… Autant se suicider tout de suite' (p. 116). Arezki who spent many years in the French school rejects arranged marriage and believes he should marry for love. This idea is shown implicitly later in the novel when Arezki, as a soldier in France, meets a young Christian lady called Elfriede, and grows close to her.

[173] Amhis-Ouksel, *La voie des ancêtres*, p. 105.

Arezki and Elfriede appear to have a romantic relationship. Each time he leaves France for a campaign, she comes to see him before leaving 'ils parleraient […] il ne se promettraient rien […] il serait à la portière […] le train démarrerait […] elle lui dirait […] au revoir ou *bye* […] elle n'agiterait pas son mouchoir, elle regarderait le train partir' (p. 195). When he was confined to hospital bed, after the last campaign, she used to pay him visits 's'ingéniant chaque fois à m'apporter « des petites choses » comme elle dit, des friandises, des journaux, des livres (elle a racheté, réjouissez-vous dans votre cœur, presque tous ceux que j'ai brûlés) des fruits' (p. 172-173). One day, after the war and before he decides to return to Algeria for good, she invites him to celebrate *l'anniversaire de la libération de Paris* where crowds gather along the Champs-Elysées to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Despite the passionate love they have for each other, Arezki and Elfriede see their relationship beset with various obstacles and eventually, they end their entanglement. Both know that Arezki will always be considered a stranger in France, and that formally recognising their relationship through marriage would be impossible because 'aucun mariage ne peut être envisagé avec « l'autre », avec sa différence'.[174] This racial barrier becomes clearer in the third part of the novel, 'l'ange', when Arezki is in Gare de Lyon heading to Algeria. Arezki is waiting for Elfriede, who never shows up, to bid her goodbye but he is surprised by her mother and aunt. The latter come to say goodbye and seem very happy that Arezki is departing. Addressing Arezki, Elfriede's mother says: 'Quand vous serez là-bas [en Algérie], vous l'oublierez vite. Pour tous les deux, il vaut mieux ainsi. Vous comprenez, Elfriede, il faut bien qu'elle se marie un jour…elle a l'âge' (p. 198).

[174] Ibid,. p. 56.

Just like Elfriede's mother, Arezki's father seems to feel powerful enough to decide on the future of his children. Not only does he oblige Arezki to marry Mohand's widow, but he also stands in the way of Sliman when he wants to marry Yakout, the girl he loves 'depuis le jour lointain où il l'avait entendue chanter dans les champs' (p. 110). He rather wants him to marry the other Yakout, '[la fille du] bon cousin' Toudert qui 'a rendu l'honneur à notre [leur] famille' (p. 82), a girl whom he has no feelings for. The main concern of the father is to protect the family and improve its material condition. Indeed, Arezki's father, who is never given a name, stands for traditional society and the cohesion of the family as he believes that 'la coutume de nos ancêtres a l'intransigeance sereine de la vérité' (p. 32).

Arezki's conservative father seems a reflection of Mammeri's father. In an interview, the novelist described his father as the embodiment of traditions in the highly coded Kabyle society:

> My father who was the *amin* (chief) of the village could recite verses for hours. He had only studied briefly. Yet when the villagers wondered how to act in one or other circumstances they went to my father, for my father knew - recalled very well- everything the ancestors had done […] my father was wisdom itself. My father was tradition embodied.[175]

Both Arezki's and Mammeri's fathers are described as the repository of collective memory and the protectors of the code of honour.[176] However, unlike Mammeri who acknowledges Berber tradition and values, Arezki mocks his people's lifestyle and declares: 'votre sagesse fossile, votre monde, votre pauvre petit monde, si vous saviez comme je m'en moque, Oh, là là, si vous saviez!' (p. 135).

[175] Mildred Mortimer, 'Profile: Mouloud Mammeri', *Africa Report*, 16.6 (Jun 1, 1971) ProQuest, 26-28 (p. 26).
[176] Amadou Hampâté-Ba, a Malian historian and an influential figure in twentieth-century African literature and cultural heritage, believes that traditionalist elders are the protectors of oral history and culture. In his speech at UNESCO (1960), he compares elders to a library: 'en Afrique, un vieillard qui meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui brûle'.

Linguistic Amnesia: The Clash between Berber and French

Arezki's alienation is also seen at the linguistic level. He forgets the language of his parents and acquires the language of the coloniser which he masters. When asked to translate his father's letter from Berber to French, Arezki faces some difficulties to move from one language to another: 'Celui qui a écrit cette lettre, dit l'écrivain public, ne sait pas très bien le français. Il emploie les mots à tort et à travers' (p. 77). Arezki is unable to understand his father's Berber because when he acquired the French language, he acquired French culture as well. In this context, we may quote Frantz Fanon: 'un homme qui possède le langage possède par contre coup le monde exprimé et impliqué par ce langage'.[177] Thus, forcing the oppressor's language on the oppressed along with banning the indigenous language brings about a linguistic amnesia among the indigenous population. That is to say that, the French that Arezki acquired in the French school, *le français du maître*, is insufficient to translate the Berber language of the father; for it is difficult to pass from one cultural code to another, or convey a message from the original language to the target language without losing some of the cultural meaning of the discourse.

The declaration of *l'écrivain public* may also imply that Arezki's French is so sophisticated, that the letter-writer is unable to understand it, a fact that confirms Arezki's adoption and mastery of the coloniser's language. This sophistication of language is seen at the level of the letters he wrote for his tutor. Indeed, the epistolary sections of the novel reveal Arezki's proficiency in the French language through his use of rich vocabulary, precise syntax, and complex style. In his letter to M. Poiré, for instance, Arezki uses a particular diction in order to give the letter a respectful tone and to convey his admiration for his tutor: 'Puisque voici venu le jour où je dois vous quitter pour ne peut-être jamais plus vous revoir, je pense

[177] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, p. 14.

qu'il ne vous sera pas désagréable de m'entendre vous dire ce que vous savez déjà…' (p. 119). Addressing M. Poiré, Arezki makes use of *un registre soutenu* i.e., a formal register that includes the use of *vouvoiement*, polite forms of address, and complicated and refined words, to reinforce his respectful and praising statements.

Unlike Arezki who adopts the French language as his own and forgets his mother tongue, his father is still holding proudly to the Kabyle language. After the incident of *le coup de fusil*, the father decides to go the commissaire or *komisar* as he is called in Berber (the colonial administrator who essentially acts as the mayor or leader of the village) in order to complain about Arezki's primary school teacher 'qui lui tournait la tête' (p. 17), and to request a pension for Mohand who contracted tuberculosis in a French factory. The father speaks neither Arabic nor French and therefore requires a translator to communicate with the *Komisar*. Once in the colonial administrator's office, the translator tells the father that 'L'administrateur te demande si tu sais parler français?' to which he replies 'Non plus, dit le père. Je suis d'Ighzer: il n'y a pas d'école chez nous' (p. 21). *Le komisar* gets angry and asks, through the translator, if the father 'ne pourrai[t] pas parler français comme tout le monde' (p. 22). The father bravely declares that 'le Kabyle est la langue de mes pères' (p. 22). This scene reveals the father's resistance and refusal of assimilation through education and language. Through this response, he also refuses to acknowledge the supposed idea that everyone in colonial Algeria can or should speak French. Indeed, his response shows the pride of the Algerians in their local language and denies the superiority of French over the indigenous culture and language.

Other young Algerians, like Lounas, Sliman's nationalist friend, learnt French only to get by in the colonial society. Lounas declares that he is aware that French is the coloniser's language and not his own, but acquiring the basics can prove useful to demand your rights and to defend yourself: 'Quand tu sais demander du pain et dire merde au patron, disait Lounas, tu

connais toute la langue, le reste c'est du remplissage' (p. 64). In other words, a basic understanding of the coloniser's language proves useful to survive, especially as French was imposed upon the Algerians through different avenues: in schools, administrations and the judicial system. Thus, French helped those who mastered it or, at least those who learnt the basics such as Lounas, and hindered those who did not such as the father.

Identity Crisis and Awakening

Arezki thinks that his arrival and integration in French society will be easy. Having attended French school, he believes in the great French rhetoric of 'les droits de l'homme', 'la liberté' and 'l'égalité'. In the name of these values, he revolts against the family oppression and Muslim society but to his bitter disappointment, he finds that the West rejects him in several different ways. European culture is not as ideal as it seems, but rather a source of great disillusionment to him. Once in Paris, Arezki goes through a variety of racial experiences and starts to lose the enthusiasm he had before joining the army. He faces the reality of colonial 'justice' and comes to the conclusion that the Western values taught by M. Poiré were nothing but lies: 'Ce que j'ai avalé de siècles, d'auteurs, de mots, de raisonnements, mieux que quiconque vous me l'avez appris. Mon orgueil rentré croissait avec une science que je croyais infaillible, sans borne' (p. 91). Despite the fact that they are fighting for a cause that is not their own, and despite the sacrifices they make on the battlefields, in the French army, Arezki and the other Algerians are maltreated and considered as inferior.

While in the French army Arezki writes a letter to M. Poiré where he narrates all the humiliation he faced in the French army; the letter stands in stark contrast to the jubilant, borderline sycophantic letter which he had previously sent to his teacher before going to war. He tells M. Poiré how Algerians were led to believe that 'à grade égal, le gradé indigène devait

obéissance au gradé européen' (p. 128), and how unfair and discriminatory *le règlement français* was. Arezki tells M. Poiré about the incident of 'la corvée de la soupe' (p. 139) when Arezki arrived early to the kitchen so that he would not be kept waiting for a long time. However, once there, Arezki had to wait for more than 'une demi-heure' (p. 124) until all the Europeans were served. Arezki, who always believed in equality, rebelled and told the European soldier who was served before him: 'Pardon, […] je suis arrivé avant toi camarade' (p. 125). At this, the soldier who obviously believed in the superiority of his race reacted in an aggressive way and said: 'Je ne peux pas te cracher sur la figure, dit-il, tu salirais ma salive' (p. 126). Arezki, who became convinced that 'c'est le règlement [qui dit que les] Européens d'abord!' (p. 125), realised that such incidents were likely to occur every day and decided, therefore, '[de] ne pas réagir, ne pas voir, ne pas entendre' (p. 127). This incident seems to be the most telling illustration of racism in the novel, as it demonstrates how the indigenous populations are forced to believe in the superiority of the European race and the inferiority of the indigenous people at the same time. Arezki's experience in the French army is similar to that of Idir, Mokrane's friend in *La Colline oubliée*. Like Arezki, Idir was enthusiastic about joining the French army. However, once there, he is disappointed by the military milieu. His dream to become a pilot is never realised because as *un soldat indigène*, his place is among the ground staff and not on board: 'L'armée avait complètement déçu mon camarade [….] Il avait tout fait pour être pilote aviateur, et on n'avait voulu de lui que comme rampant'.[178] Eventually, Idir feels so dissatisfied by the army that he looks forward to his release.

European culture is not as ideal as it once seemed. Although Arezki received a French education, had French certificates and served with the French against the Germans in the

[178] Mouloud Mammeri, *La Colline oubliée* (Paris: Plon, 1952), p. 55.

Second World War, he is always seen as an *Imann*. Arezki, who at school had read *une masse des livres*, is concerned because he never came across this word in his educational career. Addressing his master, he seems curious about the word:

> Pendant trois ans vous nous avez parlé de l'homme. J'y ai cru […] Quelle n'a pas été ma stupeur de découvrir chaque jour plus irréfutablement que l'homme n'existait pas, que ce qui existait c'étaient les Imann et les autres!... Les Imann ? Ni mes livres, ni vous, mon maître, ne m'en aviez parlé (p. 136).

Eager to know what an *Imann* is and why he has been classified as such, Arezki spends days looking in the books buried in the wooden box, that Zerrouk, 'son ordonnance, lui avait fait passer malgré la consigne' (p. 137). Unfortunately, after five days of continuous search, Arezki finds nothing and his entire search is in vain. Thus, he becomes greatly disillusioned, and starts questioning all that he has learnt in colonial school:

> Imann, mes frères, il n'y a nulle trace de vous dans tout ceci. Vous êtes morts […] D'ailleurs, tous les événements de ces mois-ci: la corvée de soupe, l'exercice de tir, votre absence, m'ont donné le vertige. Je tourne, tourne et ne sais plus…Il faudrait d'abord, que je cesse d'être ébloui, que je me retrouve…si du moins je ne suis pas encore égaré dans les dunes…définitivement… (pp. 138-139).

Arezki concludes that he had been deceived by the principles of the civilising mission, and discovers that the values he learnt in his French schoolbooks were only applicable to Frenchmen and not to Algerian people within the colonial system. He regrets turning his back to his father and ancestral heritage. This can be seen in the book-burning scene where Arezki gathers all his books, French and foreign, and burns them. The last night before the departure for Mers-el-Kébir, where they are to embark for Europe, while the officers are celebrating the departure, Arezki who is high on alcohol, asks his friend Zerrouk to bring him 'l'idéal', 'les idées, les beaux sentiments' (p. 141). After a while, Zerrouk comes back with 'la lourde caisse de livres d'Arezki. Sur un coin il y avait encore écrit: « Ecole normale de Bouzaréah »' (p. 142). Arezki gathers all his books, burns them, and urinates on their ashes:

> Voici, dit Arezki, que l'heure du grand sacrifice est venue. (…) La flamme, brusquement grossie, (…). Lentement la flamme caressait les feuilles et doucement gagnait de proche en proche Molière, Shakespeare, Homère, Montesquieu (…). Quand le feu eut dévoré le dernier tome et qu'à l'endroit où tant de savoir avait été enfermé, tant de sagesse enclose, il ne resta plus qu'un petit tas de cendres que la brise faisait voler en minuscules papillons noirs, Arezki porta la main sous la ceinture de son pantalon. La patronne entra et (…) commença de vociférer:
> - Allons, allons, messieurs…mais…qu'est-ce vous faites là?
> - Je pisse sur les idées, dit Arezki (pp. 145-147).

By setting fire to masterpieces of French and universal classical literature, Arezki is trying to destroy the influence of European culture on him, which once freed him from the suffocating life of Ighzer and was an object of admiration. However, getting rid of Western influence does not seem that easy. The fact that Arezki is drunk may be seen as a legacy of French cultural influence, since alcohol consumption is forbidden in traditional Islamic culture. Addressing his colleagues, he says: 'voici la caisse merveilleuse. Mieux que la coco, une seule de ces fioles, pardon, de ces livres vous fera voir tout en rose; un beau, du bon, du boniment' (p.142), and adds 'Tout le tas! L'idéal, les sentiments, les idées. Mais vas-y donc, ha! ha! brûle! ha! ha!'. Arezki is offering a parody of one of France's major advertisements of the time for the drink Dubonnet: 'Dubo, Dubon, Dubonnet'. By engaging critically with this famous advert of alcoholic drinks, Arezki rejects cultural assimilation. He compares the delusional effects of alcohol to those of the books he read during his educational career. For him, the impact books have on the mind of the colonised is similar to that of an alcoholic drink. While alcohol hinders people's ability to think and makes them see everything 'en rose', Western books brainwash the minds of the colonised subjects, deceive them and alienate them from the rest of their society.

Mammeri's use of the motif of book burning is different from the Nazi book burning i.e., the twentieth century's most notorious book burning that took place in the German capital Berlin, in 1933. During the first year of the Nazi regime, all the books representing ideologies

opposed to the philosophy of the German National Socialist Party under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, were thrown onto bonfires.[179] This barbarous act, which lasted for hours and was often accompanied by music and speeches of political leaders, represented persecution of indigenous and foreign authors whose opinions were opposed to Nazism. Conversely, in *Le Sommeil du juste,* the symbolic act of setting fire to the ideas of the colonial school is supposed to put an end to the brainwashing and assimilation, and to mark the beginning of *un autre jour* when the assimilated Algerian will find his own identity and his maternal culture. By this act, Arezki denies his faith in humanism and the universal values of the West. Malika Hadj Naceur elaborates on this as she writes:

> En brûlant les dieux précédemment adorés (ses livres et les idées qu'ils véhiculaient) Arezki répudie sa foi dans l'humanisme européen et se prépare à retourner vers les siens, ayant enfin compris qu'on ne peut s'assumer que parmi eux et que les institutions traditionnelles qu'il dénigrait sont en fait un rempart contre l'aliénation culturelle et sociale.[180]

Another passage that demonstrates Arezki's awakening, is the last letter he writes to his master. Lying down in the hospital bed, Arezki writes a very long letter to M. Poiré describing the horrors of the war, particularly the campaign of Monte Cassino, in Italy, where he sustained grenade explosion injuries. Describing the aftermath of the explosion, Arezki says:

> J'entendais geindre et crier autour de moi dans toutes les langues; en allemand, en arabe, en français. L'Allemand, sur les jambes duquel j'étais étendu, était très jeune, il appelait sa mère autant que j'ai cru comprendre. Je ne savais pas si le sang qui faisait floc sur mes doigts était à lui ou à moi [...] c'est Zerrouk qui me trouva tard la nuit (p. 150-151).

Arezki sustained multiple injuries: 'les jambes bien sûr, […] les épaules, un bras, la figure' (p.170), and, therefore, had to stay 'six mois' in hospital (p. 170). During this period, he thought about all that he had been through in France and Europe: racism, humiliation, and the war.

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[179] For more details see: Norbert Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany: The Führer State 1933-1945*, trans. by Simon B. Steyne (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993).

[180] Malika Hadj Naceur, quoted in Dalil Slahdji, 'Cultures en conflit et rite de passage dans Le Sommeil du juste de Mouloud Mammeri', *Multilinguales*, 3 (1er semestre 2014), 111-123 (p. 118).

In the rest of the letter, Arezki expresses his dissatisfaction and tries to demonstrate to his *maître* the hypocrisy of the so-called *mission civilisatrice*. He starts his letter as follows: 'Voilà, monsieur Poiré, il n'aura rien manqué à mon destin de héros de la civilisation. Je suis même tombé pour elle et si je ne suis pas mort sur le coup ce n'est vraiment pas de ma faute' (p. 170). Arezki is disappointed to discover that the country he has sacrificed for and contributed to the freedom of, will reject him. In this context, he quotes the nurse who has tended him with sustained attention: 'vous, les Nord-Africains, vous avez sauvé la France' (p. 171). In the same letter, Arezki destroys his master's rhetoric and pieces of advice:

> Je suis à Paris, à Paris, la ville lumière, la ville …etc… (vous complétez vous-même) depuis que je suis guerrier c'est fou ce que j'économise les mots; du reste j'ai par bonheur oublié tous ceux (les mots du maîtres) qui ne servent à rien: la moitié des vôtres y ont sombré' (p. 171).

Arezki blames M. Poiré whose pieces of advice did not facilitate his integration into Western society, nor did they prepare him to face rejection and humiliation. He declares that the French school is responsible for his misfortune: 'Il me semble avoir été lâché dans la jungle, sans dents pour mordre, sans armes, pis, gêné d'intelligence, encombré d'innocence et de scrupules, quelque chose comme la victime rêvée, l'agneau du sacrifice' (p. 94).

As a result of being rejected by French society, Arezki goes back to his *village natal*: 'Arezki entra dans la vie d'Ighzer comme un nageur se jette à l'eau: d'un coup' (p. 143) and decides to join the Algerian Communist party to take revenge on the French. This is clearly stated in the third part of the novel, 'l'ange', where the narrator reveals that 'Ce qu'Arezki cherchait c'était une doctrine pour vivre quelque chose qui pût remplacer la parole du maître' (p. 182). By joining an Algerian political party, of which his brother Sliman is also a member, Arezki is trying to compensate for *les années de mensonge* and for turning his back on his father and his country as well.

However, when Arezki and his fellow members of the party organise a meeting in the village, which coincides with the wedding of Toudert's son, Toudert reports the meeting to the French authorities. Mohand, who is nearing the end of his life, kills the treacherous cousin and brings justice to his family. Shortly after the murder, Mohand passes away, but then the whole family is brought before the French tribunal. Arezki questions the French judicial system by declaring: 'De quel crime sommes-nous positivement coupables? C'est Mohand qui a tué Toudert et Mohand est mort' (p. 237). Eventually, the judge places all the blame on 'the educated' Arezki: 'vos professeurs vous avaient fait accéder à la pleine lumière du monde et de vous-même, et c'est vous, vous seul, qui par cet acte stupide vous êtes enfoncé dans la nuit' (p. 252). The judge seems ruthless, each time Arezki tries to explain his situation or to defend himself, he interrupts him and reminds him with the usual colonial discourse, the discourse of the dominant that, the coloniser is 'the carrier of civilisation'. Convinced of the superiority of his civilisation, the judge believes that the French export what they saw as the benefits of education, progress and science to the so-called 'backward people'. This is through a 'civilising mission' which Alice Conklin traces back to the ideas of the French Revolution: '[the French Revolution] helped transform the Enlightenment belief that barbarians could be civilized into the imperial doctrine that France should be civilizing fettered and deprived people everywhere'.[181]

Arezki who no longer believes in the civilising mission or the values he learnt about in the books, decides not to defend himself and is eventually sentenced to twenty years in prison. His lawyer justifies this arbitrary condemnation by saying that '[son] affaire était tombée dans une mauvaise période' (p. 247). However, knowing this does not set Arezki free 'savoir que

[181] Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 17.

mes vingt ans sont un accident ou une malchance ne me les enlève pas' (p. 247). Addressing the judge, he declares: 'Ce soir après m'avoir condamné, vous irez retrouver dans la paix de votre maison le goût émoussé de votre liberté, monsieur le Juge' (p. 253).

Through Arezki's case, Mammeri criticises the pseudo-colonial justice that was in place in colonial Algeria. The novel reveals that Arezki is a victim of the racial colonial system of justice, for he is unfairly condemned. Echoing Mammeri's hero, Fanon declares: 'le colonisé est toujours présumé coupable. La culpabilité du colonisé n'est pas une culpabilité assumée, c'est plutôt une sorte de malédiction'.[182] Indeed, the concluding lines of the novel illustrate the suffering of the indigenous population from the injustice of colonialism. They also emphasise the fact that only French people can enjoy freedom and that justice is only made for the coloniser to protect and guarantee his power over the Algerians: 'Vous pouvez dormir, monsieur le Juge: il est bon après tout que le sommeil du juste suive le sommeil de la justice' (p. 254).

Conclusion

Le Sommeil du juste demonstrates the generational conflict between the older generation which still holds to the ancestral code, imposes blood feud and paternal domination, and the young who are unable to adapt to these traditional ways of life and prefer assimilating to Western culture. Focusing on the role of colonial education in the production of this socio-psychological phenomenon, particularly the role of the French curriculum in widening the cultural and the linguistic gap between Arezki, the assimilated, and his conservative father, this chapter has argued for the impossibility of full assimilation in a colonial context. A detailed analysis of Arezki's position as an *évolué* in colonial Algeria has revealed that the *évolué's*

[182] Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre*, p. 54.

efforts to adopt the coloniser's values are in vain because assimilation will never be complete and the colonised will end up being rejected in any case. Arezki finds himself ostracised from both societies: from his own people because of his French education, and from the French themselves because of racism. Eventually, he understands that the enemy is not his father, nor the villagers, nor the cousin Toudert but, it is the coloniser, including *le cher maître* whom he used to respect and love deeply. It takes him years to understand that his tutor's words are merely *des mensonges* and that the so-called '*mission civilisatrice*' is in fact not only an educational opportunity, but also an insidious form of violent cultural oppression.

The following chapter discusses the issues of in-betweenness and religio-cultural *métissage*, another type of alienation of the *évolué*, in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. The focus is on characters who grow up in-between their traditional culture and British values imported through colonialism: those who attend the mission school and attempt to honour their people's traditions at the same time but end up abandoning their original traditions and values.

CHAPTER TWO

In-betweenness and Religio-cultural *Métissage* in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965)

> [It is the] in-between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture […] and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves.[183]
>
> Homi Bhabha

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* (1965), originally entitled *The Black Messiah*, is one of the strongest representations of in-betweenness and *métissage* in postcolonial literature of the 1960s. Like Mammeri's *Le Sommeil du juste*, the novel exploits the theme of cultural clash between Western-educated subjects who are seduced by modernity and their elders who still hold to their traditional ways. However, unlike in Mammeri's work where the *évolué* completely rejects his local culture, the *évolué(e)* in *The River between* is someone who attends the elite colonial school and tries to mediate between the two contending factions of their ethnic traditional community and the Christian civilisation. The figure of the *évolué(e)* is a mimic man or a mimic woman who becomes so obsessed with Western ideas that they try to import them to their local culture, creating thereby an in-between space between precolonial traditional culture and modern Western culture.

*The River Between*is concerned with the division and identity crises that emerged among the indigenous populations as a result of the experience of being colonised. It is set at the time of the Mau Mau uprising, in the Gikuyu community, the largest ethnic group in Kenya, and the region where the author was born and raised. Unlike in his other works where the central conflict revolves around the struggle between the colonised and the coloniser, *The River Between* is about the struggle among the indigenous populations themselves, as a result of the

[183] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 38-39.

interaction between traditional and colonial interests. The novel records the clash between two villages: Kameno and Makuyu, over preserving traditional culture and beliefs. Prior to the establishment of the East Africa Protectorate by the British in 1895 (known from 1920 as the Kenya Colony), both sides lived in peace and were united by their common culture and beliefs. This peacefulness is revealed in the opening pages of the novel where the narrator declares that [the river] 'Honia was the soul of Kameno and Makuyu. It joined them. And men, cattle, wild beasts and trees, were all united by this life-stream […] by their common source of life'.[184] However, with the arrival of Christian missionaries, an internal conflict arose between Kameno which still held strongly to traditional rites and rituals, and Makuyu which had converted to a new religion, Christianity. This religion calls into question indigenous cultural practices and rituals, especially female circumcision, which it condemns as barbaric, turning it into the main source of the conflict between the two communities in the novel. The opening lines of the novel depict life before the British presence as peacefully utopian. Ngũgĩ's detailed description of the geographical landscape projects the notion of a perfect society to the reader. He presents his audience with an 'ideal' society, to make them realise the various deficiencies of their actual society. This idealised topography emphasises the change brought about by colonial structures and implicitly calls for a political change that will heal the scars of colonialism, and restore the pre-colonial order.

Although the term *évolué* is often associated with the French colonial context, it can usefully be applied to the educated colonial subject in the British colonies. Whether in French or British colonies, the figure who receives a Western-style education tries hard to find balance between his local culture and that of the coloniser but ends up, in the process, accepting European values and ways of thinking and believing in the redemptive power of Western

[184] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The River Between* (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. 1.

education. Ngũgĩ's *The River Between* describes the dilemma that Western-educated elites or the *évolués* face while trying to blend indigenous practice and Christian influence. The action of the novel centres on Waiyaki, the protagonist who is prophesied to bring enlightenment to the tribe and be the saviour of his people from the white man. He tries to unite these villages and to resolve the conflict between them by attending the mission school and honouring the traditions of his ancestors at the same time. Like his protagonist, Ngũgĩ found himself in an intermediate position between his local culture and that of the coloniser. He was the son of a peasant farmer who could not own land. He first received education at a primary school established by British missionaries. Then he was transferred to a school in his indigenous Gikuyu tribe where he received a more Afrocentric education.[185] Despite his Western education, and also perhaps because of it, Ngũgĩ was strongly affected by the Mau Mau rebellion (1952-1960), and the novel under study is a reflection on the situation that he experienced. In the preface to *Secret lives and Other Stories* (1975), Ngũgĩ narrates the conflict and division within his family that followed what was called euphemistically the Emergency Period:

> As I write to remember the nights of fighting in my father's house, my mother's struggle with the soil so that we might eat, have decent clothes and get some schooling; my elder brother, Wallace Mwangi, running to the cover and security of the forest under a hail of bullets from colonial policemen; his messages from the forest urging me to continue with education at any cost; my cousin, Gichini wa Ngũgĩ, just escaping the hangman's rope because he had been caught with live bullets; uncles and other villagers murdered because they had taken the oath; the beautiful courage of ordinary men and women in Kenya who stood up to the might of British imperialism and indiscriminate terrorism.[186]

He also recalls in his memoir, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (written during his detention by the Kenyan government, from 31 December 1977 to 12 December 1978, in Kamiti Maximum Security Prison) the day he returned to his village from Alliance High School, when

[185] *Literature of Developing Nations for Students: A Study Guide for Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's "The Martyr"* (Michigan: The Gale Group, 2016), p. 3.
[186] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Preface to *Secret Lives and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1970), ix.

he found that his home and village had been burnt to the ground as a result of the colonial government's effort to suppress the rebellion:

> I came back after the first term and confidently walked back to my old village. My home was now only a pile of dry mud-stones, bits of grass, charcoal and ashes. Nothing remained, not even crops, except for a lone pear tree that slightly swayed in sun and wind. I stood there bewildered. Not only my home, but the old village with its culture, its memories and its warmth had been razed to the ground.[187]

This chapter will discuss the issues of in-betweenness, another type of alienation of the *évolué*, in Ngũgĩ's *The River Between*. The focus will be on fictional characters who grow up in-between their traditional culture and British values imported through colonialism: those who attend the mission school and attempt to honour their people's traditions at the same time but end up being caught between the two cultures. We will pay particular attention to the character of Waiyaki who tries unsuccessfully to merge some aspects of Christianity, received in the Siriana School, with those of Gikuyu culture. We will also look at the case of Muthoni who is compromised by trying to choose valuable elements from both traditions and modernity, but ends up losing her life in the process.

The chapter will draw on two central theoretical concepts in the field of postcolonial studies: Homi Bhabha's 'third space' and Edouard Glissant's '*métissage*'. One of the controversial issues about identity is the question of its instability. Influenced by post-structuralism, particularly the works of Jacques Derrida, Bhabha criticises the structuralist notion of multiculturalism in which cultures and identities are seen as fixed and stable. He challenges this essentialist hypothesis by arguing that culture is not a static entity or an essence that can be fixed in time and space. On the contrary, according to his theory, it is something fluid, perpetually in motion. He believes that notions of fixed 'Britishness' or 'Africanness' do not exist because, for him, pure uncontaminated culture is a myth: all cultures are characterised

[187] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Detained: A Writer's Prison Diary* (London: Heinemann, 1982), pp. 73-74.

by a mixedness which he refers to as 'hybridity'. This hybridity is created in 'the third space' where the two cultures interact. In his cultural third space theory, Bhabha defines the first space as the space of the home, of the indigenous, of the local people or a culture which goes with the indigenous subject wherever he goes. He also defines the second space as the imposed colonial knowledge, culture and structures. In between these two spaces, Bhabha identifies a new space which he refers to as 'third space' or 'in-between space'. According to this idea, indigenous people who are torn between two cultures or spaces are unable to articulate their identity as they feel it (because the second space does not allow for the articulation of the first space) nor to fully function in the second space (because of racism). As a result, they carve out a third space where they are able to create a hybrid culture which allows them to be useful and productive. As brought to light by Bhabha, this space in itself is not representable nor geographically located, rather it 'constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew'.[188]

In much the same way, while advocating for the unity of the black people in the Caribbean under the shared experience of slavery, the Martinican writer and philosopher, Edouard Glissant, emphasises the role of '*métissage*' and 'creolization' in constructing new identities. In his theoretical work, *Poetics of Relation*, he distinguishes between '*métissage*', the French language equivalent for hybridity, and 'creolization' which he defines as 'the extreme degree of hybridity'.[189] For him, 'métissage is the initial *choc* [shock] or *rencontre* [encounter] that anticipates a *synthèse* [synthesis], creolization is the more active (altering,

[188] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 37.
[189] Celia Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance* (London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 16.

differentiating) process that diffracts'.[190] That is to say, *métissage* refers to the first encounter between cultures, while creolization is 'hybridity without limits, hybridity whose elements are multiplied, and whose end-results are impossible to foresee'.[191] Just like Bhabha, Glissant believes that identities are always in process: 'creolization is unpredictable, it cannot solidify, become static, be fixed in essence or absolutes of identity'.[192]

Ngũgĩ's *The River Between* will offer us the opportunity to explore how hybridity and creolization were part and parcel of the personal and cultural trajectory of the *évolué*. Since its publication in 1965, this novel has attracted much scholarly interest. Some researchers, such as Adriaan van Klinken, Christopher Wise, Godwin Siundu and Busolo Wegesa, have focused on the theme of religion and addressed the lack of attention to African and non-Western texts in the study of religion and literature. Through their works, they have attempted to pay more attention to how and to what extent religion is embedded within African cultures. Klinken, for instance, addresses the theme of masculinity and religion by focusing his reading on the Black Messiah. He argues that there are similarities between Waiyaki and Jesus Christ: 'Waiyaki in subtle ways is modelled after the biblical figure of Christ'.[193] He praises Ngũgĩ for merging religious traditions of Gĩkũyũ with Christianity 'to develop the idea of the Black Messiah in the context of colonialism, missionary Christianity and emerging nationalism'.[194]

Similarly, Siundu and Wegesa read Ngũgĩ's early novels as an attempt by the writer to explore the resulting trauma and tensions of Christianity among the colonised population, as well as their profound influence on the formation and development of (post)colonial Kenyan

[190] Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 34.
[191] Ibid,. p. 46.
[192] Britton, *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory*, p. 16.
[193] Adriaan van Klinken, 'The Black Messiah, or Christianity and Masculinity in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*', in *Reading the Abrahamic Faiths: Rethinking Religion and Literature*, ed. by Emma Maon (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 131-142 (p. 136).
[194] Ibid., p. 140.

subjects. Regarding the cultural impact of colonialism, they argue that Christianity is 'a cog in the wheel of colonialism',[195] and that both enterprises 'are repugnant in their tendency to dehumanize the colonized subject, albeit in different ways'.[196] They also refer in passing to the failure of the novels' characters (Waiyaki, Muthoni and Nyambura) to harmonize successfully Christian beliefs and traditional Gikuyu values. However, one should note that this claim – that missionaries were aiming at 'dehumanising' the colonised subject – is debatable. In fact, Christian missionaries believed that they were allowing indigenous people to join the community of 'spiritually aware' human beings. Since they did not give credence to local religious traditions, Christianization was meant to 'save' souls from eternal damnation, at least from the perspective of the missionaries.

Other critics like Natasha Maria Gordon and Macharia Keguro have chosen to focus on female circumcision and the impact of this religious ritual on gender. Gordon, for example, focuses on Ngũgĩ's use of female circumcision as a tool to build his narrative of the conflict between traditionalism and missionary education. She argues that Muthoni's death is 'significant because of her act of betrayal to her African Christian parents, rather than as a statement against the danger of circumcision upon the female body'.[197] In the same context of gender, Keguro addresses the impact of colonial modernity on gendered identities. Taking Muthoni as a point of departure for her analysis, she argues that 'colonial modernity ruptured concepts and practices of girlhood for girls like Muthoni, who were caught between the limbo of Christian modernity and ethnic cultural practice'.[198]

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[195] Godwin Siundu and Busolo Wegesa, 'Christianity in Early Kenyan Novels: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between*', *Journal of Language, Technology & Entrepreneurship in Africa*, 2.1 (2010), 292-310 (p. 292).
[196] Ibid., p. 292.
[197] Natasha Maria Gordon, 'To Write What Cannot Be Written: Female Circumcision in African and Middle Eastern Literature', *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, 11.1 (Mar 2004), 73-87 (p. 76).
[198] Keguro Macharia, '"How does a girl grow into a woman?" Girlhood in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*', *Research in African literatures*, 43.2 (Jul 2012), 1-17 (p. 1).

While several studies have been devoted to the cultural impact of colonialism, the alienating effects of colonial education and gendered identities, and the failure of characters to harmonize Christian beliefs and traditional Gikuyu values, at present, no work has studied in depth the position of the *évolué* within the 'third space' or the *évolué* as a 'mimic' figure in *The River Between*. Very few studies have applied the concept of mimicry to the novel. A recent exception is Apollo O. Amoko, who has reinvigorated the concept of mimicry in Ngũgĩ's early novels by exploring their aesthetic dimensions, specifically Ngũgĩ's mimicry of an 'English aesthetic' (Joseph Conrad and D. H Lawrence in particular): '*The River Between* mimics and revises canonical English texts'.[199] He further argues that Ngũgĩ's engagement with these canonical English writers provides a good example of what Homi Bhabha terms colonial mimicry. Ngũgĩ's novels are written in English but they are not English because they mimic and mock the conventions of tragedy and *bildungsroman*. To quote Amoko: 'Ngũgĩ's early novels mimic canonical English texts – they are almost the same but not quite, almost English but not quite'.[200] My aim in this chapter is not to read the novel as a mimicking of canonical English works, but rather to shed light on the novel's main mimic characters Waiyaki and Muthoni in order to bring to the surface the problem of the alienation of the *évolué* in colonial Kenyan society and the impossibility – or at least the difficulty - of in-betweenness.

Colonialism and the Destruction of the Tribal Life

The River Between is set during the Mau Mau revolution which took place in the Kenya colony and protectorate between the years of 1952 and 1957. It emerged as a result of growing resentment among the Gikuyu people against white settlers because of the spoliation of their

[199] Apollo O. Amoko, 'The Resemblance of Colonial Mimicry: A Revisionary Reading of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*', *Research in African Literatures,* 36.1 (Spring 2005), 34-50 (p. 34).
[200] Ibid., p. 35.

ancestral lands and their dissatisfaction with a lack of political representation.[201] When the United Kingdom proclaimed Kenya a British Crown Colony in 1920, 'more than 10,000 sq miles of African land had been appropriated by about 1,600 European (mainly British) settlers'.[202] These white settlers, who were based on fertile lands where they could grow lucrative cash crops such as coffee and tea, introduced restrictions on land ownership to protect their interests and pushed out the Gikuyu, who migrated to the capital Nairobi. John Newsinger elaborates on this large-scale migratory movement: 'Thousands of Kikuyu [or Gikuyu] were forced off the land altogether and driven to seek work in the towns. Between 1938 and 1952 the African population of Nairobi more than doubled, increasing from 40,000 to 95,000'.[203] Living conditions were very harsh for the indigenous populations. Workers' wages were not enough to cover the basic needs of their families. As a result, they suffered hunger, were poorly clothed and badly housed or homeless. These miserable conditions pushed the indigenous people who were forced to leave their lands to revolt against the Europeans and to claim their lands back: this was the Mau Mau uprising, which also revealed the difficulties brought about by the cultural hybridity which had emerged among some individuals as a result of the colonial experience.

Although the uprising was initially directed against the presence of the European settlers and their ownership of land, much of the violence took place between the banned Mau Mau Secret Society and African loyalists who collaborated with the colonial administration. This uprising began to take shape in 1952, when the Mau Mau armed groups formed forest gangs and started campaigns targeting European settlers in their isolated farms. The increase of

[201] Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau From Within: An Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt* (London: Modern Reader, 1970), p. 23.
[202] David Lea and Annamarie Rowe, ed. by, *A Political Chronology of Africa* (London: Europa Publications, 2001), p. 215.
[203] John Newsinger, 'Revolt and Repression in Kenya: The "Mau Mau" Rebellion, 1952-1960', *Science & Society*, 45.2 (Summer, 1981), 159-185 (p. 161).

violence led Sir Evelyn Baring, the Governor of the colony, on the 20th of October 1952, to declare officially a state of emergency which would not be lifted until 1960. In his telegram to the British government, he reported that 'it is now abundantly clear that we are facing a planned revolutionary movement. If the movement cannot be stopped, there will be an administrative break-down, followed by bloodshed amounting to civil war'.[204] Following the declaration of emergency, troops and police were sent to repress the uprising, resulting in massive round-ups of suspected Mau Mau and their supporters, and the murder of a large number of participants in Mau Mau. For most of Gikuyu, the eight years during which the State of Emergency was in place were 'a living hell of torture, imprisonment without trial, and exile'.[205] Paige Whaley Eager further argues that the response of the British government to the Mau Mau rebellion was 'genocidal at worst and heavy-handed at best'.[206] Daniel Branch describes how bloody the rebellion was as he writes:

> The anticolonial rebellion and civil war claimed the lives of approximately 25,000 Kenyan Africans as a direct result of the violence. The vast majority of these fatalities were real or suspected Mau Mau activists. One hundred seventy African members of the official armed forces and at least 1800 African opponents of the insurgents lost their lives. In contrast, 32 European settlers were murdered, and a further 63 European combatants were killed during the war.[207]

This internal conflict is revealed in the novel through the cultural clash between the supporters of the missionaries and the traditional Kenyans, represented through two different extremities; one holding rigidly to everything belonging to the tribe and the other promoting

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[204] Nicholas van der Bijl, 'Declaration of Emergency', in *Mau Mau Rebellion: The Emergency in Kenya 1952–1956* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2017), 46-65 (p. 46).
[205] Paige Whaley Eager, *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), p. 100.
[206] Ibid., p. 100.
[207] Daniel Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil war, and Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 4. For further reading on the history of Mau-Mau, see David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Pimlico, 2005).

whatever is associated with the white man. As the events of the novel develop, it becomes clear that some people of Mukuyu have converted to Christianity, while Kamino's inhabitants remain faithful to their traditional religious faith. Subsequently, the two sides become enemies. Led by Joshua the evangelical fanatic priest, the Christian converts turn their back on all traditional rites because 'The unerring white man had called the Gikuyu god, the prince of darkness' (p. 29). Henceforth, Makuyu becomes a centre for the activities of the Christian converts.

This separation between the two villages is also seen at the geographical level. The very first moments of the novel reveal that the sides are physically separated by the Honia River, which stands as a neutral ground between the opposing communities:

> Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life. Behind Kameno and Makuyu were many more valleys and sides, lying without any discernible plan. They were like many sleeping lions which never woke. They just slept, the big deep sleep of their Creator. A river flowed through the valley of life [...] The river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring-back-to-life. Honia river never dried: it seemed to possess a strong will to live, scorning droughts and weather changes (p. 1).

Ngũgĩ's portrayal of the river has a symbolic significance. It stands for the inherent unity of the communities and implies that the division that has occurred between them is unnatural. Before the arrival of the missionaries, the river unified the inhabitants of the two ridges. It provided them with life-giving water and was a source of spiritual renewal. However, with the arrival of the missionaries, an ideological division occurred between the two villages. The river ceased to be a factor that brought people together; instead, it became a sort of a boundary between the opposing sides: 'when you stood in the valley, the two ridges ceased to be sleeping lions united by their common source of life. They became antagonists [...] they faced each other, like two rivals ready to come to blows in a life and death struggle for the leadership of this isolated region' (1).

Cultural Effects of the Missionaries on Kenyan Society

During the colonial period, missionaries played a complex role in the colonies as intermediaries of harsh governmental policies to indigenous people on the one hand, and providers of education and medical treatment on the other.[208] While delivering education, however, missionaries also aimed at expanding the reach of Western culture and Christianity at the expense of local cultures and beliefs. While traditionalists viewed Christian teachings as 'against all that which was good and beautiful in the tribe' (p. 37), the defenders of colonialism often justified their case in terms of the 'white man's burden', to quote a famous poem by the Anglo-Indian arch-imperialist writer Rudyard Kipling. They argued that it was the duty of what they perceived as civilised nations to help the people of supposedly backward countries by bringing 'civilisation' (that is to say, Western values and cultures) to save souls from perdition. Caroline Elkins elaborates on this idea of colonial superiority as she writes:

> With their superior race, Christian values, and economic knowhow, the British instead had a duty, a moral obligation, to redeem the "backward heathens" of the world. In Africa, the British were going to bring light to the Dark Continent by transforming the so-called natives into progressive citizens, ready to take their place in the modern world'.[209]

As a result of this transformation, Christianity was forced onto colonised people through colonial education which taught indigenous students to accept the new religion, alienating students from their local beliefs, customs, and rituals. Missions

> incorporate an enormous attack upon the native's mind, habits, beliefs, upon his views of world and transhuman powers, upon his customs, his social and mental arrangement, and his psychic equilibrium. This attack… [has served] as an instrument for animating European expansion.[210]

[208] For more on the role of missionaries in education and health care, see James Karanja, *The Missionary Movement in Colonial Kenya: The Foundation of Africa Inland Church* (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 2009).
[209] Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Pimlico, 2005), p. 5.
[210] Richard C. Thurnwald, *Black and White in East Africa: The Fabric of a New Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1935), p. 212.

Ngũgĩ complains about the literary curriculum imposed on Kenyan students in colonial schools: 'language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds'.[211] He argues that focusing exclusively on English culture and history in education was a deliberate strategy to repress Kenyan history and identity:

> Thus the teaching of only European literature, and mostly British imperialist literature in our schools, means that our students are daily being confronted with the European reflection of itself, the European image, in history. Our children are made to look, analyse and evaluate the world as made and seen by Europeans. Worse still, these children are confronted with a distorted image of themselves and of their history as reflected and interpreted in European imperialist literature.[212]

Like the French who favoured assimilationist policy through education in Algeria, the British knew that the best way to control the indigenous population was not through military control but through controlling their minds. In fact, the early Christian missionaries who had a monopoly on indigenous education in Kenya, knew that the success of their missions depended largely on the creation of local educated classes who received Christian teachings and would be ready. The irony here is that these elites often rebelled against the coloniser in the end, using aspects of colonial teaching they had received. In fact, the 'religio-educational packet'[213] was so crucial to all missions (Catholic and Protestant) that Arthur Hinsley, English Roman Catholic cardinal and fifth archbishop of Westminster, on the occasion of his visit to a catholic mission in East Africa in 1927, made the following revealingly declaration:

> Collaborate in education with all your power, and where it is impossible for you to carry on both tasks of evangelization and your educational work, neglect your churches in order to perfect your schools. Who owns the schools will own Africa.[214]

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[211] Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 12.

[212] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Politics: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 36.

[213] John Anderson, *The Struggle for the School: The Interaction of Missionary, Colonial Government and Nationalist Enterprise in the Development of Formal Education in Kenya*, reviewed by F. B. Welbourn, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 6.2 (1974), 150-151 (p. 151).

[214] Willem Saayman, 'Who Owns the Schools Will Own Africa: Christian Mission, Education and Culture in Africa', *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 4.2 (Sep. 1991), 29-44 (p. 30).

Despite the fact that Catholic missions were in competition with Protestant missions, both hoped that by spreading education in Africa, they would be able to form 'Christian character'.

At the beginning of missionary education, indigenous parents did not allow their children to go to mission schools. According to Evanson M. Wamagatta, indigenous students went to the mission schools out of curiosity first and foremost: 'the young men to escape recruitment and girls and women to escape "the continual hard work which is their lot in ordinary Kikuyu life"'.[215] However, he argues that later on indigenous pupils started genuinely to gain interest in colonial education because they considered it the 'white man's magic'.[216] Their parents, as well, changed their minds and concluded that receiving European education would increase their children's social status and open doors for their material success. Ngũgĩ, on the other hand, focuses on how exposure to the English language gave these students access to colonial institutions: 'English was the official vehicle and magic formula to colonial elitedom'.[217]

Unlike the missionaries whose priority was conversion to Christianity, the colonial administration — which took over control of African education from the missionaries in the early twentieth century — wanted to train skilful Kenyans who could provide a cheap workforce to the Crown and the European settlers.[218] That is to say, the goal of education in Kenya was to

[215] Evanson N. Wamagatta, 'Changes of Government Policies Towards Mission Education in Colonial Kenya and Their Effects on the Missions: The Case of the Gospel Missionary Society', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 38 (2008), 3-26 (p. 06).
[216] Ibid., p. 07.
[217] Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, p. 12.
[218] Before the early 1900s, the colonial administration sponsored mission schools in Kenya to provide the workforce needed. However, when the missionaries failed to produce the number of workers the colony required - mainly because of its heavy concentration on religious subjects - the colonial administration took over control of education. To solve the problem of schools, the British authorities established an educational commission called the Frazer Commission (1909). The latter recommended a dual educational system: academic education for Europeans and industrial (vocational) training for Africans. In 1911, upon the recommendation of the same commission, the British authorities established the first Department of Education in Kenya and assigned James Orr as its director. The aim behind the department was to build and supervise government schools, provide technical and industrial training, and keep mission education on hold. For more details see: Jim C. Harper, II, *Western-Educated Elites in Kenya, 1900-1963* (London: Routledge, 2006).

create a semi-educated class who would contribute to the colony's economy and lend a hand to its administration.[219] Kenyan students who thought that the aim of colonial schools was to educate them in order to compete with the white man, discovered later that the real purpose behind educating them was, in fact, to create an élite class that would be ready to serve the interest of the coloniser. Ngũgĩ elaborates on this idea as he quotes an unpublished paper by Karega Mutahi:

> It is obvious that in establishing British values and standards in Kenya, African élites were needed. It was only with such an élite class that those values could be entrenched in this country. The teaching of English to Africans must be seen as a process of safeguarding European interests in Kenya. This was to be done by making sure that these Africans had the same views and culture as their colonial masters.[220]

The River Between reveals the alienating effects of the mission schools on the minds of young Gikuyu that Mutahi describes. Through missionary teachings, young Gikuyu think that the new culture will lead them to social reforms. As time goes by, they realise that the new culture is taking them away from their African cultural context.

Waiyaki's Belief in 'the Third Space'

The River Between reveals how colonial education plays a large role in changing the *évolué*'s attitude toward the coloniser in Kenya. This change, as revealed in the novel, often begins with the appreciation of Western values, and is followed by indigenous students' attempt to import the positive values in the coloniser's culture into their local culture. Waiyaki, who joined the British school in the hope of learning the coloniser's wisdom and using it to fight

[219] This echoes Macaulay's ideas in his infamous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) where he defended the teaching of English and the promotion of knowledge and science in India. Macaulay called for the creation of 'a learned native' - an Indian who is 'familiar with the poetry of Milton, the metaphysics of Locke, and the physics of Newton', someone with Indian external features, but with Western thinking and culture. See: George Malcolm Young, *Speeches by Lord Macaulay with his Minute on Indian education* (London: Humphery Milford, 1979), 345 – 361.

[220] Ngũgĩ, *Writers in Politics,* p. 61.

back, but ends up adopting Western values in the Kameno community, is a true exemplar of in-betweenness in colonial Kenya.

At the beginning of the novel, Waiyaki joins Siriana School to receive a colonial education in response to his father's order: 'Go to the mission place. Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites' (p. 20). Chege, who believes that his son is the saviour of Kameno traditions whom the tribe is waiting for, decides to send his son to colonial school to learn the wisdom of the white man in order to acquire the best tools to fight him. Before he dies, Chege whispers to his son the ancient prophecy: 'Salvation shall come from the hills. From the blood that flows in me, I say from the same tree, a son shall rise. And his duty shall be to lead and save the people' (p. 20). Disclosing this responsibility to Waiyaki, he says: 'Listen carefully, for this is the ancient prophecy [...] Mugo [a famous seer] often said you could not cut the butterflies with a panga. You could not spear them until you learnt and knew their ways and movement. Then you could trap, you could fight back' (p. 20). Chege recognises that colonial power represents a threat to Gikuyu culture; thus, he urges his son to fight with intelligence and strategy. Because he believes that if the colonised subject is selective, colonial education can be an effective weapon for fighting colonialism, Chege encourages his son to receive mission education. He insists that 'it is good to be wise in the affairs of the white man' (p. 38) but without following his 'vices' or being contaminated by his values (p. 20). The language Chege uses while addressing his son seems strange and unfamiliar to a non-native reader because it is a blend of both the English language and the Gikuyu culture. To give voice to the colonised culture, Ngũgĩ changes the literariness of the English language through the process of 'nativisation' or 'indigenisation'. He uses literary devices typical of Gikuyu culture, such as metaphors and similes, to capture the political and social realities of his people. An example of the metaphors

he uses is ‘cut the butterflies with a panga’, which evokes a rural African context of hunting with a bladed tool like a machete.

Once in the mission school, things go against Chege’s wish. Waiyaki’s attitude toward the coloniser starts to change as a result of the teaching received. In fact, colonial education opens his eyes to the positive elements in the coloniser’s culture and convinces him that such elements could be imported into the life of the Gikuyu community. Such a belief leads Wiayaki throughout the novel to seek a middle way, or what Homi Bhabha refers to as ‘in-between space’, capable of accommodating the two extreme positions. As brought to light by Bhabha, while investigating the question of cultural identity and identity formation of both the coloniser and the colonised, the ‘third space of enunciation’ is a space of ‘in-betweenness and liminality’ in which a new form of identity is created. In this new middle space, two different cultures interact with each other creating a hybrid identity: ‘all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation’.[221] Waiyaki, who grew up in-between two contradicting spaces (the traditional Kameno community and the imposed colonial space), finds it difficult to adapt to either. The narrator observes that ‘Waiyaki did not like to be identified with either side; he was committed to reconciliation’ between the villages (p. 110).

In his early years of schooling, Waiyaki used to feel at ease within his people and take part in his community’s rituals: ‘He joined in the dances for the young boys and felt happy’ (p. 13). He was loved and respected by his people because he showed high intelligence and a strong attachment to the traditional values: ‘People admired him. They liked the way he so freely mingled and the way he talked. He had a word for everyone and a smile for all. He pleased

[221] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 37.

many' (p. 92). The trust and respect he gained from the people made him happy: 'he had still his joy when an old man, a woman or a child stopped him and shook hands with him, a smile of trust on their faces' (p. 110). However, after joining the mission school, Waiyaki goes through a conflict between old beliefs inherited from his father, who is deeply committed to tribal traditions, on the one hand and the new knowledge absorbed in Siriana on the other. Accordingly, he starts to feel estranged from his community: 'he felt a stranger, a stranger to his land' (p. 60), and sometimes he 'felt himself standing outside all this. And at times he felt isolated' (p. 69).

Although his physical appearance seems uninfluenced by the mission's learning, Waiyaki's inner way of looking at things is greatly affected. His absence from the hill has kept him out of touch with those things that most matter to his people. Ngugi shows the reader that the missionaries' education has distanced him from the most sacred traditions of his tribe, mainly circumcision. During this ritual, he feels uneasy and finds it difficult to participate in the dances with his peers: 'Waiyaki still felt uneasy. Something inside him prevented him from losing himself in this frenzy' (p. 41- 42). Although he grew up listening to circumcision songs sung by young Kenyan boys and girls, now he hesitates to join in. When he is pulled into the dancing circle by one of his friends, he is not able to enjoy the moment: 'Although his body moved and his mouth responded to the words, his soul did not fully participate' (p. 42). He no longer enjoys the song or dances because he has been taught in the mission that taking part in such a ceremony is a source of guilt. He keeps wondering what Reverend Livingstone, the headmaster at Siriana and the 'man who had left home for a wild country, fired by a dream of heroism and the vision of many new souls won for Christ through his own efforts' (p. 55), would say if he saw him or if he found out that he was taking part in the ceremony. He knows that Livingstone and the other missionaries consider the Gikuyu rituals, customs and traditions

as satanic, and refer to the Gikuyu God as 'the prince of darkness' (p. 29). As time goes by, Waiyaki's state of 'unhomeliness' becomes clearer, as his father's words seem to be losing their meaning and places such as the sacred hill seem to become insignificant: 'the sacred grove seemed to be no more than ordinary bush clustering around the fig tree' (p. 140). This instability of identity, or 'unhomeliness', Bhabha suggests is inevitable in colonial situations and applies to both colonisers and colonised. That is to say, as a result of the cultural contact between the coloniser and the colonised, neither the colonised nor the coloniser's pre-colonial self can remain unaltered.

Waiyaki does not feel at 'home' in his indigenous space anymore and is unable to adapt to the colonial space either. He is unable to articulate in the second space because he is still associated with the first space associated with the traditionalists of his community. Although he is not against some of the religious concepts and teachings of the coloniser, he cannot find it in his heart to betray his tribe. The narrator reveals Waiyaki's ambivalence towards indigenous and foreign cultures as he says:

> After all, he himself loved some Christian teaching. The element of love and sacrifice agreed with his own temperament. The suffering of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and His agony on the tree had always moved him. But he did not want to betray the tribe (p. 100).

Waiyaki's attempt to honour Gikuyu traditions and his ambivalent attitude towards the elements of the coloniser's culture has led Livingstone (who considers him as 'a possible brave Christian leader of the Church', p. 22) to launch a frontal attack on the ritual of circumcision. Tensions between the missionaries and the indigenous population reach a fever pitch when the Siriana council decides that 'children of those who defied the laws of the church and continued with their tribal customs would have to leave Siriana' (p. 60). As a result, Waiyaki, who has a different opinion about circumcision finds himself forced to leave the mission school.

Although circumcision has lost much of its significance for Waiyaki, he does not agree with Livingstone's decision to stop it because it is still sacred for his people. He finds stopping circumcision overnight stupid because he believes that the value of circumcision does not lie in the operation itself but in its spiritual significance: 'Not that Waiyaki disliked the idea of circumcision […] In fact, he considered Livingstone, for all his learning and holiness, a little dense in attacking a custom whose real significance in the tribe he did not understand and probably never would understand' (p. 39-40). That is to say, Waiyaki is conscious of the importance of circumcision for his community and he is against the coloniser's policy of suddenly abolishing it. In fact, he does not oppose the idea of abolishing the ritual but the way of abolishing it. To do that, he believes 'patience and, above all, education were needed' (p. 142).

Waiyaki is forced to negotiate between his local culture and that of the coloniser, unable to identify himself with either. Because the imposed colonial space does not allow for the articulation of indigenous subjectivity, and the colonial subject cannot function fully in the second space, Waiyaki is compelled to carve out a third in-between space, in which he can bring the two opposing cultures closer, moulding them into oneness. That can allow a better future for the Gikuyu community where there is unity, peace and love:

> It was the vision of a people who could trust one another, who would sit side by side, singing the song of love which harmonized with music from the birds, and all their hearts would beat to the rhythm of the throbbing river (p. 119-120).

Waiyaki's belief in the ancient prophecy that he will be the saviour of his people leads him to take up the mission of unifying the two sides of the river through education. After receiving colonial teaching and admiring some of the white man's values, the central figure in the novel endeavours to change the ideals of his society by transferring the knowledge he has learnt in the Siriana school to his people. Just as the Siriana changes the way he thinks and looks

at things, he wants to deliver these positive teachings to the children of his tribe in order to produce a moderate generation, a sort of 'troisième voie' (third way) that is more tolerant toward Western culture and less rigidly attached to the traditions of the tribe. The narrator reveals Waiyaki's attitude towards the coloniser's education as he says: 'To Waiyaki the white man's education was an instrument of enlightenment and advance if only it could be used well' (p. 119).

In an effort to bring the different communities closer to each other, Waiyaki sets up independent schools where indigenous students can acquire the ability to tolerate both contradictory cultures. As we discover in chapter thirteen, realising this project is not easy because of the lack of physical materials: 'The rotting grass thatch was no deterrent to rain. Numerous pools of water must have already formed on the floor. This was the price education-thirsty children had to pay' (p. 61). However, as time goes by, Waiyaki and his colleagues manage to improve the educational environment for children of the tribe and Waiyaki becomes very busy with 'teaching and organizing the schools' (p. 91). Waiyaki's establishment of the self-help schools expresses in material form his belief in a third space of identity, a hybrid one that combines colonial and traditional values within its boundaries. Bhabha defends this idea as he writes that 'in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity' (p. 1-2).

Muthoni's Cultural *Métissage*

While Waiyaki tries to mix traditionalist values with elements of Christianity and modernity, Muthoni's conversion to Christianity does not stop her from being attached to her tribe. She tries to mix the two cultural influences by importing elements of Gikuyu tradition, mainly circumcision, to her newly embraced religion. She justifies this act by saying: 'I am a

Christian and my father and mother have followed the new faith. I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe' (p. 43). Although Muthoni converted to a new faith, she still feels associated with her first space. Her will to undergo circumcision and her claim to her sister, Nyambura, ('My life and your life are here, in the hills, that you and I know', p. 26) are all proof that she still feels that sense of belonging to her ethnic group. In fact, her attempt to negotiate a midway between the two cultures by merging Christian modernity with ethnic cultural practice exemplifies what Edouard Glissant refers to as *métissage culturel*. While focusing, in an unprecedented way, on the hybrid culture that has been created in the Caribbean, Glissant - the father of the 'créolité' movement and a major theorist in Caribbean studies and postcolonial theory – defines cultural *métissage* as 'the braiding of different cultures into a new cultural cloth'.[222]

Throughout the novel, Muthoni goes through a chaotic identity crisis because she is unable to deny the 'self' or the 'other'. As a descendant of a convert, she faces a different and far more confusing world than Waiyaki. Unlike Waiyaki whose father encourages to stay attached to the Gikuyu tradition, Mothoni's father, Joshua, not only accepts all the ways of the white man, but also harshly rejects all the practices and beliefs that his people have. In the first encounter with Muthoni in the novel, one can tell that she is neither satisfied by her new culture nor by the white man's god because she believes that in Christianity - unlike in the Gikuyu religion - there is no way for a girl to be real a girl or to 'grow into a [real] woman' (p. 26). In a dialogue with Nyambura at the Honia river, she openly declares: 'Yes, the white man's God does not quite satisfy me. I want, I need something more' (p. 26). What she really wants is to be a woman, a real girl, 'a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges' (p. 26). Muthoni's insistence on being initiated into womanhood comes as a result of her firm belief

[222] Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), p. 34.

that gender and sex 'are produced through specific cultural practices',[223] as Keguro Macharia reminds us.

Such a belief leads Muthoni, after a long period of indecisiveness, to take part in the ceremony and undergo the surgery. In the same dialogue with her sister, she expresses her will to be circumcised: 'I have thought and thought again about it. I have not been able to eat or sleep properly. My thoughts terrify me. But I think now I have come to a decision […] Nyambura, I want to be circumcised' (p. 24-25). Nyambura, who does not have the courage to stand against Joshua, tries to dissuade her sister from undergoing the ritual: 'But Father will not allow it. He will be very cross with you. And how can you think of it? […] Besides […] you are a Christian. You and I are now wise in the ways of the white people' (p. 25). Unlike her sister, who wants to bring together the two clashing cultures, indigenous and Western, in her person, Nyambura seems convinced by her father's teaching and satisfied with her new religion. She believes that as Christians, they are saved from sin because they are baptised, and that circumcision is 'the devil's work' (p. 25). Despite her sister's warning and against her father's will, Muthoni submits herself to circumcision in order to attain full womanhood. She is seen defending her rebellion in a conversation with Waiyaki: 'Father and Mother are circumcised. But why are they stopping me, why do they deny me this?' (p. 44). Muthoni who feels already isolated because of her father's religious choices, is scared of widening the gap between herself and her tribe. She fears being completely disconnected from her peers and from the social experiences of her people: 'How could I be outside the tribe, when all the girls born with me at the same time have left me?' (p. 44).

[223] Keguro Macharia, 'How does a girl grow into a woman? Girlhood in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*', *Research in African Literatures*, 43.2 (Summer 2012), 1-17 (p. 7).

As mentioned above, Muthoni's relation with her father is different from Waiyaki's. Unlike Waiyaki, Muthoni does not get along well with her father because he has dropped his traditions and become an ally of the missionaries. While Joshua believes that embracing a new faith does necessarily imply rejecting any element related to his origin, his youngest daughter finds the mixture of cultures Glissant defines as a 'poetics of relation' compelling.[224] She rebels against him because she believes that he has alienated them from the rest of the Gikuyu population by turning his back on the ways of the hills and embracing a new religion. In fact, the alienation of Joshua's family is revealed in the seventh chapter where Joshua's house is described as different from the rest of the houses: 'Joshua's house was different. His was a tin-roofed rectangular building standing quite distinctly by itself on the ridge' (p. 28). This distinguished structure stands for the marginalisation of Joshua's family from the rest of the Gikuyu community. It reveals how wide the gap between the new embraced culture and the traditional one is. It also symbolises Joshua's fanatical practice of Christianity and his intolerance towards his previous religious faith and traditions. The fact that he chooses to live in a house made of European material rather than in a traditional mud-walled, grass-thatched round hut, denotes his absolute rejection of Gikuyu tradition. Joshua's fanaticism can be seen in his reaction to Muthoni's disappearance from home. Addressing Nyambura, he says: 'Go to that woman you call aunt. Tell Muthoni to come back. If she agrees we shall forget everything. If she does not, then tell her that she ceases to be my daughter' (p. 36). Joshua is very strict on the matter of circumcision. The narrator remarks that he believes it is 'so sinful that he devoted a prayer to asking God to forgive him for marrying a woman who had been circumcised' (p. 31).

[224] Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1989), p. 251.

The Tragedy of In-betweenness in the Colonial Situation

Ngũgĩ seems to possess a bleak outlook on the notion of *métissage* or hybridity. Characters who turn their back on traditions and embrace modernity tend to fail and often face a tragic end. This pessimistic view is probably the result of Ngũgĩ's extreme loyalty to his Gikuyu roots and his belief that the 'the greatest tool for advancement is the strongest communal nature of African traditional societies'.[225] While trying to create a third space between the space of the indigenous and that of the coloniser, Waiyaki and Muthoni have not only grown alienated from their customs, rites and people but they also met a tragic end as a result. In the process of creating an in-between space, Waiyaki becomes isolated from the rest of his community; the narrator comments that he 'felt himself standing outside all this. And at times he felt isolated' (p. 69). Not only he has forgotten the main reason behind sending him to the colonial school to learn the wisdom of the white man as well as the tools to fight him, he also turns his back on circumcision when he falls in love with an uncircumcised girl. Waiyaki becomes so absorbed in uniting both sides of the river through his European education that he forgets to take political action. His belief that his educational project will serve him by unifying and reconciling the two ridges, has made him thirsty for educating his people:

> Every day he was becoming convinced of the need for unity between Kameno and Makuyu. The ancient rivalry would cripple his efforts in education. He also wanted reconciliation between Joshua's followers and the others. The gulf between them was widening and Waiyaki wanted to be the instrument of their coming together (p. 91).

He dreams of a strong and wise tribe that can chase away the settlers and the missionaries, 'a tribe great with many educated sons and daughters, all living together, tilling the land of their ancestors in perpetual serenity, pursuing their rituals and beautiful customs' (p. 87).

[225] Glenn Odom, *World Theories of Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 147.

As more people send their children to the Gikuyu-run school he has set up, building more schools becomes an obsession for Waiyaki. The fact that he is prophesied to be a saviour is what pushes him to think his success in building schools is divine: 'he could not understand how this idea had borne fruit so quickly. He saw it as something beyond himself, something ordained by fate' (p. 67). Too preoccupied with his mission to educate his people, he forgets about the widening gap between the Christian converts (Joshua's followers) and the traditionalists who have formed a secret organization, whose goal is to ensure the purity of the tribe (the Kiama). He also loses sight of the people's other pressures such as poverty, famine and fighting to recover their lost land and dignity. This is revealed in chapter eighteen where people of both ridges gather in Marioshoni School for the parents' day. While Waiyaki is celebrating his success as a teacher, addressing parents and stressing the importance of education and the need for more schools, Kabonyi, who is jealous of Waiyaki's growing popularity, stands up:

> He reminded them of the poverty of the land. The dry months had left the people with nothing to eat […] He touched on the land taken by the white man. He talked of the new taxes being imposed on the people by the Government Post now in their midst (p. 95).

While Waiyaki addresses the need for more tin for rotting roofs, desks, pencils and papers for students, and the need to build more schools and employ more teachers, Kabonyi believes that there are more serious and immediate matters that need to be addressed. He wants to free the country from the influence of the white man and to restore 'the purity of the tribe and its wisdom' (p. 95). For him, building more schools will be a burden to the tribe for he thinks that the white man's education is not really necessary and that the tribe's education and wisdom is more than enough: 'or do you think that the education of our tribe, the education and wisdom which we all received, is in any way below that of the white man?' (p. 95).

Waiyaki fails to understand that his people want another way out rather than education. What his people want is action, an active resistance that can liberate them and free their land: 'the new enthusiasm and awareness embraced more than the mere desire for learning. People wanted to move forward' (p. 118).[226] His decision to resign from his high position in Kiama, leaving his place to his enemy Kayboni, shows that education has alienated him from the political duties that he is supposed to perform: 'Perhaps the teaching of Livingstone, that education was of value and his boys should not concern themselves with what the government was doing or with politics, had found a place in Waiyaki's heart' (p. 65). Resigning from his position has also led Kiama and those who reject colonial ways to believe that active resistance does not feature among his plans, assuming, thereby, that he stands against the principle of rejecting the coloniser. Waiyaki's mother is aware of the significance of Kiama for the Gikuyu and the consequences of rebelling against it. In the last chapters of the novel, she warns her son: 'Fear the voice of the Kiama. It is the voice of the people. When the breath of the people turns against you, it is the greatest curse that you can ever get' (p. 123).

The problem between Waiyaki and Kiama escalates when the former falls in love with Joshua's uncircumcised daughter, Nyambura. As someone who has taken the oath to keep the purity of the tribe, this is a violation of that oath. After Muthoni's death (which will be discussed shortly), Waiyaki and Nyambura become attracted to each other. Their romance develops in the initiation grove where they used to meet and talk. Waiyaki wants someone to talk to, 'to share

[226] This passage reveals Ngũgĩ's own position and his political view about anticolonial struggle. Through the fictional character of Waiyaki, Ngũgĩ' is explicitly encouraging rebellion against British settlers who exploit Kenyan lands and resources, drag native indigenous populations into detention camps, and force them to give up their language and culture: 'Resistance is the best way of keeping alive. It can take even the smallest form of saying no to injustice. If you really think you're right, you stick to your beliefs, and they help you to survive.' Kyla Marshell, Interview 'Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o: 'Resistance is the best way of keeping alive', *The Guardian*, (12 Mar. 2018) <https://www..com/books/2018/mar/12/ngugi-wa-thiongo-wrestling-with-the-devil-interview> [Accessed 22-12-2020].

his hopes, his yearnings and longings with' (p. 71) while Nyambura is looking for someone who can fill the gap that Muthoni's death has left, which 'deprived her of the only companion she had ever had' (p. 75). Despite religious and cultural differences, Waiyaki and Nyambura fall in love with each other. Waiyaki, who thinks that his marriage to Nyambura will overcome the division between the two sides of the river, confesses his love to Nyambura and proposes marriage. Surprisingly, she turns down his offer but reciprocates his love because of her loyalty to Christian principles and her obedience to her father. As a daughter of a convert, she is aware that the gap between them is 'as big as the one dividing Kameno and Makuyu' (p. 78). She is conscious that the tribe will not accept her because she is a Christian and uncircumcised, and that her father will not accept Waiyaki because he belongs to pagans who supposedly live in the dark.

As a result, the couple has no other choice but to hide their love affair and meet secretly. In order to see each other, the couple takes a big risk. Nyambura, for instance, has to fake a stomach ache to skip church and meet Waiyaki in the valley (p. 90). For his part, Waiyaki attends a Christian service with an intention to see Nyambura. Soon, when their affair is exposed by Kayboni who hates Waiyaki and 'would kill you [him] if he could' (p. 112), the couple decides to pursue their love to find both extremes standing in their way. Nyambura is disowned by her father who 'could control her body, but he could not control her heart' (p. 134) for immorality and for bringing shame on the family by falling in love with the leader of their enemy. She is also rejected by the traditionalists because she is against the circumcision ritual that killed her sister. Similarly, Waiyaki who rebels against the Kiama by bringing his love, the daughter of a traitor, to their village is faced with refusal. His traditionalist community view his union with Joshua's daughter as a contradiction for 'how could he work for the togetherness and purity of the tribe and then marry a girl who was not circumcised?' (p. 151). Eventually,

Waiyaki is put on trial for playing his people false and the novel closes with both Waiyaki and Nyambura in the hands of the Kiama waiting for the Kiama's decision about their punishment.

This tragic end of the couple reveals that Waiyaki is unable to eliminate the gap between Joshua's followers and the traditionalists. His dreams of unifying both communities together under a 'midway culture and religion' collapse because his people fail to understand his plan of unity:

> How could he tell them now that he had not betrayed them, but this was not what he meant by unity; that he was not in league with Joshua? […] that he meant to serve the hills; that he meant to lead them into a political movement that would shake the whole country, that would tell the white man 'Go'! (p. 151).

The end also shows the impossibility of a third space between two extremities. The fact that Waiyaki and Nyambura fail to bring unity to local and Western cultures reveals the width of the gap between the two villages and the depth of the intolerance for each other's cultural practices and beliefs. In fact, Waiyaki and Nyambura's marriage seems as impossible as the union of the two villages.

Like Waiyaki, Muthoni, who tries to merge her Christian beliefs with Gikuyu traditions that she values against the wishes of her father and community, meets a tragic end as a result. After she runs away from her father to undergo the surgery, Muthoni develops complications and dies: 'it was now a week since the others resumed their normal life. But Muthoni was still suffering' (p. 48). During her illness, she has to endure the pain by herself because Joshua will never allow her mother or her sister to visit her. It is only after her condition has worsened that Waiyaki intervenes and informs Nyambura who visits her secretly.

Instead of bringing both communities together, Muthoni's death sharpens the division between the traditionalists and the Christian converts. Her death becomes a central issue as it triggers a heated debate over circumcision and generates different reactions among Gikuyu people. On the one hand, the traditionalists interpret her death as a punishment to Joshua and

those who have left their ancestral ways for the new faith: 'the death of Muthoni had clearly shown that nothing but evil would come out of any association with the new faith' (p. 58). By contrast, the Christian converts believe the opposite, thinking that 'Muthoni was an evil spirit sent to try the faithful' and that 'nothing but evil would come out of adherence to tribal customs' (p. 58). Unlike any father who would be shaken by the death of his daughter, Joshua receives the news of Muthoni's death without showing any 'sign of emotion on the face' (p. 53) or even asking when she passed away because, for him, 'Muthoni had ceased to exist on the very day that she had sold herself to the devil. Muthoni had turned her head and longed for the cursed land' as observed by the narrator (p. 53).

Muthoni's death represents the failure of putting cultural and religious *métissage* into practice. It serves as a warning for those who dare to negotiate between first and second spaces. As Waiyaki's father concludes: 'It was a warning to all, to stick to the ways of the ridges, to the ancient wisdom of the land, to its ritual and song' (p. 54). Muthoni's last words for Waiyaki, 'tell Nyambura I see Jesus. And I am a woman, beautiful in the tribe' (p. 53), are proof of the failure of such an attempt. Although, she seems happy and satisfied because she is circumcised, because she is a Christian woman who is still attached to her tribal rituals, the fact that she dies may be read as a warning on the part of the author that religo-cultural hybridity is not always successful and can be fatal.

Waiyaki's and Muthoni's failure at reconciliation and eventual downfall reveal Ngũgĩ's attitude towards the tradition of the bildungsroman. Although it starts as a coming-of-age story, the novel works against the logic and the structure of the conventional bildungsroman. It does not conclude with the protagonists' attainment of self-fulfilment and social integration, but rather with a sense of non-belonging. Ngũgĩ chooses to end his protagonists' journey with a tragic ending because he seeks to challenge and destroy the Western tradition of the

bildungsroman. He intentionally uses 'the master codes of imperialism' in his text to sabotage them more effectively.[227]

Conclusion

The River Between records the change brought about by colonialism and the accompanying internal division in colonial Kenya, particularly, the religio-cultural conflict between two villages: Makuyu embraced Christianity and rejected local practices, whereas Kameno remained faithful to ancestral values and traditions. It demonstrates the place and predicament of the *évolués*, those who have attended mission school and attempt to compromise between old traditions and Christian integration but end up caught between the two cultures. Revising Bhabha's concepts of in-betweenness, hybridity, and third space, and Glissant's *métissage*, this chapter has shown that negotiating a middle ground between two cultures or religions is not always successful but can sometimes be tragic. All characters who try to act as intermediates between the two extremes (Waiyaki, Nyambura and Muthoni) fail and pay dearly for attempting to braid local traditions with Christianity. Waiyaki who strongly believes in the in-between space tries to unify the two antagonists through education. He devotes all his time and effort to building schools in the hope of bringing the Gikuyu community together and making it fit with modernity. However, in the process, he becomes so absorbed with spreading colonial education that he has forgotten about the liberating aim expected from his father and his people. He finds himself in dire straits when his love affair with Nyambura is exposed. As a result, both Waiyaki and Nyambura have to face Kiama's wrath. Like Waiyaki, Muthoni goes through an identity crisis resulting from inner conflict between her commitment to their

[227] Erica A. Hoagland, 'The Postcolonial Bildungsroman', in *A History of the Bildungsroman,* ed. by By Sarah Graham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 217-238 (p. 218).

ancestors' traditions and the modern ideas brought by the coloniser. Although she converted to Christianity and received colonial teachings, she insists on being circumcised because she firmly believes that being Christian does not prevent circumcision. Unfortunately, her belief in cultural *métissage* not only results in her being shunned by her father, but also comes at the expense of her life.

In spite of being an *évolué* himself whose career negotiates the very challenges of hybridity and *métissage*, Ngũgĩ is actually lacking in optimism about the fate of the *évolué* and the subversive possibilities of *métissage*. His larger point in the novel is the impossibility of the third space and the *évolué*'s failure to reconcile Christianity and Gikuyu traditions. Through the fictional characters of Waiyaki, Muthoni, and Nyambura, Ngũgĩ is in fact calling for holding to traditions and lamenting Kenyans who sold out their own people to join the ranks of British settlers: 'only by a return to the roots of our being in the languages and cultures and the heroic histories of the Kenyan people can we rise up to the challenges of helping in the creation of a Kenyan patriotic national culture that will be the envy and pride of Kenyans'.[228]

Having dealt so far with the destructive effects of colonial education mainly on the male colonised intellectual, the next two chapters will argue that colonial education, when received by indigenous women as *évoluées,* can take a different turn and be both alienating and emancipating at the same time. The next chapter on Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), explores the intellectual consequences of colonial education on the female elite. The focus is on the ways in which female characters successfully use education to escape patriarchy and poverty, but at the same time end up alienated, sometimes even suffering from serious psychological conditions.

[228] Ngũgĩ, *Writers in Politics,* p. 65.

CHAPTER THREE

Mission School in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988): An Escape from 'the Weight of Womanhood' or an Alienating Institution?

> It seemed to me that education would be my only way out, my one chance to create a life of my own making […] I would never be a man's slave. An education would give me independence.[229]
>
> Sister Abegail Ntleko

> For I was beginning to have a suspicion, no more than the seed of a suspicion, that I had been too eager to leave the homestead and embrace the 'Englishness' of the mission.[230]
>
> Tsitsi Dangarembga

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) depicts the place of women during colonialism. It shows how colonial education alienates African female *évolués* on the one hand, and allows their struggles to be heard, seen and acknowledged on the other. The novel foregrounds the psychological effects of colonial schooling on the *évoluées* and the ways in which Western training changes their role and their condition in society. It follows the experience of female elites as they negotiate between tradition and modernity and try to push the boundaries of their gender role. It shows how these attempts are challenged by the inherent paradox of colonial education and the patriarchal law that demands silence and subordination of women in Shona culture.

The novel takes place in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in Zimbabwe – before the country had officially gained its independence from Britain and while it was still known as Rhodesia. Structured as a semi-autobiographical bildungsroman, the novel follows the journey of two young female cousins: Tambudzai and Nyasha who go through cultural change after receiving Western education. The narrative structure of the novel mimics the unfolding of the

[229] Sister Abegail Ntleko, *Empty Hands, A Memoir: One Woman's Journey to Save Children Orphaned by AIDS in South Africa* (Berkeley CA: North Atlantic Books, 2015), p. 14.
[230] Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Oxford: Ayebia Clarke Publishing, 1988), p. 207.

traditional bildungsroman where the protagonist embarks on a journey to self-discovery, undergoes a crisis and eventually achieves self-knowledge and self-actualisation. Yet, instead of focusing on one sole character, the narrative follows the journey of several Shona women as they either rebel against, or accept, the burden of womanhood, race and class: 'my story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion', as declared by the narrator in the opening lines of the novel. [231]

The plot supports the novel's alliance with the tradition of the bildungsroman. It revolves around Tambudzai (or Tambu as referred to in the rest of the novel), a girl from rural Southern Rhodesia who is leading a very modest life as any Shona girl: she is responsible for the household, gardening and taking care of her young siblings. However, with her brother's death, her life changes completely. Tambu who dreams of getting an education, is given the opportunity to study at a mission school because she becomes next in line for school as she has no other brothers. While attending the mission school, she is allowed to stay with her uncle, Babamukuru, the headmaster of the school who has just come back with his family from England. While there, Tambu is introduced to a new culture and values; she struggles to move from the culture she has left behind to the one she is interacting with. Unlike Tambu who is familiar with African culture, Nyasha is not because she lived most of her life in England while her parents were receiving their education. When back in Rhodesia, she experiences the huge gap between traditional and modern society. As a girl who grew up in a European milieu, she finds it extremely difficult to adapt to the Rhodesian patriarchal society and ends up experiencing psychological problems as a result.

[231] Ibid., p. 1.

As suggested in the title itself, these psychological problems resulting from the interaction between the coloniser and the colonised are the central issue of the novel. In fact, Dangarembga has borrowed the phrase 'nervous conditions' from Jean-Paul Sartre in his introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), in which he writes: 'the status of "native" is a nervous condition introduced and maintained by the settler among the colonized people with their consent'.[232] While Fanon explores the condition of African people oppressed by colonial structures, Dangarembga extends Fanon's work by incorporating the gender element, focusing her novel on black female characters, who experience through 'nervous conditions' as a result of the cultural links inherited from the colonial encounter as well as continued patriarchal oppression.

Both Fanon and Ngũgĩ accuse colonial education of alienating African intellectuals from their people and their culture. Yet, they approach the topic of the *évolués* and their places in society from a strictly male lens. They portray males as the only victims of colonial education and the only ones capable of fighting against the effect of the colonial encounter. This chapter will show that alienation of the African *évolués* is not unique to males, and that colonial education, when received by indigenous women, can have much more varied effects, oscillating in particular between an alienating instrument or an emancipating tool. The focus will be on Tambu and her cousin Nyasha who are representations of the way in which colonial education could be a double-edged sword in British African colonies.

The novel draws heavily on the author's own life, chiefly on her experience of growing up as a black girl in colonised Zimbabwe during that period. Just like Nyasha, Dangarembga had to move with her family to England at an early age, where she stayed until she was six years old, after which she came back to Rhodesia and attended a missionary school. Growing up in

[232] Jean-Paul Sartre, Introduction to Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 17.

between two contradicting cultures meant that Dangarembga experienced both racism abroad and sexism at home. When asked about the few years she spent overseas in the 1960s, and her first experience of race as a child she said:

> The racism in England was not so institutionalized. Well, it was institutionalized, but then it was so efficiently realized that it didn't need institutions, if you understand what I mean. In England, it was much easier not to be affected by it to that extent because my parents were students and people were somewhat respectful.[233]

After years of experiencing racism, Dangarembga came back to Zimbabwe where she encountered discrimination against women. Regarding the place of women in Zimbabwean society, she states:

> A Zimbabwean woman may become a militant, genderless fighter but on pain of ridicule at the national level she may not become a fighting woman […] My own experiences as a young writer illuminate grotesquely the energy-depleting toll on Zimbabwean women who grapple with their country's version of the usual sexist controls.[234]

To date, critical analysis of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) has reflected a diversity of opinions. Some critics have chosen to focus on the relationship between gender and food in the novel. Among them is Brendon Nicholls who tries to find out why 'food and its consumption becomes the privileged sites of Nyasha's spectacular rebellion'[235] concluding that, in Willey and Treiber's words, Nyasha's symptoms are 'the product of both Nyasha's Anglicization and her selective re-assimilation into her effaced Shona mother-culture'.[236] Others focus on silence and rebellion through the body, such as Janice Hill who

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[233] Madeleine Thien, 'An Interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga', *Brick: A Literary Journal* 91 (Summer 2013) <https://brickmag.com/an-interview-with-tsitsi-dangarembga/> [Accessed 20-04-2018].

[234] Tsitsi Dangarembga, 'This Year, Next Year', *The Women's Review of Books* 8 (July 1991), p. 43.

[235] Brendon Nicholls, 'Indexing Her Digests: Working Through *Nervous Conditions'*, in *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial*, ed. by Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002), 99-134 (p. 106). For more on food and gender in the novel see: Kelli Donovan Wixson, 'Women and Food in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*', in *Negotiating the Postcolonial,* 221-230; Heidi Creamer, 'An Apple for the Teacher? Femininity, Coloniality, and Food in *Nervous Conditions*', *Kunapipi* 16.1 (1994), 349-360; and Derek Wright 'Regurgitating Colonialism: The Feminist Voice in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*', in *New Directions in African Fiction*, ed. by Berneth Lindfors (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997) 108-122.

[236] Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber, Introduction to *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002), p. xv.

engages with Tambu's and Nyasha's rebellion through their body against patriarchy. She argues that because both female characters are unable to rebel verbally, their bodies disobey instead: Nyasha's body by rejecting the food provided by her father and Tambu's by feeling paralyzed on the day of her parents' wedding, a wedding that she objects to. Hill reads Nyasha's rebellion against her authoritative father as 'figuring the struggle of African freedom fighters in the long and bloody guerrilla war against Southern Rhodesia's government'.[237] Other critics choose to read the novel through Fanonian lenses, such as Heather Zwicker who argues that Dangarembga's representation of colonised Zimbabwe conforms to Fanon's theory of violence, and that Fanon's theory is 'incomplete if it fails to acknowledge that colonial and patriarchal structures are intertwined'.[238] She further argues that Nyasha's eating disorder is a consequence of the violence of colonialism, patriarchy and of cultural hybridity: 'Nyasha figures the very dialectic of colonial and anti-colonial violence' that Fanon referred to in his *The Wretched of the Earth*.[239]

The aim of this chapter is to extend the previous research on the cultural encounter in the novel, in this case specifically the intellectual consequences of colonial education on female characters. The focus will be on the tensions between the alienating process of colonial education on the one hand, and its emancipatory element on the other. As will be argued in this chapter, mission education is seen here as a double-edged sword: whilst it can be an empowering factor as it enables female characters to challenge African patriarchy, it can also be a regressive factor as it alienates them from their culture, and sometimes leaves them with disastrous psychological consequences.

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[237] Janice E. Hill, 'Purging a Plate Full of Colonial History: The "Nervous Conditions" of Silent Girls', *College Literature*, 22.1 (Feb. 1995), 78-90 (p. 89).
[238] Willey and Treiber, Introduction to *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga*, p. xii.
[239] Heather Zwicker, 'The Nervous Collusions of Nation and Gender: Tsitsi Dangarembga's Challenge to Fanon', in *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial*, ed. by Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002), 3-23 (p. 17).

A Depiction of Patriarchy in Zimbabwean Society

Traditional cultural practices often reinforce the subordinate status of women and male dominance in African societies. This is clearly depicted in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* where men dominate Shona families entirely unchallenged. Tambu's uncle, Babamakuru, for instance, controls the entire Sigauke family and believes that it is his duty to help ensure the prosperity of the family. He thinks he deserves respect as the head of the family; he is used to being obeyed and does not permit any argument. Although he received his education in England, he is a patriarch and has an authoritarian attitude towards his female dependents. He encourages Maiguru (his wife), Nyasha (his daughter) and Tambu (his niece) to receive a good education, yet he stifles their attempts to think and rebel. He wants his daughter and niece to receive education in order to prepare them for marriage, because 'there is nothing that pleases parents more than to see their own children settled in their own families' (p. 89).

Women in colonial Zimbabwe were given fewer rights and opportunities than men. They were confined to the domestic sphere and were 'excluded from access to land in their own right, although they could and did invest in livestock'.[240] They were often denied access to education because their parents were influenced by the cultural assumptions that education was a male preserve. Their place was believed to be at home, serving their families and, later, their husbands. They were defined by what Coquery-Vidrovitch calls, in her extensive study of African women, 'the three S's: silence, sacrifice, and service'.[241] The novel's protagonist, Tambu, is denied access to education because she is a girl while her brother, Nhamo, is allowed to attend school with the whites despite the family's poverty. Even with their limited means,

[240] Angela P. Cheater, 'The Role and Position of Women in Pre-colonial and Colonial Zimbabwe', *Zambezia*, 13.2 (1986), 65-97 (p. 66).
[241] Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), p. 18.

Tambu's parents were able to raise enough money to pay the fees to send Nhamo to school. However, there was not enough money to send Tambu as well. As a result, she decided to grow and sell vegetables and raise the money herself only to find both her father and brother standing in her way. Her father, Jeremiah, is the first to oppose her education because he believes that a woman's place is at home: 'is that anything to worry about? Ha-a-a, it's nothing […] can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables' (p. 15). He also believes that education is not important for girls because, once married, she would bring her family bridewealth. However, when it comes to his male child, Jeremiah encourages Nhamo's ambition because he believes education is important for escaping poverty. Addressing Nhamo, he says:

> If I had your brains […] I would have been a teacher by now. Or a doctor. Ya! Maybe even a doctor. Do you think we would have been living the way we are? No! In a brick house with running water, hot and cold, and lights, just like Mukoma [Babamakuru]. It would have been good, if only I had the brains (p. 5).

Tambu's brother also denies her further education because he enjoys displaying his male authority and power. Most of the quarrels between the two siblings emerge because Nhamo enjoys making Tambu's blood boil by reminding her that he is given the opportunity to receive education while she is not: 'why are you jealous anyway? […] Did you ever hear of a girl being taken away to school? You are lucky you even managed to go back to Rutivi [the village school]. With me it's different. I was meant to be educated' (p. 49). Not only does he refuse to help her, but he also does not miss any opportunity to mock his sister: 'what did you expect? […] did you really think you could send yourself to school? (p. 32). In an attempt to sabotage Tambu's efforts, he steals the vegetables from her garden and gives them to his classmates. When she discovers this, she attempts to beat him up while the two attend Sunday school. Tambu's relationship with her brother reveals that females' needs and feelings are not

considered ‘a priority, or even legitimate’ (p. 12). For this reason, Tambu grows to hate her brother, to the point that she shows no feeling or sadness even when he dies. Her arresting statement in the opening line of the novel - ‘I was not sorry when my brother died’ (p. 1) - reveals how acute the tension between the two siblings is before Nhamo’s death.

Ma’Shingayi, Tambu’s mother, seems to be greatly influenced by the mindset that promotes male domination for she does all that she can to ensure that Nhamo receives education, yet she makes no sacrifice so that Tambu can receive similar training. She hopes that Nhamo’s education will ‘lift our [their] branch of the family out of the squalor in which we were [they are] living’ (p. 4), and dreams about the day when Nhamo will be providing for his family just as his educated uncle is providing for the entire Sigauke family. Thus, when money is needed for Nhamo’s schooling fees, she plants vegetables and sells them at the bus stop. However, when funds are needed for Tambu’s further education, Ma’Shingayi does not lift a finger to help for she believes that Tambu’s gains will eventually go to her husband’s family. When Tambu complains to her mother that her father does not prioritise her education, Tambu’s mother argues that being black and female is a double burden and that these two obstacles are very hard to overcome: ‘this business of womanhood is a heavy burden’ (p. 16). Instead of encouraging her daughter to be strong and rebel against the harsh reality faced by Africans, especially, African women, Ma’Shingayi encourages her daughter’s passivity and self-sacrifice:

> When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them […] and these days it is worse, with the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other. Aiwa! What will help you, my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength (p. 16).

The only time Ma’Shingayi defends Tambu is when the latter asks her father for seeds: ‘if you will give some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize. Not much, just enough for the fees’ (p. 26). As expected, Jeremiah refuses on the pretext of having no money.

At this, Ma'Shingayi intervenes: 'did she ask for money? [...] listen to your child, she is asking for seed. That we can give' (p. 26). However, one should note that her intervention is not because she believes in her daughter, rather because she wants her daughter to 'see for herself that some things cannot be done' (p. 26). Instead of encouraging her child, she is preparing her for disappointment because she believes in the patriarchal mindset that supports male empowerment at the expense of the other gender. Tambu comments on this as she says: 'I wanted support, I wanted encouragement; warnings if necessary, but constructive ones. On the day that she discouraged me once too often I decided she has been listening too devoutly to my father' (p. 31). This unequal treatment of Tambu and Nhamo's situation makes Tambu's hatred for her parents and brother grow, and ultimately pushes her away from her family: 'thinking about it, feeling the injustice of it, this is how I came to dislike my brother, and not only my brother: my father, my mother – in fact everybody (p. 12).

The subordination of women, the silencing of their voices and gender inequalities are all factors that made Shona girls eager to receive colonial education. Tambu becomes aware, more than ever, of the need for education because she considers it the only way to end her oppression. The coming sections will engage with the following questions: to what extent can Western education be an escape from female oppression? In which ways can education change the nature of family relationships? What are the complex effects of colonial education on the identity of indigenous women?

Mission Schools: An Escape from 'the Weight of Womanhood'?

After the arrival of the white settlers in 1890, missionaries controlled the educational system in Zimbabwe. They provided the first formal education for indigenous people, while the

government took responsibility for educating white children.[242] However, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when demands for more education began to increase among the local population, the colonial government stepped in to control missionary education and ensure that indigenous children were not 'over educated'. The colonial administrators were sceptical about the type of education that the missionaries provided. They believed that Africans had to be given a practical education – one that prepared them to be industrial and agricultural labourers, but not to the point of competing with Europeans.[243] Indigenous fathers often agreed to send their sons to mission schools but not their daughters because they were precious sources of agricultural labour before they married and of wealth (bridewealth) once married.[244] Thus, the tension between missionaries and indigenous parents reached fever pitch when colonial schools opened their doors to girls. This tension is revealed in the novel's second chapter, when Jeremiah disagrees with Tambu's teacher, Mr. Matimba, over Tambu's education. Unlike her tutor who is doing his best to help her return to school the following year, Tambu's father strongly opposes her getting further education. In fact, he becomes more active in his disapproval because he believes that educating a girl is a bad investment from which he will not make any profit. Responding to Mr. Matimba's comment: 'this is only ten pounds that we are quarrelling over' (p. 30), Jeremiah openly declares that he is not concerned about the ten pounds, rather about the long-term profit which Tambu's husband-to-be (and his family) will benefit from:

[242] Edward Shizha and Michael T. Kariwo, *Education and Development in Zimbabwe: A Social, Political and Economic Analysis* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), p. 16.
[243] B. J., Dorsey, 'The African School Leaver: Aspirations, Academic Achievement and Post School Employment', in *Education, Race and Employment in Rhodesia* ed, by M.W. Murphree (Salisbury: Artica Publications, 1975), 15-174 (p. 41). See also: Norman Atkinson, *Teaching Rhodesians: A History of Educational Policy in Rhodesia* (London: Longman, 1972).
[244] Carol Summers, 'If You Can Educate the Native Woman...: Debates over the Schooling and Education of Girls and Women in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1934', *History of Education Quarterly* 36.4 (1996), 449- 471 (p. 453).

> But one day, when Tambudzai has done well in her studies, she will earn more than ten pounds a month. Have you ever heard of a woman who remains in her father's house? […] she will meet a young man and I will have lost everything (p. 30).

While Shona's patriarchal structures deny women the right to receive education, colonial culture gives them this right. Mission schools taught obedience and submissiveness to Shona girls but at the same time encouraged them to take responsibility for their own souls and their own marriage, as argued by Summers: 'mission education preached chastity but offered girls new opportunities to associate with young men very different from the sometimes elderly or polygynous husbands their fathers told them to marry'.[245] Missionaries were also against polygamy; accordingly, they offered a safe haven to girls who were unwilling to marry or those who were not satisfied by their husbands:

> The prospect of being forced into an unwanted marriage provoked many African girls to seek refuge in the missions. The missionaries willingly accepted them in the name of 'civilising' and emancipating African women, and also encouraged the girls to rebel against the confining practices of their indigenous culture.[246]

For Shona girls, mission schools 'were primarily an opportunity to escape restraint and responsibilities and to have fun […] girls enjoy[ed] a sense of relief and freedom'.[247] Mission education helped Shona women to reach material prosperity and to escape household chores, a situation which is clear when comparing Maiguru and Tambu's mother. Unlike Ma'Shingayi, Tambu's mother, who is ignorant, grew up in terrible poverty and does all the physical labour at their homestead, Maiguru is an educated and successful professional woman who stands out from the rest of the Shona women. Mary Jane Androne argues that Dangarembga 'suggests that the strongest, most resilient females are not the women educated and "liberated" in the West and privileged within their societies, but the women who emerge from rural Africa and are

[245] Ibid., (p. 455).
[246] Sadia Zulfiqar, *African Women Writers and the Politics of Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholarship Publishing, 2016), p. 114. For further reading, see Diana Jeater, *Marriage, Perversion and Power: The Construction of Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia 1894 – 1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
[247] Summers, p. 455.

shaped by agricultural labor'.[248] Yet, comparing Ma'Shingayi, the rural women, and the educated Maiguru it seems that women with the least education tend to live on the margins of society. In fact, the huge differences between Maiguru and Ma'Shingayi are revealed in the opening pages where Tambu draws distinctions between both characters and holds her uncle's wife in high esteem:

> My mother said being a woman was a burden because you had to bear children and look after them and the husband. But I did not think this was true. Maiguru was well looked after by Babamukuru, in a big house on the mission which I had not seen but of which I had heard rumours concerning its vastness and elegance (p. 16).

Tambu is not convinced by her mother's ideas for she is unsatisfied with her mother's passivity and the harsh living conditions. She does not want to suffer the same fate as her mother; for this reason, she decides it is better to be like her uncle's wife 'who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood' (p. 17). She decides to educate herself in order to become like Maiguru who is 'driven about in a car, looked well-kempt and fresh, clean all the time' and who is 'altogether a different kind of woman from my mother (p. 16).

Ma'Shingayi seems doubly oppressed. Both the economic and cultural domination by imperial forces and the domination of indigenous males have led to her entrapment, oppression and powerlessness. She was born into a poor family and has led a very difficult life as a result of colonialism. Due to the British colonisation of Zimbabwe, many indigenous people lost their lands and were forced to settle down in 'densely populated communal unproductive land from whence they eke out their living'.[249] The colonists exploited the seized lands to build missionary stations and develop industry and agriculture, leaving indigenous populations to suffer from

[248] Mary Jane Androne, 'Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*: An African Woman's Revisionist Narrative' in *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial*, ed. by Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002), 271-280 (p. 276).
[249] Michelo Hansungule, 'Who Owns Land in Zimbabwe? In Africa?', *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 7.4 (2000), 305-340 (p. 318).

poverty and its subsequent effects. Tambu's grandmother explains to her grandchild how the whites confiscated their lands and made their lives miserable:

> Your family did not always live here, did not move to this place until after the time I was married to your grandfather. We lived up in Chipinge, where the soil is ripe and your great grandfather was a rich man in the currency of those days, having many fat herd and cattle, large fields and four wives who worked hard to produce beautiful harvest […] Wizards [the whites] well versed in treachery and black magic came from the south and forced the people from the land. On donkey, on foot, on horse, on ox-cart, the people looked for a place to live. But the wizards were avaricious and grasping; there was less and less land for people (p. 18).

Tambu's mother seems also oppressed by her own traditional society. In fact, she represents the conventional image of an African woman who endures, and works both at home and in the fields without complaining or protesting. Like most African women, she is supposed to contribute to the household and food production systems and to play a submissive role at home in order to gain the favour of their husband, as decent women would do. Coquery-Vidrovitch refers to the tasks of the peasant African woman as she writes: 'women took care of agriculture, household tasks such as supplying water and firewood, nearby gardening, and small-scale subsistence and neighbourhood trading'.[250] She is expected to be a silent and obedient worker whose concern is nothing but the satisfaction of her husband and family. Her tasks are very difficult and require multiple skills and physical strength. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí comments on this double oppression: 'African females were colonized by Europeans as Africans and as African women. They were dominated, exploited, and inferiorized as Africans together with African men and then separately inferiorized and marginalized as African women'.[251]

[250] Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women A Modern History*, p. 10.
[251] Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyèwùmí, 'Colonizing Body and Mind', in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (Oxford: Routledge, 1995), 256-259 (p. 257).

Because of her illiteracy, Ma'Shingayi is portrayed as a submissive hardworking figure who has toiled for her family and who accepts the reality of her life. Married to Jeremiah at the age of fifteen, she has no knowledge of another life except that of hard work and sacrifices. In the first scenes, she is described as a driven provider for her family: 'she began to boil eggs, which she carried to the bus terminus and sold to passengers passing through […] she also took vegetables – rape, onions and tomatoes – extending her garden so that there was more to sell' (p. 15). She is the exact opposite of her husband, Jeremiah, who is lazy and demonstrates very little responsibility for his children and family.

Tambu's mother is aware that her ignorance and poverty are the reasons she has had no voice. After Nhamo's death, she becomes very jealous of Maiguru because of the latter's money, education, and presumed respect. When the other women in the family ask Maiguru about her opinion on the issue of Takesure and Lucia living in the homestead, Maiguru refuses to intervene. She claims that since she was not born into this family, it is not her business to intervene and she goes to bed. At this, Ma'Shingayi's flagrantly expresses her antipathy towards Maiguru's education and wealth:

> I am only saying what I think, just like she did. She did tell us, didn't she, what she thinks, and did anyone say anything! No. Why not? Because Maiguru is educated. That's why you all kept quiet. Because she's rich and comes here and flashes her money around, so you listen to her as though you want to eat the words that come out of her mouth. But me, I'm not educated, am I? I'm just poor and ignorant, so you want me to keep quiet, you say I mustn't talk. Ehe! I am poor and ignorant, that's me, but I have a mouth and it will keep on talking, it won't keep quiet (p. 142).

Although at the beginning of the novel she considers her place simply as a burden to bear, after her child's death, Ma'Shingayi becomes angry about her silencing. She furiously demands her right to speak and be heard – a right that she has for so long been denied – by comparing herself to Maiguru who not only has a voice but whose voice is heard. This episode reveals that there is a kind of hierarchy within the patriarchal Shona family. In other words,

members of Shona families are ranked according to their authority and respect. Men are at the top of the totem pole as they enjoy full authority and respect, followed by women who are educated but are nevertheless given less respect, while poor housewives are at the bottom with no voice or respect. Ma'Shingayi embodies what Gayatri Spivak refers to as 'subaltern' in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' because she is at the very bottom of the hierarchy and she is fully aware of this: 'if […] the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow'.[252]

Ma'Shingayi has no voice of her own and even when she speaks her opinion is not taken into account. When Babamakuru and Jeremiah decide that Tambu must be given the opportunity to study after Nhamo's sudden death, Ma'Shingayi who is still in mourning for her son, immediately rejects the idea:

> You, Jeremiah, are you mad? Have you eaten some wild scrub that has gone to your head? I think so, otherwise how could you stand there and tell me to send my child to a place of death, the place where my first living child died! […] she will not go […] I will not let her go (p. 56).

This long argument with her husband shows that Ma'Shingayi does have a voice but her voice is not heard. Tambu's statement – 'my father did not pursue the matter, but I went to the mission all the same' – is proof of the silencing of women in patriarchal societies (p. 57). D'Almeida elaborates on this when she writes: 'silence presents the historical muting of women under the formidable institution known as patriarchy, that form of social organization in which males assume power and create women an inferior status'.[253] The debates over whether to send Tambu to the mission or not also reveal that women's feelings are not respected. Ma'Shingayi keeps saying that anxiety would kill her if Jeremiah sent her daughter to the place where her other

[252] Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', p. 287.
[253] Irène Assiba D'Almeida, Introduction to *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 1.

child had died, yet he sends her regardless. As a result, her anxiety becomes real and by the time Tambu leaves the house, she becomes ‘so haggard and gaunt she could hardly walk to the fields, let alone work in them (p. 57).

In stark contrast with Ma’Shingayi, Maiguru has the advantage of having received an education and, as a result, has led a more comfortable life. Although she has sacrificed her independent career in order to support and look after her husband and children, she stands out among the women in her family because she is educated. In fact, life in England has changed both her character and lifestyle: she is financially independent, she stands up for herself, and above all, she has a voice. Maiguru lives a comfortable life in material terms compared to the other women in the family. She works as a teacher at the mission school and financially contributes to the household finances. Material comfort and luxury are seen in her physical appearance and in her fancy house. In fact, in the first encounter with Maiguru in the novel, she looks quite presentable compared to her female relatives as noted by Tambu: ‘dressed in flat brown shoes and a pleated polyester dress very much like the one Babamukuru bought for my mother the Christmas before he left’ (p. 37). She also lives in a big house that ‘not even the Whites themselves could afford’ (p. 61) and has a housemaid who undertakes all the household chores for her.

At the very beginning of the novel, Maiguru is portrayed as ‘the angel in the house’, a phrase that comes from the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore’s long narrative poem, in which he idealises his angel wife and presents her as a model for all women. She is depicted as the supportive mother and ideal wife who keeps quiet and does her duties as dictated by the Shona system. When at the farm for holidays, Maiguru is reduced to a traditional homemaker role. She ‘worked harder than anybody else, because as the senior wife and the owner of the best cooking facilities as well as provider of the food to cook, she was expected to oversee all

culinary operations' (p. 137). Despite being educated, Maiguru endeavours to meet the expectations of Shona practices by being in charge of cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children. Yet, all her efforts in the homestead and the kitchen are in vain because her female relatives consider her as 'proud and unfeeling' and envy her for her education (p. 142). Things start to change, however, when Tambu confronts her uncle's wife about her education. At this, Maiguru pours her heart out to Tambu and tells her about her life in England and the opportunities she gave up for her family. When Tambu is surprised to learn that Maiguru holds a Master degree just like her husband, Maiguru sourly says:

> When I was in England I glimpsed for a little while the things I could have been, the things I could have done if - if - if things were - different - But there was Babawa Chido and the children and the family. And does anyone realise, does anyone appreciate, what sacrifices were made? As for me, no one even thinks about the things I gave up (p. 103).

She explains that her life could have been different if she had stayed in England but she chose to sacrifice it instead because 'when you have a good man and lovely children, it makes it all worth while' (p. 103).

Tambu's question seems to have opened Maiguru's eyes to her unrecognised sacrifices. Maiguru who used to be submissive and obedient starts to stand up for herself against Babamukuru. During the following holidays and after the wedding of Tambu's parents, Maiguru gets into an argument with her husband because she believes that Tambu is being punished too harshly for not attending her parents' wedding. When her husband disagrees with her, she continues the fight and, eventually, tells him she is unhappy and confronts him about the lack of respect and recognition she gets in the family:

> Yes, she is your brother's child […] but when it comes to taking my money so that you can feed her and her father and your whole family and waste it on ridiculous weddings […] let me tell you Babawa Chido, I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home I am working myself sick to support (p. 174).

At this, Babamukuru boldly reacts by telling her to go somewhere where she will be happy, an action that leads to her leaving the house. Although she returns five days later, she becomes stronger having discovered that she can leave. She no longer idolizes Babamukuru, 'most of her baby-talk has disappeared', and her smiles have become more frequent and less mechanical (p. 178). More bravely, she becomes more vocal in her decisions. A relevant example of that is when she refuses to go to the homestead for the Christmas vacation because she does not want to 'spend another Christmas catering for a family of two dozen' (p. 185).

Maiguru's departure from the house, although for a short time, has given her the power to voice her opinions in a way she never did before. This is revealed when Baba takes the decision for Tambu not to attend the convent school; Maiguru influences his decision by explaining that she does not think that Tambu will be corrupted by going. She reminds him about the common prejudice which prevailed against educated women when she was herself a student in South Africa:

> Don't you remember, when we went to South Africa everybody was saying that we, the women, were loose. It wasn't a question of associating with this race or that race at the time. People were prejudiced against educated women. Prejudiced. That's why they said we weren't decent. That was in the fifties. Now we are into the seventies. I am disappointed that people still believe the same things (p. 184).

This scene shows the change in Maiguru's character after her stay in her brother's house. Maiguru's defence of women's education and Tambu's right to attend the convent school after being offered a scholarship is part of the reason Tambu is allowed to go to the convent school. The reader finds out later that Tambu is happy to see 'that Maiguru's speech had had some effect' on her uncle (p. 185). Babamukuru's final decision to let Tambu go to the school with the nuns demonstrates that Maiguru has some effect on her husband and can exert some power in the decision-making process within her family.

Although Maiguru's education has, to an extent, helped her escape patriarchy and poverty, she is still 'trapped in her inability to seek equal partnership in marriage'.[254] Her entrapment is mainly economic, because she has no control over what she earns. She cannot spend any money on herself because her husband spends all her income on his extended family. In her conversation with Tambu, she declares: 'your uncle wouldn't be able to do half the things he does if I didn't work as well' (p. 103). The fact that she has no control over her own financial resources shows the complex challenges that African women face within a patriarchal society. Just as the colonial government oppresses the indigenous population, indigenous males, like Babamukuru, oppress their women, if not physically, at least, economically. This 'double otherness' makes the African woman 'the forgotten casualty of both imperial ideologies, and native and foreign hierarchies' as argued by Gandhi.[255]

Tambu's Schooling: An Assertion of Personal Liberty

Just like her uncle's wife, who manages to escape poverty and lead a comfortable life thanks to her education, Tambu's life changes for the better after she moves to Babamukuru's house to attend the mission school. Before moving to her uncle's place, Tambu struggles against poverty and the lack of opportunities in her village. Describing herself, she says:

> You could see at a glance in my tight faded frock [...] broad-toed feet that had grown thick-skinned through daily contact with the ground in all weathers [...] corrugated black callouses on my knees, the scales on my skin that were due to lack of oil, the short, dull tufts of malnourished hair (p. 58).

Aware of her poverty, Tambu looks forward to getting rid of her peasant look and becoming 'clean, well-groomed, [and] genteel' (p. 58). Thus, when she is given the opportunity

[254] Pauline Ada Uwakweh, 'Debunking Patriarchy: The Liberational Quality of Voicing in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*', *Research in African Literatures*, 26.1, New Voices in African Literature (Spring, 1995), 75-84 (p. 81).
[255] Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 83.

to join the mission school, she becomes very excited and decides to leave poverty and her old self behind. She wants so badly to seize the opportunity that she does not show any remorse for leaving her weeping mother. When she first comes to Babamukuru's place, Tambu notices the alienating effects of colonial education and regrets chastising her brother for deserting his family and losing touch with life in the village. She feels a twinge of empathy because she understands how he became so spoiled. Now that she is in his shoes, she is doing exactly the same thing:

> I could not pretend to be sorry to be leaving the waterdrums whose weight compressed your neck into your spine […] I was not sorry to be leaving the tedious tax of coaxing Nyamarira's little tributary in and out of the vegetable beds (p. 59).

Although she finds adapting to a new life in the mission difficult at the very beginning, Tambu manages to settle quickly into her new home. On her first day in the mission, she feels inferior and so embarrassed because she does not know how to operate the light switch in her bedroom and struggles to use a knife and fork after a lifetime of eating with her fingers. At this, she understands that disposing of her old self might not be as easy as she thought. Commenting on her experience of adjusting, she says:

> I was in real danger of feeling sorry for myself. I reprimanded myself for this self-indulgence by thinking of my mother, who suffered from being female and poor and uneducated and black so stoically that I was ashamed of my weakness in succumbing so flabbily to the strangeness of my new circumstances (p. 91).

Remembering her mother, her patience and her hard work, Tambu is motivated to work harder and make the most of the opportunity her uncle has given her.

As time passes, Tambu feels very pleased with herself and her life in the mission and the way things turn out. She considers her transfer to the mission as her 'reincarnation' because she escapes the restraints of the domestic life and her life at the mission is remarkably easier as

'she bears few of the burdens that she did at the homestead'.[256] She becomes confident about her physical appearance and admires herself and her new look. She is happy to see herself tidy, not only on special occasions but every day of the week. Now that she wears clean clothes, straightens her hair, files her nails and sometimes paints them, she becomes more self-confident and no longer belittles herself:

> When I was dressed I admired myself in the mirror. I looked better in that uniform than I had ever looked before […] it was a shock to see that in fact I was pretty, and also difficult to believe, making it necessary for me to scrutinise myself for a long time, from all angles and in many different positions, to verify my suspicion (p. 92).

She also finds herself excelling at school because she reads eagerly anything she can get her hands on. Most of her knowledge does not come from the lessons she is taught at school but from her cousin's extensive library. Her English is improved and she no longer struggles to communicate with Nyasha: 'my English soon became fluent from all the reading I was doing and from talking to Nyasha all the time, but I spoke without an accent' (p. 96). Her teachers like her because she is hardworking and they always cite her diligence as an example for her colleagues. Tambu compares her performance in the mission and her old school, and declares that now she performs better than she had done at home because 'Baba and Maiguru knew that my school work was important and did not disturb me when I was studying (p. 96).

The quicker Tambu adapts to the mission life, the further she situates herself from her family and culture. As she becomes more established at the mission school, she begins to embrace new ways of thinking and new beliefs, which are totally different from those of her rural uneducated family. Her attitude towards white people has changed. She does not consider them enemies anymore because now she interacts with many of them; they are her teachers, her

[256] Ann Elizabeth Wiley, 'Modernity, Alienation and Development: *Nervous Conditions* and the Female Paradigm', in *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolonial*, ed. by Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2002), 61-81 (p. 79).

classmates, and her neighbours. Comparing the 'wizards' whom her grandmother used to tell her about to the whites of the mission, she says:

> The whites on the mission were a special kind of white person, special in the way that my grandmother had explained to me, for they were holy. They had come not to take but to give […] they had given up the comfort and security of their own homes to come and lighten our darkness (p. 105).

Although Tambu's consciousness seems relatively innocent at this stage of the novel, we, the readers, are in a different position. We know from Dangarembga's ironic use of biblical language that missionaries are nothing like the self-sacrificing figure of the Messiah, but rather an integral part of the colonial project.

Tambu's perspective has changed after receiving a formal education. She becomes seduced by colonial education because she believes that she would be freed from traditional gender oppression. Gorle comments on Tambu's alienation:

> Tambu's deracination begins as a voluntary escape from a suffocating situation at home. It enables her to achieve a partly liberating but partly frightening distance from her roots, and she runs the risk of becoming alienated from her family as a result of the educational opportunities she earns.[257]

In other words, Tambu's fairy-tale impression of Western education has encouraged her desire for Western assimilation and pushed her away from the Shona culture. She starts to privilege modernity over tradition: 'the more I saw of worlds beyond the homestead the more I was convinced that the further we left the old ways behind the closer we came to progress' (p. 147). She thinks that she is progressing through the assimilation of colonial education because she conceives the mission school as a place that 'manufactured guaranteed young ladies', one in which 'you wore pleated terylene skirts to school every day and on Sundays a tailor-made two-piece linen suit with gloves, yes, even with gloves!' (p. 178). As a result, she 'accepts the losses

[257] Gilian Gorle, 'Fighting the Good Fight: What Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* Says about Language and Power', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 27, The Politics of Postcolonial Criticism (1997), 179-192 (p. 186).

as well as gains that come from alienation from a traditional culture that accompanies her education'.[258]

When Tambu returns to her village before Christmas, she starts to see the place where she grew up in a different light. She becomes suddenly aware of the squalor she used to live in. For the first time, she describes her old home as backward and disgusting. Her description of the caving-in roof and filthy latrine (which she cleans herself with Nyasha's help and even then it is not clean enough), reveals the results of upward mobility on Tambu and the significant change in her character. While Tambu herself has no idea about how much she has changed, her mother notices the difference in her daughter. In the seventh chapter, she accuses Tambu of being proud and judgmental: 'Oh, yes, Tambudzai […] Do you think your mother is so stupid she won't see that Maiguru has turned you against me with her money and her white ways. You think I am dirt now, me your mother' (p. 140).

Tambu becomes 'unhomed': assimilation has made her socially and psychologically uncomfortable in her own home, within her own people. Homi Bhabha, who coined the concept of 'unhomeness' drawing upon Freud's theory of Unheimlich, insists that it is not a question of having no physical home (i.e. being homeless) but of being forced to negotiate one's place in the world. In this context, he writes: 'to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres'.[259] Other scholars such as E. Masgrau-Peya comment on the concept of 'unhomeness' and define it as follows:

> 'unhomeness' is most readily identified in the experience of migrants and postcolonial people for whom geographic or cultural dislocation are defining traits either because

[258] Wiley, 'Modernity, Alienation and Development', (p. 69).
[259] Homi Bhabha', 'The World and the Home', *Social Text*, 31/32, Third World and Post-Colonial Issues (1992), 141-153 (p. 141).

> they have been uprooted from former places of identification or because a familiar place has undergone radical change as a result of its colonial past or present.[260]

Just as she had noticed her brother's alienation after joining the mission school — 'my brother had become a stranger to me' (p. 56) — Tambu starts to notice how Western modes of life are changing her identity. After her stay in Babamukuru's place, Tambu becomes ashamed of her family's poverty and distant from her parents. She becomes physically and mentally removed from her place and her family there. Aware of her dislocation, Tambu states: 'I do not know how I came to be like that […] I had grown very tentative […] my going to the mission was such a drastic change that it unnerved me' (p. 112).

Tambu who used to enjoy life in the village, does not feel at ease anymore and becomes estranged from her people. Her persistent desire for social mobility and admiration of white colonial modernity has changed her inner early thoughts about her home. Tambu recalls describing the rural landscape of her village in a very idealistic way and announces the change that has occurred in her personality: 'the river, the trees, the fruit and the fields. This was how it was in the beginning. This is how I remember my earliest memories, but it did not stay like that' (p. 3). It is not the village that has changed but her personality and her attitude towards the homestead. Tyson argues that 'to be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your own home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee'.[261]

Although education has distanced her from her family and culture, it has also freed her from patriarchy. Before receiving mission education, Tambu used to be submissive to her male relatives, especially her uncle whom she considered a godlike figure. However, her experience

[260] Elisenda Masgrau-Peya, 'Towards a Poetics of the "Unhomed": The House in Katherine Mansfield's "Prelude" and Barbara Hanrahan's "The Scent of Eucalyptus"', *Antipodes*, 18.1 (June 2004), 60-66 (p. 60).
[261] Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-friendly Guide*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 421.

in the mission has taught her how to stand for herself and rebel against the silencing of her voice. When Babamukuru imposes a church wedding on her parents, Tambu stands up for the first time for what she wants and speaks her mind. Addressing her uncle, she fearlessly declares: 'I'm sorry, Babamukuru, but I do not want to go to the wedding' (p. 169). Her decision not to attend her parents' wedding and to stand up to her uncle, whom she considers as a model, comes from her anger at him, because he blames her parents for bringing a curse upon the whole family. Babamukuru believes that her parents' unofficial marriage is the reason behind the family's problems and considers them as sinners. Tambu finds his idea of the church wedding offensive because it reduces her parents 'to the level of the stars of a comic show, the entertainers' (p. 165). She is not willing to listen to him this time because of 'having devised this plot which made such a joke of my parents, my home and myself' (p. 151).

Rebellion against patriarchal decisions often requires courage and strength such as Tambu's when she decides to disobey Babamukuru and miss her parents' wedding. Despite being angry and resentful, she tries to hide her feelings and manage her anger because she is scared of Babamukuru's reaction. Yet, on the day of the wedding, because she is unable to express her disobedience verbally, her body takes action and rebels against the silencing of her voice through a 'hysterical paralysis'. Tambu becomes depressed, anxious and unable to get out of bed. In other words, she 'refuses, by feigning paralysis, to become complicit in events over which she has little control'.[262] Describing the nervous conditions she experienced, she says: 'I suffered a horrible crawling over my skin, my chest contracted to a breathless tension and even my bowels threatened to let me know their opinion' (p. 149). Hill comments on the protagonist's psychological condition as she writes: 'although Tambu cannot be verbally disobedient, this psychic rupture allows her to disassociate the silent obedience that she has

[262] Hill, 'Purging a Plate Full of Colonial History', (p. 78).

affected from her body's performatively disobedient actions'.[263] Faced with this psychosomatic development, she apologizes to her uncle and at the same time avoids going to the wedding. Tambu manages to miss the wedding and express her opinion but this comes at a price. After the wedding, Tambu has to pay for her brave decision by being punished with fifteen lashes and two weeks of taking over Anna's maid duties. Despite being punished, Tambu is proud of herself because she stood up for herself and did not have to attend. She feels emancipated and believes that the punishment is 'the price of my [her] newly acquired identity' (p. 169).

The Cost of Education

Unlike her cousin who has managed, to a large extent, to escape poverty and push away male domination thanks to mission schooling, Nyasha's education comes at a price. Her assimilating of Western values has made her a stranger among her own people, leaving her struggling with identity crises. Nyasha's loss of the Shona language, her lack of modesty and decorum, her clothing deemed indecent by traditional African standards, and her disrespect for elders are all indications of her alienation which will contribute to her eventual nervous breakdown.

After spending many years in England, Babamakuru's family seems to have lost all traces of their traditional Shona culture. Nyasha admits to Tambu that her experience of living in England has turned her and Chido into cultural 'hybrids'. She does not know what to do about it 'Tambu, really I don't. I can't help having been there and grown into the me that has been there' (p. 78). When Babamakuru and his family return home, Tambu's family throws a big reception to welcome them back. The relatives, in the homestead, are shocked by Chido and

[263] Ibid., (p. 86).

Nyasha's new English affectations and customs. Tambu observes that Maiguru does not look as though she had been to England, but that Nyasha 'obviously had. There was no other explanation for the tiny little dress she wore, hardly enough of it to cover her thighs' (p. 37). The narrator finds that the tiny little dress her cousin is wearing is inappropriate: 'I could not condone her lack of decorum. I would not give my approval. I turned away' (p. 37).

Nyasha's revealing clothing is the first indication of her foreignness. Being used to imitating everything European, Nyasha fails to understand that the way she dresses is inappropriate for the homestead's space and does not conform to traditional Shona standards — which are patriarchal, insofar as they regulate women's bodies. Commenting on her looks when she first arrives to the homestead, Tambu narrates:

> She was self-conscious though, constantly clasping her hands behind her buttocks to prevent her dress from riding up, and observing everybody through veiled vigilant eyes to see what we were thinking. Catching me examining her, she smiled slightly and shrugged; 'I shouldn't have worn it,' her eyes seemed to say (p. 37).

Nyasha'a alienation is also seen at the linguistic level. Her time and education in England have made her aphasic. In fact, both Nyasha and her brother have lost the ability to speak their local language. As a result, Tambu who used to chat and play with her cousins in Shona without any complex is now unable to communicate with them. Communication between the cousins becomes a constant struggle because Nyasha and Chido cannot speak Shona, and Tambu cannot speak English. Unable to relate to her cousins in Shona or through traditional dance, Tambu starts to see her cousins, whom she was excited to meet again, as strangers: 'I remembered speaking to my cousins freely and fluently before they went away, eating wild fruits with them, making clay pots and swimming in Nyamarira. Now they had turned into strangers. I stopped being offended and was sad instead' (pp. 42 - 43).

The exposure to Western culture has created a barrier between Babamukuru's children and people in the homestead. Tambu tries very hard to develop a friendship with Nyasha

whenever her cousin comes to visit, but the latter is not responsive. Tambu describes her cousin as always 'silent and watchful, observing us all with that complex expression of hers - what we said, what we did […] with an intensity that made me uncomfortable' (p. 52). Consequently, Tambu becomes suspicious of her cousins because of their English manners, language, and style of dress. She thinks they are snobs because they now look down on Tambu's family and the Shona culture, which is foreign to them. Tambu feels offended when Maiguru states that her children do not understand Shona very well anymore because they have been speaking nothing but English for so long. She cannot find an explanation for the radical change that her cousins have undergone: 'I had not expected my cousins to have changed, certainly not so radically, simply because they had been away for a while. Besides, Shona was our language. What did people mean when they forgot it?' (p. 42). In his interview with *The Nation* while addressing the continuing effects of colonialism, Ngũgĩ comments on linguistic amnesia, as he argues: 'the colonizer not only imposes his language, but he denigrates and represses the languages of the colonized. So, the condition of learning English was the unlearning of our language, which continued into the postcolonial era'.[264] It seems that the cultural and linguistic evolution of Nyasha and Chido simply reflected this type of long-running deprecating trajectory.

Nyasha has also adopted new habits that do not conform to accepted Shona cultural standards. She has taken to smoking, a habit which is regarded as indecent and improper for a Shona young girl. Tambu's shock at discovering that her cousin smokes is expressed in the fifth chapter, where Nyasha asks her cousin to accompany her to the garage to smoke a cigarette: 'you smoke cigarettes; I was aghast. Babamukuru was right! His daughter was beyond

[264] Rohit Inani, 'Language Is a "War Zone": A Conversation with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o', *The Nation* (March 2018) <https://www.thenation.com/article/language-is-a-war-zone-a-conversation-with-ngugi-wa-thiongo/> [Accessed 24-07-2018].

redemption.' (p. 85). Tambu tries to change the topic 'hoping that the cigarette she has fished out of her bookbag would disappear, or that at the very least she would put it back in the bookbag and tell me that she was carrying them for somebody else' (p. 86). She is scared that Babamukuru will come and catch them holding the cigarette because 'either he would kill her or the shock would kill him' (p. 86).

Another behaviour that is improper for a Shona girl is disrespect for elders. Tambu is surprised by the way her cousin treats her parents and her constant fights with them. At her first dinner at the mission, Tambu who is accustomed to being served after male members of the family have finished eating, is surprised by Nyasha's decision to serve her own food before her mother is finished preparing Babamukuru's plate. Nyasha justifies her action by saying that she does not 'like cold food' (p. 83). For Tambu, this is unacceptable because it is a disruption of table manners and, above all, disrespect to elders.

As dinner progresses, Nyasha realises that her mother has confiscated a copy of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover.* At this, Maiguru rebukes Nyasha for reading a book that is inappropriate for her, but Nyasha talks back and defends herself. She wants to know why it is inappropriate for her: 'it's only a book and I'm only reading it' (p. 85), she ventures daringly. For her, it is just a book, but her parents are afraid that Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, considered pornographic at that time, might affect her decency. Because she is not given a satisfactory answer, except that decent girls should not read such books, Nyasha bursts out of the dining room angrily and goes to the backyard to smoke a cigarette. Tambu does not like the way Nyasha speaks to her mother because 'a regular African child would not pursue the matter in that tone'.[265] Thus, she confronts Nyasha about her treatment of

[265] Phanuel Akubueze Egejuru, *Womanbeing and Womanself: Characters in Black Women's Novels* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), p. 129.

her mother, but Nyasha responds by saying that Maiguru does not 'want to be respected' (p. 78-79). Nyasha's attitude toward her parents puzzles Maiguru and Babamukuru; both think that she is 'too Anglicised' and out of control. Disappointed at his daughter's lack of politeness, Babamukuru declares: 'I don't know what's wrong with our daughter. She has no sense of decency, none whatsoever' (p. 91). Dangarembga's reference to D.H. Lawrence's masterpiece, *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* which was banned in Britain and America for obscenity until 1960, is not arbitrary. In an interview about D.H Lawrence, she declared that she 'could see what he was aiming at – all the anxieties he would put in his writing'.[266] By insisting on reading this novel, which turns around an extramarital affair and the explicit sexual explorations between a working class man and an upper class woman, Nyasha vociferously takes ownership of her own body and challenges the default attitude of Shona society towards womanhood, decency and female sexuality.

Nyasha's rebellion and disrespect do not stop here; they reach even her father — 'the head of the Siguake family'. When Nyasha, Chido and Tambu return from a school dance, one night, Nyasha is ten minutes later than the others because of one of Chido's friends who taught her a new dance move at the end of the road. When back, Babamukuru asks for an explanation for her lateness and tells her off. At this, Nyasha, who does not see any reason why staying for a few minutes with male acquaintances is improper, stands up to her father and says: 'what do you want me to say? […] you want me to admit I'm guilty, don't you. All right then. I was doing it, whatever you're talking about (p. 115). Unused to being challenged, Babamukuru feels offended: 'do not talk to me like that, child […] you must respect me. I am your father (p. 115). The situation escalates when Nyasha punches her father in the eye after he calls her a 'whore'

[266] Shubha Tiwari, *Children and Literature* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2006), p. 21

and hits her twice. Enraged at his daughter's rebellious behaviour, Babamukuru threatens to kill her:

> She has dared to challenge me. Me! Her father. I am telling you […] today she will not live. We cannot have two men in this house. Not even Chido, you hear that Nyasha? Not even your brother there dares to challenge my authority (p. 117).

After this fight, Nyasha's relationship with her father deteriorates. She becomes more detached from her family because whilst she cannot accept being submissive to her parents, her father cannot either accept her disrespect. However, as her attempt to rebel against her father's continuous oppression fails, Nyasha has no other choice but to rebel through her body. Her body has become a site of resistance, a site 'on which Nyasha enacts her resistance. She wears short dresses, smokes cigarettes, and goes dancing. When forced to eat, she withdraws to the bathroom'.[267] Nyasha is aware that rejecting food is an illogical behaviour but 'it does make her feel better that's why she continues.' (p. 87). She is using her own body to draw attention to her revolt and as a sign of the (masochistic) extent to which she is prepared to endure hardship for what she believes in. By not eating the food provided by her father, Nyasha is trying to challenge her father's authority and gain control over her life. Addressing her cousin, she says:

> You've got to have some conviction, and I'm convinced I don't want to be anyone's underdog. It's not right for anyone to be that. But once you get used to it, well, it just seems natural and you just carry on. And that's the end of you. You're trapped. They control everything you do (p. 119).

Nyasha's rejection of food lasts for several months and becomes very alarming, causing her a serious mental health condition. She becomes weaker day by day, to the extent that she can barely walk. The 'pretty bright Nyasha has now grown skeletal and the sparkle [has] gone from her eyes (p. 202). The narrator describes how serious the situation has become as she says: 'it

[267] Biman Basu, 'Trapped and Troping: Allegories of the Transnational Intellectual in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*', *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 28.3 (July 1997), p. 13.

was truly alarming, but nobody commented, nobody acted; we were all very frightened. One evening, at supper, she passed out into her plate' (p. 204).

Babamukuru thinks that his daughter is making a scene and, as a result, he does not take any action. It is only when Nyasha has a nervous breakdown that he realises how serious the problem is, and decides to take her to a psychiatrist. During this nervous breakdown, like Arezki in *Le Sommeil du juste*, Nyasha destroys her books. Not only does she shred her history book with her teeth, but she also breaks the clay pots she used to make with Tambu in their free time.

> She rampaged, shredding her history book between her teeth ('Their history. Fucking Liars. Their bloody lies'), breaking mirrors, her clay pots, anything she could lay her hands on and jabbing the fragments viciously into her flesh, stripping the bedclothes, tearing her clothes from the wardrobe and trampling them underfoot (p. 205).

Nyasha's attack on both her history book and clay pots comes as a reaction against colonial education and patriarchy at the same time. David Jefferess argues that 'in Nyasha's attack on her European history text and the clay pots, she seems to be disrupting both poles of binary between colonizer/ colonised, modern/ traditional'.[268] Betrayed by her body which becomes skeletal and in need for nourishment, Nyasha turns her anger and aggression at the colonising myths and indigenous traditions towards her own body, as the literal manifestation of being caught in the double yoke of the binaries Jefferess mentions. Unable to find an alternative way to resist her father's domination after her hunger strike fails, she decides to destroy her own body.

Nyasha's rebellion and eventual nervous breakdown stem from the fact that she is caught between her English identity and her Shona roots. She is split between the knowledge she acquired in school and the traditions of her people. She is the victim of what Buchi Emecheta refers to as 'the double yoke' (yoke of tradition and modernity). In her novel *Double*

[268] David Jefferess, *Postcolonial Resistance: Culture, Liberation and Transformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 72

Yoke, Emecheta explicitly tells her readers that the African woman is the victim of both the patriarchal constraint and colonial oppression, because she has to bear the traditions of her own cultural and social past and adapt to the new teachings imposed on her by the missionary. Yet, the negotiation between the two opposing ideologies is not always successful. Nyasha fails to find a balance between the two conflicting ideologies and ends up feeling completely alienated not only from her family but also from her classmates who do not like her because they think she tries to be 'white'. She is aware of this failure and she is able to explain the dilemma to Tambu: 'I am not one of them but I'm not one of you' (p. 205). This failure has left her suffering from physical and psychological problems. Sue Thomas believes that 'the hysteric in *Nervous Conditions* is a product of precariously repressed rage at patriarchal and colonial domination under conditions of cultural dislocation and disruption of Shona gender norms'.[269]

Conclusion

Nervous Conditions shows that the idea of the '*évolué*' is not limited to men but can also be applied to women. Indigenous women who received mission education in colonial times were also caught between their local culture and that of the West. Their challenge seems even harder than their male compatriots' because they bear a double burden, the burden of traditions and the burden of modernity. This chapter has revealed that education received by colonised women can be a double-edged weapon: an emancipatory tool and an alienating factor at the same time. While Tambu uses education to escape the environment of inequality and poverty and seeks to liberate herself, Nyasha uses it to resist the patriarchy. However, her rebellion

[269] Sue Thomas, 'Rewriting the Hysteric as Anorexic in Tsitsi Dangarembga''s *Nervous Conditions*', in *Scenes of the Apple: Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women's Writing,* ed. by Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran (New York: State University of New York, 2003), 183- 198 (p. 185).

against her father ends up tragically as she suffers from these nervous conditions. Nyasha's breakdown towards the end of the novel is a turning point for Tambu because it awakens within her an awareness of the side-effects of colonial education. Her final statement reveals a change in her personality and the way she perceives colonial education: 'I was young then and unable to banish things, but seeds do grow […] something in my mind began to assert itself, to question things and refuse to be brainwashed' (p. 208).

In the next chapter, I examine the issue of bilingualism and biculturalism in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985). I focus on French education not only as a manifestation of the colonial condition but also as a tool of resistance. Focusing on Djebar's own cultural and linguistic evolution in colonial Algeria, I intend to push the boundaries of existing interpretive frameworks by demonstrating that being caught between two cultures or two languages is not always a trap for indigenous women but can also be a way out.

CHAPTER FOUR

Bilingualism and Biculturalism in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985)

> La langue étrangère me servait, dès l'enfance, d'embrasure pour le spectacle du monde et de ses richesses. Voici qu'en certaines circonstances, elle devenait dard pointé sur ma personne.[270]
>
> Assia Djebar

> As a child born in a harem, I instinctively knew that to live is to open closed doors. To live is to look outside. To live is to step out. Life is trespassing.[271]
>
> Fatima Mernissi

Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985) is one of the most eloquent representations of bilingualism and biculturalism and their complex role in the alienation of the female *évolué* in colonial Algeria. It explores the ambivalent position of Western-educated Algerian women who are born into a privileged class that is ready psychologically and economically to offer them French education and accept their emancipation. It focuses in particular on women whose Western training alienates them from their native cultural heritage on the one hand and frees them from the constraints of their patriarchal societies, on the other. The novel shows how linguistic and cultural experiences complicate the *évoluées'* position and separate them from the other women who belong to different social strata and do not share their Western training.

Structured as a bildungsroman, the novel follows the life of a little Algerian girl from childhood to adulthood, and her movement between cultures, traditions, and languages in colonial Algeria. The novel is often considered as complex and multidimensional for it alternates between autobiographical, historical and oral narratives. In this novel, Djebar elegantly blends historical accounts of the French invasion, written by French soldiers and journalists, oral narratives of rural Algerian women who recall their participation in the

[270] Assia Djebar, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 143.
[271] Fatima Mernissi, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (New York: Perseus Books, 1995), p. 3.

independence struggle of 1954 to 1962, with autobiographical fragments from her own experience of growing up in colonial Algeria.

Despite the author's declaration that *L'Amour, la fantasia* is her 'premier livre ouvertement autobiographique',[272] the unusual structure of the novel makes it difficult to classify it as an autobiography. Unlike in the usual autobiographical accounts where events are told from the author's point of view, the narrative's perspective in *L'Amour, la fantasia* keeps alternating from first to third person and back again. In fact, Djebar does introduce a first-person narrator who sometimes appears as a young girl and at other times as an adolescent, and who observes encounters that take place in colonial Algeria and tells her experiences. Yet, these autobiographical narratives are interrupted by historical chapters which are told by different voices leaving the reader puzzled and unable to decide whether it is Djebar's voice or someone else's. It is only as the novel progresses that the reader comes to understand that these descriptions are Assia Djebar's memories of her past.

In her earlier novels, Djebar refused to give any autobiographical dimension to her writing and 'systematically turned [her] back on [her] own life', as she declared in an interview with Clarisse Zimra.[273] She avoided giving her stories an autobiographical dimension because she was afraid of exposing herself. She was not ready to violate the traditional Algerian culture which rejected direct and personal self-representation and considered them scandalous. *L'Amour, la fantasia* is in fact the first literary text in which she refers to her own life and memories. In an interview, she explains why she hesitated to include her autobiographical journey in *L'Amour la fantasia* (*Essai d'autobiographie* as it was originally called): 'j'ai

[272] Assia Djebar, 'La Langue dans l'espace ou l'espace dans la langue', in *Mises en scène d'écrivains Assia Djebar Nicole Brossard Madeleine Gagnon France Théoret,* ed. by Dominique Johnson and Sylvie Ouzilleau (Quebec: Le Griffon d'Argile, 1993), p. 15.

[273] Clarisse Zimra, 'Women's memory spans centuries - An interview with Assia Djebar', Afterword to Assia Djebar, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, trans. by Marjolin de Jager (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 167-187 (p. 169).

toujours voulu éviter de donner à mes romans un caractère autobiographique par peur de l'indécence et par horreur d'un certain strip-tease intellectuel auquel on se livre souvent avec complaisance dans les premières œuvres'.[274]

L'Amour, la fantasia has attracted much national and international attention, mainly focusing on the rewriting of the history of the colonisation of Algeria. Among these critics, Veronika Thiel and Anne Donadey both choose to analyse the strategy of a palimpsest-like structure in *L'Amour, la fantasia*. While focusing on the formal techniques and strategies of the rewriting of history, Thiel argues that Djebar uses her novel as 'un palimpseste sur lequel elle inscrit son propre texte'.[275] She refers to the conflicting and even violent enterprise of the project which amounts to a rewriting of the story seen as 'une véritable querelle des discours et des représentations'.[276] Focusing on the same strategy, Donadey argues that the palimpsest-like structure in *L'Amour, la fantasia* is elaborated through the re-reading and rewriting – and indeed the effacing – of the French male accounts of colonisation.[277]

Other critical scholarship has focused on the linguistic tension in the novel, among them Rachel Rothendler who disagrees with Dorothy S. Blair about Djebar's use of language as a violent act. Unlike Blair who argues that Djebar 'does violence to it [French], forcing it to give up its riches and defying it to hand over its hidden hoard',[278] Rothendler views it as a reconstruction. She argues that Djebar instead 'challenges it, pushes its limits with her extensive

[274] Gabrielle Rolin, 'Assia Djebar. Interview', *Jeune Afrique*, 87 (June 1962).

[275] Veronika Thiel, 'La Querelle des discours: Techniques formelles de la réécriture de l'histoire dans *L'Amour, la fantasia*', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 48.4 (Winter 2008), 34-46 (p. 35).

[276] Ibid., p. 44.

[277] Anne Donadey, 'Elle a rallumé le vif du passé': L'écriture-palimpseste d'Assia Djebar', in *Postcolonialisme et autobiographie*: *Albert Memmi, Assia Djebar, Daniel Maximin*, ed. by Alfred Hornung et Ernstpeter Ruhe (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 101-115. For further reading on the rewriting of history in *L'Amour, la fantasia* see also: H. Adlai Murdoch, 'Rewriting Writing: Identity, Exile and Renewal in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia'*, *Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadisms*, 2.83 (1993), 71-92; and Amira Souames, *(Re) penser l'Histoire dans L'Amour, la fantasia, Ombre Sultane et Loin de Médine d'Assia Djebar* (Unpublished doctoral thesis: ENS Alger, 2015).

[278] Assia Djebar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, trans. by Dorothy Blair (London: Quartet, 1985), p. xviii.

use of unusual and foreign vocabulary, her shifts in narrative structure and voice, and her manipulation of grammar and syntax'.[279] In the same context of linguistic tension, Beth Gale considers the French language, which Djebar chose to tell her own story, as a poisoned gift which functions both as a burden and as a blessing,[280] while Laurie Corbin prefers to focus on *le cri* in the novel, the language of the body of the woman who is often oppressed and imprisoned. For her, *le cri* signifies the unspeakable, the inexpressible: 'Le cri est souvent représenté comme la voix du corps – la manière dont le corps s'exprime dans l'amour, au moment de la mort, dans l'hystérie, dans la révolte, et même dans la joie'.[281]

Autobiographical laments in Djebar's text have also attracted several critics, among them Zineb Chih, Patricia Geesey, Clarisse Zimra, Mildred P. Mortimer and Hédi Abdel-Jaouad. Chih, for instance, follows the evolution of autobiographical writing in *L'Amour, la fantasia* arguing that in the course of the piece, narration becomes a writing of the cries. She argues that these cries become an alternative for the narrator to describe her love and emotions, since she fails to convey her love in both French (*langue de liberté*) and Arabic (*langue de l'intimité et de l'amour*). To quote Chih: 'l'impossibilité de se dire, de dire l'amour par les mots a engendré chez la narratrice un sentiment de frustration et d'angoisse, qui l'a poussée à la recherche d'un moyen plus efficace pour exprimer sa douleur et rompre son silence'.[282] Other critics like Geesey choose to focus on the collective autobiography. She criticises Memmi and Fanon because they 'mention the role women have played in revolutionary struggles, but they

[279] Rachel Rothendler, 'Languaging Space in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 12.2 (July 2016), 296-300 (p. 299). For more on language see: Mildred Mortimer, 'Language and Space in the Fiction of Assia Djebar and Leila Sebbar', *Research in African Literature*, 19. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 301-311.

[280] Beth Gale, 'Un cadeau d'amour empoisonné: Les paradoxes de l'autobiographie postcoloniale dans *L'Amour, la fantasia* d'Assia Djebar', *Neophilologus*, 86.4 (2002), 525-536.

[281] Laurie Corbin, 'La langue de la mère, les lois des pères: la signification du cri dans *L'amour, la fantasia*', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 102 (Summer 2014), 49-56 (p. 52).

[282] Zineb Chih, '*L'Amour, la fantasia* d'Assia Djebar: de l'écriture autobiographique à l'écriture des cris', *Synergies Algérie*, 21 (2014), 29-43 (p. 42).

do not envision the possibility that colonised women have specific concerns in regard to their own relationship to history'.[283]

The novel has also been read through feminist lenses. Critics like Hafid Gafaiti, Lisa Connell, Debra Popkin and Soheila Ghaussy have examined the position of women and feminist related issues such as women writing, mobility, education and empowerment. Gafaiti, for instance, explores the problematic relationship between womanhood and writing in the novel. For her, 'to write, for the woman, is to steal words, to tear them from social rule, from the masculine grasp. It is therefore through writing that Assia Djebar asserts her freedom'.[284] In the same context of gender, Connell examines the connection between mobility and education by following Djebar's shifting attention to colonial and sexist circumscription. She argues that 'Djebar accounts for her schooling as not only a traditional mechanism of colonial power, but also a surprising source of mobility and bodily autonomy'.[285]

The existing scholarship on *L'Amour, la fantasia* reveals extensive research on the nature and process of the colonial encounter. The aim of this chapter is to go beyond this existing body of literature, focusing on education not only as a manifestation of the colonial condition but also as a complex expression of what it means to appropriate the language of the coloniser. Being caught between two cultures or two languages is not always a trap: it can also

[283] Patricia Geesey, 'Collective Autobiography: Algerian Women and History in Assia Djebar's L'Amour, la fantasia', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 35 (Summer 1996), 153-167 (p. 159). For detailed reading on the autobiographical notion in the novel see: Clarisse Zimra, 'Autobiographie et Je/Jeux d'espace: Architecture de l'imaginaire dans le Quatuor d'Assia Djebar', in *Postcolonialisme et Autobiographie: Albert Memmi, Assia Djebar, Daniel Maximim*, ed. by Alfred Hornung and Ernstpeter Ruhe (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 101-115; Mortimer, Mildred, 'Assia Djebar's Algerian Quartet: A Study in Fragmented Autobiography', *Research in African Literatures*, 28.2 (1997), 102–18; Hédi Abdel-Jaouad, '*L'Amour, la fantasia*: autobiography as fiction', in *Revue Celfan*, 7.1 (1987), 25-29.

[284] Hafid Gafaiti, 'The Blood of Writing: Assia Djebar's Unveiling of Women and History', *World Literature Today*, 70.4 (Autumn 1996), 813-822 (p. 813) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40152308> [Accessed 04-01-2020].

[285] Lisa Connell, 'Movement, Education, and Empowerment in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*', *Contemporary Women's Writing*, 7.3 (November 2013), 291-308 (p. 292). See as well: Soheila Ghaussy, 'A Stepmother Tongue: "Feminine Writing" in Assia Djebar's Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade', *World Literature Today*, 68.3 (Summer, 1994), 457-462.

be a way out. Jenny Murray argues that Djebar realises that she will never belong to the community of Algerian women and that the narrator of *L'Amour, la fantasia* is aware that 'the act of writing in the French language has definitively separated her from traditional Algerian women'.[286] Yet as I will argue extensively in this chapter, colonial education can be both a source of alienation and a source of liberation, in a complex yet fascinating dance between two extreme consequences of the colonial encounter for indigenous women.

The Irony of French Education and the Rise of the *Évolués*

Before the 1930s, French efforts to educate Algerian children were not effective. It is when France was about to abandon its domination of Algeria that the French authorities started building enough schools to educate more than a small minority of school-age Algerian children. In the 1880s, France made primary education free and compulsory in the metropole, and since Algeria was considered a 'French department', this school legislation should have been applied to Algeria as well. Thus, on 13 February 1883 the French government passed a decree which made primary schooling free and mandatory to indigenous boys within a three-kilometre radius of an established public school.[287] At this stage, the French authorities were not ready to challenge Algerian society on the question of women's emancipation; accordingly, they did not make any efforts to recruit Algerian girls, who were generally kept home, in their schools. That would come much later.

At that time, the French government failed to 'share the benefits of French civilization with Muslim subjects' because this law could not be enforced and remained mere words on

[286] Jenny Murray, *Remembering the (Post)colonial Self: Memory and Identity in the Novels of Assia Djebar* (Germany: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 242.

[287] Alf Andrew Heggoy and Paul J. Zingg, 'French Education in Revolutionary North Africa', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 7.4 (Oct., 1976), 571-578 (p. 573).

paper due to the lack of classrooms and trained teachers.[288] Only children of European settlers and very few indigenous children in urban areas ended up attending French schools. The majority of the indigenous population was against French schooling because they considered it as a threat to local culture and religion. Anne Laaredj-Campbell comments on this: 'Indeed the beginnings of French-Moorish schools were very much met with prejudice by the natives. The fear of being converted through the school was especially high'.[289]

Yet, during the 1930s, this attitude towards formal French education started to change. Returning Algerian migrants, who had been working in France during the First World War, changed their minds about colonial education and insisted on sending their sons to French schools, because they believed education to be the only way to achieve equality of citizenship with the settlers. Thus, *L'éducation à la française* became 'the main leverage for social mobility among the indigenous society'.[290] At the same time, France, in an attempt to reward Algerians for their contributions to its victory in the First World War, launched a number of reforms, most of which were conceived essentially in educational terms. Among the education reforms adopted by French authorities, was the 1944 reform which aimed at enrolling one million Algerian pupils by 1964. This plan was improved in 1958, when the target was set at 2.5 million.

Besides these reforms, the French administration decided also to deal with the issue of women's emancipation and to put efforts into the education of Algerian girls. Serious efforts were made to assimilate Algerian women through various educational, social, and economic programs that promoted women's education, voting rights, health care, and jobs, sometimes run alongside unveiling campaigns. French authorities who wanted to maintain 'l'Algérie

[288] Andrea L. Smith, *Colonial Memory and Postcolonial Europe: Maltese Settlers in Algeria and France* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 2006), p. 184.
[289] Anne Laaredj-Campbell, *Changing Female Literacy Practices in Algeria: Empirical Study on Cultural Construction of Gender and Empowerment* (Germany: Springer VS, 2006), p. 97.
[290] Fanny Colonna, 'Training the National Elites in Colonial Algeria 1920-1954', *Historical Social Research*, 33.2 (2008), 285-295 (p. 285).

française', believed that these reforms would help them win the support of indigenous women and stop the rebellion, since women were considered as symbols of Algerian national identity and culture. One of the main policies that were followed to 'liberate' Algerian women from ignorance and patriarchy was unveiling them: 'the administration, together with various state and private institutions, tried to begin the task of modernizing Algerian women by getting them to take off their veils'.[291] Fanon argues that the French attempt to bring Algerian women over to the side of European modernity and liberalism, and convert them to Western values was not altruistic but rather an element of French colonisation policies to insure colonial hegemony. He summarises the political doctrine of the colonial administration as follow:

> If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the woman, we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight.[292]

In colonial Algeria, wearing the veil was symbolic because it indicated women's patriotism and dedication to the struggle. In the first phase, the veil was a form of cultural resistance against French efforts to unveil Algerian women and to destroy local traditions. It was not only worn 'because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria'.[293] In the second phase, when 'revolutionaries discover that women passing as European or unveiled can move freely in the city to deliver messages and arms', women dropped their veils as a war strategy against the coloniser.[294]

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[291] Alf Andrew Heggoy, 'On the Evolution of Algerian Women', *African Studies Review*, 17.2 (Sep., 1974), 449-456 (p. 452).
[292] Frantz Fanon, 'Algeria Unveiled', in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. by Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 35-63 (pp. 37-38).
[293] Ibid., (p. 41).
[294] Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 76.

French education was designed to assimilate indigenous students (both males and females) and to 'Frenchify' them. It was supposed to be 'La troisième conquête', as declared by the Minister of National Education Alfred Rambaud:

> La première conquête de l'Algérie a été accomplie par les armes et s'est terminée en 1871 par le désarmement de la Kabylie. La seconde conquête a consisté à faire accepter par les indigènes notre justice et notre administration. La troisième conquête se fera par I 'École: elle devra assumer la prédominance de notre langue sur les divers idiomes locaux, inculquer aux musulmans l'idée que nous avons nous-mêmes de la France et de son rôle dans le monde, substituer à l'ignorance et aux préjugés fanatiques des notions élémentaires mais précises de science européenne.[295]

French authorities realised that the most effective way to settle permanently in Algeria was assimilation through education: 'l'ouverture d'une école au milieu des indigènes vaut autant qu'un bataillon pour la pacification du pays' was the way the Duc D'Aumale put it.[296] The ultimate aim of educating colonial subjects was to create elites, within the dominated populations, who would allow the colonial system to function properly. Yet, this was not the case because education results in a paradoxical situation: it created indigenous elites who became aware of the political theories which led to nationalist movements and, thus, to independence.

Algerian authors who were educated within the colonial educational system have foregrounded this privileged way of creating 'French' subjects as a paradoxical source of submission to, and subversion of, the colonial power. The literary works of Algerian writers such as Mouloud Feraoun, Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Mammeri, Rachid Boudjedra, Tahar Djaout, Assia Djebar, and Malika Mokeddem use the French language to resist French hegemony and as representation of Algerian national identity and culture at the same time.

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[295] Rambaud Alfred, quoted in Fanny Colonna, *Instituteurs algériens, 1883-1939* (Algiers: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1975), p. 40.

[296] Charles - Robert Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France (1871- 1979)*, 2 (Paris: Editions Bouchène, 2005) p. 319.

Abdelkebir Khatibi, the Moroccan literary critic and writer, argues in his work *Le Roman maghrébin* that the use of French by North African writers resulted in a kind of:

> Ironie [qui] aurait pu être non seulement une revanche détournée du colonisé opprimé et séduit par l'Occident, elle aurait permis à l'écrivain maghrébin d'expression française de prendre de la distance par rapport au langage en l'inversant, en le détruisant, en présentant de nouvelles structures à tel point que le lecteur français serait étranger dans sa propre langue.[297]

The colonial educational system also gave rise to female elites or *évoluées* who were supposed to exemplify 'emancipated' Algerian women, side with France and support 'l'Algérie française'. While some women like Algerian author Djamila Debeche, spoke out against the resistance movement, advocated for Western-style feminism and embraced the French reforms, other *évoluées* such as Zohra Drif and Samia Lakhdari chose to participate in the struggle and played an active role in the fight for the independence of Algeria. While a student in the French school, Drif was introduced to the French revolution and individual liberties: these teachings helped her develop feminist and anti-colonial ideas and awaken in her the desire to take part in the resistance movement. Drif describes her and Samia Lakhdari's (her friend) decision to become active members of *Armée de libération nationale* (ALN) as follows:

> In August 1956, Samia and I, assuming full responsibility, chose to become "volunteers for death" to recover and free our mother, Algeria - who had been taken by force, raped, and kidnapped for 125 years - or to die. Faced with the choice between our mother and our lives […] we chose our mother […] The only case where a people has the right and duty to take up arms is when its country and territory are attacked by an external force.[298]

Educating female colonial subjects in Algeria did not necessarily result in 'Frenchified' women who would support the French. It often had opposite effects. Natalya Vince examines the unexpected consequences of educating Algerian women as she writes: 'both archival evidence and the memoirs of French army officers reveal that the French authorities had

[297] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le Roman maghrébin: essai* (Rabat: SMER, 1979), p. 70.

[298] Sarah Grey, 'Inside the Battle of Algiers: An Evening with Zohra Drif', *Review of African Political Economy*, (Sept. 2017) <http://roape.net/2017/09/26/inside-battle-algiers-evening-zohra-drif/> [Accessed 22-10-2019].

difficulty coming to terms with the idea that these apparently Europeanized young women, commonly referred to as *évoluées,* could turn against them'.[299] The next sections will focus on the complex role of French schooling on indigenous women, particularly on the ways in which colonial education can be both a blessing and a burden for the Algerian *évoluées,* both a site of physical freedom and resistance from one side, and a source of cultural and linguistic dislocation from the other side.

L'École Française as a Space of Bodily Freedom

L'Amour, la fantasia highlights the complex role of colonial education in the life of Algerian women. It reveals how colonial education can liberate female subjects from the confinement of the *harem* and allow them physical freedom. The novel opens with the protagonist recalling a precious memory from her childhood, which comes to determine her future as a liberated woman:

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

This semi-autobiographical opening is marked by contradiction and cultural *métissage*. In the times when Algerian women are confined exclusively to the domestic sphere – *harem* – the little Arab girl is walking to the French school, hand in hand with her father who is a tutor in the colonial school and a colonised subject himself. The father's style is both occidental (European suit) and oriental (North African traditional hat) at the same time. The father

[299] Natalya Vince, 'Colonial and Post-Colonial Identities: Women Veterans of the "Battle of Algiers"', *French History and Civilization,* 2 (2009), 153-168 (p. 157).

embodies, from the very first moments of the reading, the dual heritage which will constitute the major problematic of the novel.

This unusual scene of an Algerian 'girl' going to the colonial school produces a sense of public attention. The narrator describes the reaction of the traditional neighbours to her father's decision to support her education as follows:

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

The father's act of supporting his daughter to receive colonial education is brave because, by allowing her to 'sortir dehors', 'échappée hors du harem', he is encouraging her to transgress the taboos of the Algerian patriarchal society.

The scene also announces the connection between education and bodily freedom. Djebar suggests that the experience of school begins with intense impressions of moving through the streets rather than learning within the classroom.[300] Unlike her cousins, 'les trois jeunnes filles cloitrées', with whom she spent the holidays, Djebar's body moves freely:

> Comme si soudain la langue française avait des yeux, et qu'elle me les ait donnés pour voir dans la liberté, comme si la langue française aveuglait les mâles voyeurs de mon clan et qu'à ce prix, je puisse circuler, dégringoler toutes les rues, annexer le dehors pour mes compagnes cloîtrées, pour mes aïeules mortes bien avant le tombeau (p. 256).

French education helped Djebar liberate herself from the female enclosure that Orientalist painters such as Eugène Delacroix first depicted as the North African *harem*. As a child, she becomes aware that her French schooling and freedom of movement in public space have moved her beyond the traditional world of her female friends and relatives. Mildred Mortimer comments on the role of *l'école française* in Djebar's life as he declares:

[300] Connell, 'Movement, Education, and Empowerment', p. 295.

> The day that Assia Djebar's father escorted her to school […] he set her on a bilingual, bicultural, indeed an ambiguous journey that freed her from the female enclosure but sent her into a form of exile away from the majority of her sisters.[301]

At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist seems privileged. She is compared to the enclosure of her female family members and friends. Unlike her peers, and thanks to her father she escaped the fate of a cloistered life. In the first section of the novel, Djebar tells her readers about her friend, *la fille du boulanger,* who attended both French and Koranic schools but was not given the chance to continue the experience of a bicultural education: 'La fille du boulanger kabyle avait dû fréquenter, comme moi, l'école française en même temps que le cours coranique. Mais je ne me souviens de sa présence, à mes côtés, que devant le cheikh' (p. 206). While Djebar continues on her way to school, her friend is forced to stay at home because of her body's visible transition to womanhood:

> Qu'est devenue la fille du Boulanger? Voilée certainement, soustraite du jour au lendemain aux Chemins de l'école: son corps la trahissait. Ses seins naissants, ses jambes qui s'affinaient, bref l'apparition de sa personnalité de femme la transforma en corps incarcéré! (p. 259).

The story of the baker's daughter reveals that there is a strong connection between the female body and freedom of movement. Before puberty, the girl could enjoy freedom of movement, yet as her child's body matures into a feminine body, her mobility becomes limited and bounded. Connell elaborates on this as she writes: 'The end of the adolescent's schooling stands for a double loss in that her forceful removal from school corresponds with a deprivation of bodily autonomy'.[302] This memory remains engraved in the mind of the protagonist because it reminds her of what her life would be without further education.

[301] Mildred Mortimer, 'Language and Space in the Fiction of Assia Djebar and Leila Sebbar', *Research in African Literatures,* 19.3, Special Issue on Language and Style (Autumn, 1988), 301-311 (p. 203).
[302] Connell, 'Movement, Education, and Empowerment', p. 297.

Djebar owes her escape to her father who gave her the consent to go beyond *harem, l'espace intérieur* which belongs to women, and to access the outside world, as well as the world of books:

> Ces apprentissages simultanés, mais de mode si différent, m'installent, tandis que j'approche de l'âge nubile (le choix paternel tranchera pour moi: la lumière plutôt que l'ombre) dans une dichotomie de l'espace. Je ne perçois pas que se joue l'option définitive: le dehors et le risque, au lieu de la prison de mes semblables (p. 261).

Throughout the novel, the narrator pays homage to her father whose 'enlightened attitude towards the question of women's education paved the way for her life as an independent Muslim woman'. [303] Without her father's support, she would probably have met the same fate as *la fille du boulanger* and her attempt to escape the cloistered life of the *harem* would have never been successful. In her second autobiographical work *Ombre sultane*, Djebar expresses her gratitude to her father for his liberating act as she declares: 'ma singularité de jeune Arabe "émancipée" avait besoin de garder ancrage. J'aimais mon père avec une allégresse reconnaissante. Je me disais à tout instant qu'il m'avait libérée du harem!'[304]

French Schooling as a Site of a Double Rebellion against Patriarchy and Colonial Control

French schooling does not only help the novel's protagonist escape the domestic confinement of Algerian society, but also gives her the privilege to challenge its patriarchal structure. In the opening lines of the novel, the protagonist recalls the first time she rebels against her father's authority. This memory concerns the day she received the first adolescent love letter from an unknown suitor. 'Secoué de rage, sans éclats', the father destroyed the missive, and threw it in the bin to prevent his daughter from reading it. When alone, the seventeen-year-old girl pieced together the shredded love letter 'qui a suscité la colère

[303] Murray, *Remembering the (Post)colonial Self,* p. 55-56.
[304] Assia Djebar, *Ombre sultane* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2008), p. 184.

paternelle', and discovered the identity of the sender. Commenting on her rebellious act, the narrator says: 'à l'instar d'une héroïne de roman occidental, le défi juvénile m'a libéré du cercle que des chuchotements d'aïeules invisibles ont tracé autour de moi et en moi' (p. 13). By comparing herself to the heroines of European novels, Djebar is not only acknowledging the effect of colonial education on her personality but also the influence of Western literary tradition on her development as a writer. Her use of the theme of female rebellion provokes an obvious correlation to the Western female Bildungsroman, where the development of the female heroine 'operates against implacable forces'.[305] Like the heroines of the traditional female bildungsroman, Djebar's protagonist, arrives at 'her inner standing, in part, through recognition of the role rebellion plays in a family and society where custom and place for women, in particular, was fixed and determined'.[306]

Djebar reveals how important this innocent letter was and the impact it had on the development of her rebellious personality: 'les mots conventionnels et en langue française de l'étudiant en vacances se sont gonflés d'un désir imprévu, hyperbolique, simplement parce que le père a voulu les détruire' (p. 12). The paternal prohibition of reading the letters increases the adolescent's rebellion who defies her father and challenges the conventions of Algerian society by secretly corresponding with her suitor:

> Les mois, les années suivantes, je me suis engloutie dans l'histoire d'amour, ou plutôt dans l'interdiction d'amour […] Dans cette amorce d'éducation sentimentale, la correspondance secrète se fait en français: ainsi, cette langue que m'a donnée le père me devient entremetteuse (p. 12).

Djebar's revolt continues when she discovers that her cloistered cousins are secretly corresponding with Arab male friends in distant lands. Aware of the danger she is exposed to,

[305] Esther Kleinbord Labovitz, *The Myth of the Heroine: The Female Bildungsroman in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), p. 75.
[306] Ibid., p. 75.

she joins in the epistolary exchange enjoying 'l'audace que cette correspondance clandestine nécessitait' (p. 22). The girls realise the risk they are taking, yet they continue their 'révolte sourde':

> Nous en évoquions les terribles dangers. Il y avait eu dans nos villes, pour moins que cela, de nombreux pères ou frères devenus «justiciers»; le sang d'une vierge, fille ou sœur, avait été versé pour un billet glissé, pour un mot soupiré derrière les persiennes, pour une médisance (p. 22).

Thus, writing these letters becomes, for the cloistered girls, a means of escaping the confinement of the *harem* and a way of challenging patriarchal authority.

Despite supporting his daughter's education and being a tutor in the French school himself, Djebar's father seems authoritarian. He cannot be completely dissociated from patriarchy since he controls his daughter's academic fate, and punishes actions or gestures deemed too indiscrete.[307] While reading the received letters, Djebar cannot help thinking about her father: 'chaque mot d'amour, qui me serait destiné, ne pourrait que rencontrer le diktat paternel. Chaque lettre, même la plus innocente, supposerait l'œil constant du père, avant de me parvenir' (p. 91).

The protagonist imitates her father's rebellion against Algerian convention to rebel against him. In the section entitled 'mon père écrit à ma mère', she describes her father's attempt to bend the Algerian tradition when he sent a postcard to his wife signed with his name and addressed to her directly. Other women of the *harem* are shocked and consider this act scandalous, whereas the narrator regards it as a proof of their love: 'l'un et l'autre, mon père par l'écrit, ma mère dans ses nouvelles conversations où elle citait désormais sans fausse honte son époux, se nommaient réciproquement, autant dire s'aimaient ouvertement' (p. 58). The narrator

[307] Sanson Hervé, 'Mon père, cet autre: Variations autour de la figure paternelle dans l'œuvre d'Assia Djebar', in *Assia Djebar: Littérature et transmission*, ed. by Wolfgang Asholt, Mireille Calle-Gruber and Dominique Combe (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010), 317-30 (p. 318).

implicitly reveals that she has found inspiration for her revolt in the figure of her father who dared to break with Algerian tradition, which would normally have him address the entire family, but never his wife directly:

> La révolution était manifeste, mon père de son propre écriture, et sur une carte qui allait voyager d'une ville en ville, qui allait passer sous tant et tant de regards masculins, y compris pour finir celui du facteur de notre village, un facteur musulman de surcroît, mon père donc avait osé écrire le nom de sa femme qu'il avait désignée à la manière occidentale (p. 57).

It is worth noting that this daring act of breaking away from tradition is made in the coloniser's language rather than in the indigenous tongue. The French language becomes, for the adolescent, a space of intimacy and an ambivalent medium which despite being imposed, is liberating: 'quand j'écris et que je lis la langue étrangère*:* il [mon corps] voyage, il va et vient dans l'espace subversif, malgré les voisins et les matrones soupçonneuses' (p. 261). She feels more comfortable writing her correspondence in French rather than in Arabic because French 'does not carry the weight of Algerian traditions in restraint and prudishness, and allows love to be spoken'.[308]

After rebelling against her own father, the embodiment of Algerian patriarchal society, the narrator turns her rebellion towards the coloniser. She rebels against the coloniser by writing in his language because she believes that 'écrire ne tue pas la voix, mais la réveille, surtout pour ressusciter tant de sœurs disparues' (p. 285). Djebar picks up *el qalam* to write the history of her country from a female perspective: 'l'histoire est utilisée dans ce roman comme quête de l'identité. Identité non seulement des femmes mais de tout le pays'.[309] Djebar notices, while preparing for her advanced degree in history at the University of Algiers, that Algerian history has been sexualised and reserved only for men. The written reports that she finds while doing

[308] Trudy Agar, 'Annexing the Land of Exile: Language and History in the Work of Assia Djebar', in *Creativity in Exile,* ed. by Michael Hanne (New York: Edition Rodopi B.V, 2004), 183- 192 (p. 189).
[309] Mildred Mortimer, 'Entretien Avec Assia Djebar, Écrivain Algérien', *Research in African Literatures*, 19.2, Special Issue on Women's Writing (Summer, 1988), 197-205 (p. 201).

her archival research about the French conquest are French and written by male authors, revealing the absence of Algerian heroines from the history of the country. As a result, she decides to bring to light women's contributions to Algerian history and give credibility to their struggle by giving voice to *les aïeules* and *les porteuses de feu* to tell their own experiences during the Algerian revolution.

Djebar appropriates the coloniser's language and uses it as a tool to give voice to other women who are suffering in silence. She revises the colonial construction of history by juxtaposing male narratives of French soldiers, reporters, and painters during the years of colonisation with women's narratives of the Algerian Revolution. Combining oral narratives of indigenous women with written reports and correspondences of the colonial military and administrative personnel, Djebar challenges historical and patriarchal discourses which falsify the history of the Algerian war and give voice to silenced female subjects. Nancy Ali stresses this aspect when he writes: 'en insérant les images et les histoires de femmes dans l'histoire coloniale de l'Algérie, Djebar fait ressortir le moi et le corps féminins, enterrés par la violence coloniale et la société patriarcale. Djebar entreprend ainsi une féminisation de l'Histoire.[310] Thus, the French language, the conqueror's cultural weapon, becomes a tool for the restoration of Algerian cultural memory. In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Djebar seems to be 'colonizing the language of the colonisers'.[311] She makes use of her mastery of 'the language of the Other' to bridge the gap between the orality and writing and expose the violence and destruction unleashed by the coloniser's armies upon the indigenous populations. She 'took words from the

[310] Nancy Ali, 'Assia Djebar et la réécriture de l'Histoire au féminin', *Multilinguales*, 6 (Second semestre 2015), 1-212 (p. 56).
[311] Dorothy Blair, Introduction to Assia Djebar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (London: Quartet, 1985), xviii.

physical spaces of the archives and from the locations where she conducted interviews and ethnographic studies and literally placed them on the pages of her book'.[312]

Djebar devotes the last chapter, entitled 'Les voix ensevelies', to the testimony of *Les femmes du Mont Chenoua* who took part in the Algerian Revolution and whom she interviewed near the Tunisian border while preparing for her own film *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* (1978). In this part, she gave voice to different women: widows, women who lost their sons and victims of rape to describe their experiences (hiding in the woods, being captured, jailed, and tortured) and to recall events that took place twenty years before. The first voice in this chapter is Chérifa Amroune, a shepherdess who participated in the Algerian War in the countryside. Chérifa recalls her brother's death during the war and the pain she lived through when she dragged his body to a safe place to bury it. She also recounts her own imprisonment by the French when they captured her after her brother's death:

- Que faisais-tu dans les montagnes?
- Je combattais!
- Et pourquoi?
- Pour ma foi et mes idées!
- Et maintenant, puisque tut e retrouves prisonnière?
- Je suis prisonnière, et après?
- Qu'as tu gagné?
- J'ai gagné le bien de mes compatriotes et le bien pour moi-même! M'avez-vous arrêtée en train de voler ou de tuer! Je ne volais pas! Ma conscience est avec moi! (p. 199).

The second female voice is Zohra Sahraoui, cousin of the narrator's grandmother, whose hair was burned when French soldiers torched her house and who is deemed mad by most of the villagers. The other two testimonies belong to two widows who are entirely anonymous. The first one whose husband was killed by the French, wanted to visit the nurse who treated him just before his death. The second one, not only lost her three sons but also her brother -

[312] Rachel Rothendler, 'Languaging Space in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia'*, *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 12.2 (July 2016), 296-300 (p. 298).

who asked her to bury his corpse if he was killed, which she did - and her husband who had been tortured for three days before he was hanged in the public square. By giving these women the chance to recount their stories, Djebar not only gives them an empowered voice to recall the days of the war of liberation, but also to 'digs [dig] out the fear, the defiance, and the intoxication that entails the entire history of colonization'.[313]

Dislocation between School and *Harem*

While French education allows the protagonist bodily freedom, escape from the *harem* and gives her the privilege of challenging the colonial power, the same education separates her from the comfort and the protection of the *harem.* Education helps her leave the confines of the *harem* but at the same time distances her from other women and 'the safety and comfort of the female milieu she has inhabited'.[314] In the section entitled 'L'aphasie amoureuse', the narrator expresses her ambiguity towards her French schooling. She provides a concrete example of her alienation which manifests itself in her body and her voice:

> Je parlais, j'étudiais donc le français, et mon corps, durant cette formation, s'occidentalisait à sa manière. Dans les cérémonies familiales les plus ordinaires, j'éprouvais du mal à m'assoir en tailleur: la posture ne signifiait plus se mêler aux autres femmes pour partager leur chaleur, tout au plus s'accroupir, d'ailleurs mal commodément (p. 181).

French education has made the adolescent's body less oriental. She is no longer physically comfortable sitting cross-legged with the other women. She participates in the traditional dances but she prefers sport that she practices in the French school: 'she acquires a taste for

[313] Salma Khatoon, 'The Subaltern Voices in Fantasia', *Journal of Research (Humanities),* 53.17 (March 2017) , 31-39 (p. 36).
[314] Beth Gale, 'Multiple Identities as Adolescent Coping Mechanism in Annie Ernaux's *Les Armoires vides* and Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*', in *Francophone Women Coming of Age: Memoirs of Childhood and Adolescence from France, Africa, Quebec and the Caribbean,* ed. by Debra Popkin (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 03-17 (p. 09).

basketball and athletics, preferring these activities to trances at female meetings'.[315] She also finds it difficult to ululate – she only joins uncomfortably in the traditional songs and cries, preferring to listen to her mother:

> Ce cri ancestral de déchirement – que la glotte fait vibrer de spasmes allègres – ne sortait du fond de ma gorge que peu harmonieusement. Au lieu de fuser hors de moi, il me déchirait. Je préférais écouter la longue vocifération de ma mère, mi- roucoulement, mi-hululement qui se fondait d'abord dans le chœur profus, puis le terminait en une vocalise triomphale, en long solos de soprano (p. 182).

This personal memory reveals that the narrator is aware of the distance that French schooling has placed between herself and her own culture and community. Indeed, she recognizes the paradoxical situation in which she finds herself. Her father releases her from the prison by sending her to French school, but at the same time, her links with the indigenous language and culture are strained. Ghaussy argues that it is the *harem* which is missing, 'this barrier, this wall of protection from an appropriation through colonization, is what Djebar feels is missing from her French-oriented upbringing'.[316] By escaping the restrictions of the *harem*, Djebar has also escaped the shelter of the *harem*, the sense of community and the sense of belonging to the Algerian traditional and conservative society. Contrary to Western notions of the *harem* as an exotic place in which women are kept for the erotic pleasure of men, the Moroccan sociologist and writer Fatima Mernissi considers the *harem* as a place which is designed to keep women sheltered from men outside of the family and the public sphere in general. Mernissi who was herself raised in a traditional domestic *harem*, recounts her childhood experiences of living in a *harem*. In her autobiographical account, *Rêves de femmes:*

[315] Agar, 'Annexing the Land of Exile, (p. 189).

[316] Soheila Ghaussy, A Stepmother Tongue: "Feminine Writing" in Assia Djebar's Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade, *World Literature Today*, 68.3 (Summer, 1994), 457-462. (p. 458).

une enfance au harem (Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood), she depicts the *harem* as both a shelter and a dull space that allows limited freedom.[317]

The fact that the narrator does not wear the veil has also alienated her from the other women of her community. Unlike her peers who are forced to wear the veil by the age of twelve, the protagonist has escaped the veil thanks to her French education: 'since I had escaped the veil thanks to the French language ... when outside, I thought of myself as like a boy as much as like a girl'.[318] The narrator recalls a conversation between her mother and one of the neighbours who was wondering why a thirteen or a fourteen-year-old Arab girl is not veiled yet*:* 'elle ne se voile pas encore, ta fille? […] Elle lit! répond avec raideur ma mère. Dans ce silence de gêne installée, le monde entier s'engouffre. Et mon propre silence. «Elle lit», c'est-à-dire en arabe, «elle étudie»' (p. 254). The mother's reply reveals that there is a connection between unveiling and receiving colonial education. Fanon analyses this in his article, 'l'Algérie se dévoile', where he argues that during the colonial period, the French administration took on the role of 'emancipating' Algerian women by trying to convince them to unveil themselves and free themselves from oppressive indigenous traditions: 'converting the woman, winning her over to the foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian culture'.[319]

Employees of the colonial government, including schoolteachers such as Djebar's father, were convinced by the idea of emancipation and wanted to help the French change the fate of Algerian women. Djebar's father 'wanted to contribute to an indigenous elite, to which

[317] Fatima Mernissi, *Rêves de femmes: une enfance au harem* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2010).
[318] Lise Gauvin, 'Assia Djebar, territoire des langue, entretient', *Littérature – L'Ecrivain et ses langue*, 101 (Feb. 1996), 73-87 (p. 84).
[319] Fanon, 'Algeria Unveiled', p. 39.

his daughter would also belong thanks to her education'.[320] Yet, as we learn from E. San Juan in his analysis of Fanon's 'Algeria Unveiled', the French attempt to convert women to what Fanon calls 'foreign values' is not noble but rather an element of French colonisation policies: 'this bureaucratic consensus to forcibly emancipate the cloistered Algerian woman became a major policy of the French colonial administration. The rationale is strategic: to overcome the Algerian male resistance to assimilation via the control of women'.[321]

In the chapter entitled 'L'école coranique', the narrator feels exiled from her local culture and language. She seems confused and torn between Algerian and French cultures: 'je ne m'en aperçois pas, nul autour de moi ne s'en aperçoit, que, dans cet écartèlement s'introduit un début de vertige' (p. 261). Her alienation is manifested in the way she dresses. Unlike her peers who are veiled, she is not. She dresses in a European style, either in '[une] jupe, qui justifiait ma [sa] fréquentation de l'école française (p. 259) or shorts when at the gymnasium. The narrator admits that she does not feel comfortable wearing shorts because she is scared that her father shows up suddenly to her *jeudi* classes and sees her. She compares herself to her French colleagues, yet she cannot forget her culture of *femme arabe*. She feels lonely, as she has no friend to share this concern with:

> Une inquiétude me harcèle: je crains que mon père n'arrive en visite! Comment lui avouer, que forcément, il me fallait me mettre en short, autrement dit montrer mes jambes? Je ne peux confier cette peur à aucune camarade; elles n'ont pas, comme moi, des cousines qui ne dévoilent ni leurs chevilles ni leur Bra, qui n'exposent même pas leur visage. Aussi, ma panique se mêle d'une "honte" de femme arabe (p. 253).

Although he was the one who encouraged her to receive colonial schooling, Djebar's father often does not approve of the way she dresses. The previous passage reveals that he often

[320] Brigitte Weltman-Aron, 'The pedagogy of Colonial Algeria: Djebar, Cixous, Derrida', in *French Education: Fifty Years Later*, ed. by Ralph Albanese and Mortimer Guiney (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 132-146 (p. 142).
[321] E. San Juan, JR., 'Fanon: An Intervention into Cultural Studies', in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives,* ed. by Anthony C. Alessandrini (London: Routledge, 2005), 126-145 (p. 135).

disagrees with his daughter wearing revealing clothes. Similarly, in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père,* he is also shown criticising her for not covering her legs while riding a bicycle: 'Je ne veux pas, non, je ne veux pas – répète-t-il à ma mère, accourue et silencieuse – je ne veux pas que ma fille montre ses jambes en montant à bicyclette'.[322]

The problem of alienation is also present in Djebar's other works. Like in *l'Amour, la fantasia*, in *Vaste est la prison*, the protagonist seems estranged from her mother and her female relatives. In the second section of the novel, the narrator recalls a moment when, as a teenager, she was dancing among other women on the occasion of her cousin's wedding, wearing a revealing dress. The other women who started judging her as a potential wife for their son, questioned the upbringing she was receiving and the freedom of movement she was given:

> Elle sort, elle lit, elle va ainsi dans les villes, nue, son père, étrange, lui permet […] Elle marche ainsi chez les autres là-bas, dans le monde ennemi [...] elle ne comprendra jamais car elle ne sera jamais de nos maisons, de nos prisons, elle sera épargnée de la claustration et, par là, de notre chaleur, de notre compagnie![323]

Emotional Aphasia

Another aspect of the narrator's dislocation is her emotional aphasia. French, the ambiguous gift which she received from her father, has helped the protagonist enter the male universe trespassing the boundaries of the *harem,* and freeing her body. Yet, this same gift has also pushed her away from her mother tongue. Djebar acknowledges that she cannot express her love and emotions in French:

> Dès que j'étais dans un besoin d'expression amoureuse – je veux dire dans ma vie de femme – le français devenait un désert. Je ne pouvais dire le moindre mot de tendresse ou d'amour dans cette langue, à tel point que c'est un vrai questionnement de femme. Ainsi avec certains hommes qui se dérouler un jeu de séduction, comme il n'y avait pas de passage à la langue maternelle, subsistait en moi une sorte de barrière invisible.[324]

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[322] Assia Djebar, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (Paris: Éditions Fayard 2007), p. 49.
[323] Assia Djebar, *Vaste est la prison* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), p. 278- 279.
[324] Gauvin, 'Assia Djebar, territoire des langues, entretient', p. 79.

She feels subject to a form of aphasia, the loss of the faculty of speech:

> Cette impossibilité en amour, la mémoire de la conquête la renforça. Lorsque, enfant, je fréquentai l'école, les mots français commençaient à peine à attaquer ce rempart. J'héritais de cette étanchéité; dès mon adolescence, j'expérimentai une sorte d'aphasie amoureuse: les mots écrits, les mots appris, faisaient retrait devant moi, dès que tentait de s'exprimer le moindre élan de mon cœur (p. 183).

She fails to express her desires spontaneously in French because this language is the language of the invader which is often associated with suffering. Laurie Corbin argues that Djebar finds it difficult to express her feelings in French because 'pour elle, le français est une langue violente, parler cette langue est presque un acte violent, alors que pour parler de ou dans l'amour il lui faut une autre langue, la langue de la mère'.[325] Whereas French widens the space between the narrator and her people, on the contrary, the transition to the mother tongue allows the development of closer ties with her community: 'si je désirais soudain, par caprice, diminuer la distance entre l'homme et moi, [...] il suffisait d'opérer le passage à la langue maternelle : revenir, pour un détail, au son de l'enfance' (p. 184).

Hervé Sanson blames Djebar's father for not transmitting Arabic to his daughter and considers him the reason behind his daughter's ignorance of her father's heritage:

> Tout père transmettant sa langue aura immanquablement à desquamer la fille, arracher des lambeaux de peau de son enfant. Le père de l'écrivain transmet la langue française mais mutile en arabe: ainsi est signifiée l'aporie du legs paternel, l'héritage sans héritage.[326]

In the same context, the French-Algerian author Leila Sebbar blames her father for not passing the Arabic language to her: 'mon père ne m'a pas appris la langue des femmes de son peuple'.[327] As the daughter of an Algerian father and a French mother, she is only able to speak and write in French. In her essays and narratives, Sebbar compulsively alludes to her ignorance of her

[325] Corbin, 'La langue de la mère, les lois des pères', p. 53.
[326] Sanson, 'Mon père, cet autre', p. 319.
[327] Leila Sebbar, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (Paris: Julliard, 2003), p. 59.

father's heritage and sense of exile within French culture. She repeatedly refers to her ignorance of her father's language and the silence of Arabic through titles such as: 'Si je ne parle pas la langue de mon père', 'Le Silence de la langue de mon père, l'arabe', 'Mon père ne m'a pas appris la langue de sa mère', and of course, *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*.[328] Yet, despite being separated from their fathers' memory and language, the recapturing of Algerian heritage is a frequent theme of most of Sebbar and Djebar's writing.

One of the episodes that clearly show Djebar's emotional aphasia is a chance encounter between the narrator and her brother in Paris, shortly after the independence. The narrator describes how the term *hannouni*, pronounced by her brother years later, evokes childhood memories associated with the mother tongue. She remembers her aunts and cousins calling their children *hannouni*, a term of tenderness used specifically in her community, which means 'my dear' or 'my love'. At this, she muses:

> J'évoque les tantes, les cousines attendries de la tribu, celle qui caresse les bébés et répète à satiété: 'mon foie... hannouni!' […] J'ai dévié. J'ai rappelé le passé et les vieilles tantes, les aïeules, les cousines. Ce mot seul aurait pu habiter mes nuits d'amoureuse (p. 117).

Although the Arabic term *hannouni* evokes nostalgia and longing for the old day, the memories associated with this term warm the narrator's heart. It reminds her of the linguistic aphasia she is suffering from as a result of assimilation and the fact that she is forced to tell her story in French rather than in Arabic, yet '[ça lui] fait chaud au cœur' because of the memories it conjures (p. 117). In the same passage, Djebar acknowledges the difficulty to translate the term *hannouni* into French. She suggests different words in French which could be synonyms such

[328] Leila Sebbar, 'Si je ne parle pas la langue de mon père', in *Voix de père, voix de filles,* ed. by Adine Sagalyn (Paris: Maren Sell, 1988), 153-214; Leila Sebbar, 'Le Silence de la langue de mon père, l'arabe', *Etudes littéraires,* 33.3 (2001), 119-129; 'Mon père ne m'a pas appris la langue de sa mère', in *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (Paris: Julliard, 2003), 33- 47.

as: ‘tendre’ or ‘tendrelou’. Yet, these equivalents are not exact and do not convey the emotional meaning that the term connotes in the original language – that is, Arabic:

> Comment traduire ce «hannouni», par un «tendre», un «tendrelou»? Ni «mon chéri», ni «mon cœur». Pour dire «mon cœur», nous, les femmes, nous préférons «mon petit foie», ou «pupille de mon œil»…Ce «tendrelou» semble un cœur de laitue caché et frais, vocable enrobé d’enfance, qui fleurit entre nous et que, pour ainsi dire, nous avalons (p. 117).

This is not the only occasion where the narrator finds it difficult to translate a word between French and Arabic. In the last chapter of the novel, she presents the definitions of the word tzarl-rit from two Arabic-French dictionaries. Obviously, both definitions fail to give a faithful translation to the meaning and implications of the word, which refers to *les youyous* or shrill cries of women’s voices.

The narrator feels nostalgic towards her mother tongue from which she was deprived since her nubile age: ‘en fait, je cherche, comme un lait dont on m’aurait autrefois écartée, la pléthore amoureuse de la langue de ma mère. Contre la ségrégation de mon héritage, le mot plein de l’amour-au-présent me devient une parade-hirondelle’ (p. 92). This nostalgia is felt in the last part of the novel where the narrator explains her relation to the mother tongue, evoking some childhood memories. She devotes two autobiographical chapters to the description of the sounds in the Arabic language, Arabic poetry and the sensitivity that this language has left engraved in her memory since she was a child. For the narrator, the Arabic language is associated with voice and sound, recalling her Koranic school days:

> Anonner en se balançant, veiller à l’accent tonique, à l’observation des voyelles longues et brèves, à la rythmique du chant; les muscles du larynx autant que du torse se meuvent et se soumettent à la fois. La respiration se maîtrise pour un oral qui s’écoule et l’intelligence chemine en position d’équilibriste. Le respect de la grammaire, par la vocalise, s’inscrit dans le chant (p. 260).

Djebar considers the Arabic language to be more poetic than French, because it is based on alliteration and sound pattern. For her, Arabic is about more than meaning, about emotions

that it evokes – especially love and desire. In the last section of part II, entitled 'Sistre', Djebar uses the French language to reproduce the sonority of Arabic poetry. She merges French semiotics with the rhythms of the maternal language to produce a sort of a 'hybrid' poem:

> Long silence, nuit chevauchées, spirales dans la gorge. Râles, ruisseaux de son précipices, sources d'échos entrecroisés, cataractes de murmures, chuchotements en taillis tressés, surgeons susurrant sous la langue, chuintements, et souque la voix courbe qui, dans la soute de sa mémoire, retrouve souffles souillés de soûlerie ancienne. Râles de cymbale qui renâcle, cirse ou ciseaux de cette tessiture, tessons de soupirs naufragés [...] (p. 156).

Djebar explains her ambiguous relation with the French language using Greek Mythology. In the section entitled 'la tunique de Nessus', she compares the French language bestowed onto her by her father to the poisoned gift Hercules received from his wife, Deianira: 'la langue encore coagulée des Autres m'a enveloppée, dès l'enfance, en tunique de Nessus, don d'amour de mon père qui, chaque matin, me tenait par la main sur le chemin de l'école. Fillette arabe, dans un village du Sahel algérien' (p. 302). Yet, unlike Hercules who could not bear the painful effects of the poisoned tunic, which symbolises both Deianira's love and jealousy, and decided to kill himself as a result, Djebar undertakes 'the difficult task of bearing this ambivalent gift, and rewrites the myth so that the tunic is both toxic and salutary'.[329]

Conclusion

Swinging between the history of Algeria and episodes from Assia Djebar's life, *L'Amour, la fantasia* tells us about what it means to be a bilingual and a bicultural intellectual woman in colonial Algeria. Following the cultural and linguistic evolution of the author as she oscillates between the French and the Arab-Islamic cultures, this chapter has argued that colonial education is not only a manifestation of the colonial condition but also a tool of

[329] Connell, 'Movement, Education, and Empowerment' (p. 292).

resistance. The French language, the poisoned chalice Djebar received from her father, helped her escape the confinements of the *harem* as well as transgress the taboos of Algerian society. Unlike her peers who were condemned to a cloistered life and enjoyed limited mobility, Djebar rebelled against her father, freed her body and relished mobility and freedom. Yet, the same education which encouraged Djebar to rebel against her father and act in a way that is morally unacceptable in Algerian society, inspired her as well to rebel against the yoke of colonial control. In fact, it is in the French school where she learnt how to appropriate the coloniser's language and uses it as a tool to give voice to other women who were suffering in silence. Thus, it is the French language, the language of the coloniser, which became a tool for the restoration of Algerian cultural memory and a step towards Algerian independence.

Following the chronological trajectory of colonial and post-colonial experiences, the coming two chapters focus on the long-term legacies of colonial education on newly-independent countries by examining the experience of the postcolonial intellectual (both male and female) in the ex-coloniser's boarding schools. Based on Buchi Emecheta's *Head Above Water*, the next chapter follows Emecheta's trajectory as she evolves from a poor Igbo girl fighting for education in Nigeria to an internationally renowned female writer in England.

CHAPTER FIVE

Buchi Emecheta's Head Above Water (1986): From the Struggle for Education to International Recognition

If you're black, working class and a woman, you lose out three times over.[330]

Michelene Wandor

Among African novels that have treated the subject, Buchi Emecheta's *Head above Water* is an exceptionally rich record of the difficulties black female *évolué* experienced settling and living in the once-colonial metropolis. The novel denounces the sexism that black women experience within their own culture at the hand of their male counterparts and the racism they face in England. It exposes the tradition that demands women's self-sacrifice in Igbo society and protests patriarchal privileges that subjugate women and deny their rights to study, work or own a property. It also captures the displacement and dislocation that black immigrant women go through while trying to locate themselves within the ex-metropolis and simultaneously maintain links with their homeland. It focuses on their struggle to claim their voice and survive in a hostile world where they are not judged by their intellectual abilities and Western training but rather by their skin colour.

Set in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the novel follows the author's life, starting from her struggle for education in Lagos (Nigeria) to her present life in London as an internationally recognised writer. It records the difficulties she faced to overcome the restrictions of patriarchal Igbo society as well as racist, classist and sexist England to keep her head above water, as the novel's title puts it. Classified as an autobiography, it tells in an episodic way Emecheta's struggle to secure a place in a missionary boarding school, marriage at an early age and

[330] Michelene Wandor, *Body Politic: Writings from the Women's Liberation in Britain, 1969-1972* (London: Stage 1, 1972), p. 234.

migration to join her student husband in London where she finds herself and her five small children abandoned by her indifferent and abusive husband – far away from Nigeria. Stuck in a foreign country, the twenty-two-year-old woman demonstrates a firm persistence and perseverance to find a decent job and a place to live, bring up her children alone and study for a sociology degree at the same time. Emecheta admits that her mission was not easy and describes her survival in England as miraculous:

> As for my survival for the past twenty years in England, from when I was a little over twenty, dragging four cold and dripping babies with me and pregnant with the fifth one - that is a miracle. And if for any reason you do not believe in miracles, please start believing, because keeping my head above water in this indifferent society […] is a miracle.[331]

Unlike Emecheta's previous works – *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) – which are all set in Nigeria, *Head Above Water* has both Nigerian and British backgrounds. The first part of the novel is set in late 1940s and early 1950s colonial Nigeria when women were struggling against both colonialism and patriarchy, while the second part takes place in London before the emergence of the black feminist movement. In pre-colonial Nigeria, particularly in Igbo societies, women played an important role in social and economic life. They were neither seen as inferior nor marginalised. On the contrary, they were considered as complementary to men.[332] Their role was not only limited to mothering but also to providing financial support through food processing, mat weaving and pottery making. However, during the colonial era, colonial government and Christian missionaries changed women's status by introducing the notion of 'European patriarchy' which confined women to the domestic sphere and evaluated their femininity only in terms of their reproductive sexuality and their ability to perform the highly codified role of mothering. Moreover, the colonial

[331] Buchi Emecheta, *Head Above Water* (London: Fontana, 1986), p. 5.
[332] Rose Uchem, *Overcoming Women's Subordination in the Igbo African Culture and in the Catholic Church: Envisioning an Inclusive Theology with References to Women* (Florida: Universal Publisher, 2001), <http://dissertation.com/books/1581121334> [Accessed 04-03-2020], p. 46.

government encouraged the separation of economic roles of the two genders by excluding women from economic life and basing colonial economy only on male manpower:

> Males began to dominate the cultivation of cash crops for the international market and confined women to the growing of food crops which received lower returns. By focusing on men, the cash crop farmers, bureaucratic efforts to improve agriculture further encouraged the separation of economic roles of men and women that had previously complemented each other.[333]

This change of roles did not please Nigerian women who decided to rebel against the coloniser and his unfair policies. Among these protests were the so-called Women's war in 1929 and Abeokuta women's tax revolt in 1947.[334] Women's dissatisfaction with patriarchy and colonialism was also manifested in colonial and postcolonial feminist literature such as the works of Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta which challenged colonial and patriarchal conventions by encouraging women to marry outside their community, take control of finances and be dominant in sexual relationships. Although their works are all about feminism, both Nwapa and Emecheta found it initially difficult to identify themselves with feminism because they considered it to be fundamentally anti-men and against their traditions and culture. In her early career, when asked if she was a feminist, Nwapa denied that she identified with it. Yet, a few years before she passed away, she took part in a conference in Nsukka and declared:

> I think that I will go out and say that I am a feminist with a big f […] feminism is about possibilities; there are possibilities, there are choices. Let us not be afraid to say that we are feminists ... Globally, we need one another.[335]

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[333] Olanike Deji and Dorcas Alabi, 'Agricultural Production, Policy, and Profession', in *Gender and Development in Nigeria: One Hundred Years of Nationhood,* ed. by Funmi Soetan and Bola Akanji (London: Lexington Books, 2018), p. 122.

[334] For more details on these two important occurrences in Nigerian history, see Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock, *The Women's War of 1929: A History of Anti-colonial Resistance in Eastern Nigeria* (Durham, N.C: Carolina Academic Press, 2011); Marc Matera and others, *The Women's War of 1929: Gender and Violence in Colonial Nigeria* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Chiedo Nwankwor, 'Women's Protests in the Struggle for Independence', in *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics,* ed. by A. Carl LeVan and Patrick Ukata (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 103-120.

[335] Obioma Nnaemeka 'Feminism, rebellious women and cultural boundaries: rereading Flora Nwapa and her compatriots', *Research in African Literatures,* 26.2 (Summer 1995), 80-113 (p. 83).

Similarly, Emecheta refused to identify herself with Western feminism and preferred instead to be referred to as a feminist with a small 'f' because when it comes to the African concept, people have many other problems:

> I am just an ordinary writer who has to write. Being a woman and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist, then I am an African feminist with a small 'f'. I do believe in the African kind of feminism. They call it womanism.[336]

The fact that the two women are defending a similar vision of feminism, but with two different approaches, one defending it with a lower case 'f', while the other uses capital 'F' seems ironic. Yet, it is worth noting that they are in fact defending different forms of feminism. While Nwapa aligns herself with Western traditions of feminism which focus strictly on gender - that is with a capital 'F'- Emecheta prefers to offer an indigenised, Africanised version of feminism which focuses not only on gender but also on race and class – that is with a small 'f'. Emecheta's version of feminism is more akin to what the African-American author Clenora Hudson-Weems calls 'Africana Womanism' because it seems more 'family-centered' than 'female-centered'.[337] Although Emecheta does reject Western feminism as a school of thought, she embraces some of its principles such as fighting for women's rights. This is clearly shown in *Head Above Water* where she documents her own fight for education and her struggle to work, write and publish.

Emecheta's idea of Black feminism is revealed clearly in the second part of *Head Above Water* where she offers a detailed portrait of Black women's lives in Britain before the black feminist movement. After WWII, Britain experienced labour shortages and actively sought

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[336] Buchi Emecheta, 'Feminism with a Small "f"!', in *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers' Conference*, ed. by Kirsten Holst Petersen (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988), 173-85 (p. 175).

[337] Clenora Hudson-Weems, 'Africana Womanism: The Flip Side of a Coin', *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 25.3 (2001), 137- 145.

immigrants across the empire to 'meet postwar labor demands and to facilitate economic reconstruction'.[338] However, immigrants and intellectuals who came from Africa, the Caribbean and India to the metropole either to study or to settle did not feel welcomed by the locals. They found it extremely challenging to settle because of racial discrimination, the lack of housing, and the difficulty to find a decent job.[339] The hostility black people faced in England is reflected in black male-authored fiction and poetry of the post-WWII era, exemplified by works such as George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954), Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), E. R. *Braithwaite's To Sir, With Love* (1959) and *Paid Servant* (1962), and V.S. Naipaul's *Tell Me Who to Kill* (1971).

The situation of the black community in England remained the same until 1976, when a Caribbean-style festival to celebrate aspects of black culture in the Notting Hill area of London turned into a violent riot between the young black community and the English police who, according to their own version of the facts, were trying to arrest a black pickpocket. The situation escalated when some black youths intervened to defend the pickpocket. The clashes resulted in more than 100 police officers and 60 carnival-goers being hospitalised, and at least 66 people arrested.[340] Despite its brutality, the riot became a turning point in the history of black people in Britain as it marked the beginning of a new period of race relations in Britain. A year after the incident, the government passed the 1976 Race Relations Act which built on earlier legislation in 1968 to make 'racial discrimination unlawful in employment, training, housing, education and the provision of goods, facilities and services'.[341] Four years later, the 'Sus Law'

[338] Kennetta Hammond Perry, 'Migration, Citizenship, and the Boundaries of Belonging', in *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 67.
[339] Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

[340] Emma Griffiths, 'Remembering the Notting Hill riot', *BBC NEWS* (25 August 2006) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/5275542.stm> [Accessed 15-12- 2020].
[341] Andrea Mann, 'August 30, 1976: Racial tension run high as Notting Hill Carnival ends in riots', *BT* (2 May 2017) < http://home.bt.com/news/on-this-day/august-30-1976-racial-tensions-run-high-as-notting-hill-carnival-ends-in-riots-11364000534127> [Accessed 03-12-2019].

which empowered police officers to stop, search and arrest any person on suspicion of being in breach – and which was used mainly to target black people and other ethnic minorities - was abolished.

At this point in the twentieth century, Black and Asian women formed groups such as the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Decent, the Southall Black Sisters and the Brixton Black Women's Group mobilized to denounce classism, racism and gender discrimination ever more vocally. This alliance of women of colour, as argued by Florence Binard, stemmed from 'their common experience as victims of colonialism and imperialism which, according to them, outweighed their ethnic and cultural differences'.[342] This feminist struggle for rights and recognition was soon reflected in the works of Black female authors such as Beryl Gilroy who recounted in her memoir, *Black Teacher* (1976), her own experience of being a teacher in Inner London Education Authority schools, as well as the problems she initially faced to secure the position; and Farrukh Dhondy who described in his selection of short stories, *East End at Your Feet* (1976), life in Britain through the eyes of teenagers from Asian and English families. As this chapter will demonstrate, Emecheta was a part of this movement: she devoted most of her novels to themes such as black women's reality in Britain and the challenges, like racism and sexism, she faced to become recognised as an author and more fundamentally, as a human being.

Black female authors, like their male counterparts, struggled to have their works published. Publishing houses were not willing to publish their works because they did not consider Black literature as art.[343] This was compounded by the fact that distribution outlets

[342] Florence Binard, 'The British Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s: Redefining the Personal and the Political', *French Journal of British Studies* XXII, (2017), 1-17 (p. 5).

[343] It is worth mentioning here that despite the restricted publishing opportunities in the post-war era in England, black writers managed to publish their works and sustain themselves thanks to the literary climate that BBC's programmes helped to foster. Authors who published novels in the 1950s and 1960s honed their skills by writing for *Caribbean Voices* and *West African Voices* programmes which provided an outlet, financial support, and

refused to identify a readership for Black and Asian literary works. Emecheta reveals in her article 'Out of the Ditch and into Print' that publishing for a woman of colour was indeed not an easy task because she had to struggle against reluctant publishers, distributors and booksellers:

> I spent almost every week of 1968, 1969, and 1970 trying to persuade publishers just to read my work. I did not care whether I was paid for their publication or not, my only wish was that someone would share in my dreams.[344]

This struggle to get published pushed black female writers to collaborate with both black and women's publishing and distribution companies with a militant agenda such as Virago, Black Woman Talk, Onlywomen Press and The Women's Press.[345] Other writers who had financial means preferred to set up their own publishing houses and market their works by themselves. Among them was Emecheta who decided to set up – with the help of her son – her own publishing house 'Ogwugwu Afor' after a publisher cut an essential part of one of her novels. The publication of the works of these early black female writers paved the way for women of colour, particularly those from Africa, and gave them 'the idea that they might get published', as put by James Currey, the editorial director of Heinemann's African Writers Series.[346]

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guidance for immigrant writers. Naipaul, for example, started his international career as a freelancer for the BBC's *Caribbean Voices*, and several of his short stories were broadcast on the programme. He later worked as an interviewer and was the editor of the *Caribbean Voices* in the last few years it was on the air. See: Hyacinth M. Simpson, 'The BBC's Caribbean Voices and the Making of an Oral Aesthetic in the West Indian Short Story', *Journal of The Short Story in English*, 57 (Autumn 2011), 81-96; Louis James, *Caribbean Literature in English* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 93; and C. L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 217.

[344] Buchi Emecheta, 'Out of the Ditch and into Print', *West Africa,* (3 April 1978), 669- 672 (p. 671).

[345] Susan Alice Fischer, 'Postcolonial and diasporic voices: 'Black' British Women's Fiction and Literary Institutions in 1980s', in *The 1990s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by Philip Tew, Emily Horton, and Leigh Wilson (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 101- 124 (p. 105).

[346] Margaret Busby, **'**Buchi Emecheta Obituary: Novelist who overcame barriers to education and whose writings epitomised female independence', *The Guardian Online,* (3 Feb. 2017) <https://www.buchiemecheta.co.uk/category/external-articles-obituaries/the-guardian/> [Accessed 10-01-2020].

Despite its cultural, historical and thematic richness, Emecheta's *Head Above Water* has not attracted much attention. The slim existing literature on the novel reveals that there is a tendency among critics to focus more on its autobiographical aspect. Roger A. Berger, for instance, traces in his article 'Decolonizing African Autobiography' the shift of discourse from tragedy to comedy in three African autobiographies: Camara Laye's *The Dark Child*, Dugmore Boetie's *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* and Buchi Emecheta's *Head above Water*. In this article, Berger explains how these literary texts challenge the Western canon of autobiography by denying the possibility of verifying autobiographical truth, and the ways in which they negotiate the attempt to challenge history, language, genre, modernity, and colonialism:

> Dugmore Boetie's *Familiarity Is the Kingdom of the Lost* (1969) and Buchi Emecheta's *Head above Water* (1986) are also set in recognizably colonial sites (for Boetie, in pre-World War II and then Apartheid South Africa, and for Emecheta, second-class status in 1960s and '70s England), but they deploy narrative structures and strategies that comically and ironically disrupt colonial discourse and suggest nontragic African autobiographies can be written.[347]

In the same context of autobiography, Cynthia Ward, in her article entitled 'What They Told Buchi Emecheta: Oral Subjectivity and the Joys of "Otherhood"', focuses on the notion of oral subjectivity in the novel, particularly on the chapter entitled 'What They Told Me' which challenges the Anglophone autobiographical canons. She focuses on the passage where Emecheta went to her village and heard the story of her birth. She considers it as a 'moment of self-discovery' and an example of the experience of the oppressed African woman.[348]

Other critics choose to focus on the author's individual experience in the Metropole, her struggle against racism and the process behind her identity formation. Among them is Delphine

[347] Roger A. Berger, 'Decolonizing African Autobiography', *Research in African Literatures*, 41.2 (Summer 2010), 32-54 (p. 36).
[348] Cynthia Ward, 'What They Told Buchi Emecheta: Oral Subjectivity and the Joys of "Otherhood"', *PMLA*, 105.1, Special Topic: African and African American Literature, (January, 1990), 83-97.

Fongang who takes Emecheta's novel as an example of 'the tenacity of diaspora subjects in their struggle for self-definition and agency in a constraining environment'.[349] She follows Emecheta's empowerment as she moves from victimhood to subjecthood and power, and analyses it from a Black African feminist diasporan perspective. Fongang focuses, in particular, on the ways in which Emecheta overcomes hegemonic systems: patriarchy, racism, classism and sexism to keep her head above water in the Metropole. She concludes that Emecheta has succeeded in transforming her marginality into a site of resistance and agency - the idea which will be developed further in this chapter while tracing and analysing the evolution of the female *évolué* or the *évoluée* as I will be referring to, starting from her struggle for education to her recognition.

F. Odun Balogun examines from a comparative perspective the depiction of the complex relationship between the black self, the self's place of habitation and identity formation in two west African immigrant women memoirs: in addition to Emecheta's *Head above Water*, he also considers Meri Nana-Ama Danquah's *Willow Weep for Me.* Balogun emphasises the significance of place and relocation in each writer's journey of becoming a world-renowned writer. He argues that these physical journeys 'provide social circumstances and the challenges – e.g., poverty, racism, male chauvinism, divorce, separation, abandonment, and aspiration to social success – which, in their complex combinations, ultimately motivate the writers by compelling them to search for solutions to their problems'.[350]

The relative lack of literature on Emecheta's *Head Above Water* comes in stark contrast with intensive criticism produced about her previously published autobiographical novels: *In*

[349] Delphine Fongang, 'Diasporan subjectivity and the dynamics of empowerment in Buchi Emecheta's *Head Above Water*', *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal,* 6.1 (2013), 43-54 (p. 43).
[350] F. Odun Balogun, 'Self, Place and Identity in Two Generations of West African Immigrant Women Memoirs: Emecheta's *Head above Water and Danquah's Willow Weep for Me',* in *The New African Diaspora,* ed. by Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 455.

the Ditch (1972) which is based on her failing marriage, her experiences with the welfare system in London and her attempt to bring up her children alone; and *Second-Class Citizen* (1974) which relates her early marriage years when she was trying to support her indifferent husband who turns out later to be physically and emotionally abusive. In fact, Emecheta acknowledges in the first section of *Head Above Water* that some of the events have already been mentioned in her other autobiographical works:

> I will therefore write episodically, touching lightly here and there on those incidents on which I have dwelt in depth in my other books: *Second-Class Citizen, In the Ditch, The Bride Price, The Slave Girl, the Joy of Motherhood* and *the Double Yoke* […] if, however, some of the incidents described in the first part of this book are familiar to you, my reader, please don't be offended because some of them have to be touched upon again in order to highlight the present (p. 1-2).

In the light of the scarce amount of critical material available on Emecheta's work, which illuminates the position of the *évolué* in the Metropole in an anglophone context, the aim behind this chapter is to analyse the positionality of the African female *évolué* in the more recent publishing context of 1980s Britain, as she moves from subjugation to recognition. The chapter will follow Emecheta's journey of self-fulfilment from her struggle for education, to overcoming poverty, racism and sexism, and eventually reaching international recognition.

Poverty and the Struggle for Education

Poverty and gender are the first obstacles to Emecheta's literary inclination. Born in colonial Nigeria to a railway worker father and uneducated mother, her early life was dominated by misery and deprivation. Her family was so poor that they could not afford to send her to school. Instead of encouraging her to study, her ill-educated mother insisted that she learn certain trade and house duties from an early age because she believed that 'a girl needs to master

a trade to help her in later life'.[351] Her mother wanted her to contribute to the family's income by selling oranges in the market but luckily a benefactor 'spotted the intelligence in the young girl with the large, forever watchful eyes', and encouraged her to continue her education.[352] Describing her tough childhood, Emecheta's son, Sylvester, says:

> She was a sick, poorly and undernourished child but with a ravenous desire to survive, against all odds. She lost her father, who doted on her, when she was eight years old. With his passing, she and her younger brother were left at the mercy of a mother who, due to lack of education, was unable to appreciate the talent in the young girl.[353]

Poverty is not the only reason behind depriving Emecheta from receiving a formal education: gender proves to be another crucial issue. Due to the gender discrimination of Nigerian society at that time, she was kept at home while her brother was encouraged to go to school. Her family allowed her brother to study but not her because they considered educating a girl an unnecessary luxury and a waste of money: 'educating a girl who would just be turned over to her husband's family was viewed as a waste of scarce resources'.[354] However, the rebellious girl did not consider her gender as weakness and decided to challenge the gender conventions of Igbo society and go to school too. One day, while confined at home with her mother who paid little attention to her, Emecheta sneaked out of her house and ran to the school where her neighbour taught, in the hope that he would let her attend his class. The latter appreciated the child's strong will to study and welcomed her in his class. Emecheta recalls this scene in detail in *Second-class Citizen* where she refers to herself by the name of 'Adah' instead of Buchi:

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[351] Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 180.
[352] Sylvester Onwordi, 'Remembering my mother Buchi Emecheta, 1944-2017', *NewStatesman*, (31 Jan. 2017) <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2017/01/remembering-my-mother-buchi-emecheta-1944-2017> [Accessed 11-01- 2020].
[353] Margaret Busby**, '**Buchi Emecheta Obituary: Novelist who overcame barriers to education and whose writings epitomised female independence', *The Guardian Online,* (3 Feb. 2017) <https://www.buchiemecheta.co.uk/category/external-articles-obituaries/the-guardian/> [Accessed 10-01-2020].
[354] Nancy Topping Bazin, 'Feminist Perspectives in African Fiction: Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta', *The Black Scholar,* 17.2, The Black Woman Writer and the Diaspora (March/April 1986), 34-40 (p. 35).

> She felt Mr Cole should have asked why she came, but being reassured by his smile, she said in her little loud voice: I came to school – my parents would not send me! […] the day ended too soon for Adah's liking. But they must go home, Mr Cole assured her. Yes, of course she could come again if she liked, but if her parents would not allow her to come, he would take it upon himself to teach her the alphabet.[355]

Adah's determination to study did not stop at sneaking out from the house. Despite the economic situation of the family, she did her best to get money for the entrance examination fee. Once, for example, she pretended to lose the money she had been given to buy meat. For losing it, she was beaten one hundred and three strokes. Although punished harshly, Adah was happy because she felt that she 'had earned the two shillings'.[356] As she received no support from her family, she had to fight for her dream and survive on her own:

> Children, especially girls, were taught to be very useful very early in life, and this had its advantages. For instance, Adah learned very early to be responsible for herself. Nobody was interested in her for her own sake, only in the money she would fetch, and the housework she could do and Adah, happy at being given this opportunity of survival, did not waste time thinking about its rights or wrongs. She had to survive.[357]

Seeing their daughter's determination to get an education, her parents allowed her to go to school. At school, she learnt more than how to write her name: for the first time she learnt how to read a story instead of listening to it. After her father's death, she was sent to her uncle who allowed her to continue her education not because he believed that education is important for a girl but because he thought it would increase the amount of the bride price that could be negotiated on her marriage. Treated as a family servant at her uncle's place, Adah fought hard for her education. Her determination paid off when she won the scholarship to attend the prestigious Methodist Girls' High School in Lagos, which at the time was only reserved for the most privileged students.

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[355] Buchi Emecheta, *Second-Class Citizen* (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 6.
[356] Ibid., (p. 16).
[357] Ibid,. (p. 13).

One may have noticed that the narration of *Head Above Water* has a strong overlap with that of *Second Class Citizen*. Although clearly a fictional character, Adah's life often matches that of Emecheta. At the time when *Second Class Citizen* was written, Emecheta was facing gender and race issues. She was not ready to confront readers, publishers and critics about her reality; thus, she fictionalised the narrative by using Adah as her fictional proxy. By doing so, Emecheta managed to distance herself from the work, avoid direct criticism of her readers and critics and 'affirm the value of [her] identity, which had been denied [her] until recently because of sexism and racism'.[358]

Emecheta's Years among the British in Colonial Africa: The Methodist Girls' High School

At High School, Emecheta goes through different experiences which contribute to her personality. The combination of the Methodist Girls' training and her own personal and intellectual development turn her into a postcolonial *évoluée*. Coming from a poor background, Emecheta has to face both racist and classist prejudices from her teachers and colleagues. Although she won the scholarship in a fair competition, she does not feel welcome probably because she is different from the other girls: 'there was nothing to like about me anyway. I was forever looking serious, with formidable glasses, and not particularly tidy or exceptionally clever' (p. 22). Despite craving company, she does not feel at ease with the other girls because they make her feel inferior and lower her self-esteem: when in their company, she remarks, 'I was wont to make a fool of myself by doing or saying something wrong. And that wrong thing I would worry about, cry about, bite my nails to the point of almost eating up my fingers about'

[358] Olga Kenyon, *Writing Women: Contemporary Women Novelists* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), p. 54.

(p. 18). Aware of the socio-economic difference between herself and the other girls, as well as the hostile environment surrounding her, the young girl deliberately avoids interacting with her colleagues and prefers instead to find refuge in the English literary canon:

> I always liked to stay behind deliberately when the others had gone, so that I could read a line of Wordsworth, or a verse of Byron, or Tennyson, then make the short journey from the boarding house, through the trees that were often still wet from the night dew, with only myself for company, taking my time and walking "as if next year would do" as our house Mistress, Mrs Okuyemi, often reminded me (p. 18).

Staying behind often causes her more trouble because it gives her teachers the impression that she is unpunctual and irresponsible. One day, for instance, when she is late for the morning assembly – a gathering for students to perform prayers and sing the school hymn – her teacher does not allow her in immediately but keeps her waiting for a while, enough to be noticed by the other teachers and colleagues. At this, the girl feels humiliated especially as the other girls are pretending to be disturbed by her lateness: 'I knew what they were thinking: that Igbo girl has done it again' (p. 20). By doing so, her teacher is trying to give a lesson, that behaving like a 'bush girl' is not acceptable at the missionary school and should be punished.

This scene reveals that discipline was very important in the Girls' Methodist school especially when it comes to religious rituals. Founded in January 1879 by Wesleyan Methodist missionaries, the school aimed to spread Christianity and to teach indigenous girls Mathematics, English, Latin, Greek, Science, needlework and other domestic arts.[359] Given the school's religious inclination, girls were required to recite biblical texts and pray before starting their classes. They were not allowed under any circumstances to skip the morning assemblies; if they did, they would have been considered as 'sinners' and would have had a 'word' with their form mistress whose word is sharper than Hamlet's daggers, as Emecheta puts it (p. 20). Commenting

[359] Gbade Aladeojebi, *History of Yoruba Land* (Johannesburg: Partridge Africa Publishing, 2016) <https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/History_of_Yoruba_Land/jbBODQAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=girls+methodist+school+in+lagos+needlework&pg=PT137&printsec=frontcover> [Accessed 23-12-2020].

on the importance of religion in the mission school's curriculum, Emecheta recalls: 'they had taught us at the Methodist Girls' High School that prayers and devotion could move mountains' (p. 25).

The text implies that although this attitude may seem harsh, Emecheta's teachers were very much trying to help her; she only understood this later when she left school and got married. The only teacher who behaved in a racist way towards her was Miss Humble, the young English teacher with an MA in English from Oxford. Unlike what her name may imply, Miss Humble is not humble at all. In her accumulation of personal characteristics, and association with Oxford, Miss Humble represents a condensed sort of traditional Englishness. She does not like the little Igbo girl and enjoys humiliating her in front of her colleagues despite her efforts and her love for literature. Emecheta narrates that the English teacher tends to distinguish between her and her other friends and never gives her the chance to show her passion for literature and poetry:

> The tall and broad Miss Humble never liked me. I wanted her to like me the way she did my friend Kehinde Lawai. I used to really try in her literature lesson, and her subject was my best anyway […] Anyway, Miss Humble did not like me and if she never favoured me, she had more excuse after my shameful behaviour in the assembly that morning (p. 22-23).

Another factor which makes Emecheta's integration more difficult besides racism and classism is the school's colonialist agenda. As a mission institution, the Methodist school aimed at spreading the English language and Western civilisation while at the same time repressing all that is indigenous. Thus, local languages such as Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa were not taught, in favour of English. Emecheta recalls that Nigerian students were not allowed to speak any other language inside the school but English. If they did, they would be punished harshly: 'if I spoke my Ibo language or any other Nigerian one in the school compound, I would be given a

bad mark or asked to pay a find [sic]' (p. 25). Ositadimma Ogbonna addresses this idea while discussing the effects of Western education on indigenous languages in colonial Nigeria:

> There was a time when the speaking of local languages was banned in schools and students were punished if caught speaking any native language which they call vernacular. Although this practice was later abolished, the effect lingered on the students who spoke Igbo in school were made fun of and called *odenigbo.* And if you offered Igbo language in the school Certificate Examination, you are ridiculed and labelled as an "*Igbo, Igbo, BK*" student, as opposed to those students that studied Math, Additional Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry.[360]

This passage explains well why the other girls refer to Emecheta as 'the Igbo girl' instead of calling her by her name.

To escape the school's hostile environment, Emecheta immerses herself in her studies and does her best to prove herself to her teacher.[361] However, and despite all her efforts, she still finds some subjects such as Maths difficult to understand. When time comes to study them, she dreams of another world. She dreams and builds her own stories in which she is the heroine, in which she always has enough food and a nice bed and 'not the bug-ridden planks we slept on at Mrs Deddeke's boarding house' (p. 22). As she does not have the chance to see her family often, especially after the death of her father and her mother's remarriage, she dreams about her life in the village, a life where she is surrounded by her loving parents and relatives:

> I used to imagine myself lost like that in the bush, so that the relatives with whom I was living at the time would be kinder to me and stop beating me for the slightest thing I did, so that my mother would come and stay with my brother and I, like she used to before our father died, so that my mother would love me so much that she would leave her native husband, who only had to inherit her and not marry her properly the way my Pa did (p. 22).

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[360] Ositadimma Ogbonna, *Killing the Golden Geese: Wars Against* (Lulu Publishing Services, 2016), p. 58.

[361] This quest to prove oneself is part of what structures Dickens' novels. Emecheta's journey in *Second Class Citizen* as well as in *Head Above Water* is similar to that of David and Philip in Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. When asked about the Dickensian influence on her writing, Emecheta declared: 'all I can say is that I write in what I consider my own style and choose my subjects in my own way. If there is any resemblance to the Dickensian models, then it is purely accidental. But maybe it is not so accidental because, like all secondary school children in English Colonial Africa. we knew most of Dickens' work almost parrot fashion. So, our brand of English still sounds like that of these early masters'. Retrieved from 'A Nigerian Writer Living in London', *Kunapipi*, 4.1 (1982), 114-123 (p. 115) <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol4/iss1/11/> [Accessed 17-12-2020].

Like Mehdi, Laroui's protagonist, whom we will discuss in the following chapter, Emecheta's greatest escape is literature. She knows that leaving school is not an option especially after all that she has done to secure a place. Thus, she has to find an alternative, a way of escaping which will make reality less painful. She finds an answer in her very own imagination: 'I began to dream of another world […] and the more I wallowed in my dreams, to the extent of bringing them into the classroom, the more my work suffered and the greater my fear' (p. 22). Evoking pleasant memories of her life in the village and creating her own world has led Emecheta's work to suffer. However, as she knows that failing an exam means losing the scholarship, she does her best to compensate for the bad marks and eventually manages to achieve a good grade.

The Dream of Becoming a Writer

While at the Methodist Girls' High School, Emecheta's character begins to take shape. She starts developing desires which are deemed 'unnatural' for girls. She changes from a too-sensitive girl who was afraid of confronting people to an ambitious and rebellious girl. This change of character is seen in the passage where Miss Humble asks her students what they want to be in the future. At this, Emecheta announces that she wants to be a writer, a storyteller like her big mother. Shocked at the girl's statement, Miss Humble shouts at the girl in front of her classmates and sends her out of the class: 'Pride goeth before a fall! […] Go out, out and straight to the chapel. Go there and pray for God's forgiveness. […] take a bad Mark!' (p. 23). Puzzled by her teacher's reaction, the girl leaves the classroom towards the chapel as her teacher has ordered her. However, on her way to her place of penitence, she starts questioning her teacher's decision:

> What are you going to tell God, enh? What, Florence are you going to tell Him, when you go inside there to ask His forgiveness? Are you going to say, "Please, dear God,

> don't make me a writer" And then at the same time say, "But, dear God, I so wish to be a writer, a story-teller, like our mother Ogbueyin and her friends at home in Ibuza" (p. 24).

After a long soliloquy, she concludes that becoming a writer is not a sin. She decides thereby not to enter the chapel and not to pray for forgiveness because, as Mehdi would also come to conclude in different circumstances in *Une année chez les Français*, she thought 'God had more important things to do than to start punishing me for speaking my dreams aloud' (p. 24). She also opts for not to calling in her bad mark on the following Friday, as she is expected because she feels she has done nothing wrong. By doing so, the girl rebels against Miss Humble, the manifestation of colonial authority, the voice she is taught to associate with correctness and never dare to question. Emecheta is no longer the shy girl who is afraid of speaking, now she is a determined young girl who stands up for what she believes and defends her dreams loudly. Commenting on her personality development, Fongang argues: 'her outspokenness might have been seen as a form of disrespect by the authorities at her school, but it only represented the kind of person Emecheta was going to become in the future'.[362]

Miss Humble's harsh reaction towards Emecheta's announcement could possibly be the result of her belief that being a writer is 'unnatural' for a girl. As a teacher in the Methodist school, her mission is to form girls who will be able to contribute effectively to the stability of family life within the society. Thus, by encouraging the girl's ambition to become a writer, she will be encouraging her to give up on her role as a good wife and mother, which contradicts the goals of the Methodist mission. The other possible reason behind her reaction could be her belief that her English language is too pure for African people like Emecheta to use it and express themselves in it, just like Sergeant Davy who thought two centuries earlier that

[362] Fongang, 'Diasporan subjectivity and the dynamics of empowerment', p. 43.

'the air of England is too pure for any slave to breathe'.[363] Most probably, Miss Humble does not want Emecheta to write her stories in English because she thinks she will 'contaminate' it by her Africanness.

In fact, what has made Emecheta want to be a writer is the combination of her love for the literary classics of the British canon – Chaucer, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Austen and Tennyson – as well as her influence by the oral traditional fictional Igbo narratives called *ifo*, in which 'the big mother, in her role as *griotte*, tells stories that flow from the matrix of women's traditional lives'.[364] Emecheta acknowledged on several occasions that her role model was her father's eldest sister who used to be a storyteller: 'all I ever wanted was to tell my stories from my own home, just like my big mother Nwakwaluzo used to tell her stories in her own compound with her back leaning against the *ukwa* tree' (p. 242). In one of her interviews, Emecheta recognises the influence of her aunt on her decision to become a writer: 'She was very old and almost blind […] I thought to myself no life could be more important than this. So when people asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up, I told them I wanted to be a storyteller'.[365] Emecheta wants to pass on the wisdom and traditions of her Igbo people like her aunty did. Yet, unlike her big mother, she will not be using moonlight and oral language as her tools but rather 'electricity, a typewriter and a language that belonged to those who once colonized the country of my birth' (p. 242).

Unlike her ancestors and some of her successors who chose to tell their stories in their indigenous languages, Emecheta opts for writing in English but in a version that is Africanised or domesticated. Because she wants her stories to reach a larger audience, not only women and

[363] Sergeant Davy, quoted in Ellen Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel, 1684-1814* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 177.
[364] Jefilyn Fisher, 'Buchi Emecheta 1944 -', in *Modern British Women Writers: An A-to-Z Guide*, ed. by Vicki K. Janik, Del Ivan Janik, and Emmanuel Sampath Nelson (USA: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 113.
[365] Rosemary Bray, 'Interview with Buchi Emecheta', *Voice Literary Supplement* (June 1982).

children of her village, she has made the opposite decision to Ngũgĩ, who gave up on writing in English and decided to write in Gikuyu instead. Instead of rejecting the coloniser's language, as Ngũgĩ famously did in his seminal work *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Emecheta seeks to 'indigenise' English by adapting it to African aesthetics. She infuses English scribal tradition with elements of African orality such as idioms, proverbs, riddles and songs to transform the coloniser's language from a tool of oppression into a tool of resistance and emancipation. An example of Emecheta's use of orality can be found in the third chapter, entitled 'What They Told Me', where she evokes some of her childhood memories while living in Ibusa, Nigeria. In this chapter, she retells the oral stories she heard from her mothers and incorporates in her narration some songs in the Igbo language. Below is a song that she and the other children use to sing for birds:

> Umu nnunu umu nnu nta
> Tunzaza tulu nza
> Unu no nebo eme gide
> Tunzanza tulu nza… (p. 7)

Emecheta's extensive use of techniques associated with an oral literary tradition in *Head Above Water* reminds us of Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances* (1968). Although they are written in the coloniser's language, both Emecheta and Kourouma's works demonstrate the strong influence of oral traditions. Like Emecheta, Kourouma makes use of the coloniser's language and consciously incorporates techniques of Malinké oral literature into his narratives. While Emecheta igboizes her works by 'going back to the Igbo narrative tradition, such as irony, dialogues and integrating of genres of Igbo oral literature into her narratives',[366]

[366] Susan Arndt, 'Buchi Emecheta and the Tradition of Ifo: Continuation and Writing Back', in *Emerging Perspectives on Buchi Emecheta*, ed., by Marie Umeh (Trenton NJ: African World Press, 1996), 27-56 (p. 28).

Kourouma malinkeses the French language by 'subsuming it to the syntax of the Malinke language'.[367]

As argued in the previous section, missionary education has a great impact on Emecheta's evolution as a woman and as a writer. Indeed, it is in the Methodist Girls' High School that her journey as an *évoluée* starts. It is also in the same school that she decides to become a writer, leave her home country and settle in 'The mother country' – England. Emecheta's decision to settle in England is influenced by both her father who made her imagine that England is a piece of heaven as well as her early schooling. In *Head above the Water*, she admits that the temptation to go to England stems from the stories she read or heard from her English teachers: 'I thought people in England lived like they did in Jane Austen's novels and that the typical Englishman was like Mr Darcy, and the woman like Mrs Bennet and her daughters' (p. 28).

The decision to move to England, however, is not easy to implement especially for a poor African woman. Aware of the difficulty of the situation, Emecheta who is no longer able to postpone marriage due to family pressure, leaves the Methodist school at the age of sixteen and decides to get married to a local man in the hope that he will support her to go to England and fulfil her dream of becoming a writer. Yet, this is not the case: her husband turns out to be abusive and not as ambitious as she thinks. He goes to England to pursue his studies and leaves with her the responsibility of raising the children. Despite all the hardships, Emecheta does not give up on her dream and insists upon joining him. To do so, she makes use of her Western education to find a job. Her efforts pay off when she finds a prestigious job at the American

[367] Peter W. Vakunta, *Indigenization of Language in the African Francophone Novel: A New Literary Canon* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), p. 119.

Embassy. After years of saving, she decides to take her two babies and join her student husband in England.

As one may expect, immigration for women was not a common practice in as conservative a society as the Nigerian one. A woman was supposed to stay in her village and take care of her children until her husband came back. This patriarchal attitude can be seen in her in-laws who were the first to oppose her trip and urged her to stay in Nigeria. At this stage of her life, Emecheta seemed to have overcome poverty but not patriarchy. Although she was earning almost six times her husband's salary and more than many Nigerians who had returned from Britain, she was not happy with the gendered condition of her life in Lagos. She did not have full control of her money because she had to support her husband's studies and her in-laws.

The Price of Blackness

Once in England, Emecheta is shocked at the social conditions of black people in London. On arrival, she experiences a cultural shock, quite literally. England is not as she expected: its people are not like the characters of the stories she read, and its skies are not as blue as she imagined: 'I felt like walking into the inside of a grave: I could see nothing but masses of grey' (p. 29). The gloominess, the cold and the unwelcoming faces of Londoners make her feel that the trip is not worth it. She regrets coming and wishes she could go back to Nigeria but as she has sold everything she possesses back home, she decides to survive if not for her own sake, for her babies' wellbeing. Describing the hostility she felt on her first days in England, Emecheta observes: 'England gave me a cold welcome. As I said in *Second-Class Citizen*, "if I had been Jesus, I would have passed England by and not dropped a single blessing' (p. 29). Although she previously experienced racism back home at the hands of her English

teacher, Emecheta's shock when confronted with the realities of England as opposed to the idealised version she nurtured through schooling and reading, is severe because she thinks Miss Humble is just an exception. It is only when she starts interacting with English people that she realises that Miss Humble is in fact reflecting some of the long-term trends running through British society such as a deeply ingrained superiority complex, xenophobia and prejudice – which she has not expected to encounter with such vigour and regularity.

Emecheta is not the only one who has experienced a cultural shock on arrival to England. The Antiguan novelist, Jamaica Kincaid, feels a similar sense of deception when she leaves her Antiguan village and comes to England. In her essay entitled 'On Seeing London for the First Time', she tells her readers about the hostility she faces in 'the real England'. She is shocked to see that the England she saw on the map during her school years is completely different from the England she visits as a grown-up woman:

> When I saw England for the first time, I was a child in school sitting at a desk. The England I was looking at was laid out on a map gently, beautifully, delicately, a very special jewel …when my teacher had pinned this map on the blackboard, she said: "this (is) England" – and she said it with authority, seriousness and adoration and we all sat up […] we understood then …that England was to be our source of myth and the source from which we got our sense of reality.[368]

Once in England, Kincaid realises that the idea of something and its reality are two completely different things. England is not as paradisal as she has imagined. It is not the same England she knew through pictures, paintings and books. The real England is 'ugly', its weather is like 'a jail sentence' and its people are xenophobes.[369] The confrontation of the chasm between the idea of England presented in the colonial discourse and the reality of hostility makes the Antiguan writer feel hatred for the country: 'I wanted to take it into my hands and

[368] Jamaica Kincaid, 'On Seeing England for the First Time', *Transition: An International Review*, 51 (Jan. 1991), 32-40 (p. 32).
[369] Ibid., (p. 40).

tear it into little pieces and then crumble it up as if it were clay, child's clay'.[370] Like Emecheta, Kincaid feels like an outsider and finds the journey to 'the mother country' unworthy.

Emecheta describes her initial cultural shock further in *Second Class Citizens* where she tells her readers about her bitter deception when she sees the terraced house where her husband has been living with other Nigerian migrants since his arrival in the UK. Adah's husband told her in his letters that he had accommodation for them in London but he did not warn her what it was like. The result of this omission is a shock that nearly drives her crazy. The house is very small and the family has to live in a 'half-room' with a single bed at one end and a new sofa her husband bought with the money she had sent him to buy her a top coat.[371] Trying to justify the miserable status of the house her husband declares:

> You see, accommodation is very short in London, especially for black people with children. Everybody is coming to London, the West Indians, the Pakistanis and even the Indians, so that African students are usually grouped with them. We are all black, all coloureds, and the only houses we can get are horrors like these. [372]

The 'horrors' of this accommodation push Emecheta to look for a better place for herself and her children. Yet, as she starts hunting for a new home, she is shocked to see on advertisements for accommodation the words 'SORRY NO COLOUREDS' in bold red letters (p. 30). Later, she has to deal with racist landlords and landladies who refuse to rent her their properties only because of her skin colour. One of the landladies in Hasley Street, for instance, denies that the rooms she has advertised are vacant when she realises that Emecheta and her family are black.[373] These racist landlords make her realise that 'her colour was something she was supposed to be ashamed of'.[374] She also realises that no matter how well-educated she is,

[370] Ibid., (p. 37).
[371] Emecheta, *Second Class Citizens*, p. 35.
[372] Ibid., p. 35.
[373] Ibid., p.75.
[374] Ibid., p. 70.

her ‘colour which we had hitherto regarded as natural was repulsive to others and posed a great problem’ (p. 29). Michael Meyer comments on the black experience in England and considers the English attitude towards them as ironic: ‘the English attitude towards African and Caribbean residents ranges from indifference to xenophobia. The English, paradoxically, seem to expect others to assimilate but pursue a strategy of exclusion that prevents integration’.[375]

Property owners are not the only ones who refuse to see beyond the surface of Emecheta’s skin: neighbours display similar approaches. The worst of all her neighbours is the family that lives close by her maisonette in Regent’s Park. This white family does not appreciate the fact that one of the best maisonettes that Camden Council has built is given to black immigrants. They feel that ‘coloureds’ are taking their chances in accommodation, benefits and jobs. Thus, they immediately take a dislike to Emecheta’s family and do their best to throw her out:

> That meant having rotten tomatoes left on our doorstep, while calls were made to the council workers to come and see how dirty it was. They told the council I did not deserve the flat given to me. We went through the stage of stolen milk bottles until I cancelled all my milk and started fetching it myself. Then we reached the stage where my doors were sprayed and rude things written on them (p. 47).

All these racist experiences make Emecheta exorcise the idealistic image she previously had of England. She concludes that England is not ‘the kingdom of God’ her father thought it was (p. 29) but rather a place where minorities are oppressed. Meyer corroborates this idea when he argues that the difference between the colonial image of England as the embodiment of the Christian Kingdom of Heaven and reality is alienating for the immigrant:

> The outsider’s preconception of the “moder kontry Englan” is very different from the English mother country. Emecheta destroys the immigrants’ and the Englishmen’s illusions about England as a tolerant land of opportunity with a model culture. To the

[375] Michael Meyer ‘The Other Women’s Guide to English Cultures: Tsitsi Dangarembga and Buchi Emecheta’, in *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Society in a ‘Post- Colonial World’,* ed. by Geoffrey V. Davis and others (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 335- 349 (p. 337).

> immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean, England appears, rather, to be a stepmother country, in which they are less the lost and found children than unwelcome aliens. [376]

It is worth mentioning that Emecheta's experience with racist landlords and neighbours coincided with the speech of Enoch Powell (1968) on the so-called 'Rivers of Blood' in which he evoked the race question in the UK and the repartition of all non-white immigrants, mainly those from the Commonwealth. Powell's radical speech was considered as a blatant incitement to racism and hatred against immigrants. It faced much criticism from the press and the other political parties for 'being more provocation than prognostication at a moment when the major political parties in Britain were trying to avoid any appearance of condoning racism'.[377] In chapter eighteen of *Head Above Water*, Emecheta criticises Powell's speech and considers it as hypocritical: 'Enoch Powell implied that most of these troubles were caused by blacks. They all should be sent home, he cried, forgetting that only a few years back he had welcomed the black nurses from the West Indies with hysterical enthusiasm' (p. 114). In the same chapter, she recalls the day her daughter comes from school in tears because her teacher has told her that Enoch Powell will force them to leave England and go home whether they like it or not:

> She [her teacher] said that the Tory party will win the next election and that Enoch Powell is the most popular man in the party, and since he'd been saying that blacks cause all the trouble, he is going to force us all to go home (p. 115).

Abusing the position of the educator to verbally attack the only black child in the classroom, the teacher seemingly takes pleasure in expressing remarks that could be traumatic for the child. The little girl who has never been to Africa does not consider Nigeria as 'home'

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[376] Ibid., (p. 336).

[377] Benjamin T. Bowyer, 'The Contextual Determinants of Whites' Racial Attitudes in England', *British Journal of Political Science*, 39.3 (July, 2009), 559-586 (p. 559) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27742758> [Accessed 17-12-2020]. For more on the press reaction to Powell's 'rivers of blood' speech see: Roy Greenslade, *Seeking Scapegoats: The Coverage of Asylum in the UK Press* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2005), 19-20.

because she was born and raised in England. Africa is home for her parents but not for her. As with Meyer's point about the English expecting assimilation while practising exclusion, in this instance another double bind is imposed by the perverse logic of racism: the teacher expects the girl to 'go home' without recognising that England already is her home. The racist environment that Emecheta confronts in London hinders her journey as an *évoluée* and renders her a 'second class citizen'. Yet, as this chapter argues, Emecheta eventually manages to overcome racism and construct a liberating model of a black woman living in a Western society.

The Weight of Motherhood

Race is not only the obstacle in Emecheta's journey as an *évoluée*. Her responsibilities as a wife and as a mother have also burdened her and made her mission harder. Her husband, whom she thought would be supportive, turns out to be abusive and irresponsible. He refuses to work and relies on her income to support his studies. He pays little attention to his children and leaves to her all the responsibility of providing food and childcare. He also becomes involved with other women and, when he fails his summer exams, blames her for burdening him with responsibilities and disturbing his studies. His irresponsibility reaches the point where he recommends adoption for his children. When she refuses, he washes his hands of them, renounces their marriage, and rejects his paternity of their children:

> Sylvester denied his children and recommended that I should have them all adopted because, being a student, he did not wish to be saddled with five kids. He said that we never married, so I had no claim on him' […] we were married but he burnt my Nigerian passport, the children's birth certificates, and our marriage certificate, knowing full well that to get those documents back from Nigeria was impossible (p. 36).

The official documents are not the only things he burns: he gives the same treatment to her first manuscript, *The Bride Price*, the story upon which she bases her dream of her becoming a writer. Emecheta gives him the manuscript to read and to give her his opinion given that he

also received a Western education. Yet, he destroys it under the pretext that it exposes their failed marriage and depicts him as an unfaithful husband and irresponsible father:

> He was still burning the last pages when I came into the room from Queen's Crescent where I had been shopping. I knew then that my dream of being an ideal wife and mother was buried. Society never prepared us for lone parenthood […] Nonetheless, the burning of my *Bride Price* decided me (p. 34).

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Emecheta describes how deeply Adah is hurt by her husband's act not only because he refuses to read her piece and calls it 'rubbish' but because he is 'unable to accept the concept of a black woman writing', as put by Asia Zgadzaj.[378] While she is expecting his encouragement and support, he ridicules her dream of becoming a writer: 'he had said that she would never be a writer because she was black and because she was a woman'.[379] By burning her 'brainchild', Sylvester is trying to silence her and to stifle her desire for independence. Yet, this is not the case because by doing so he has helped her put an end to their failing marriage and made her more determined to become a writer and tell her own experience as a black female. As Emecheta notes in *Head Above Water:*

> Sometimes it is very good to meet people like Carole, Miss Humble and Sylvester. Such people were particularly good for me and my Chi, because one way to set my mind on achieving something was for another person to tell me that I could not do it. I would then put all my thoughts into it. I would pray for it and go out for it, in search of the miracle (p. 46).

Although her marriage has failed, Emecheta has learnt a lot of lifelong lessons from this experience. She has discovered how to rebel against patriarchal control and sexual inequality, how to fight back, and how to make her way without remaining dependent on her abusive husband. As a Nigerian woman and a mother of five children, she is expected to stay home,

[378] Asia Zgadzaj, 'Writing Mothers: Spatial-Textual Formation in Nigerian Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, and Pole Anna Janko's *The Girl with Matches',* in *Women's Voices and Feminism in Polish Cultural Memory*, ed. by Urszula Chowaniec and Ursula Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 155-170 (p. 162).
[379] Emecheta, *Second Class Citizen*, p. 178.

raise the children, take care of the house while remaining totally dependent on her husband. Yet, she prefers to challenge the traditional gender roles of Igbo society which confine her to the domestic sphere and makes her way as a successful independent woman. Her mission is not easy for she has to make a balance between her role as a mother, work, attending London University and her passion – writing.

Emecheta has felt this change in her personality when her husband comes back for reconciliation. She initially tries to forgive him for the children's sake but when she notices that he has not changed, that he is seeking reconciliation only because her economic status has improved, she rebels against him. The 'new her' is no longer able to tolerate his exploitation and his abusive behaviour towards herself and her children:

> This was a new me! I never used to hit back in the old days, to say nothing of striking first. When overcome, I used to bite and cry. But then I had not been through [the Council housing experience of] Pussy cat Mansions, neither had I fought the rent collectors nor learned to challenge 'fate or my Chi', instead of accepting it all or leaving it all to 'God in prayer' the depth of my rebellion surprised me and so did the intensity of my sense of self-preservation (p. 93).

Emecheta's rebellion against patriarchy, gender inequality and racism stems both from the financial and emotional hardships she has gone through in England as well as her early education at the Methodist school where she was taught to value her own importance as a woman and learnt how to speak up and defend herself: 'white Missionaries who had left their different countries to come to Lagos in Nigeria to teach the girls to value their own importance' (p. 18).

Can the Subaltern Publish?

After overcoming the double burden of blackness and motherhood, Emecheta has to face the sexist publishers and distributors of 1970s and 1980s England. In her article entitled

'A Nigerian Writer Living in London', Emecheta describes her endless trips to the publishers and the obstacles she faces to write what she wants and to have her works published. While trying to publish her second novel, *Second Class Citizen*, Emecheta faces constant rejection from publishing houses which fail to appreciate her writing: 'Because I have fallen out with my first publishers, all well-known publishers refused to accept *Second Class Citizen*. So my hope of making a living from writing was dashed even before it was born'.[380] Emecheta is facing 'le mur d'argent' because people who have the means to publish refuse to publish her works under the pretext that her manuscripts are not interesting enough to be published.

After several attempts, Emecheta accepts the constant rejection as part of her life. She becomes so used to it that she has learnt by heart the nicely worded letters that accompany her manuscripts: 'publishers thanked me very much for letting them read my lovely manuscript which they enjoyed enormously, but it could not be published at that moment' (p. 67). Despite the continuous rejection of her work, Emecheta remains determined and so she keeps trying. Each time she is asked why she is sending all these manuscripts to publishers who will never read them, she replies that 'I knew people who for ten to fifteen years gambled on football pools, hoping that one day they would win the jackpot' (p. 68). Her efforts pay off when *The New Statesman* accepts a series of 'Observations' for publication. These short articles re-create the daily life of welfare recipients as seen through the eyes of a Nigerian female immigrant called Adah, helping her thereby to launch her literary career. Commenting on her happiness when her first novel is published, Emecheta says:

> I was dying to get away and be by myself to examine the new book thoroughly. I had come a long way, and only people who have set their hearts on achieving something and eventually getting it will realize how one feels at a time like this (p. 74).

[380] Emecheta, 'A Nigerian Writer Living in London', p. 115.

Although her first novel, *In the Ditch,* is eventually published, Emecheta realises that 'having one's first novel published is not as glamourous an affair as the media would have one believe' (p. 65). She understands that proving oneself as a female writer is not easy, especially at a time when writing is still considered a masculine preserve. Like many other female authors, Emecheta has not received the same encouragement that her male counterparts have. While would-be male authors are 'surrounded by good friends and doting members of their families who actually believe in them […] many would-be women writers are not so lucky – they invariably viewed with suspicion' (p. 66). Emecheta considers herself 'one of the unluckiest would-be authors that ever lived' because she has never received the necessary support when she needs it. Neither her teachers nor her husband believe in her nor encourage her to pursue her dream of becoming a writer. Each of them punishes her literary ambitions in their own way: Miss Humble by humiliating her in front of her colleagues and her husband by burning her first manuscript.

Another difficulty Emecheta faces in her early career as a writer is editorial censorship. She is unable to write all what she wants because publishers are not happy about the way she describes life in London. They find her first novel 'too depressing' and as a result, they cut away some of its passages. Emecheta has always worried about this strict, albeit nameless, censorship. She does not want her readers – who are unaware that many pages have been chopped out – to think that she has not made enough effort (p. 73). Other publishers impose on her the modification of her text because they believe that African customs are a bit difficult for the western reader to understand. As John F. Povey observes when he comments on the difficulty of a genuine bicultural approach between African and Western audiences 'the need

to appeal to an English publisher may effect some change in the nature of the novelists' work even before submission'.[381]

Emecheta and her other African compatriots (like Flora Nwapa for instance) are allowed to use specialised African terms but are asked to either explain them between parenthesis, in footnotes or as part of the dialogue where one character explains the term or the custom to another character'.[382] To comply with the publishers' conditions, Emecheta has to find a way to explain African terms and customs to her Western readers without interrupting the flow of the plot. She does this by 'incorporating explanation as much as possible into the body of her narration. Though these explanations are noticeable, they generally do not interrupt the flow of the narrative very much, nor are they particularly jarring to Western readers'.[383] An example of that can be found in the third chapter where she mentions a name of an Igbo song 'Agadi Nwaying', followed by its English translation presented in parenthesis as 'The Old Woman Who Lost her Sons' (p. 7). The fear of destroying her work either as a result of the intensive editorial censorship or the over-reliance on extraneous explanatory material finally pushes Emecheta to take the decision to become autonomous and set up her own publishing house. Emechata's experience with publishers reminds us of the power relations analysed by Benedict Anderson through his concept of 'print-capitalism': because publishers have perforce the capital needed to access audiences, they could also act as gatekeepers and contribute to the shaping of public opinion.[384] In contrast, by investing her money in her own publishing house,

[381] John F. Povey, 'Changing Themes in the Nigerian Novel', *New African Literature and the Arts,* ed. by Joseph Okpaku (New York: Crowell, 1970), 27-41 (pp. 27-28).
[382] Katherine Fishburn, *Reading Buchi Emecheta: Cross-Cultural Conversations* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), p. 42.
[383] Ibid., p. 42.
[384] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

Emecheta becomes herself a publisher and succeeds in her attempt to short-circuit exclusions imposed on the literary field of African authors – particularly women – in Britain at that time.

Social Mobility and International Recognition

The novel ends with two remarkable accomplishments: Emecheta's becoming a recognised writer and the purchase of her own house. After a long journey with editors and publishers, Emecheta manages to impose her name as a female black writer in the English literary community. Her articles, novels and plays are sympathetically received in both England and America, journalists approach her for interviews and organisations invite her to give talks: 'I was almost like one of those early English poets who said that he woke up one morning and suddenly found himself famous. Agents wrote to me, journalists wanted interviews, and there followed a series of talks over the radio' (p. 71).

Although well-received, Emecheta's work has met with much criticism in both England and Africa. This criticism is mostly held by men who have attacked her literary style and accused it of being plain. Among them, Lloyd W. Brown thinks that her novels 'suffer from lapses into banal statement and into what is, quite simply, sloppy writing',[385] and Omar Sougou finds her work 'admittedly not exciting in terms of stylistic achievement'.[386] In *Head Above Water*, Emecheta addresses the issue of language in her first novels and admits that it was simple and needed some sophisticated vocabulary to be improved: 'the language was simple and to give it weight I sprinkled a lot of sociological phrases here and there' (p. 63). Yet, she justifies this by reminding her readers that English is not her mother tongue, but her fourth language

[385] Lloyd W. Brown, *Women Writers in Black Africa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 36
[386] Omar Sougou, 'The Experience of an African Woman in Britain: A Reading of Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen'*, in *Crisis and creativity in the new literatures in English*, ed. by Geoffrey Davis V. and Hena Maes-Jelinek (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 511-522 (p. 511).

after Igbo, Yoruba and Agayin. Emecheta's 'plain' style, as often described by critics, could also be the result of her choice to focus on social reality rather than on language and style. According to what she declares in her autobiography, form has never been a priority:

> I did not care about its form, I did not care that my subject was not intellectual, I just let it pour, all my anger, all my bitterness, all my disappointment, into those Woolworths exercise books, and then retyped later. My social realities, my truths, my life in London (p. 68 - 69).

In Africa, scholars who value representations of the traditional submissive women in African novels have not appreciated her rebellious female characters like Adah. As Robert Ross remarks, such critics accuse her of betraying African culture and traditions and refer to her as a 'traitor':

> Even though Emecheta has been called by some critics the most important African woman writer, she has enraged certain readers, mainly African males, by her emphasis on the condition of women. The dictators have called her a traitor to her own culture and have accused her of misrepresenting the Nigerian community. [387]

This unenthusiastic reception among African critics explains why Emecheta's success in England is met with indifference from African publishing houses. In her autobiography, Emecheta reports that when her agent was trying to approach Heinemann (the world's most influential publisher of African and Caribbean literature) to publish *The Bride Price*, the publishing house in Nigeria did not bother to reply, leading her thereby to rewrite the work for non-Nigerian readers (p. 184). All this criticism has not dimmed Emecheta's determination because she knows now that 'writers simply have to write, and not worry so much about what people think, because public opinion is such a difficult horse to ride' (p. 186).

Emecheta's literary fame is followed by financial prosperity and social mobility. Her access to formal education and becoming a writer make her attain economic independence and

[387] Robert L. Ross, ed., *Colonial and Postcolonial Fiction – An Anthology* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), p. 320.

help her secure a better life for her children. In fact, one can clearly see how her life has changed since she started being paid for her writing. In the following passage, for instance, Emecheta recalls the day she received her first pay as a writer and describes the happiness she felt when she spent the money on her family:

> I waited for the children to return from school, and we celebrated by going around the corner in Robert Street and ordering several packages of chips; I even allowed the children to buy sausages as well - a great luxury […] bought dresses from Mark and Spencer for the girls and bought jumpers for the boys […] I only bought a bottle of Avon hand cream from my local Avon lady for myself. And all that made me feel rich (p. 72).

Although the money she has received from writing has never been enough, it has helped her improve her life gradually: 'living entirely off writing is a precarious existence and money is always short, but with careful management and planning I found I could keep my head and those of my family, through God's grace, above Water' (p. 243). Thanks to her income as a writer, she gains some financial stability and manages to save her children from growing up in poverty. Unlike their mother who was born into poverty and spent most of her childhood thinking about where to get the next meal from, Emecheta's children do not have to worry about this. They live in clean houses, enjoy better food, wear new clothes, and go to decent schools. With careful management, Emecheta is also able to afford self-catering holidays for her family and save some money to complete her PhD programme. More importantly, by saving some money from writing and teaching, she manages to buy (with a mortgage) a house in London. Although she initially finds the idea of paying 10000 pounds over twenty years scary, she eventually accepts the idea because without a mortgage she would never buy a house (p. 222). She also takes out a mortgage protection scheme because she does not want her children to be thrown from the house if she dies suddenly. Having her own house in Haringey, 'one of those London boroughs with high rates', is Emecheta's biggest achievement after becoming a writer

because it is an assertion of her economic freedom as a woman and a dream that her parents could never achieve in Lagos (p. 222).

Conclusion

Emecheta's road to recognition as an African *évoluée* was full of obstacles. Her journey of self-fulfilment started in Nigeria when she managed to overcome poverty and challenge gender inequality to secure a place for herself in the Girls' Methodist school; and ended in England when she succeeded to cast off the burden of poverty, racism, and sexism to eventually become an internationally recognised female writer. This chapter has shown that Emecheta's early education at the mission school was crucial to her personality formation and her development as a postcolonial female writer. Indeed, it was at the same school that she learnt how to value her own importance as a woman, rebel against voices of authority, set a dream and fight to make it true. All these lessons proved to be very useful for Emecheta's survival in London and her evolution from subjugation to recognition. The chapter has concluded that if Black male writers' journey to recognition is burdened by poverty and race, their female counterparts are triply burdened not only because of their economic background and skin colour but also because of their gender.

In the final chapter, dedicated to Fouad Laroui's *Une année chez les Français* (2010), I follow the protagonist's experience in the French boarding school and its effects on his identity formation. I focus on the challenges Mehdi faces to integrate in the French community and the ways in which experiences he lived at the French boarding school and at his French friend's place have contributed to his development and maturity.

CHAPTER SIX

Mimicry, Integration and Distance in Fouad Laroui's *Une année chez les Français* (2010)

'لا تقترب حد الاحتراق ولا تبتعد حد الافتراق كن بين ... بين لا قريبًا من أحد ولا بعيدًا عن أحد'

> Be neither so close that you burn, nor so far that you part. Be in between, neither near nor far'.[388]
>
> Arab proverb

Fouad Laroui's *Une année chez les Français* (2010) is one of the most extensive representations of integration and identity-formation in a Francophone post-independence context. Like Emecheta's *Head above Water*, *Une année chez les Français* captures the hardships that Western-educated Africans face to integrate into European societies and win intellectual and social recognition, yet with a particular focus on the experience of the male *évolué*. The novel sheds light on the economic, linguistic and cultural differences between home and host societies and the ways in which they contribute to *évolué's* cultural shock and sense of non-belonging. It traces the *évolué's* development into maturity as he learns from his experience of living among the French and his daily interaction with them, particularly his trajectory as he moves from a state of alienation to a state of assimilation and eventually to self-assertion.

Set in Morocco in 1969, thirteen years after the country gained its independence from the French Protectorate, the novel tells the story of ten-year-old Mehdi Khatib, who leaves his rural village in the Atlas Mountains to join the French Lycée Lyautey of Casablanca thanks to a French government grant. The story follows Mehdi as he attempts to adjust to his new life in the French world and describes the cultural shock he faces as a result of the systematic differences between Muslim and French culture. Although published in 2010, the events of the

[388] Translation from the author.

novel are set in the immediate post-independence era (in the late 1960s and early 1970s). The aim of including this novel in the thesis is to extend the chronological period of the study to the context of post-2000 writing and follow the trajectory of the *évolué* up to the present day.

This fictional work is particularly important in Fouad Laroui's literary trajectory not only because it was selected for the Goncourt prize (2010) and won *Le Prix de l'Algue d'Or* (2011), but also because it contains many autobiographical details. *Une année chez les Français* draws heavily on the author's Moroccan origins, his French education, and his immigration experience from North Africa to Europe. Inspired by his own childhood and his experience at Lycée Lyautey, Laroui tells his own experience of being caught between two cultures, of being a stranger within his own country. Despite using the third-person narration, Laroui has confirmed on many occasions that the novel is autobiographical, even qualifying it with a precise percentage on one occasion – as if he possessed a tool to measure precisely this value: 73%.[389] By giving this intriguingly precise statistic, Laroui is being playful with his readers and critics, whilst conveying the clear message that most of the events are based on his personal life. When asked about what made him drop his brilliant career as an engineer at *l'Office chérifien des phosphates* in Morocco and devote himself to teaching and writing instead, Laroui confirmed that the protagonist of *Une année chez les Français*, Mehdi, is modelled after himself:

> Moi, j'étais passionné par la lecture. Je suis cet enfant, Mehdi dans *Une année chez les Français*, qui pendant un tremblement de terre s'assied près d'une source de lumière et se met à lire alors que tout le monde autour de lui s'agite et crie. Je suis cet enfant qui pense que le monde de la fiction romanesque est plus réel que le monde réel.[390]

Influenced by French eighteenth-century literary production (mainly the works of Montesquieu and Voltaire), Laroui chooses humour and irony to tell Mehdi's adventures in the

[389] 'Entretien avec Fouad Laroui', in *Une année chez les français: Texte abrégé* (Paris: Hatier, 2018), p. 12.
[390] Georgia Makhlouf, 'Entretien: Fouad Laroui: une vie entière dans les livres', *L'Orient littéraire* (Oct 2011) <http://www.lorientlitteraire.com/article_details.php?cid=6&nid=3589> [Accessed 16-08-2019].

French boarding school, and his struggle to decipher this new world. He creates an artistic form similar to the one employed by Montesquieu in his epistolary novel *Lettres persanes* (1721): satire. To criticise French customs, law and religion, Montesquieu mixes two different satirical models: Horatian, a comic, witty and socially constructive mode, and Juvenalian which is 'more severe, denouncing the crimes rather than mocking the follies of a society where depravity is the norm'.[391] Laroui, however, adapts a single approach to the satire, Horatian, 'qu'il fassera rire ou sourire le lecteur'.[392]

Laroui makes his readers laugh at the series of comical and cynical misunderstandings his protagonist faces as a result of economic, cultural and linguistic differences. The reader does not only laugh at Mehdi's misunderstandings and clumsiness but also at the language and the behaviour of the French teachers, supervisors or students who, through the eyes of the innocent Mehdi, often seem caricatural. By making use of satire, Laroui is indeed taking revenge on behalf of the postcolonial *évolué* who used to be condemned to subalternity during colonial times but is now able to reclaim agency by appropriating the coloniser's tools. Montesquieu's influence on Laroui is also clear at the thematic level. In fact, he borrows the theme of 'le regard de l'autre' from Montesquieu's work *Lettres Persanes,* where the Bordelais provides a satirical portrayal of French civilisation as seen by two foreigners. Like Mehdi, the two Persian travellers in Montesquieu's epistolary work gaze in wonder at French society and its sociocultural norms which seem unfamiliar and different to the protagonists.

Mehdi's struggle to adjust to the new situation in the French school is similar to the struggle of his newly independent nation to adjust to the end of the French colonial presence

[391] Roland Greene, and Stephen Cushman, eds., *The Princeton Handbook of Poetic Terms Third Edition*, 3rd edn (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 311. For a modern discussion of Horatian and Juvenalian satirical models see also: William S. Anderson, *Essays on Roman Satire* (Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 2014), and Daniel Hooley, *Roman Satire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).
[392] Le Courrier de l'Atlas, *Fouad Laroui: "la satire m'a choise"*, online video recording, YouTube, 12 Feb. 2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtsXTH5wXLQ&t=139s [Accessed 19-08-2021].

and to its effort to eliminate gradually and manage colonial legacies. During the French protectorate (1912-1956), the French language and culture were imposed on the indigenous population through colonial education in the hope of reinforcing French hegemony and making local populations comply with the French colonial agenda of subjection and modernization. The French government built many schools for the children of the French community and Moroccan elites, in which the sole language of instruction was French. The aim of these schools was to create '[des] lauréats [qui] ont largement contribué à maintenir la langue et la culture françaises, en défendant une politique de bilinguisme'.[393] To resist French hegemony, Moroccan nationalist movements established private schools called *al madaris alhurra*, in which Arabic was the main language of instruction. The aim of these Arabic schools was to make education accessible to everyone and affirm the Arab identity of the Kingdom. However, these schools were not enough as they only 'served a relatively small number of students and thus had little effect on the widespread use of French in the education system'.[394]

With the independence of Morocco in 1956, the country was left to struggle with the lasting legacy of colonialism. Moroccans were torn between their local culture, language and traditions and those inherited from the ex-coloniser which were often associated with modernity and socio-economic success. In order to eliminate the colonial influence, the government created a national education system by reviving Standard Arabic and unifying the education system and the Moroccan people. However, this project of Arabisation, launched by Mohammed El Fassi (Morocco's first Minister of Education who was exposed to both French and traditional teachings) faced strong criticism from Amazigh leaders who 'felt threatened by

[393] Fouzia Benzakour, 'Langue française et langues locales en terre marocaine: rapports de force et reconstructions identitaires', *La Découverte*, 3.126 (2007), 45-56 (p. 46).
[394] Marouane Zakhir and Jason O'Brien, 'French Neo-colonial Influence on Moroccan Language Education Policy: A Study of Current Status of Standard Arabic in Science Disciplines', *Language Policy*, 16.1 (2017), 39-58 (p. 40).

Arab nationalism and saw the Arabisation project as an attempt to diminish the use of their language in Morocco'.[395]

The Arabisation process also caused dissatisfaction among the French authorities, who had hoped that 'the choice of an educational minister with a background in both the French system and in the Qarawiyyin [university located in Fez] suggested that the policies of the new regime would bridge the gap between the traditional and the Western'.[396] However, despite declaring that 'French would really be the second national language', Al-Fassi's traditional and *Salafi* influences made him a strong opponent of bilingualism and cultural hybridity, which led the French authorities to find an alternative for the education of French children in Morocco. After long negotiations between the Moroccan and French governments, an agreement – called *La convention culturelle* – was reached in 1957 allowing more than six thousand French teachers who had taught in the protectorate system to continue working for the Moroccan government as 'coopérants' under what was called *la Mission universitaire et culturelle française au Maroc*.[397] The latter was later replaced in 1990 by the AEFE (Agence de l'enseignement français à l'étranger) which aimed at assuring the quality of French Language teaching worldwide (including Morocco).

Despite the novel's popularity among the readers of the Francophone world and the author's satisfaction about its success, it does not seem to have attracted much attention among critics. Yet, in an interview with *les Editions Hatier*, Laroui praises his novel and declares that *Une année chez les Français* has a special place in his body of work:

> *Une année chez les Français,* qui est mon sixième ouvrage publié, occupe une place de choix dans mon œuvre. D'abord, il a eu beaucoup de succès, ce qui a fait plaisir à mon

[395] Ibid., (p. 40).
[396] Spencer D. Segalla, *The Moroccan Soul: French Education, Colonial Ethnology, and Muslim Resistance, 1912-1956* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), p. 249.
[397] Ibid., (p. 251).

> éditeur et lui a enfin fait gagner un peu d'argent. Surtout, je n'ai jamais rencontré un seul lecteur qui ne l'ait pas aimé.[398]

In the light of this comment, the dearth of critical literature on this book is all the more striking. Only a few articles have appeared to date, focusing on the linguistic aspect of the novel, the challenges faced by translators, or the racist experience the young Mehdi went through in the French boarding school. Among those critics who have written about the novel, Sarah Robertson chose to investigate the question of linguistic identity in Morocco by recognising students' experiences of transitions between schools. She takes Laroui's novel as an example of the transition between school systems because she believes that 'this novel undoubtedly reflects real emotions, real people, and plausibly real situations', as it draws heavily on Laroui's personal experience through the French school system.[399] Robertson argues that Mehdi's transition from a rural traditional school to the French *Lycée* is 'incredibly transformative, and often very challenging and isolating'.[400] This consolidates our view that this semi-autobiographical novel offers a unique opportunity to explore the new embodiment of the *évolué* in the post-colonial period.

Other critics such as Cristina Vezzaro and Katrien Lievois have focused on the strategies used in the translated versions of the novel. While Lievois examines the strategies used to convey the ironic intertextual allusions in the Dutch translation of Laroui's *Une année chez les Français,* Vezzaro prefers to analyse the different strategies adopted by translators to convey the sense of humour and multilingualism in both the Dutch and Italian versions of the novel.[401] Vezzaro emphasises the need to consider humour and multilingualism while translating from

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[398] 'Entretien avec Fouad Laroui', in *Une année chez les français: Texte abrégé* (Paris: Hatier, 2018), p. 12.

[399] Sarah Robertson, 'Transnational Education Systems in Morocco: How Language of Instruction Shapes Identity', *Independent Study Project* (*ISP) Collection*, (Spring 2015), 1-55 (p. 6). <https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/ispcollection/2061> [Accessed 28-07-2019]

[400] Ibid., (p. 40).

[401] Katrien Lievois, 'la traduction de l'allusion intertextuelle', *Monographies de traduction et d'interprétation*, 9 (2017), 125-148 <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=265155167005> [Accessed 14-07-2019].

the source text to the target language because – as she argues – they are two central features of Laroui's writing:

> In Laroui, the issue of multilingualism and multiculturalism […] is mostly treated with humour and irony. This is a particularly interesting element of his writing, since this approach allows him to present his readership with different perspectives simultaneously while inspiring both laughter and reflection. We believe this is a fundamental feature of the source text that translators have to consider.[402]

The last category of critics followed a thematic approach by focusing either on Mehdi's experience of isolation within the French boarding school or on the racism he faced. Following Mehdi's experience in Casablanca, Jocelyn A. Frelier argues that Mehdi's development offers a new model for Moroccan coming-of-age in a postcolonial context. In this article, Frelier emphasises the new bonds the protagonist cultivates in the French school as well as in his surrogacy experiences in the Berger household. He argues that both school and the Bergers develop an ambivalent 'pull-push' gesture toward Mehdi in which they simultaneously draw him in and keep him at a distance: 'this pull-push characterises the combination of, on the one hand, the bonds Mehdi develops with Denis, the Bergers, and the school at large, and on the other, the racism that serves as his bondage in this new community'.[403]

In the same context of racism, Ana Soler Pérez analyses the exilic experience and the process of depersonalisation that Mehdi undergoes in his own country while living a year among the French at Lycée Lyautey. She focuses on the minority situation the young protagonist finds himself immersed in, and highlights the reasons behind his 'expérience exilique' such as the difference in economic status, the confrontation with new social norms, and the linguistic separation. Pérez also argues that Mehdi manages to overcome this sensation thanks to the world of books. For her, reading proves to be Mehdi's road to

[402] Cristina Vezzaro, 'Multilingual humour in a polyglot multicultural author: the case of Fouad Laroui', *European Journal of Humour Research* 7.1 (May 2019), 71–90 (p. 88).
[403] Jocelyn A. Frelier, 'Surrogacy: temporary familial bonds and the bondage of origins in Fouad Laroui's *Une année chez les Français', The Journal of North African Studies*, 24. 2 (2019), 300-32 (p. 302).

success and social recognition: 'au sein de cette expérience exilique liée à l'abandon et à la solitude, la lecture se présente pour Mehdi comme une issue face à la sensation d'extranéité environnante'.[404]

The lack of literature on Laroui's *Une année chez les Français* is probably in part due to the fact that Laroui is so frequently associated almost exclusively with transnational and migrant literature. Themes such as the clash of cultures, the experience of otherness and stereotyping, or the long-term effects of colonial education, have either been overlooked or not been dealt with in depth. Unlike in the previous chapters where the focus was on the alienating effects of colonial education during the colonial period, this chapter will shed light on the lasting legacy of colonial education on newly-independent countries by following the protagonist's experience in the French boarding school and its effects on his identity formation. This chapter will argue that despite the failure of full integration, education in a postcolonial context can be a road to recognition and social mobility for the ex-colonised populations.

Understanding Cultural Evolution and Linguistic Dynamics in a Post-colonial Context: The *Mission Universitaire et Culturelle au Maroc*

The domination of the French language and culture in Morocco did not end with the country's accession to independence. The French language remained prominent, dominating both social and political lives thanks to *La Mission universitaire et culturelle*. Unlike what its name may have implied in earlier times, this *'Mission'* was cultural and was not invested with any religious agenda. Its aim was to impose the perennity of French teaching in seven institutions in Morocco, among them *Le Lycée Lyautey de Casablanca* where most of the

[404] Ana Soler Pérez, '*Une année chez les Français* de Fouad Laroui: une expérience exilique singulière', *Çédille: Revista de Estudios Franceses*, 14 (April 2018), 551-567 (p. 562).

novel's events take place, as well as to propagate 'les idéaux laïques de la Révolution', as clearly indicated in the fourteenth chapter of the novel.[405]

This prestigious lycée – also referred to as 'lycée en planches' in the novel (p. 281) – was founded in 1913, in the military barracks built under the Residency of General Hubert Lyautey (a leading colonial administrator and the architect of the French protectorate over Morocco). While in power, the French general tried to improve everyday life for Moroccans and make Casablanca a modern city. Accordingly, he launched ambitious urban projects (port, roads, railways) and planned the construction of one of the most important educational institutions in Morocco**,** le Lycée français de Casablanca, which was later named after him.[406] Whilst the 'old' Lycée Lyautey operated from the interwar years onwards, with the end of the protectorate, a new Lycée Lyautey was developed on the site of an old French military camp, and the reformed buildings were officially inaugurated in 1963. Both old and new Lycée Lyautey were only meant to teach children of senior officials and influential families of the Moroccan regime: 'L'enseignement organisé par les Français au Maroc demeure assez élitiste et ne recrute souvent que des enfants issus des classes dirigeantes, dont les parents sont associés à l'action du Protectorat'.[407] This is clearly shown in the novel, where the majority of students Mehdi encounters are either French, Europeans or children of wealthy Moroccan families: Ramon Fernández and Javall are Spanish, Kirchhoff and Fetter are most likely to be German, Loviconi seems Italian, and Denis is French. The only Moroccan is Sidi Mohamed Khalid M'chiche El Almi, whose name implies he is a descendant of an influential rich family (the title 'sidi', which means 'my master' or 'my lord' in Arabic, is used as a title of respect when

[405] Fouad Laroui, *Une année chez les Français* (Paris: Julliard, 2010), p. 171.
[406] Alfred de Tarde, 'The Work of France in Morocco', *Geographical Review*, 8.1 (July, 1919), 1-30 (p. 29).
[407] P. J. Bravo, 'Sous le Protectorat: Lycée Lyautey de Casablanca' <https://www.lyceelyautey.org/presentation/etablissement/histoire-du-lycee-etablissement/sous-le-protectorat> [Accessed 16-10-2019].

referring to a person holding a high position under the King or in government). Mehdi seems the only exception, for he is neither European nor an heir of a wealthy Moroccan family. He manages to join this prestigious institution thanks to his village teacher, Mr Bernard, who did his best to obtain a grant for Mehdi from the French government.

Mr Bernard's support could not be possible without Mehdi's intelligence and proficiency in French. Throughout the novel, Mehdi is shown to be like a bookworm. Instead of playing with his peers in the neighbourhood, he avoids the streets and prefers to stay alone without any other distraction but books. Mehdi's addiction to reading is revealed in chapter two, which presents a flashback to the year before Mehdi joined the boarding school. That year when a violent earthquake hit Morocco (leaving ten people dead and more than 200 injured), Mehdi was so absorbed in reading *Le Général Dourakine* by la Comtesse de Ségur that he did not notice the violent shaking of the ground or '[les gens qui] couraient dans tous les sens. Certain psalmodiaient à haute voix le Coran, d'autres s'interpellaient de loin, demandant si l'on avait vu telle personne' (p. 31). This scene reveals that, indeed, literature has always been a refuge for Mehdi and that being in the French Lycée is not a mere coincidence.

Mehdi owes his brilliant educational career to his parents as well who have always encouraged him to read a lot and supported him in his studies despite their uncomfortable economic situation. This was particularly the case for his mother, Mina, who had accepted to send him to Casablanca on the proviso that he was ranked first in his class (p. 41). Although she herself had not been able to become academically educated, she felt absolute respect for learning. Laroui emphasised the importance of growing in a family that valued education and the educated:

> Mon père nous encourageait beaucoup à lire et nous soutenait beaucoup dans nos études. Il n'avait pu lui-même poursuivre des études supérieures et il en avait gardé un grand regret. Mais c'est lui qui, en raison de leur différence d'âge, a élevé mon oncle, Abdallah

> Laroui, qui est devenu un historien majeur. Mon père avait un respect absolu de la culture et de l'éducation. Et quand il nous voyait lire, il était heureux.[408]

The Road to Becoming an *Évolué:* Arriving at Lycée Lyautey

Having received the grant, Mehdi feels excited to join the reputable Lycée of Casablanca, 'cette institution mythique' that all Moroccans have heard about (p. 38). However, as soon as '[ce] boursier méritant' arrives to school, economic, social and linguistic differences between him and his European colleagues start coming to the surface (p. 25). In fact, the opening pages of the novel reveal that Mehdi comes from a starkly different economic and cultural background. Unlike the other students who are accompanied by their parents, Mehdi is left alone on his first day at school. His mother sent him with his uncle because she could not afford to come with him all the way from Béni-Mellal to Casablanca. Unaware of his personal circumstances, the school staff kept asking Mehdi about his parents and why they left him alone on his first day. Embarrassed by this question, Mehdi felt anxious and lost 'dans cet immense Casablanca qui lui fait peur' (p. 19).

Mehdi's modest economic background is also revealed through the first contact with the lycée's administration. On his arrival, Miloud – the doorman and 'la première ligne de défense du lycée' – assumes from Mehdi's physical appearance and his spent suitcase that he is a rural poor Moroccan: 'ce n'était pas le bagage d'un *nasrani* [French in Moroccan Arabic dialect, meaning Nazarean], ça! Tous les Français sont riches, c'est bien connu. Non, *celui-là* ne pouvait être qu'un enfant du pays' (p. 11). Although Moroccan himself, Miloud is convinced by the over-generalized belief that all Moroccans coming from the countryside are poor. Similarly, when Mehdi is introduced to Mrs. Benarroch, the laundry supervisor, she asks Mehdi why he is missing half of the belongings his parents were requested to provide him with prior

[408] Makhlouf, 'Entretien: Fouad Laroui: une vie entière dans les livres'.

to the start of the school year: 'six paires de chaussettes, six caleçons, deux pantalons, six mouchoirs, quatre chemises…' (p. 10). At this, Morel, a supervisor who is present in the linen room, intervenes with a racist and classist comment: 'peut-être ne portent-ils pas de pyjama, les gens, du côté de Béni-Mellal? Savent pas ce que c'est…Dorment enroulés de peaux de mouton' (p. 23). Because he has always been living in the city (Casablanca), and is in all likelihood European, Morel believes that people of the Moroccan countryside are backward and uncivilised. He is judging the villagers of the Atlas without taking into consideration their lifestyle or their financial circumstances. Mehdi's parents most likely sent him with an incomplete *trousseau* because they could not afford it. They would not have made their child an object of mockery if they had had the required material means. Furthermore, the school's *trousseau réglementaire* seems a bit extravagant, exceeding the material obligations of Mehdi's family, which demonstrates again that the school is indeed reserved for the children of upper-class families. Mehdi's poverty is brought to light again in chapter nine: 'les prolétariats n'ont pas de patrie'. In this chapter, Régnie, the supervisor who is in charge of keeping an eye on Mehdi on Saturday, refers to Mehdi as a 'prolétaire' and even worse, as 'un damné de la terre' because his parents fail to come to collect him from school at the weekend. Régnie's use of the word proletariat is not random since he is referring to Marx and Engels's *Manifeste du Parti communiste* (1948) where Marx explained that the proletariat (working-class people) is exploited everywhere in the world and must rise up: 'Prolétaires de tous les pays, unissez-vous!'.[409] Similarly, Régnie's reference to the concept of 'les damnés de la terre' makes an immediate reference to Frantz Fanon's analysis of the colonial situation where the coloniser and the colonised are moulded into their respective roles as slave and master.

[409] Alain Meyer, 'Le Manifeste politique: modèle pur ou pratique impure?', *Littérature*, 39 (Oct 1980), 29-38 (p. 32).

The other difference between Mehdi and his peers relates to social norms and traditions. Moroccan traditions, in particular those of Béni-Mellal, are totally different from those of the French, a situation which often puts Mehdi in embarrassing situations. Mokhtar (Mehdi's uncle) left him at the door of the school with two turkeys that were supposed to be a gift for the headmaster of the school. The French staff, who were not aware of this tradition, kept asking the child about 'les dindons' and if they are his. However, he refused to acknowledge that they were his, because he knew that the French do not have such a custom. Overwhelmed by shame, Mehdi has totally forgotten about his uncle's lecture on the Muslim tradition which states that Muslims do not enter another person's house empty-handed, especially for the first time (p. 52). Similarly, when M. Lombard ('le surveillant général') was talking with Mehdi about his village tutor, M. Lombard told Mehdi that he should be grateful to his village teacher because without his efforts Mehdi would not be at Lyautey: 'tu dois une fière chandelle à M. Bernard. J'espère que tes parents l'ont remercié comme il convient' (p. 15). At this, Mehdi could not reveal that his parents 'ont dû lui offrir un mouton' because he feels ashamed of this tradition which consists in giving an animal as a present (p. 16).

Another difference that has contributed to Mehdi's cultural shock in the French lycée is of a linguistic nature. Despite his fluency in French and his good level in academic writing, Mehdi finds it difficult to understand the sense of humour and *l'argot* employed by native French speakers. Despite growing up in an Arabic-speaking family, Mehdi's level of French is excellent not only because he learnt it at school but also because he uses it at home to communicate with his family:

> Il parlait français à l'école mais aussi à la maison, avec son frère et sa sœur – et ça s'arrêtait là, car il ne jouait jamais dehors, avec les enfants du quartier. Avec son père et sa mère, un *modus vivendi* insolite s'était établi: on lui parlait le plus souvent en dialectal – il s'agissait de quelques phrases, toujours les mêmes ("Mange", "Va te laver les mains!", "Il est temps de dormir!", "As-tu fait tes devoirs?") – et il répondait dans le français de la Comtesse (p. 44).

This passage shows that, at least in Mehdi's case, the Moroccan local dialect is highly affected by the French language. The narrator tells readers that Mehdi's parents often speak to him in 'darija', yet the examples provided reveal that they actually communicate with him in French. Laroui addresses this problem in his article 'Le drame linguistique marocain' where he sheds light on the linguistic problems faced by North African countries – with a particular emphasis on Morocco. In this work, he focuses on the phenomenon of diglossia between classical Arabic and dialectical Arabic or 'darija' and the ways in which Arabic and 'darija' are affected by the influences of the French language. For him, the use of the French language is not a choice but a way of escaping from this linguistic dilemma:

> [d]ans cet embrouillamini linguistique, écrire en langue française n'est pas un choix mais une échappatoire, une façon de sortir du conflit en utilisant la seule langue à disposition, l'arabe classique étant réservé à quelques rares lettrés et la darija étant la grande absente des livres et cahiers d'écolier.[410]

Through the novel and even before joining the French lycée, Mehdi seems more comfortable speaking French than Arabic. He seems so used to 'la langue de la Comtesse' that he often fails to understand what his relatives say in the Moroccan dialect. On his way to Casablanca, Mokhtar (Mehdi's uncle) is trying to kill the time by telling his nephew funny stories from his life, and commenting on the events that happened on their way. Yet, as Mokhtar is talking in 'un arabe dialectal riche et pittoresque, truffé de dictons savoureux, peuplé d'images qui venaient du fond des siècles', Mehdi does not understand anything (p. 44). Each time Mokhtar bursts out laughing, Mehdi pretends that he understood by giving his uncle a fake smile.

[410] Mustapha Harzoune, 'Fouad Laroui, *Le Drame linguistique marocain*', *Hommes & migrations*, 1300 (2012), 165-166 (165) <https://www.cairn.info/revue-hommes-et-migrations-2012-6-page-165.htm> [Accessed 07-09-2019].

Mehdi's vocabulary in Arabic is limited compared to his French repertoire. He can understand some basic words such as 'l'hamm' which means meat, all types of meat, and 'yqra' which means to study or to read but he cannot go into a deep conversation in dialectical Arabic (p. 47-48). An example of this can be found in chapter four where Mokhtar is trying to explain to his nephew the reason behind buying the turkeys:

> On ne rentre pas chez les gens les [incompréhensible] vides. Surtout la première fois. Il y a une [?] très importante chez nous, les musulmans. Il faut [incompréhensible]. C'est [?] l'honneur. Les Français [inaudible]. La plus grande [incompréhensible] chez l'homme, c'est la [?]. Tu demandes qui est le directeur et tu [?] les dindons. Tu lui serres la main et tu [?] les dindons. Le [?] la [?] les [?]. Mais attention! Tu dois dire: [incompréhensible]. N'oublie pas, c'est très important, tu dis [incompréhensible] et tu [?] les dindons. Ensuite, tu es [?] pour toute l'année (p. 53).

As shown from the passage, Mehdi is unable to understand what his uncle is saying because he fails to decipher the most important words of his uncle's speech. Even after Mokhtar patiently explains the idea 'dix ou onze fois' using simplified language and synonyms, Mehdi manages to understand the general idea (that is what to do with *les dindons*) but not the details (p. 52).

Paradoxically, Mehdi's vocabulary in French is richer than in Arabic. The way he describes a vacation he has never experienced (the subject of a written composition) based solely on the words and expressions he has read is proof of his proficiency in French. Thanks to his ceaseless reading and excellent academic writing, he manages to access the level of French necessary to be first in a class full of French and European pupils. His level not only surprises his tutors who believe that he is 'doué', but also the parents of his colleagues (p. 167). Mme Berger (Denis's mother), for instance, cannot understand how a Moroccan can be better than the French who have been exposed to the culture and language from the moment they were born, probably because she believes that language is inherited, not learnt:

- Comment ça? Tu veux dire qu'il est le premier *des Marocains*?'
- Non, c'est lui qui a les meilleures notes. De tous.
  Elle fronça les sourcils.

- Mais alors, vous ne faites pas beaucoup d'efforts, toi, et la fille des Kirchhoff, et le fils Fretter et les autres, Livicioni et la petite Bernadette…
- Non, maman, on fait tout ce qu'on peut, il est plus fort que nous (p. 214).

However, as soon as Mme Berger goes into a deeper conversation with Mehdi, she realises that he is well-read and that his French vocabulary is wider than her child's. In the scene where Mme Berger jokes with her husband, Denis, and Mehdi that to earn their kiss they must say something flattering about Mozart, Mehdi cites a passage from Paul Verlaine's *L'Art poétique*. Mme Berger who recognises the passage is astonished by his rich literary culture: 'la question que je me pose est: comment un enfant de dix ans, onze ans est-il capable de réciter du Verlaine? Ce n'est pas au programme de la sixième, je suppose' (p. 213). She eventually realises that she has underestimated Mehdi's intellectual abilities.

Mehdi's proficiency in French is also revealed when he interrupts one of the school's supervisors, Morel, regarding the misuse of the preposition 'à' instead of 'de' in 'la fille à Chamayrac'. Offended by Mehdi's comment, the supervisor reacts in a very racist way: 'Fatima [a female name that Morel uses to call Mehdi] veut m'appendre *ma* langue … I déboule d'la montagne et i veut m'apprendre ma langue' (p. 96). Morel's racist reaction causes Fernández - another resident student of Spanish origin - to intervene and defend his colleague: 'allez, va danser le flamenco, espèce de gitan, au lieu de prétendre m'apprendre ma langue' (p. 97). This incident is full of irony, in that both Morel and Fernández claim that the French language is theirs while they are in fact both 'Pieds-Noirs' of Spanish descent. This episode evokes Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, which refers to the accumulation of knowledge, norms and values which demonstrate one's cultural competence and social status.[411] In relation to Bourdieu's sociological system, Morel is supposed to have more cultural capital than Mehdi

[411] Pierre Bourdieu, 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction', in *Knowledge, education and cultural change: papers in the sociology of education* ed by Richard Brown (London : Tavistock Publications, 1973).

and the other students, because he considers himself to be a native speaker and has always been living among the French in Casablanca. Hence, when Mehdi displays a higher level of cultural capital, Morel feels in danger and reacts in an aggressive way. By correcting Morel, Mehdi is not trying to show off, but he is simply unfamiliar with informal language and social markers of the French culture. He believes 'la fille à' is grammatically wrong (which is true) but he is not aware of its popular usage among the French, which lowers Morel's social status and comparatively enhances Mehdi's standing.

Mehdi's learning of the language has been done mainly through reading, which explains his solid literary background and formal style. Yet, despite his excellent academic writing and his intensive reading, Mehdi still does not understand everything in French. He understands the literal meaning of words and expressions, but finds it difficult to understand *l'argot,* metaphors and sense of humour. For instance, he cannot understand why the school's supervisors find it funny to call him Fatima, and what is this 'hachis Parmentier' that he needs to be served at each meal? Who is Parmentier? More generally, what is this *argot* that has nothing to do with *le français livresque,* the French he has learnt from books and *les bandes dessinées*?

While interacting with the French, Mehdi comes across many new words which he had never heard before. In order to decipher these words, Mehdi spells and breaks them so that they become close in meaning to words he is familiar with. This decoding method often results in totally different meanings, provoking laughter among his colleagues: 'un incunable' for instance becomes 'un nain cunable' (p. 203) and 'prolétaire' becomes 'pro lait terre' (p. 111). Another strategy Mehdi uses to discover a new word is by finding a link between the new term and information he has previously read in books. For instance, when he heard the word 'frichti' for the first time from Dumont, he automatically linked it to *Les Deux Nigauds* by la Comtesse de Ségur. Because he thinks Dumont looks like 'un Breton' (a character in the tale) with his

‘peau rose [et] son bouc blond’, Mehdi deduces that ‘le frichti’ (‘le repas’ in argotic French) is a Breton dish (p. 58). This is not the first time Mehdi evokes fictional characters to interpret what is happening around him. His imagination often interferes with reality, provoking funny visions or misinterpretations. Influenced by the tales and the comic strips he has read, Mehdi imagines Mrs. Benarroch, the laundry supervisor, as ‘une ogresse’ and Miloud as Pat Hibulaire – the villain black cat in *Mickey* (a French weekly comic book for young people, created in 1934). Laroui comments on his protagonist’s imagination:

> Il est exclusivement nourri de culture livresque. Il croit que le vrai se trouve dans les livres. La réalité le laisse de marbre. Quand il vit des situations, il voit des dialogues de la Comtesse de Ségur qui s’incrustent. Il est dans un univers qui l’isole, a priori, mais qui en même temps lui permet d’aller vers les autres en les identifiant à sa propre grille de lecture du monde.[412]

Other words become meaningful by chance through the scenes Mehdi witnesses. An example of this is when he was observing Mokhtar eating with voracity and pleasure. Only at this juncture did he understand the significance of the expression ‘se pourlécher les babines’, an idiomatic expression that he had once came across in his books ‘mais il n’avait jamais vu la chose “en vrai”’ (p. 50). Despite his unfamiliarity with French colloquial language, Mehdi has demonstrated excellent skills in deciphering the meaning of new words as well as reusing them thanks to his good memory and sense of logic.

Mehdi’s Attempts at Integration

As a result of these economic, cultural and linguistic differences, Mehdi feels a stranger among the French. He is imprisoned in this new world: ‘une marée d’appréhension l’envahit, lentement, tout doucement, jusqu’à ce que la boule, l’inévitable boule, fidèle compagne des

[412] Fadwa Miadi, ‘Fouad Laroui: “Je ne suis ni d’ici ni d’ailleurs”‘, *BabelMed* (2010) <http://www.babelmed.net/article/433-fouad-laroui-je-ne-suis-ni-dici-ni-dailleurs/> [Accessed 14-09-2019].

moments d'angoisse, se matérialisât au creux de son ventre' (p. 33). This feeling of anxiety and loneliness has given him the impression that he is a victim of a plot mounted against him by his parents who left him alone in this totally different environment and by the school staff who did not make him feel welcome at the lycée.

On his first day at school, before the rest of the students join, Mehdi finds himself alone in the big yard, with no friends to talk to and no book to read. To overcome this loneliness, Mehdi has no other option but to communicate with objects. As a result, he starts a conversation with an oak, a tree that he has heard about from books but never seen 'en vrai' (p. 35). To verify the accuracy of the information he has about oaks, he asks the tree some questions such as 'Tu es un chêne?', and 'Robuste? Robuste comme un chêne?' (p. 35). Yet, as this little chat is interrupted by M. Lombard who brings some food to Mehdi, the latter has to find another distraction. This time, he chooses to read the yoghurt cup's packaging and '[les] affiches défraîchies, datant sans doute de l'année scolaire précédente' (p. 36). Unfortunately, all of Mehdi's attempts to forget his presence in this foreign space are in vain: 'l'après-midi passa ainsi, dans un désœuvrement total. Faute de pouvoir lire, Mehdi fixait intensément tout ce qui l'entourait – et tout ce qui l'entourait lui renvoyait l'image de son étrangeté. Qu'est-ce que je fais ici? (p. 36). It is worth noting that it is not a coincidence for chapter three to be entitled 'Qu'est-ce que je fais ici?'. By doing so, Laroui is putting emphasis on the cultural shock Mehdi went through at the beginning of his schooling as a result of moving from the familiar traditional environment of Béni-Mellal to the unfamiliar modern one of Casablanca. The question 'Qu'est-ce que je fais ici?' reveals Mehdi's feeling of disappointment, loneliness and anxiety.

These feelings of loneliness and anxiety are supposed to fade away when the other resident students join the school, yet this is not the case because returning students have noticed that Mehdi is different from them and start, as a result, to make of him an object of mockery.

Some of them find his pink pyjamas bizarre, others make fun of his *village natal* 'tu viens du pays de la faim?' (p. 85), while others treat him like an idiot because of his unfamiliarity with *l'argot:* 'c'est de l'argot. Ça s'écrit pas. Si tu sais pas ça, c'est que tu es vraiment nul' (p. 87). To escape their mockeries, Mehdi decides to avoid interacting with the other students and prefers instead to immerse himself in fiction. He spends all his free time reading the works of the Countess of Ségur, la Fontaine, Racine, Jules Verne and others to the point that he has memorised some of their passages. Commenting on the importance of reading in the life of his protagonist, Laroui argues:

> Il y a toujours, dans un livre ou un autre, une allusion à ce qui t'arrive, la preuve que d'autres ont souffert ce que tu souffres: que tu n'es pas seul au monde. Il y a toujours, dans un livre ou un autre, comme une consolation.[413]

Fiction becomes for Mehdi a source of escapism from humiliation, embarrassment and the feeling of being alone. It gives him a parallel world, a comfort zone where he can have a dialogue with himself or with his surroundings without any fear or complex: 'la lecture l'invite au rêve et à l'évasion. Elle le conforte, le ravit, l'apaise, elle l'inspire aussi. Elle lui permet de pulvériser les limites étroites de ce réel étouffant'.[414]

Reading not only has helped Mehdi overcome the daily harassments but has also allowed him to create a world where he is the hero. Each time he is mistreated by a member of staff or one of his colleagues, his literary imagination intervenes to lessen his pain and embarrassment. Annoyed by Morel who keeps calling him by demeaning names such as Fatima, Kroumir and Zoulou, Mehdi imagines him pulverised by a gigantic hammer which 's'abattit d'un coup, v'lan!, sur son crâne, qui éclata en mille morceaux' (p. 28). This scene does not seem to quench Mehdi's desire for revenge, though: he makes Morel a victim of another scene.

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[413] Fouad Laroui, *D'un pays sans frontiers: Essais sur la littérature de l'exil* (Léchelle: Zellige, 2015), p. 25.
[414] Said Ouchari, 'La question de l'extranéité dans Une année chez les Français de Fouad Laroui', in *Etrangers, émigrés, immigrés,* ed. by Mohamed Semlalià (Fès: Université Sidi Ben Abedellah, 2019), 85-102 (p. 98).

This time, he imagines Morel dead in his bed, 'un grand pieu enfoncé dans la poitrine, les yeux grands ouverts, un rictus hideux voltigeant sur ses os décharnés' (p. 69). Unable to defend himself – either due to shyness or to fear, Mehdi invites his imagination as a tool for revenge. Although imaginary, Mehdi finds these scenes satisfying because it is the only way to escape the suffocating reality and to vent his anger. To visualise these vengeful scenes, Mehdi mimics the writing style of the French authors whom he heartily admires such as Jules Verne, la Comtesse de Ségur and La Fontaine. The sophisticated vocabulary he uses shows that he is indeed trying to write himself into the company of these classics.

Although he has managed to escape anxiety and loneliness through literature, Mehdi realises after a while that he cannot remain isolated from the rest of the pupils. He will eventually have to interact with them because they have become a part of his life. Thus, he decides to immerse himself fully to find acceptance from them. One of the strategies Mehdi follows to become fully integrated is telling lies. To cover for his modest economic background and escape the embarrassment, Mehdi finds himself forced to make up stories about himself and his family. When asked why he came to school before the due time (on Saturday instead of Sunday), Mehdi wants to be honest with his colleague, Nagi, but he feels embarrassed. Instead of saying that his mother could not come with him to Casablanca due to financial constraints, the real reason why she asked his uncle to give him a lift a day earlier, Mehdi invents a totally different story:

> Mes parents, ils sont très très riches, ils vont passer la semaine à New York, en Amérique, alors ils m'ont déposé ici, et puis ils sont allés à *l'aréoport* [sic], et puis alors ils ont pris l'avion et puis, et puis ils sont allés à New York (p. 70).

Aware of his class difference, Mehdi tries to hide his poverty through lies. Yet, the story he invents about his parents seems exaggerated and not very plausible. In addition, his use of the faulty formulation 'l'aréoport' instead of 'l'aéroport' betrays his lack of familiarity with the

actual facility. He would have been in serious trouble if his colleague had asked for more details or proof.

Besides lying to his colleagues, Mehdi finds himself obliged to lie to Madini and M. Lombard as well. When Madini, *le surveillant d'origine marocaine,* asks Mehdi about the profession of his father, Mehdi hesitates to say '[qu'il] il ne savait pas vraiment ce que faisait son père, dans la vie' or that his father is dead - this piece of information is not explicitly given in the novel but is left to the reader to understand (p. 125). Panicked by Madini's questions and assumptions: 'il est quoi, ton père, alors? Commissaire divisionnaire? Homme d'affaires? Il est quoi? Mehdi finds no better lie but to claim that his father is a Japanese ambassador (p. 125). Obviously, Madini finds Mehdi's lie unreasonable 'tu te fous de moi? T'as pas l'air japonais du tout. T'as pas les yeux bridés. En plus, tu t'appelles Khatib, tu t'appelles pas Yamamoto Qu'a-des-ratés ou Kenzo Qui-chie-du-haut-du-mât ou un truc de ce genre' (p. 126). Mehdi's reference to Japan, in particular, is not a coincidence. He is aware of the country's remoteness and foreignness, thus, he refers to it to reduce his own feeling of exoticism and to look unique in the eyes of the French.

Similarly, on All Souls Day, M. Lombard, who has noticed that Mehdi seems 'délaissé', asks him to call his parents to remind them that they have to pick him up for the weekend of 'la Toussaint' because the school will be closed and nobody will be allowed to stay. At this, Mehdi confirms to M. Lombard that he has called while, in fact, he has called nobody. Mehdi feels ashamed to say that 'à Béni-Mellal, ils ne sont que quelques-uns à avoir le téléphone, sa mère n'est pas du nombre' (p. 166). He wants to explain to M. Lombard that his family situation is difficult and that he has not heard anything from them since the day he came, but he is afraid that M. Lombard will not believe him.

The other strategy Mehdi follows to win the acceptance of his new environment is rejecting his biological family and origins. After he was abandoned by his family on the weekend of *la Toussaint*, the school staff had no other choice but to send him to the Berger family, his friend's family who opened their doors for him every weekend. The Bergers were very generous with Mehdi and treated him very well. They loved him like a son and referred to him as 'notre Mehdi' (p. 228). The possessive adjective 'notre', indicates that they feel a level of intimacy towards him and consider him a member of the family.

Mehdi, who has not seen his mother and siblings since the day he left his village, feels nostalgic towards family gatherings and the feeling of having a mother who takes care of him. Thus, he has found among the Bergers the warmth of the family he is missing while he has filled the void left by their son Pascal who had passed away a year before. Mme Berger, who is still traumatised by the death of her child, finds in Mehdi a son: 'elle lui caresse les cheveux comme la veille au soir quand elle croyait qu'il dormait. Puis elle lui apporte du chocolat chaud et des croissants […] elle lui lace les souliers. Elle − lui − lace − les – souliers' (p. 188). It is worth noting that Mehdi is pleasantly surprised by Mme Berger's behaviour because she was not very welcoming when they first met. She was acting weird and refused to shake his hand, most probably because Mehdi reminded her of Pascal, especially as they were of the same age.

While at the Bergers' place, Mehdi does not only find the warmth and tenderness he missed for long time but also a physical space, a home to go to at weekends. He does not have to stay at the boarding school at the weekend 'avec quelques autres internes, pas toujours les mêmes, et parfois tout seul' (p. 170). Now he has a house, he shares '[une] chambre extraordinaire' with Denis, and he has 'ses tiroirs dans l'armoire de Denis, et Mme Berger y avait disposé quelques chaussettes, quelques sous-vêtements et un sachet de lavande' (p. 191).

These drawers symbolise Mehdi's belonging to the family and imply his high level of integration.

In order to maintain this familial atmosphere and life of luxury, Mehdi tries his best to assimilate into French culture and to resemble the Bergers. To do so, he starts mimicking his surroundings, particularly their food habits. Although he knows that pork and wine are both forbidden in Islam, Mehdi feels tempted by them and decides to sample both of them. Watching Denis and his parents munching pork sausages and accompanying them with sips of red wine, Mehdi feels curious about how would a sausage taste: 'ça doit être très bon. Pourquoi n'aurait-il pas le droit d'en manger aussi? Pourquoi Denis et pas lui?' (p. 211). Yet, as soon as he tries the sausage, Mehdi finds it unsavoury. As he cannot swallow it, he gets rid of it by slipping it under the carpet of the boat. The same thing happens when Madini serves Mehdi a glass of wine and asks him to try it. At first, Mehdi seems open to trying it, yet as he approaches the glass to his mouth, 'une odeur âcre lui remplit le nez' (p. 135). At this, he decides that he cannot drink it because it is disgusting.

By being open to trying both pork and wine, despite knowing that they are strictly forbidden for Muslims, Mehdi is challenging Islamic rules. Both while with the Bergers or with Madini, Mehdi has the choice not to taste any of the forbidden products but he voluntarily does so because he believes that since he is away from his village, nobody can see him. So absorbed to be accepted by the French, Mehdi even questions what his mother and his grandmother used to lecture him about God – that 'Dieu est partout et qu'il voit tout' (p. 221). He finds this ridiculous because God does not have time to watch everything, especially 'les choses les plus insignifiantes' like Mehdi's food (p. 221).

As he becomes accustomed to his life among the French, Mehdi begins to reject his biological family and hometown. During the Christmas holidays, Mehdi knew that his mother

would send someone to collect him from school but he deliberately refused to go to his village and see his family: he would rather stay with the Bergers. Accordingly, he asked Régnier to write a letter to his mother, Mina Khatib, and inform her that it is in her son's best interest to stay in Casablanca. Trying to convince Régnier, Mehdi produced and extended the same lie involving the Japanese ambassador:

> M'sieur, je crois que mes parents vont venir me chercher à Noël pour que je travaille chez l'ambassadeur du Japon pour gagner un peu d'argent mais moi, je préfère passer les vacances à lire les *Tout l'Univers* de Denis Berger […] Est-ce que vous pourriez leur envoyer une lettre pour leur dire que je dois rester à Casablanca et que c'est beaucoup mieux pour moi… pour les études… (p. 208).

Mehdi is so used to his new life in Casablanca that he does not want to go back to Béni-Mellal. He enjoys the weekends with his new family especially as they always try to do something different (family dinners, playing ping-pong, boat trips). Fascinated by the Christian traditions he is discovering – *le jour des défunts, la Noël, le Réveillon,* and *la Pâques* – Mehdi forgets about Moroccan traditions and special occasions. When Mokhtar came to take his nephew to the village to attend a wedding of a family member, Mehdi was not excited at all. Even worse, he felt himself as a 'victime d'un kidnapping' (p. 241). He was so disappointed to see his uncle because he was planning to join the Berger family for another boat trip.

Once at the wedding, Mehdi feels very happy to see his mother, brother and sister but at the same time '[il se sent] envahi par une sorte de gêne qu'il ne comprenait pas' (p. 242). Despite being among his own people, Mehdi 'se croit tombé dans une étrange contrée, étranger parmi les étrangers'.[415] Thus, he starts to compare and contrast Moroccan culture with the French one. Observing Moroccan women on the dance floor, he tries to imagine Mme Berger or Sabine Armand (his drama teacher) dancing on the songs of *les chikhates* - a Moroccan term for singers, musicians, dancers and prostitutes. Yet, he quickly concludes that these worlds are

[415] Alfred Schütz, *L'Étranger* (Paris: Allia, 2003), p. 42.

totally different (p. 244). Mehdi does not seem to enjoy the Moroccan wedding as much as he enjoys the Bergers' gatherings. He has become so familiar with French culture that his own culture has become strange for him. Throughout the wedding, he seems annoyed by the songs and the dances of *les chikhates*. He wishes he were sitting peacefully in the Bergers' living room listening to *Une petite musique de nuit* and sipping his hot chocolate (p. 244). Mehdi's estrangement and feeling of alienation become worse as the wedding turns into drama between the groom and the bride's families. His disappointment with his weekend in the village is seen when Mme Berger assumes that Moroccan weddings are nice and that Mehdi has undoubtedly had a good time. At this, Mehdi confirms her assumptions because he felt ashamed and could not say that:

> Le fiancé, Ahmed al-Boumbi, est tombé amoureux d'une chikha, il voulait l'échanger avec ma cousine puis a pris la fuite avec elle (la chikha), le frère d'icelle (Tamou, donc) voulait lui (le pompier) casser la gu…, il y a eu une bagarre générale, le feu s'est déclaré on ne sait où, Nagib a menacé de se jeter du balcon, la tente caïdale a été réduite en cendres. Et puis la pluie s'est mise à tomber et nous a tous noyés. Voilà, c'était mon week-end de joie et de liesse à Khouribga (p. 255).

Mehdi's dissatisfaction with his weekend in his village reveals that he is in fact a victim of a reverse cultural shock. The more he integrates in the French community, the more his family and village become unfamiliar to him. Mehdi's experience is similar to that of *l'émigré* who feels nostalgic for his motherland but once he comes back he discovers that the image he has in mind about his country and family is not the same anymore: 'il n'est plus le même, ni pour lui, ni pour ceux qui ont attendu son retour'.[416]

[416] Ibid., p. 64.

Mehdi's Moments of Anger towards the French

While trying to fully integrate into French culture, Mehdi faces both classism among the Bergers and racism at school, the thing which will make him rethink his decision to assimilate so fully into French culture. When among the Bergers, Mehdi becomes a victim of Mme Berger's classist assumptions. Although he never told her about his family's economic situation, Mme Berger who has been observing Mehdi carefully during his stays at the weekends, detects in the process clues which prove that he comes from a poor family. After examining his situation, she concludes that he has been sent to the French school to escape the fate of his parents and save his family from poverty. Indeed, Mme Berger's assumption is correct. Yet, by highlighting Mehdi's socioeconomic status, she unintentionally others him and makes him feel ashamed of his family. When she, Denis and Mehdi are having a look at 'un beau livre' devoted to Van Gogh's paintings, they come across 'les godasses noires', a painting of an old used pair of shoes (p. 228). While Mme Berger finds the artistic piece uninteresting and refers to Van Gogh as an insane who is tormented by his art and failure, Mehdi, on the contrary, admires 'la toile' and finds the pair of shoes 'belles' (p. 229). To her astonishment, Mehdi explains that these spent shoes remind him of his father, yet before he finishes his explanation, Mme Berger jumps to the conclusion that Mehdi's father must have similar ones:

> Il n'y a pas de honte […] je t'assure, j'admire ton père, de si humble extraction, d'avoir réussi à mettre son fils au lycée français. Au moins, toi, tu n'auras jamais à porter des godillots aussi pourris […] C'est ce qu'on appelle l'ascension sociale' (p. 233).

Although her intention is to praise Mehdi's father who despite his poverty encouraged his son to excel in school, Mme Berger seems tactless because she ends up hurting Mehdi's feelings and making him feel poor. Without giving him the opportunity to tell her the story behind the shoes, she assumes straight away that his father must have worn similar ones because he could not afford to buy new ones. Mme Berger's assumption, which is based on classism,

embarrasses Mehdi and makes him feel ashamed of his social status. She could have made a less embarrassing assumption, for instance by assuming that Mehdi's father is a painter, the reason why Mehdi admires Van Gogh's painting. Or at least, given him the chance to tell her the real story – that the spent shoes are not his father's but they belong to a beggar his father hosted for the night because he had nowhere else to sleep. By recalling this memory, Mehdi feels proud of his father who was very hospitable and charitable despite his modest economic status. Mehdi still remembers his father's words on the importance of charity (Zakat) in Islam:

> Tu ne peux quand même pas dormir confortablement si tu sais qu'au coin de la rue, un pauvre vieil homme tout usé dort sur le sol? D'ailleurs, c'est contre notre religion de ne rien faire. On doit aider les pauvres (p. 232).

Unlike Mme Berger who considers Van Gogh's painting as miserable and banal, Mehdi sees in it the image of a sensitive and kind artist who reminds him of his father: 'Il [Mehdi's father] était bon… il était comme Van Gogh!' (p. 234).

In school, Mehdi experiences more than 'class' prejudice. He becomes not only an object of mockery because of his poverty but also a victim of prejudice around race and ethnicity. When his drama teacher, Sabine Armand, announces the cast of the school's end of year play, Mehdi is surprised to see that 'le premier rôle', and the most important one, has been given to his best friend, Denis (p. 258). Since Mehdi has always been praised for being 'le meilleur acteur', he assumes that roles will be distributed on the basis of merit and not on ethnicity or skin colour. Objecting to his teacher's decision, Mehdi asks:

- Pourquoi?
  Sabine fronce le sourcil.
- Pourquoi quoi?
- Pourquoi c'est pas moi qui joue Linus?
  La jeune femme sourit.
- Mais enfin, voyons, mon petit Mehdi… Linus est blond. Regarde! (p. 259).

Mehdi is not convinced that Linus is white, he cannot understand why his teacher is certain about the character's skin and hair colour while the comic strip is all in black and white: 'C'est

pas vrai! Il est pas blond! Il est… il est rien' (p. 259). Despite Mehdi's challenging questions, Sabine still insists that Linus is white because he is an angel, and that all angels are white as proven by 'toutes les toiles de la Renaissance' (p. 259). Sabine's association of angels with white skin reveals her firm belief in the pre-eminence of Europe and Europeans. This incident sparks Mehdi's anger at his teacher and colleagues who have othered him and made him feel different. He realises that being 'un Maure' reduced his chances among the French (p. 195). Thus, he decides to abandon his passion for theatre performance and leave the club. Mehdi's decision to leave the club as well as his violent behaviour towards Denis result in him feeling ostracised and lonely:

> Une sensation atroce s'empare de lui. Il se voit seul mais, pour la première fois, ce n'est plus un vague adjectif, un état transitoire (une pause, du repos…), voire une bénédiction (seul sur la terrasse quand tout le monde s'agite, en bas…) ; cette fois-ci, tout a disparu, tous les adjectifs, tous les mots, tous les états, il n'y a plus d'avant ni d'après, le temps est aboli, il n'y a plus que ça : seul (p. 261).

This incident invites the reader to think about 'l'ascension sociale' that Mme Berger mentioned previously. Will Mehdi have a bright future like his French peers? Will he have the same chances? One cannot be sure if education will necessarily open for Mehdi doors to success and financial stability within this context of racism and stereotyping. Azouz Begag, the Franco-Algerian *beur* writer and former *ministre délégué à la promotion de l'égalité des chances* under Jacques Chirac, argues that when one is a North African in a French boarding school or a son of an immigrant in France, there are two possible attitudes: 'l'une qui consiste à se marginaliser en disant on n'est pas français; on n'a aucune raison d'apprendre l'histoire des Gaulois puis celle des rois Louis; l'autre qui fait le pari que l'école permet d'envisager un avenir meilleur'.[417]

Another author who makes oblique references to racism at the French boarding schools is the Moroccan Tahar ben Jelloun. In his autobiographical novel *La Soudure fraternelle* (1994),

[417] Azouz Begag, *Tranches de vie* (Stuttgart: Klett Verlag, 1998), p. 52.

Ben Jelloun narrates his experience of being alienated at the Lycée Regnault of Tangiers and the challenges he faced to integrate:

> A l'époque, nous ne faisions pas attention à cela. Les filles nous narguaient. La seule occasion de leur faire la cour, c'était lors des surprises-parties organisées, la plupart du temps, par des camarades français. Nous y étions rarement invités […] Lotfi et moi étions quelconques. Les filles ne nous remarquaient pas. Celles qui nous approchaient un peu ne retenaient même pas nos noms, ou les écorchaient: Lotfi devenant Lofti et moi Ta AR.[418]

This passage not only highlights the latent hostility – or at least painful indifference – Moroccan pupils faced at the French schools but also the cultural prejudices they became victims of. By mispronouncing his name or not remembering it at all, Tahar's colleagues are expressing a cultural prejudice against Arabic names, language and culture. The fact that they did not bother to pronounce the 'h' carries a cultural message – that the Arabic language is not important enough for them to learn how to pronounce its sounds. By eliding the 'h' from his name, Tahar's colleagues are not only making a linguistic elision but also a cultural one. It is more than a sound that is missed out here: his Arabic identity is elided as well.

The racist experience Mehdi and Tahar went through in the French boarding school is similar to the one faced by *beur* children in Republican schools in France. In his autobiographical novel, *Le Gone du Chaâba,* Azouz Begag tells his own experience of breaking through the barriers of poverty and racism in Lyon. Like Mehdi and Tahar, school for Azouz becomes a site of racism where he has to endure both racist remarks from his peers and mistreatment on the part of his teachers. Despite his efforts, his primary school teacher, Mme Valard, is never satisfied with his work. She keeps accusing him of copying the work of famous French authors, such as Guy de Maupassant, and always finds his essays 'inintéressant! Manque d'originalité! [and] trop vague'.[419] Azouz has never been given the chance to deny his teachers'

[418] Tahar Ben Jelloun, *La soudure fraternelle* (Paris: Arléa, 1993), p. 24.
[419] Azouz Begag, *Le Gone du Chaâba* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1986), p. 222.

accusation or to defend himself. Thus, when his secondary school teacher Mr. Loubon (a pied-noir from Algerian origins) asks him and the other students to write an essay about a topic of their choice, Azouz choses racism: 'j'attendais cette chance depuis de longs mois, et un pied-noir me l'offrait sur un plateau. Le racisme. C'est du racisme qu'il fallait que je parle dans ma rédaction'.[420] Azouz seizes the opportunity to address the issue of racism and the difficulties he faces to integrate in French society as well as to prove to his colleagues and teachers that he is not 'malhonnête' or simply a 'petit malin' as his primary teacher called him.

The continuous confrontation with racism opens Mehdi's eyes to his otherness. He realises that his attempts to be fully integrated in the French milieu are in vain because 'il sera toujours marocain' (p. 228). After a few months of living among the French, he realises that he does not belong to them and he will never do. Thus, he decides to distance himself from his school entourage by ignoring anyone who attempts to engage him in conversation and by taking refuge in his studies: 'il ne regardait que le professeur, le tableau et son cahier' (p. 264). Racism in school also contributes to Mehdi's detachment from the Bergers whom he used to consider as his adoptive family. It causes him to recall other negative experiences he went through at their household. One of the scenes which marks him profoundly is when he was walking near the water with the Berger family. M. Berger held his son's hand but refused to do the same with Mehdi '[qui] courut pour se porter à leur hauteur […] tenta de se coller un peu à lui pour indiquer sa présence mais rien à faire: la main gauche de M. Berger resta dans sa poche' (p. 218). Although very polite and respectful, M. Berger does not show the same level of intimacy with Mehdi because he considers him as a guest and not a 'son' as Mehdi thinks. He has welcomed him, fed him, showed him a little affection but it stops there.

[420] Ibid,. p 222.

Mehdi started feeling uncomfortable with the Bergers after the scene surrounding Van Gogh's shoes, when he felt that Mme Berger insulted his father. Yet, things escalated after the theatre incident when Denis stole Mehdi's opportunity to play the main role. As the weekend approaches, Mehdi 'n'avait aucune envie de se retrouver avec Denis et ses parents, dans leur maison' (p. 264). He becomes so anxious about confronting the Bergers that he starts praying for a miracle. On Saturday afternoon, a young man arrives to school and announces that he will take Mehdi to spend the weekend 'en famille' (p. 264). Mehdi does not recognise the man whom the reader discovers later to be Mehdi's biological cousin. Yet, Mehdi feels so pleased to see him, first because he does not have to face the Bergers and second because he does not feel abandoned anymore: 'Miloud n'avait qu'à expliquer aux Berger que Mehdi n'était pas disponible. Il était avec sa famille, on s'occupait de lui, son cousin était venu exprès pour cela' (p. 266). As soon as Mehdi arrives at his uncle's house, the reader starts drawing parallels between Mehdi's *séjour* at the Berger's house and his weekends among his biological family. When he first arrived at the Berger's household, Mme Berger was not as welcoming as Mehdi's biological aunt. She was behaving strangely with him and refused to shake his hand, the thing which gave him the impression that she was mean. Conversely, however, on his first visit to his cousin's house, Mehdi is warmly welcomed by his aunt and her husband who do not hesitate to show him a high degree of intimacy: 'Mehdi fut assailli par sa tante qui le couvrit de baisers' (p. 267). Unlike at the Berger's house where he felt like a stranger due to the differences in lifestyle, social norms and food habits, Mehdi feels at ease among his biological family because he can act naturally, without any restrictions: 'Il ne lui parla pas de pyjama ni d'autre chose […] il paressa au lit jusque vers midi, sans que personne ne vînt le déranger' (p. 269). The atmosphere and the food seem familiar to him because they remind him of his lifestyle at Béni-Mellal. While among his family, he does not have to force down food he does not like – on the

contrary, he can enjoy his favourite Moroccan dishes such as 'tagine d'agneau aux pommes de terre' and 'harira', as well as the Moroccan tea that he has missed (p. 267- 273).

Mehdi's sense of belonging and comfort become clearer when his cousin takes him to watch a football match between TAS (Tihad Athletic Sport) and *L'Association sportive des Douanes*. Mehdi, who has never been to a stadium before, feels 'grandement impressionné' by the large stadium. His fear of being lost 'au milieu de la foule' disappears because he and Tayeb 'se retrouvèrent, toujours la main dans la main' (p. 270). During the match, Mehdi observes with attention the players' performance as well as his cousin who is enjoying watching his favourite team winning. With the victory of his team, Tayeb treats Mehdi to a sandwich of grilled meat and a glass of *petit-lait*: 'Je te l'offre. Après tout, c'est toi qui as gagné le match!' (p. 272).

Mehdi's visit to his cousin's place has given him the chance to reconnect with his origins. It has awakened his nostalgia for the Moroccan lifestyle he had before joining the French boarding school, and revived the sense of belonging he was missing among the Bergers. He does not feel abandoned anymore because he now has a family to stay with on the weekend, a family who accepts him as he is, without judgment or prejudice. Thus, when Tayeb offers Mehdi to pick him up next Saturday to spend the weekend *en famille*, Mehdi accepts the invitation with open arms:

> Il voulait revenir dans ce monde où on lui offrait des lits grands comme des paquebots […] ce monde où on l'acceptait tout naturellement; où l'on ne se moquait pas des souliers de son père [...] Ce monde où l'ange, c'était lui (p. 273).

The word 'ange' shows the effect of the theatre episode on Mehdi's identity development and cultural evolution. In fact, it is this incident which has made him rethink his decision to fully integrate himself in the French community. The experiences he has been through during his

year among the French contribute to his cultural maturity and help him find 'la bonne distance' between himself and the French.

Recognising the Postcolonial Élite

When the academic year approaches its end, Le lycée Lyautey organises an end of year ceremony to honour 'ses élèves les plus méritants en présence de leurs professeurs, de leurs parents et de toute l'administration, du proviseur aux simples surveillants' (p. 275). Mehdi who has been eagerly waiting for this day is recognised for being the first in his class: 'M. Bellion [the Lycée's principal] lui remit les livres (qu'ils étaient lourds!), posa dessus une sorte de parchemin enroulé (le fameux "Prix d'excellence") et lui tapota la joue avec bienveillance. Félicitations, mon fils!' (p. 282 - 283). By receiving this award, Mehdi has proven to his *lycée* that his intellectual abilities are higher than those of his European colleagues. His hard work earns him the esteem of his teachers who rush to congratulate his mother for his accomplishments, as well as the acceptance of the lycée staff who are now convinced that he has a bright future ahead and that he deserves to be part of their community. This idea is clearly shown in M. Bellion's speech where he refers to Mehdi as one 'nos enfants' and attributes the latter's success and achievements to the French school:

> Hommage aux enseignants et au proviseur du plus grand lycée d'un empire spirituel: l'empire de la francophonie […] Nous sommes fiers de vos enfants, de nos enfants. Notre lycée est le symbole éclatant de l'amitié entre les peuples, de la richesse du dialogue et de la diversité. Tous ont fait de leur mieux […] Mais il faut distinguer particulièrement ceux qui se sont illustrés par leurs efforts, leur talent, leurs résultats. C'est ce qu'on appelle "l'élitisme républicain" (p. 280).

Although this speech does acknowledge the efforts made by the postcolonial *évolué*, it seems full of irony. M. Bellion is claiming that the French schools encourage diversity and friendship between pupils while the reader knows from the narrator that this is not the case. Mehdi has

always been alienated from the rest of the students because of his cultural and economic background. He could not build strong friendships because he has always been seen as an 'other'. The only friend he had was Denis from whom he drifted apart after the theatre incident.

Despite being eventually recognised and accepted by the French community, Mehdi does not want to be integrated anymore. He wants to keep a distance between himself and the French in order to reconnect with his origins. When he sees his mother, who came all the way from Béni-Mellal to attend the prize-giving ceremony, Mehdi feels very happy and proud of her in her 'djellaba bleue' and 'voile rose' (p. 284). At this, he decides to eliminate the distance he previously created between himself and his origins and reconnect with his mother and the culture she represents. Laroui comments on Mehdi's evolution during his year among the French in an interview where he says:

> Quand on est marocain mais qu'on n'a connu que l'école française, on vit en français, on rêve en français et on croit faire partie de la France. Cela paraît si évident que l'on ne se pose même jamais la question. On n'a aucune distance. Mehdi se fait même quasiment adopter par une famille française. Mais quand il revoit sa mère et renoue avec son milieu familial d'origine, quelque chose en lui finit par s'apaiser. Il trouve cette bonne distance qui lui faisait défaut.[421]

The final scene of the novel reveals the evolution of Mehdi in dealing with French people, language and culture. After living one year among the French, Mehdi has eventually understood that the French language is indeed a sign of modernity and social mobility; yet mastering it should not push him away from his culture and origins.

Conclusion

Une année chez les Français tells in a caricatural way the cultural shock a young Moroccan boy goes through while living for a year among the French, these *invraisemblables*

[421] Makhlouf, 'Entretien: Fouad Laroui: une vie entière dans les livres'.

who speak a variety of the French different from the one found in literary production, and have totally different social norms and food habits compared to North African traditions. It shows the challenges the young Mehdi faces to integrate in the French community and the ways in which every experience he lived - either at the French boarding school or at his friend's place - has contributed to his development and maturity. This chapter has traced the evolution of Mehdi as he moves from a state of alienation to a state of assimilation and integration, and eventually to self-assertion. Arguably, Mehdi's main challenge is to familiarise himself with the school environment, integrate with his colleagues and win intellectual and social recognition without becoming a French person himself.

Mehdi's initial attempt to escape the feeling of alienation and loneliness through reading was indeed successful because it helped him avoid the embarrassment and the mockery of his colleagues and the school staff. Yet, he soon noticed that he could not spend all the academic year avoiding people around him: he had eventually to interact with them as they had become part of his life. Thus, he did his best to eliminate the distance existing between him and the French by immersing himself to be fully accepted. By becoming so close to the French, Mehdi thought he had become *un petit Français*; yet he shortly understood from the daily interaction with the French that he will always remain Moroccan. Mehdi's year among the French was crucial for his maturity and personal development because he eventually managed to reconnect with his origins and find the right distance: 'ni infiniment loin des Français ni et pas non-plus complétement assimilé'.[422]

[422] Editions Julliard, *Une année chez les Français - Fouad Laroui,* online video recording, YouTube, 29 Sep. 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDshcCOiGLk&feature=share> [Accessed 18-08-2019].

CONCLUSION

This thesis has focused on the ways in which French and British education has contributed to the alienation of the colonial elite, usually embodied by the figure of the *évolué(e)*, in six postcolonial novels: Mouloud Mammeri's *Le Sommeil du juste,* Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *The River Between,* Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions,* Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Buchi Emecheta's *Head Above Water* and Fouad Laroui's *Une année chez les Français.* In these novels, a figure from the colonised elite is consistently depicted as estranged from his or her community. After spending their school years at the colonisers' institutions, the protagonists of these novels feel shocked by the differences between local and colonial culture and values. Once they are back to their place of origin, they find it difficult to readapt to the life they had before joining the colonial school, resulting in their alienation. This alienation can take different shapes. It can be manifested as an intergenerational conflict between the young assimilated subject and his conservative community (Arezki); a religious *métissage* resulting from the combination of ancestral traditions and modern ideas brought by the coloniser (Waiyaki and Muthoni); a form of cultural hybridity contributing to a certain level of emancipation (Tambu and Djebar's protagonist); or as a struggle for integration and recognition (Emecheta and Mehdi).

The first two chapters have focused on the destructive effects of colonial education on the figure of the *évolué* and his identity formation. They have argued for the impossibility of coexisting between indigenous cultures which still hold to ancestral customs, on the one hand, and, on the other, Western cultures which reject indigenous traditions and promote a specific version of modernity. Arezki and Waiyaki's trajectories have shown that overcoming the cultural barriers between African and Western cultures is impossible because it eventually results in the destruction of the *évolué*'*s* identity. Both Arezki who has turned his back to his

Kabyle culture in the hope to become French and Waiyaki who has tried to reconcile local culture with that of the coloniser, have gone through an identity crisis. Influenced by modern, European-inspired ideas through schooling in colonial institutions, both characters could no longer be guided by their people's traditions. They have ended up alienated from both cultures, belonging neither to here nor to there. Their tragic end reveals that there is no happy ending for cultural and religious hybridity.

The third and the fourth chapters have shed light on the difficulties faced by educated female characters who attempt to reintegrate into their indigenous society, and the social alienation they suffer from as a result of biculturalism and bilingualism. They have concluded that colonial education when received by indigenous women can be both alienating and emancipating at the same time. Djebar's protagonist in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, is a girl who yearns for more than law and traditions allow her to experience. She uses the coloniser's education to liberate herself from some of the fundamental features of Algerian patriarchy. Eventually, she succeeds in escaping from cloistered life but at the expense of her local culture. In *Nervous Conditions*, likewise, Tambu's acquisition of education and the adoption of Western ways allow her to escape customs but, at the same time, lead her to alienation from restrictive traditional practices. Both female characters choose to embrace what is new and abandon what is old. Unlike other women, they become westernised through education; they rebel against patriarchy and escape domesticity. Their fight for a better life, however, comes at the cost of their relationship with their families and their wider indigenous societies.

The final part, which includes chapter five and six, have focused on the long-term legacies of colonialism on African former colonies by exploring the situation of the *évolué(e)*, both male and female, in the period that follows the political independence of their countries. Focusing on the protagonists' experiences in the ex-coloniser's boarding schools, chapter five

and six conclude that despite the impossibility of full integration, education at the institutions of the former oppressor can indeed be a road to recognition and social mobility. Emecheta and Mehdi's different experiences at the Methodist Girls' High School and lycée Lyautey prove to be crucial for their personality formation as well as their development as postcolonial writers. My analysis of Emecheta's *Head Above Water* and Laroui's *Une année chez les Français* has shown that if African male writers are doubly burdened by both poverty and ethnicity, their female counterparts are triply burdened. In order to be recognised, an indigenous female writer must overcome not only financial hardships and the weight of blackness but also the weight of womanhood.

Unlike many historians and critics (like Ali Al'Amin Mazrui, Toyin Falola, Guy Martin and others)[423] who believe that French cultural legacies on African colonies are more significant than those of Britain, this thesis has argued that the traditionally established differences between the cultural effects of French assimilation and British indirect rule are not real but rather mythical. Due to the oversimplification of the difference between the French assimilation policy and the British approach of indirect rule, there is a tendency among scholars to believe that French cultural policies were more damaging to the indigenous cultures of their colonies, than those of the British. While the French ideology of assimilation was mainly associated with creating a sort of 'France d'outre-mer' and turning colonial subjects into Frenchmen (at least in theory), the British system of indirect rule was regarded as 'the antithesis of assimilation'.[424] Contrary to the French, the British were believed to be more interested in the economic

[423] Ali Al'Amin Mazrui, 'Francophone Nations and English-Speaking States: Imperial Ethnicity and African Political Formations', in *Power, politics, and the African condition,* ed. by Robert L. Ostergard, Jr., Ricardo Rene Laremont and Fouad Kalouche (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), Toyin Falola, *The Power of African Cultures* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2008), and Guy Martin, *African Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
[424] Michael Crowder, *West African under Colonial Rule* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), p. 168.

exploitation of their empire than in imposing British culture on the local populations and superimposing it onto African cultural heritage.

Although the French cultural and linguistic policies are often regarded as more aggressive than those of the British, it is fair to recognise that the French and the British policies proved to be equally damaging in terms of displacing indigenous cultures. Like the French, the British were interested in imposing their language and culture. Yet, because the British tended to be less explicit about their objectives than the French, this often escapes notice. France had an explicit ideology of cultural assimilation because it 'prides itself on being the home of a particularly rich culture and on having a vocation to spread this culture overseas'.[425] Britain, on the contrary, followed a less explicit policy because one of the ways British imperialism worked was to seemingly support local cultures, languages and identities – or at least not to threaten them openly. Yet, as this thesis has demonstrated, both imperial powers left a lasting cultural impact on their African colonies. Both realised that colonising the geographical territories starts with colonising the minds of indigenous populations. As a result, they both used colonial education as a way to guarantee the perennity of their domination.

An analysis of the literary depiction of colonial education and its consequences on the indigenous population has shown that regardless of the level of assimilation, colonised peoples in French and British colonies suffered comparable consequences. Colonial education in Algeria, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Morocco had similar effects on local languages and cultures, suppressing and denigrating local cultures through acculturation processes as well as enforcing the use of the coloniser's language as the main means of official communication while relegating indigenous languages to a subaltern position. This cultural legacy did not end with the gaining of political independence but continues in postcolonial and sometimes neo-

[425] Martin, *African Political Thought*, p. 45.

colonial contexts today.[426] It is mainly attributed to the continued economic ties between former colonies and their ex-colonisers as well as the weakening of local culture and languages. Despite the strenuous attempts made by local governments to recover national languages and cultures, English and French are still widely used in the former African colonies. French is the common second administrative language in Algeria and Morocco, while Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe are still English-speaking.

The encounter between imperialist and indigenous cultures is most accurately expressed in the figure of the *évolué(e)* who finds themselves torn between admiring the culture of the colonial dominator as a means of social climbing and recognition, and hating it because it alienates them from their own roots. This study has shown the complex role of assimilation and colonial education in shaping the identity of the colonial elite. It has argued that the relation of the *évolué(e)* toward the coloniser's language and culture is ambivalent and cannot be simply classified as positive or negative.[427] For the characters under study, colonial education does not always contribute to the alienation of African elites but can also be liberating. Although trained and indoctrinated to support the coloniser, the educated colonial subjects often react in an opposite way. Instead of siding with the coloniser, they manage to wrest political power from the coloniser's fists by appropriating his language and culture and transforming them into a discourse of liberation. They implement ideas of equality, democracy and economic prosperity,

[426] The issue of whether independence really means the end of colonial control in African colonies continues; it can be seen in the different terms used to name the post-independence period. While critics generally use the term 'postcolonial' to refer to the period following the political independence of the colonised, others argue that real emancipation is yet to come. Such critics prefer instead the term neo-colonialism as they argue that ex-colonies are still controlled by their former colonial masters through local élites: 'political control may have moved from Europeans to the natives. Economically, however, the native populations are still controlled by European powers. That is '"free" nation-states continue to suffer from economic exploitation […] this form of control has been called neo-colonialism' (Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008), p. 5.

[427] Unlike Fanon, Memmi and Ngugi who overlooked the subversive agency of assimilation and education, I tried through this research to be more nuanced by focusing on both destructive and emancipatory sides of assimilation and colonial education.

learnt from the coloniser himself at his institutions, to give rise to nationalist movements, contributing thereby to the decolonisation of their countries.

In addition to its subversive agency, colonial alienation resulting from education and the different assimilation policies have proved also to be a positive force in the life of the fictional characters, the authors themselves as well as their society because it opens the door for artistic creativity. African writers who came from a colonial experience and went through psychological traumas and political subordination succeeded in their attempt to transform their struggle into pieces of art: 'each struggle for identity provides the fighter with some ingredients for future literary creativity; each frustrating experience a step towards some positive achievement'.[428] Mammeri, Ngugi, Djebar, Dangarembga, Emecheta and Laroui set a strong example for this generation and those who will follow by showing that by becoming *évolués/évoluées*, they changed the direction of African literature. Their works reversed Western colonial discourse, challenged canonical literature and gave rise to Anglophone and Francophone literature.

This research has also enriched our understanding of the concept of the '*évolué*' which has often been associated with the male colonial subject. Chapters three, four and five have introduced the notion of gender as a valid analytical tool, showing that the idea of the '*évolué*' is not only limited to men but can also be applied to indigenous women. Like their male compatriots, indigenous women who received French or British education in colonial and postcolonial times were also caught between their local culture and that of the coloniser. Their experience as *évoluées* was even more difficult because they had to overcome a triple burden: traditions, class and gender. The analysis has shown that when received by colonised women,

[428] William Dikedi Onyebuchim Nwaegbe, *Alienation and Literature: Discursive Maps in the West African Experience* (US: Xlibris, 2013), p. 189.

colonial education can be both alienating and emancipatory at the same time. In fact, in colonial and postcolonial societies, education favoured women's emancipation and gender equality. It helped them challenge some stereotypes of female passivity and submissiveness by giving them the opportunity to rebel against the constraints of indigenous traditions and to battle for their personal autonomy. It meant that these women could enjoy a degree of physical freedom, access the public sphere and benefit from equal opportunities compared to men. Yet, the same education disempowered women who were seeking emancipation in so far as it alienated them from their traditional African communities. While trying to become modern women, these female members of the elites became unable to reconnect to their pre-colonial traditions and ended up deserting their traditions.

The literary depiction of colonial education and its cultural consequences on the indigenous population in both French and British former colonies has proven to be a particularly rich and insightful angle to approach the position of the *évolué(e)* in late colonial and early postcolonial societies. The nuanced and often contradictory picture that has emerged as a result of this work has shown that colonial alienation resulting from education and assimilation policies remains a complex issue, for it often results in the paradoxical image of the figure of the *évolué(e)* who is emancipated and recognised from one side, but remains confused and alienated from the other. The predicament of being 'neither from here nor from there' is rich and complex, one that is bound to remain a valid analytical tool for years to come, paving the way for a better understanding of the complex mechanisms of cultural and linguistic interaction inherited from colonial practices.

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