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État present Algerian Cultural Production Sixty Years after Independence

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<TX>Marking the fiftieth anniversary of Algerian independence in 2012, the organizers of the state-funded 'Festival international de la littérature et du livre de jeunesse' commissioned a bilingual publication (in Arabic and French) titled *Dix escales dans la littérature algérienne moderne*. Mohamed Sari's Introduction is a nationalist, teleological account of Algeria's anti-colonial struggle and emergence as a modern state.[1] The first 'escale' begins with the 'Kassaman', Algeria's national anthem written by Moufdi Zakaria (1908–1977), and this is followed by nine prose extracts from the work of Ahmed Reda Houhou (1910–1956), Mouloud Féraoun (1913–1962), Mouloud Mammeri (1917–1989), Mohammed Dib (1920–2003), Abdelhamid Benhadouga (1925–1996), Malek Haddad (1927–1978), Kateb Yacine (1929–1989), Abou Laid Doudou (1934–2004), and Tahar Ouettar (1936–2010). All men — no room for women, such as the francophone writer Assia Djebar (1936–2015) or the arabophone writer Ahlam Mosteghanemi (b. 1953). The list is balanced between Arabic and French texts but the brief presentation of Mammeri makes no reference to his tireless advocacy for the official recognition of Tamazight. Ten years later, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Algerian independence, and focusing on the past twenty-five years in

[1] Mohamed Sari, 'Présentation générale', in *Dix escales dans la littérature algérienne moderne* (Algiers, 2012), pp. 6–11. Free copies of this booklet were distributed to the public in the vicinity of Riadh El Feth, where the festival was held.

particular, how might we think differently of Algeria's literary canon and cultural production?[2]

<P>To say that Algerian cultural production over the past twenty years or so has in large part woven narratives from the warp of the *décennie noire* and the weft of the Algerian Revolution or War of Independence (1954–62) — as well as the popular protests of October 1988 — is true but not in any totalizing way. While these historical events continue to be dominant features within cultural production, the relationship of writers and film-makers to the War of Independence has shifted from experience to received memory. The majority of the Algerian writers who feature in this *état présent* were born not in French colonial Algeria but *after* the anti-colonial war, during either President Houari Boumedienne's regime (1965–78) or that of President Chadli Bendjedid (1979–92). Boumedienne effected a transformation of the country with the policy of Arabization pursued alongside a version of state socialism that resulted in the oil and gas industries being nationalized in the 1970s. It was during this period too that Algeria's self-image as a country that had defeated French colonialism, and continued to support revolution, was still an accepted commonplace.[3] This image began to fade in the late 1970s and was laid to rest in the 1980s — a decade which saw the carapace of a state-determined national identity harden, the housing crisis intensify, and unemployment increase significantly. The events that marked the post-war generation of writers and

[2] For an excellent insight into that moment of revolutionary victory and its meaning, see Malika Rahal, *Algérie 1962: une histoire populaire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2022). Natalya Vince's brilliant history of the legacy of the revolution in terms of gender is essential reading; Natalya Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria, 1954–2012* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

[3] On Algeria in the 1960s and its turn away from revolutionary idealism, see Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

filmmakers were, in the first instance, the social protests and subsequent killing of civilians by the military that occurred in October 1988. Reacting to these events, President Chadli Bendjedid , initiated a transition to multi-party democracy, and subsequent elections to the national assembly were held in December 1991.[4] The Islamist party, the Front islamique du salut, looked set to win a majority in the second round. The army intervened and cancelled the elections, and what followed has been called Algeria's civil war, or *la décennie noire*, a phrase that captures the tragedy of that decade but also its obscurity, for the civilian population seemed to be caught between two forces which, if identified as State and Islamism, were in practice composed of many different groups. It was not always clear which killings were carried out by whom. Coming to terms with the violence of this decade has been central to much cultural production since 2000.[5]

<P>In what follows, I recognize that the Algerian writers and filmmakers under discussion draw from history as well as the vicissitudes, patterns, and encounters of daily life across the regions and cities of Algeria and across languages: Algerian Arabic (*derja*), Modern Standard Arabic (*fusa*), French, and Tamazight in all its forms (such as Kabyle,

[4] For a political analysis of that critical period from 1988 to 1992, see Myriam Aït-Aoudia, *L'Expérience démocratique en Algérie (1988–1992): apprentissages politiques et changement de régime* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2015).

[5] Exact figures are not available. Human Rights Watch suggests that the number of dead is over 100,000. The figures for the 'disappeared' seem more definite at 7000; see Human Rights Watch, 'Algeria Led World in Forced Disappearances: Chirac Visit Should Spotlight Need for Accountability', <https://www.hrw.org>. See also the relevant chapters on Algeria from 1954 to the present, in James McDougall, *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and James D. Le Sueur. *Algeria since 1989: Between Terror and Democracy* (New York: Zed Books, 2010).

Chaouia, Chenoua, and Mozabite).[6] It is important not to identify these languages with mutually exclusive identities and positionalities. Most Algerians speak at least two languages and move between them in this plurilingual country. My focus here is on francophone cultural production but I recognize the vibrant contemporary Tamazight novel and the work of arabophone novelists such as Mosteghanemi, Waciny Laredj (b. 1954), and H'mida Ayachi (b. 1958), as well as the proliferation of hip-hop groups who perform in *derja*.[7] My focus is on the range of Algerian novelists and poets who write primarily in French, such as El-Mahdi Acherchour (b. 1973), Kaouther Adimi (b. 1986), Salim Bachi (b. 1971), Mustapha Benfodil (b. 1968), Amina Damerdji (b. 1987), Kamel Daoud (b. 1970), Sarah Haidar (b. 1987), Adlène Meddi (b. 1975), Samira Negrouche (b. 1980), and Samir Toumi (b. 1968). These writers pursue literary form in ways that explore aesthetic possibilities and obliquely speak to Algerian society. Equally, since 2000, Algerian-born film directors — such as Merzak Allouache (b. 1944), Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche (b. 1966), Yamina Bachir-Chouikh (1954–2022), Malek Bensmaïl (b. 1966), Hassen Ferhani (b. 1986), Nadir Moknèche (b. 1965), and Tariq Teguia (b. 1966) — have produced works which interrogate cinematic form yet also offer representations of contemporary Algeria that have generated social and political commentary. These range from Bachir-Chouikh's film *Rachida* (2002) and its portrayal of the violence of the *décennie noire* (in particular the horrific gender-based nature

[6] See *Algeria in Others' Languages*, ed. by Anne-Emmanuelle Berger (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

[7] On the novel in Tamazight, see Mohand Akli Salhi and Nabila Sadi, 'Le Roman maghrébin en Berbère', in *The Contemporary 'Roman maghrébin': Aesthetics, Politics, Production 2000–2015*, ed. by Patrick Crowley and Megan MacDonald (= special issue, *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 20.1 (2016)), pp. 27–36. On Algerian hip hop as a form of political contestation, see Luc Chauvin, 'Flou, limites et expérience fragile de l'identité dans les productions culturelles des jeunes algérien/nes', dissertation, Université Lumière Lyon 2, 2011.

of the violence), to Allouache's drama *Le Repenti* (2012), which tells the story of an Islamist fighter Rachid, who takes up the offer of a government amnesty that brought the violence of that decade towards a closure, of sorts. To cite these two examples is to begin a process of shaping 'Algeria', of giving it an outline based on two films, and this raises the question of 'representation'; of the ways in which we can talk about 'Algeria', and the limits of an *état présent* that seeks to frame Algerian cultural production through a process of selection that necessarily involves omission, exclusion, and ultimately, distortion.

<P>In a review essay, Idriss Jebari reflects on this question of how to represent Algeria and concludes:

> <XTT>Algeria is best understood by transversal methodologies, multilingualism, and research strategies that include a significant component of oral history and interview in Algeria […] academic studies need to be more forthcoming about the value of discourses, culture, and power in Algeria. When it comes to Francophone novelists, the frequency of their coverage leads the uninformed observer to assume they are the only existing (or valid) spokesperson for today's Algeria, rather than doing the work of framing them in the overall field.[8]

[8] Idriss Jebari, 'In Search of Algeria: Between Literature, History, and Cultural Studies', *Arab Studies Journal*, 28 (2020), 138–51 (p. 150). Jebari's review was of Valérie Orlando, *The Algerian New Novel: The Poetics of a Modern Nation, 1950–1979* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017); Tristan Leperlier, *Algérie, les écrivains dans la décennie noire* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2018); and *Algeria: Nation, Culture and Transnationalism 1988–2015*, ed. by Patrick Crowley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017). For this *état présent*, I build upon my 2017 volume while recognizing the limits of this current task. I focus on francophone cultural production and its material contexts over the past twenty years. For a conceptual framing, see the excellent *état présent* by Jane Hiddleston, 'Francophone North African Literature', *French Studies*, 70 (2016), 82–92.

<TX>In what follows, I look not to frame Algeria but to identify significant cultural works, mainly French, produced in Algeria, but also elsewhere, by Algerians in Algeria or from the Algerian diaspora. I do so from the angle of how writers and filmmakers, both directly and indirectly, give form to the experience and legacy of conflict (the Algerian War of Independence, October 1988, and the *décennie noire*), but also seek to go beyond it. In doing so, I also attend, if only briefly, to the material contexts of cultural production, to the issue of language as a topic of reflection, and to the increasing diversity of production that moves away from a France–Algeria binary or a focus on an exclusively nationalist narrative, moving back to Arabic cultural references and beyond to a more global reach. The vibrancy and heterogeneity of production since 2000 escapes the trammels of a single narrative, if not the shadow and weight of history. If the War of Independence and the foundation of the state in 1962 remains the currency of political discourse and the symbolic reservoir of both state and people, then for writers and filmmakers to explore the limits of change requires them to draw upon this currency, to put it to work in ways that differ from a state narrative that has sought to monopolise and control it. The challenge is to creatively rework the state narrative. For example, Toumi's novel *L'Effacement* is narrated by the unnamed son of a War of Independence hero who e sees his image in the mirror slowly, over time, disappear.[9] As this happens, he drifts into madness and amnesia and is absorbed by his dead father's identity at the conclusion of the novel. The weight of the past can crush the present. So, while the revolution provides the vernacular, it continues to be translated and interpreted by Algerians, such as Toumi, both within and outside of Algeria. How that vernacular is given shape and form is contingent upon the material and intellectual conditions of cultural production.

<SH>The Material Conditions of Cultural Production>

[9] Samir Toumi, *L'Effacement* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2016).

<TX> The Algerian state has monopolized its version of the revolution and controlled its meaning as a way of legitimating its hold upon, and exercise of, power.[10] There were active publishing houses, in Arabic and French, both within Algeria and within France supported by the Algerian diaspora during the 1990s.[11] However, central to the diffusion of alternative and critical narratives has been the emergence of dynamic independent publishing houses in Algeria since 2000. Amongst the most important are APIC, Barzakh, Casbah, Chihab, El-Ikhtilef, and Sédia-Alpha.These publishers commission translations, produce new editions of Algerian works that are out of print and have, in particular, promoted and published new writing. If insignificant compared with the financial power and distribution network of publishers located in Paris (Gallimard, Seuil, Actes Sud etc), Algerian publishers have sought to inaugurate the beginnings of a new autonomy, the effect of which lies in a future that, from the viewpoint of the present, can only be read with tempered optimism. Funding, distribution, and recognition are critical yet conditions are precarious. State funding is required to promote and support literary activity if an autonomous national field is to be sustained and grow. The enormous increase in state revenue, derived from soaring oil and gas profits at the close of the 1990s, resulted in significant support for the cultural sector. The distribution of such supports has not always been transparent or consistent and its importance can place

[10] On the Algerian state's attempt to control memory and commemoration since 1962 — for example, its use of pensions — see Raphaëlle Branche, 'The martyr's torch: memory and power in Algeria', *Journal of North African Studies*, 16.3 (2011), 431–43. On a version of nationalist history that has been occluded — the role of Messali Hadj in the history of independence — see Nedjib Sidi Moussa, *Algérie, une autre histoire de l'indépendence: trajectoires révolutionnaires des partisans de Messali Hadj* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2019).

[11] For a detailed account of publishing in Algeria and by Algerians in France during the 1990s see Leperlier, *Algérie, les écrivains dans la décennie noire*. Leperlier notes that at the height of the *décennie noire* one third of all Algerian writers were in France (p. 31).

publishers in a difficult position, especially if the state narrative is challenged. The funding continues to be contingent upon the international price of oil. For example, support for publishers during the Salon international du livre d'Alger in 2015 was around 120 million DZD [just over €800,000), but it dropped to 60 million DZD in 2018.[12]

<P>In an interview published in the Algerian francophone newspaper *Liberté,* Selma Hellal, co-editor of Barzakh, reflected on the difficulty of publishing in Algeria and the lack of bookshops . Regretting the recent passing of Hadj Miliani, who had been working on the question of readership and publishing in Algeria, Hellal believes that there is evidence of an active readership based on the numbers attending the Salon international du livre d'Alger, the interest in public readings organized by bookshops, as well as the enthusiasm of students taking university literature courses.[13] However, she says,

> <XTT>la librairie […] est en danger: elle aurait besoin d'être soutenue, de bénéficier d'allègements fiscaux, elle aurait besoin que son personnel soit formé, que son essaimage à l'échelle du pays soit encouragé par des mécanismes d'aide systématiques et finement réfléchis. Est-il concevable que le plus grand pays d'Afrique en termes de superficie, peuplé de 44 millions d'habitants, n'ait que 15 à 20 librairies dignes de ce nom sur tout son territoire?[14]

[12] Karima Bentoumi, 'Rethinking the Algerian publishing "boom": perspectives of authors, booksellers, and publishers on transnational networks and local infrastructure', *Journal of the African Literature Association*, 14. 3 (2020), 354–72, (p. 358).

[13] On earlier work where Miliani undertook to map and understand the 'champ littéraire' in Algeria, see Hadj Miliani, *Une littérature en sursis? Le champ littéraire de langue française en Algérie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

[14] Hana Menasria, interview with Selma Hellal, 'La Littérature nourrit l'imaginaire et façonne un individu libre', *Liberté*, 22 September 2021, <https://www.liberte-algerie.com>.

Karima Bentoumi lists a range of other impediments including 'high taxes on raw materials such as paper and ink, complications to importing and exporting, bureaucracy, austerity, undeveloped distribution networks, and the failure of the educational system to include locally produced texts into school curriculums'.[15] The combined effect of these constraints is to put pressure on the autonomy of production within Algeria.

<TX>As a result publishers need to establish transnational commercial relations in order to maintain financial viability. For example, Barzakh has developed an astute partnership with Actes Sud, with whom it has had a commercial relationship for a number of years, as well as POL. This relationship was developed further in 2011 with an agreement to co-publish an even greater volume of fiction and essays. Barzakh also has commercial agreements with the fine-art publishing house Le Bec en l'air in France, and with the Arabic-language publishing house Dar El Jadeed in Lebanon. Transnational supports are also available; Barzakh, along with APIC, established by Samia Zennadi-Chikh and Karim Chikh in 2003, are part of the Alliance internationale des éditeurs indépendants. This association receives funding from the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, the Swiss Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer, the American Ford Foundation and UNESCO.[16] Such alliances can help to offset commercial risk and support a broad catalogue. However, an over-dependency on transnational funding or publishing houses in France or in the Middle East can also reduce

[15] Bentoumi, 'Rethinking the Algerian publishing "boom": perspectives of authors, booksellers, and publishers on transnational networks and local infrastructure', p. 358.

[16] Bentoumi, 'Rethinking the Algerian publishing "boom": perspectives of authors, booksellers, and publishers on transnational networks and local infrastructure', p. 360.

the autonomy of Algeria's publishing houses in terms of which authors or themes to support.[17]

Habib Tengour's book series 'Poèmes du monde — Poems of the World', published by Éditions APIC offers an interesting case study of publishing and funding. Tengour presented his series at the 2022 Salon international du livre d'Alger.[18] Some twenty-three titles have been published in the series since 2018. Each publication is bilingual and features a collection of poetry from a single poet outside of Algeria (such as India, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Sweden), whose work is translated into French. In his interview with Regina Keil-Sagawe, Tengour notes:

> <XTT>Part of the edition is financed by the Institut Français in Algiers. And then during the two years of COVID, the TAMAAS art and culture foundation founded by Sarah Riggs and Omar Berrada helped us a lot. The authors supported us, too. I am always looking for sponsors; occasionally I also put in some of my own money.[19]

<TX>As Tengour makes clear, funding is precarious. Another example is the annual review, *Poésie contemporaine de deux rives*, which was first published in 2003 under the editorship

[17] See Bentoumi, *ibid*., and for a more extensive treatment Karima Bentoumi, 'Power and Publishing: Contemporary Arabophone and Francophone Algerian Literature and its National and Transnational Conditions of Production', Thesis, University of Portsmouth, (2020).

[18] In her interview with Tengour, Regina Keil-Sagawe writes that at the Algiers Book Fair of 2022 there were '1250 exhibitors from a total of 36 countries, among them 266 Algerian, 324 Arab and 660 foreign publishers, [who] presented around 300,000 titles'; Regina Keil-Sagawe, 'Habib Tengour and the "Poems of the World"', trans. by Ruth Martin, *Qantara*, 2022, <https://en.qantara.de>.

[19] Keil-Sagawe, 'Habib Tengour and the "Poems of the World"'.

of Téric Boucebci. It was conceived as an opening-up of post-conflict Algeria to poetry in the francophone world. The first volume featured poets from Algeria and France; the second brought Algerian and Belgian poets together; and the third was a collection of Algerian and French Canadian poets. The publications were funded by the Fondation Mahfoud Boucebci. Dr Mahfoud Boucebci, Téric's father, was assassinated by an armed Islamist group as he worked in the Hôpital Drid Hocine on 15 June 1993 and the foundation sought to honour his memory and work by promoting art and education. [20] However, the funding and infrastructure were not adequate and, from what I know, publication of *Poésie contemporaine de deux rives* has ceased. Nevertheless, there are now enough outlets to support poets such as Samira Negrouche who, as Jill Jarvis notes:,

> <XTT> 'has published seven collections of poetry in French, many of them with the innovative publishing houses that have renewed Algeria's cultural sphere in the wake of the 1990s war, such as Éditions Barzakh, Éditions du Tell, Éditions El-Ikhtilef, and Lettres Charnues'.[21]

Negrouche also translates works from Arabic to French and, as is the case in the work of many Algerian writers, Arabic inflects her writing in French.[22] There is some institutional support for this plurilingual literary world. The Prix Mohammed Dib was inaugurated in 2001 for Algerian novels written in French. However, in recognition of the growth (and quality) of

[20] An account of his assassination is the subject of the section 'Deuxième jour', in Assia Djebar, *Le Blanc de l'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), pp. 71–77.

[21] Jill Jarvis, *Decolonizing Memory: Algeria and the Politics of Testimony* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), p. 180.

[22] The importance of translingualism is brilliantly analysed by Yasser Elhariry, *Pacifist Invasions: Arabic, Translation and the Postfrancophone Lyric* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017).

literatures in Arabic and Tamazight, this award — important in terms of financial support and visibility — is now awarded to literary production in all three languages.[23]

Transnational funding also impacts on language choice and representation. Walid Benkhaled argues that recent films — such as *Viva Laldjérie* (dir. Moknèche, 2003) — offer a distorted view of Algeria because international funding bodies based in France stipulate French-language requirements and are more likely to support films that commodify Algeria as exotic or promote secular viewpoints so as to appeal to Western tastes.[24] This returns us to the importance of national supports but also, as Hellal points out above, the need to further develop networks of dissemination and sites of critical debate within Algeria. Francophone Algerian newspapers such as *Liberté, El Watan,* and *Le Quotidien d'Oran* publish book and film reviews, along with interviews with authors, and details of cultural events. Many of Algeria's contemporary writers are journalists — for example, Chawki Amari (b. 1964), Benfodil, Daoud, Haidar, and Meddi — and while this is important to the visibility of literature within the (Francophone) public sphere in Algeria it might also limit the margin for critical distance. The film documentary *Contre-pouvoirs* (dir. by Bensmaïl, 2015) provides a

[23] There is an increasing emphasis upon English. Wagdy Sawahel reports that the Algerian Higher Education and Scientific Research Minister, Tayeb Bouzid has directed the country's seventy-seven universities and higher-education institutions to use English rather than French and Sawahel cites the results of a 2019 survey indicating 'that more than 94,000 participants, or 94.03%, expressed their approval for the enhanced use of English'. See Sawahel, 'Language in Universities: No One-Size-Fits-All Solution', *University World News*, 5 September 2019, <https://www.universityworldnews.com>.

[24] Walid Benkhaled, 'Algerian Cinema between Commercial and Political Pressures: The Double Distortion', *Journal of African Cinemas*, 8 (2016), 87–101.

useful insight as it captures discussions that take place in the offices of the newspaper *El Watan* in the run-up to the presidential elections of 2014. *Contre-pouvoirs* includes images of Benfodil protesting in the streets with fellow members of the contestatory group Bezzef, and of journalists debating the state of Algerian politics and how best to represent it. It suggests a relative autonomy of expression within the francophone public sphere and offers an example of a more disparate international source of funding that includes France 24, Berbère TV (located in France), Mediapart, Institut de recherche et d'études Méditerranée Moyen-Orient, and the Ligue des droits de l'homme, as well as contributions from individual donors, many of whom form part of Algeria's diaspora. These cross-currents — of transnational and national funding for cultural production — work their way across Algerian society, bringing literature to local sites. Benni Yenni is a small village in the Kabylia region is where the writer and academic Mouloud Mammeri is buried. There is a beautiful sculpture upon his grave and in the distance are the hills ravaged by the fires of 2021 but now greening once more. In the village there is the Association culturelle et de loisirs pour jeunes — run by Monsieur Hacen Metref — and its library is stocked with books in French and Arabic. Transnational networks and funding have an impact on the publishing landscape in Algeria but the local conditions of reception also matter. Algerians read, often in several languages, in order to be entertained, to pass time, and to understand. <SH>*Writing after the 'décennie noire'*

<TX>Algerian literature in French over the last twenty years has sought to understand, and not simply represent, the complex interweave of past and present in its many forms. There has been a move away from the *littérature d'urgence* of the 1990s — with its emphasis on realist accounts of the conflict — shifting instead to an exploration of formal or aesthetic

possibilities as a medium through which Algeria's past might be understood.[25] The former army officer, Yasmina Khadra — the *nom de plume* of Mohammed Moulessehoul (b. 1955) — is the most prolific and popular writer whose trilogy on the conflict of the 1990s — *Morituri*, *L'Automne des chimères*, and *Double blanc* — brings the reader into the conflict through the genre of the *roman policier*, at its most *noir*.[26] In these entertaining novels, the honest police commissioner, Brahim Llob, carries out his investigations into gruesome murders, observes the violence of Islamic radicalism, and uncovers corruption amongst the agents of state. Khadra entertains but he also reflects on society and once his identity became known, he left Algeria for France in 2000. The genre of the *roman policier* was also adopted by Boualem Sansal for his first novel, *Le Serment des Barbares*, in order to give form to the *décennie noire* but the writing and complexity of his content establish a stronger literary claim than Khadar's work. The novel begins with the murders of two men — Si Moh, a wealthy corrupt businessman, and Abdallah Bakour an impoverished labourer who returned to Algeria having worked for many years in France for his *pied-noir* employer. Both are presumed to have been killed by Islamist insurgents and Si Larbi, an old cop close to retirement, is given the task of investigating Bakour's death. In what follows, Sansal interweaves unheroic elements from the War of Independence with events from the *décennie noire* and ties of criminality, venality and corruption linking the two periods. The style is often opaque and the unfolding compelling and while his novels since then have been

[25] On *littérature d'urgence*, see Rachid Mokhtari, *La Graphie de l'horreur: essai sur la littérature algérienne (1990–2000)* (Algiers: Chihab, 2002) and Dominique D. Fischer, *Écrire l'urgence: Assia Djebar et Tahar Djaout* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007).

[26] Yasmina Khadra, *Morituri* (Paris: Baleine, 1997); *L'Automne des chimères* (Paris: Baleine, 1998); *Double blanc* (Paris: Baleine, 1998).

successful, I'm not sure if any have surpassed *Le Serment des barbares*.[27] In terms of literary talent and output, Bachi is without doubt the most important contemporary Algerian writer. . His first novel, *Le Chien d'Ulysse*, published in 2001, dealing with the conflict of the 1990s, is set within Cyrtha, an imaginary city that draws its inspiration from Algiers, Constantine, and Annaba; this lateral, geographical condensation is given temporal depth-of-field as Cyrtha is also a derivation of Cirta, the Numidian capital.[28] Cyrtha is a malevolent presence carrying within it the scars of historical events and is shaped by myths of which it is both matrix and conduit. Set within this urban dreamscape are a range of characters, men mainly, of which the central one is Hocine who, like Leopold Bloom in Joyce's *Ulysses* (a key hypotext along with Homer's *Odyssey*), wanders through Cyrtha with its temporal layers and its violence. Bachi has said that this mythical space is one that seeks to undercut the myth of the nation as propagated by those in power and to explore the nature, and mythical

[27] Sansal's novels include *Harraga* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), *Le Village de l'Allemand ou le journal des frères Schiller* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008) won the Grand prix RTL-Lire 2008, Grand prix de la francophonie and Prix Nessim Habif (Belgium); *Rue Darwin* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011) and *2084: La fin du monde* (Paris: Gallimard. 2015) Grand Prix du roman de l'Académie française.

[28] Salim Bachi, *Le Chien d'Ulysse* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001). Bernard Aresu, in one of the first articles on Bachi's work, gives close attention to the polysemous possibilities of Cyrtha and to Bachi's first novel in general; see Bernard Aresu, 'Arcanes algériens entés d'ajours helléniques: *Le Chien d'Ulysse*, de Salim Bachi', in *Paroles déplacées: échanges et mutations des modèles littéraires entre Europe et Algérie*, ed. by Charles Bonn, 2 vols (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), II, 97–107.

dimension, of violence, not only in the 1990s but within Algerian history.[29] Cyrtha is also the location for Bachi's second novel, *La Kahéna*, and the short stories of *Les Douze Contes de minuit*.[30] *La Kahéna* is a brilliantly constructed, densely poetic novel that is narrated in the aftermath of October 1988 and is mainly focalized through Hamid Kaïm who tries to make sense of the state's repression, through his own memories and through his account of the life of Louis Bergagna, who left Malta to make his fortune as a colonist in Algeria in 1900 and who built the house in which much of the story takes place, 'La Kahéna'. The voices in the text, at times difficult to identify, interweave colonial and postcolonial Algeria as well as — in a series of chapters that resonate with Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* — French Guyana and the Amazonian jungles of Brazil.. The novel, and house, become the setting for genealogical and historical unfoldings and revelations that ultimately suggest that attenuated forms of reconciliation that come with the passage of time and through an understanding of the enigmatic traces of the past.

<P>Benfodil's novel *Body Writing: vie et mort de Karim Fatimi, écrivain (1968–2014)* offers a different kind of formal invention. It is an exciting, challenging mix of narrators, genres (poetry, diary, epistolary insertions, press reports), typographical fonts, and images (photographs of documents, graffiti, children's drawings) all of which combine to create a chaotic, yet driven, narrative that recounts Karim Fatimi's experience of October 1988, the *décennie noire* and subsequent years. These diverse forms are as written by Fatimi and posthumously reconstructed, reworked and inscribed into the diary that his wife, Mounia,

[29] For more on Bachi's understanding of myth, see Patrick Crowley, 'Myth, Modernism, Violence and Form: An Interview with Salim Bachi', *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 4 (2013), 2–11.

[30] Salim Bachi, *La Kahéna* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003); Salim Bachi, *Les Douze Contes de minuit* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

began to write in the wake of his death[31] The style is a montage of forms that unsettle the reader as it sounds Algeria's past but also the possibilities of aesthetics in seeking to give that past a shape. With less invention, Meddi, in his novel *1994*, follows a more traditional narrative that takes the form of a palimpsest linking present with past. The central event of the novel involves a group of four young friends during the 1990s who, faced with Islamist insurgency, discuss the anti-colonial violence deployed by the older generation during the War of Independence.[32] Influenced by this, they think that violence should also be used against Islamists in order to defend their idea of Algeria. They plan and carry out a senseless killing that sees the friends disperse, and scatter along separate ways. Two of them — Amin and Sidali — meet again in 2004, and the encounter leads to a form of anamnesis that results in regret, guilt and a sense that the post-memory of the War of Independence had pressed too heavily upon them during the *décennie noire* and that the simple line of division between army and Islamist, good and bad, was not as clear as it had seemed during the 1990s. This sense of the weight of the historical past upon the present is a recurring one in the novels under discussion; Toumi, Bachi, Meddi and other writers raise questions as to what is forgotten and what needs to be remembered.

<SH> What to remember and what to forget

The Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation approved by referendum on 29 September 2005 led to legislation, enacted in 2006, that made it an offence for anyone who 'par ses déclarations, écrits ou tout autre acte, utilise ou instrumentalise les blessures de la tragédie nationale, pour porter atteinte aux institutions de la République algérienne démocratique et

[31] Mustapha Benfodil, *Body Writing: vie et mort de Karim Fatimi, écrivain (1968–2014)* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2018).

[32] Adlène Meddi, *1994* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2017), published in France by Rivages in 2018.

populaire, fragiliser l'Etat, nuire à l'honorabilité de ses agents qui l'ont dignement servie, ou ternir l'image de l'Algérie sur le plan international'.[33] Human Rights Watch saw this as an amnesty for war crimes perpetrated by agents of the state. [34] Allouache's film *Le Repenti* (2012), which received support from TV5 Monde, Fonds Sud Cinéma, and the Centre national de la cinématographie in France, deals with the state's use of amnesties to bring about an end to conflict and gives narrative figure to the abstractions of justice and truth that are freighted with embodied experiences of repentance and grief. The film can be read in conjunction with other contributions to the topic of acknowledging the past, such as Barzakh's publication of *Aspects de la repentance* (2012) edited by Ismaël-Sélim Khaznadar.[35] While the manifest topic was the issue of repentance in the case of France and Algeria, the relevance of the debate to Algeria in the wake of the Charter of 2005 was implicit. To this we could add the novel by Maïssa Bey (b. 1950), *Puisque mon cœur est mort*, and its powerful indictment of the post-1990s peace process.[36]

<SH> Writing with Camus and Kateb

[33] The full text of the Charter is available at < https://www.interieur.gov.dz/index.php/fr/dossiers/168-la-charte-pour-la-paix-et-la-reconciliation-nationale.html#faqnoanchor>.

[34]Article 46 of the Decree Implementing the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation enacted on February 27 2006 is assessed by Human Rights Watch here <https://www.hrw.org/news/2006/02/28/algeria-new-amnesty-law-will-ensure-atrocities-go-unpunished>.

[35] *Aspects de la repentance*, ed. by Ismaël-Sélim Khaznadar (Algiers: Barzakh, 2012).

[36] Maïssa Bey, *Puisque mon cœur est mort* (La Tour d'Aigues: Aube, 2010).

<P> The questioning of the past — both the 1990s and the War of Independence — has led to a return to two of the greatest writers born in Algeria: Albert Camus (1913-1960) and Kateb Yacine. The resurgence of interest in Camus is notable after the *décennie noire*. Though always linked to colonial French Algeria, Camus's notion of the absurd, of the artist's existential choices, and of the actions that emphasise a shared humanity, saw an explicit revival of interest that is evident in his narrative importance to Aziz Chouaki's dramatic monologue *Les Oranges*, one of the first, and possibly most brief and imaginative, representations of Algerian colonial history, which concludes with the *décennie noire* and a poetic appeal for tolerance that draws explicitly from Camus.[37] In 2013, Flammarion published Bachi's *Le Dernier Été d'un jeune homme*, a fictional account of Camus's (real) journey to Brazil in 1949.[38] Throughout the voyage he writes *Les Justes* and thinks back to his youth in Algiers in this unexpected exploration of Camus's desire to write and what prompted it. Also in 2013, Barzakh published Daoud's novel *Meursault, contre-enquête*, and owing to its agreement with Actes Sud, the book was published in France in 2014.[39] Where Bachi's 'Camus' novel was critically well received, it has remained in the shadow of Daoud's work, which was an immediate success and has since been translated into at least twenty languages. The conceit for Daoud's novel is Camus's 1942 work *L'Étranger*, in which Meursault shoots an unnamed Arab on the beach beneath the midday sun. Daoud's narrative

[37] Aziz Chouaki (1951-2019), *Les Oranges* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 1998). On the resurgence of interest in Camus see *Camus et les lettres algériennes: l'espace de l'inter discours*, ed. by Afifa Bererhi, 2 vols (Algiers: Université d'Alger, Faculté des lettres et des langues, 2007).

[38] Salim Bachi, *Le Dernier Été d'un jeune homme* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013).

[39] Kamel Daoud, *Meursault, contre-enquête* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2013). Camus's importance to Algerian literary production has been singular.

takes place seventy years later. It is narrated by Haroun, whose brother Moussa was the Arab who had been shot but left unnamed. Haroun tells the story of their mother's grief and the need to retaliate but also of Haroun's frustration, his sense of being a stranger in his own city of Oran amidst those holding intolerant Islamist beliefs. Lia Brozgal, in an early article, concludes that

> <XTT>Daoud manages to recognize and problematize his work's relationship to its colonial past without becoming a prisoner of it. But perhaps more importantly, *Meursault, contre-enquête* incarnates a praxis that has been a mainstay of the North African novel for as long as it has existed in French, that is the relentless interrogation of literature itself.[40]

<TX>Daoud's sense of literature also appeals to a French market with a taste for Camus and a dislike of Islamist radicalism. Based on his reading of *Contre-enquête*, Joseph Ford observes that 'in the example of Kamel Daoud, the image of the embattled public intellectual pitted against that of a self-reproducing Islamist threat remains common currency in French and international receptions of the Algerian novel'.[41] These three examples reflect the polyvalency of Camus — as life and œuvre — that prompts and informs Algerian literature in French but also the impact of the international market and reception.

Kateb Yacine's reception and legacy differs from that of Camus. Katel died in October 1989 as Algeria began the transition to multi-party democracy. His literary legacy — in particular his foundational novel *Nedjma* — and his belief in revolutionary action, remain key points of

[40] Lia Brozgal, 'The Critical Pulse of the *Contre-enquête*: Kamel Daoud on the Maghrebi Novel in French', in *The Contemporary 'Roman maghrébin': Aesthetics, Politics, Production 2000–2015*, ed. by Patrick Crowley and Megan MacDonald pp. 37–46 (p. 44).

[41] Joseph Ford, *Writing the Black Decade: Conflict and Criticism in Francophone Algerian Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), p. 140.

reference.[42] Since the 1990s writers have re-inscribed 'Nedjma', his allegorical figure of Algeria. These novels include Mosteghanemi's trilogy *Zakirat el Jassad*, *Fawda el Hawas* and *Aber Sareer*, Malika Mokeddem (b. 1949), *Les Hommes qui marchent*; Bachi, *Le Chien d'Ulysse*; Mourad Djebel (b. 1967), *Les Sens interdits*, Chouaki, *L'Étoile d'Alger* and Benfodil, *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*.[43] In each novel, there is at least one moment that reflects upon the star (*nedjma* in Arabic) and its centrality to a symbolic condensation of the nation. These writers resist the afterimage of the War of Independence constructed by the state, in order to reconfigure the present. A few examples. In *Les Hommes qui marchent* Malika Mokeddem's narrator recalls the hoisting of the national flag in July 1962 — a moment of national unity where people and emotion align with the foundation of the state, only to undercut this inclusive event shortly after:

> <XTT> 'Dans les jours qui suivent la déclaration de l'Indépendance, Estelle, la juive algérienne, se suicide au lieu de partir pour la France. Pour consoler son amie Saâdia, Zohra inventa 'une complainte': celle de la juive Estelle, qu'elle surnomma 'Nedjma', l'étoile. Une étoile du Nord venue vers le sud [...] Les mots

[42] Kateb Yacine, *Nedjma* (Paris: Seuil, Collection Points, [1956] 1996).

[43] Ahlam Mosteghanemi's trilogy is composed of *Zakirat el Jassad* (Beirut: Dar al adab, 1993); *Fawda el Hawas* (Beirut: Dar al adab, 1997) and *Aber Sareer* (Beirut: Dar al adab, 2003); Malika Mokeddem, *Les Hommes qui marchent* (Paris: LGF, Livre de Poche, 1999); Mourad Djebel, *Les Sens interdits* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2009), Aziz Chouaki, *L'Étoile d'Alger* (Paris: Balland, 2002) and Mustapha Benfodil, *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2007).

de la dame aux tatouages sombres racontaient la lumière de cet astre dans les ténèbres des cieux'[44]

This image of the star is given further resonance by Estelle's name which is a derivation of the Latin word 'stella' meaning star. This darkening and doubling of the star is repeated in other texts. For example, in Aziz Chouaki's *L'Étoile d'Alger* the main character dreams of becoming a star 'son ambition à lui c'est les étoiles, oui, Michael Jackson, Prince' and adopts the name Moussa Massy as his 'nom de star'.[45] Poverty and unemployment bring him in a different direction. In prison at the end of the novel he joins with the Islamists, is renamed 'Nour' meaning 'light' and becomes a member of the Groupe Islamique Armée. Moussa/Nour moves from the joyful aspirations of an Algerian youth to be a pop star to someone who kills in the name of a violent variant of Islamic radicalism.

Finally, Mustapha Benfodil in his novel *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)* also doubles Nedjma. The narrator reflects:

> <XTT> '*Un manuel de l'amour et de la révolution, avec Nedjma comme porte-parole. Voilà ce qu'il faut !* Nedjma *est* LE *manuel de l'Amour et de la Révolution…Quand je lis Kateb, je n'ai plus envie d'écrire. Divin Yacine ! Kateb nous a complexé à jamais avec sa* Nedjma. *Vise-moi ça, Nada, ma Nedjma beyrouthine!'*[46]

Again, we see a doubling of Nedjma. To write in the wake of the *décennie noire* is to return and rethink the foundational symbols forged through politics and literature and to feel their

[44] Mokeddem, *Les Hommes qui marchent*, p. 236.

[45] Chouaki, *Les Oranges*, p. 16.

[46] Benfodil, *Archéologie du chaos (amoureux)*, pp. 66–7. Italics in the original.

heft; but it is also to challenge them. Benfodil looks to a transnational version — Nada, his Beirut Nedjma — in order to find a space that is not entirely dominated by the weight of Kateb's Nedjma/*Nedjma* yet maintains its poetic and revolutionary force and renews the allegorical, and gendered, embodiment of Algeria.

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<TB>

<New HorizonsSH>

<TX> Writers have looked back but they are also looking beyond Algeria. While some critics have rightly made the case for a more nuanced study of Algerian cultural production in its own right, others have looked to situate Algeria within a wider frame, such as that of the Mediterranean.[47] Algerian writers themselves have looked further. We noted above Bachi's inclusion of Brazil in his novel *La Kahéna*, and his *La Peau des nuits cubaines* is set in Cuba where the narrator, an Algerian filmmaker living in France, meets Chaytan, a political refugee from Iran.[48] Olivia Harrison analyses the transcolonial dimension of Algerian

[47] For an explicit expression of this position see Mireille Rosello, 'Les Tranches circulaires de la grande pastèque: images de l'Algérie', *Expressions maghrébines*, 6 (2007), 1–18. More recently, see Olivia C. Harrison, 'Beyond France–Algeria: The Algerian Novel and the Transcolonial Imagination', in *Algeria: Nation, Culture and Transnationalism*, ed. by Crowley, pp. 222–41. For strong examples of scholars focusing on Algeria, see *Algérie: vers le cinquantenaire de l'indépendance: regards critiques*, ed. by Naaman Kessous, Christine Margerrison, and Andy Stafford (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009) and Jarvis, *Decolonizing Memory*.

[48] Salim Bachi, *La Peau des nuits cubaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 2021).

writing, in particular the recurring engagement with Palestine.[49] Her research marks a welcome spatial turn in studies of the Algerian novel that is also evident in the work of Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, who offers a compelling reading of the Algerian novel situating it within transcontinental influences that reaffirm the Mediterranean.[50] And Jane Hiddleston seeks to open up readings of the Algerian novel that move away from the postcolonial and towards what is broadly understood as world literature and a wider frame of literary and intertextual references.[51]

This ever-widening range of intertextual references moves in different directions. Bachi takes from the *Thousand and One Nights*. And this return to classical Arabic literature and thought can be seen in other texts. In his insightful treatment of North African poetry in French, Yasser Elhariry makes an entirely convincing argument that poets such as Habib Tengour (b. 1947; Algeria) and Abdelwahab Meddeb (1946–2014; Tunisia) engage with source texts from classical Arabic traditions in ways that result in 'creative inflections of intertextual rewriting within the folds of their own poetic work, as they draw on historiographers such as Ibn Hishām, on Sufis such as Ibn 'Arabī'.[52] This is the case of El-Mahdi Acherchour, who took the title of his first volume of poetry from Ibn 'Arabī's *Le Chant de l'ardent désir*.[53] Amari's novel *Balak* deals with chance and the possibility of

[49] Olivia C. Harrison, *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[50] Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, *The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literature across the Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

[51] Jane Hiddleston, *Writing after Postcolonialism: Francophone North African Literature in Transition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

[52] Elhariry, *Pacifist Invasions: Arabic, Translation and the Postfrancophone Lyric*, p. 30.

[53] El-Mahdi Acherchour, *L'Œil de l'égaré* (Algiers: Marsa, 2002); Ibn 'Arabi, *Le chant de l'ardent désir*, poems selected, translated, introduced by Sami-Ali (Arles: Actes Sud, 1989).

revolution; the protagonist is a member of the secret sect of the Zahiroune and the novel references Islamic thinkers such as the Persian theologian Ibn al-Rawandi [54] The novel by Ryad Girod (b. 1970), *Les Yeux de Mansour*, which is set in Saudi Arabia, integrates Sufi thought and cites Rabi'a El Adawiya and other Islamic thinkers.[55] Bachi, in *Le Silence de Mahomet*, looks to the Qur'an and narrates Muhammad's life through the fiction of four people who knew him: Khadija, his first wife; his close friend Abou Bakr, his lieutenant Khalid; and his third wife, Aïcha.[56] These humanizing perspectives make up the book's four parts. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, is silent. Bachi's autobiographical *récit*, titled *Dieu, Allah, moi et les autres*, offers a different perspective, bringing the reader back to Bachi's youth and the sense of guilt that religion induced in him: 'J'allais brûler dans la Géhenne, en enfer, *Djahanem*, pour un temps infini.'[57] While some writers are seeking alternative forms of Islamic thought, one based on Islamic humanism and classical Arabic philosophy, Bachi recalls learning the Qur'an in Arabic and learning Arabic through the Qur'an as a formative, everyday childhood experience.

Sami-Ali's translations from the longer, original text *Tardjumân al-ashwâq*. Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240), poet, Sufi, theologian was born in Murcia, Al-Andalus. Acherchour's volume has an epigraph taken from Ibn 'Arabi's work.

[54] Chawki Amari, *Balak* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2018), p. 69.

[55] Ryad Girod, *Les Yeux de Mansour* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2018).

[56] Salim Bachi, *Le Silence de Mahomet* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).

[57] Salim Bachi, *Dieu, Allah, moi et les autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), p. 14.

<, Bachi's *récit* is a coruscating critique of independent Algeria and gives voice to a deep disappointment in the state's betrayal. In Adimi's first novel, *Des ballerines de Papicha*, we find an everyday where the traces of revolution are distant and the theme of the nation only barely heard. Each, brief chapter provides an insight into its protagonist's life through the detail of the moment and its folds of desire and despair set within the backdrop of everyday life: 'Des enfants jouent avec un ballon usé et déchiré. Un bébé fait ses premiers pas sous l'œil attendri d'une caméra.'[58] In the same year, 2010, Bensmaïl released his documentary film, *La Chine est encore loin* is set in Ghassira where, in November 1954, the killing of two French primary-school teachers and a local Algerian *caïd* marked the outbreak of the War of Independence. Most of the documentary is filmed in the school, or follows the children as they play, argue or chat outside. There is no commentary as Bensmaïl's camera moves from scene to scene and captures what appears to be the everyday real beneath the rhetoric of the state. The lessons that feature in the documentary focus on learning French, on preparing the objectives details of one's life (name, age etc) for a *carte d'identité*. It is difficult not to reflect on the structure of the school built during the time of French colonialism and on the future that awaits the children. In her novel (above), Adimi depicts a reality from which her young protagonists seek to escape, some through drugs and others through immigration.

<SH> *Harragas*

<P>Crossing the Mediterranean to Europe is a feature of many novels and films: Sansal's novel, *Harraga* (2005), Allouache's film *Harragas* (2012) and others deal with the

[58] Kaouther Adimi, *Des ballerines de papicha* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2010). It was published by Actes Sud under the title *L'Envers des autres* in 2011.

clandestine migration. Teguia's road movies, *Rome plutôt que vous* (2006) and *Inland* (2008), are similarly about the desire to leave Algeria. In *Rome plutôt que vous* Kamel and his friend Zina, both in their early twenties, search Algiers and its environs for Bosco, a human trafficker, to obtain a forged passport for Kamel so that he can attempt the journey to Europe. In the second film, *Inland*, Malek, a topographer, is sent inland from Oran to survey the terrain in preparation for a state electrification project. There, at night, he encounters a clandestine migrant, a young woman, from anglophone sub-Saharan Africa, crossing Algeria on her way to Europe. Her fellow migrants have been wounded or killed crossing mines that were planted during the 1990s conflict. Malek decides to help her and their journey begins.

<P>In many ways Teguia's two feature films can be read as one, both thematically and, as Joseph McGonagle observes, in that the names of the main protagonists, Malek and Kamel, are each an anagram of the other.[59] Where Kamel seeks to leave Algeria and reach Rome by crossing the Mediterranean, Malek drives with the woman towards the coastline and then, at her wish, back, southwards, inland, towards an unseen line in the desert that marks a southern frontier. Neither Kamel nor Malek crosses the Mediterranean or the invisible Saharan line of division. They remain between the lines of these geographical spaces in a country they seek to leave but cannot, remaining within an im/mobile grappling with place and desire and unclear of where they are going.

<P>On *Rome plutôt que vous*, McGonagle writes that 'Teguia's film […] ultimately paints a bleak portrait of life and their immediate prospects within contemporary Algeria' on

[59] Joseph McGonagle, 'Going Nowhere Fast: On the Road in Contemporary Algeria in Tariq Teguia's *Rome plutôt que vous*', in *Open Roads, Closed Borders: The Contemporary French-Language Road Movie*, ed. by Michael Gott and Thibaut Schilt (Bristol: Intellect, 2012), pp. 87–102, (p. 100).

the eve of the country's fiftieth anniversary of independence.[60] Guy Austin is similarly sombre in his assessment, arguing in psychoanalytic terms that much of contemporary Algerian film mourns the revolution as lost object. He notes that the soundtrack of *Rome plutôt que vous* features Archie Shepp's 'Brotherhood at Ketchaoua', a track that brings us back to the 'first Pan-African festival, the acme of Algerian cultural status, and in a sense the highest achievement of the new nation, only seven years after the end of the war'.[61] For Austin, the gulf between the optimism and confidence of Algeria in 1969 and present realities is vast and

> <XTT>expressed succinctly but bitterly by Teguia's poignant choice of music. Where the revolution is the lost object in *Youcef* and *Bab el Oued City*, in *Rome rather than you* it is the cultural flowering derived from the revolution that is mourned as lost, in this brief echo of 1969.[62]

<TX>Austin's reading of Teguia's use of Shepp's 'Brotherhood at Ketchaoua' is in many ways convincing but I'd like to propose one that is not about the lost object but about the reactivation of traces of the object that might incite a form of social and political radicalism recalling Algeria's anti-colonial past. Teguia does this through his references to, and sampling of, the Beat poets of the 1950s, Black writers and musicians, as well as more recent music he incorporates into this soundtrack, such as Sonic Youth. If Teguia returns us to the music of the 1960s, it is not to trade in nostalgia or to mourn, but to recover the unsettling rhythms of radicalism that break down form. *Inland* includes a visual reference to the road

[60] McGonagle, 'Going Nowhere Fast, p. 89.'.

[61] Guy Austin, 'Against Amnesia: Representations of Memory in Algerian Cinema', *Journal of African Cinemas*, 2 (2010), 27–35 (p. 32).

[62] Guy Austin, 'Against Amnesia: Representations of Memory in Algerian Cinema', p. 32.

movie *Easy Rider* (dir. by Dennis Hopper, 1969) in the scene where Malek and the young migrant woman ride across the desert-scape on a dune buggy. Instead of Steppenwolf's 'Born to Be Wild', Teguia has a sample from Fela Kuti's 'Fear Not for Man', a track that begins with Fela Kuti citing the Ghanaian president and revolutionary, Kwame Nkrumah: 'The father of Pan-Africanism Dr Kwame Nkrumah says to all black people, all over the world: "The secret of life is to have no fear."' This is not mourning for a lost object but a return to its anti-colonial, anti-oppression energy and will that speaks to the present.

A Return to Revolution's Future

<TX> Two recent novels offer contrasting views on revolution. Damerdji's novel *Laissez-moi vous rejoindre* is a fictional account of the last hours of the real-life Cuban revolutionary Haydée Santamaría, who took her own life in 1980 on the eve of the revolution's anniversary. One of the great revolutionaries, Haydée believed in the power of literature and the ideals of the revolution but she ended her life marginalised by those in power and devastated by the failure of the state to fulfil the promise of revolution.[63] It is difficult not to read the novel as a commentary on Algeria's present. Haidar's novel *La Morsure du coquelicot*, offers a different perspective. The novel is set in a country without name or dates and is the story of a revolution foretold and of the need for violence to overcome authoritarianism.[64] In 2019, three years after the publication of Haidar's novel, demonstrations gathered momentum against the prospect of Abdelaziz Bouteflika's of fifth presidential term. The protests were mainly peaceful, humorous, and polyvocal in that they represented many political and social positions. This movement of protest, the *hirak*, attracted enormous support across Algeria with demonstrations of up to a million people taking place, mainly on a Friday, for over a

[63] Amina Damerdji, *Laissez-moi vous rejoindre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2021).

[64] Sarah Haidar, *La Morsure du coquelicot* (Algiers: APIC, 2016).

year until Covid restrictions on public gatherings were enforced. Fabbiano has analysed the play of past within the present of the Hirak focusing on forms of transposition and commemoration that reactivated memories of the Algerian Revolution.[65] Protestors carried home-made flags that dated from the revolution, images of the revolutionary Larbi Ben M'hidi (1923–1957), slogans reclaiming the past — a reminder that the state's confiscation of the symbols of the revolution could be countered by those same symbols transposed from the past into a political present.[66]

<SH> Coda

<TX>. At the very beginning of the Hirak, February 2019, the Brazilian filmmaker Karim Aïnouz (b. 1966) took a ferry from France to Algeria and began to work on a cinematic travel diary, *O Marinheiro das montanhas* [Mariner of the Mountains], released in 2021. The film beautifully captures night scenes in Algiers before Aïnouz travels to the Kabyle region, to the village of Tagmut Azouz, his father's birthplace. On one level it is a deeply personal film, an elegiac conversation with his deceased Brazilian mother, Iracema. At another level it is a reflection on exile, on Algeria and those who stay, those who go and those who return.. In Tagmut Azouz, he meets someone who has his exact name, Karim Aïnouz, and wonders what his life might have been if his father, whom he never knew, had never left Algeria. The film is also a reflection on the past of the country to which his father

[65] Giulia Fabbiano, 'Le temps long du hirak: le passé et ses présences', *L'Année du Maghreb* 21 (2019), 117–130 < https://doi.org/10.4000/anneemaghreb.5334>.

[66] For more on the Hirak see Amin Allal and others, *Cheminements Révolutionnaires. Un an de mobilisations en Algérie (2019–2020*) (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2021) and Omar Benderra and others, *Hirak en Algérie. L'invention d'un soulèvement* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2020).

had returned in order to help build after 1962. Aïnouz meets some youths in Algiers, one of whom claims to have left Algeria by boat eight times, each time being deported back to Algeria. The youth expresses regret that France left Algeria: had France remained, he says, he might at least have had work. Aïnouz is unsettled by the thought, and throughout the second half of the film, documentary images of members of the Front de libération nationale are spliced with footage of the French army. Interviewed for FilmFest Hamburg, Aïnouz says that *O Marinheiro das montanhas* is a personal story through which he seeks to bring viewers back to the utopian possibilities of the 1950s and 1960s, to that period when Algeria was under construction and the country had not yet been stifled by those in power.[67] Alongside *O Marinheiro das montanhas,* Aïnouz released *Nardjes A.* (2021), a day in the life of a Hirak activist whose grandfather had fought for the Front de libération nationale. Aïnouz comments that both films reflect on colonial violence and, ultimately, upon the process of decolonization and the hopes of those years: that rich moment where everything seemed possible, when things seemed radically different, and where a new world *and* a new Algeria could be imagined. [68] In an interview with *Jeune Afrique*, recorded in 1962 and published in January 1963, Kateb stated that 'la révolution algérienne ne saurait être qu'une tragédie avec,

[67]The interview can be viewed here https://www.filmfesthamburg.de/en/film/marinheiro-das-montanhas/.

[68] The collective *J'ai rêvé l'Algérie. Témoignages, fictions et récits* (2020), composed of short prose pieces (fiction and non-fiction), does just that with each writer asked to creatively engage with the question 'De quelle Algérie rêvez-vous, et pourquoi ?'Chawki Amari and others, *J'ai rêvé l'Algérie* (Algiers: Barzakh, 2020).

au centre de tout, l'*explosion poétique*'.[69] To describe complex, variegated cultural production in a sentence is clearly a distortion, but this one seems ever pertinent to cultural production in Algeria sixty years after the Revolution.

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[69] Kateb Yacine, 'Kateb Yacine à pied d'oeuvre', Interview, *Jeune Afrique* 118 21-27 (1963), cited in B. Aresu, *Counterhegemonic Discourse from the Maghreb. The Poetics of Kateb's Fiction* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993), p. 19.