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CULTURAL HERITAGE SUPERIMPOSITION IN THE NOVELS OF EMMANUEL ROBLES AND MAïSSA BEY (20th AND 21st CENTURY)

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John B. Romeiser, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
CULTURAL HERITAGE SUPERIMPOSITION IN THE
NOVELS OF EMMANUEL ROBLES AND MAïSSA BEY (20th AND 21st CENTURY)

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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Lavinia Adina Horner
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“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”

I would like to thank Professor John Romeiser who guided me from the first day I joined the French and Francophone Studies program at The University of Tennessee. He always had a smile on his face and encouraging words. As I was finishing my dissertation, I felt slightly overwhelmed by the amount of work that had to be done. One day, I worked almost non-stop from 8 AM to 3 PM. When I emailed him the finished product, he said: “Excellent, bravo, quel tour de force! It ‘ain’t’ a Ph.D. for nothing!” Needless to say, I needed a good laugh and his words brightened my day. Thank you for everything! Even though she is not part of my committee now, I would like to thank Professor Douja Mamelouk who introduced me to Francophone literature and was my biggest fan throughout the years. I can never thank you enough! Professor Corbin Treacy, thank you for having accepted to join our UTK team during this process! I appreciate your advice, patience and your response to my (very) many emails! I would also like to thank Professor Alderman who allowed me to audit one of his Geography classes. His class discussions helped me a lot with my research and I also had the chance to meet his wonderful students who shared information about their own research – thank you, Jordan Brasher! Professor Alcocer, thank you for always being excited about my work and for encouraging me! I enjoyed meeting with you during the first stage of my dissertation project and I appreciate all the good advice I received. Professor Cruz-Camara, thank you for being an amazing Director of Graduate Studies, we are all grateful for everything you do to make our lives easier! Thank you for being part of my committee and for the advice you offered during my prospectus defense and during our initial meeting! I don’t even know how to thank my family for all of their help, patience and love, so I will only say THANK YOU!
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the novels of Emmanuel Roblès (1914-1995) with a focus on *Jeunes saisons* and *Saison violente* and those of Maïssa Bey (1950-present) with an emphasis on *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre* and *Bleu blanc vert*. My dissertation builds on science and literature to analyze forms of cultural heritage in colonial and postcolonial Algeria. By examining the literary works of Roblès and Bey, I demonstrate that they explore cultural heritage through the lenses of superimposition – a common technique in medicine where new images are placed over an existing image to detect changes. I argue that the superimposition method employed by Roblès and Bey allows for new images of cultural heritage created by child-like narratives to be placed over monolithic images promoted by adult-like narratives. Thus, this superimposition technique complicates oversimplified images of cultural heritage. When addressing cultural heritage, I focus on language, customs and architecture since language allows for customs to be transmitted from generation to generation, and, in turn, customs are influenced by the landscape of a country. While previous scholarly work has studied the topic of cultural heritage in the novels of Bey and Roblès, it has not explored the superimposition method that both authors employ to address the controversy of cultural heritage in Algeria.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................1

CHAPTER I: ALGERIA AND IMAGES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

1.1 Colonial Algeria ............................................................................................................17

1.2 Postcolonial Algeria .................................................................................................... 36

1.3 Cultural Heritage: On Stage and Behind the Scenes ............................................... 58

CHAPTER II: EMMANUEL ROBLÈS

2.1 Architecture ................................................................................................................. 77

2.2 Customs ....................................................................................................................... 97

2.3 Language .................................................................................................................... 116

CHAPTER III: MAÏSSA BEY

3.1 Architecture ................................................................................................................. 140

3.2 Customs ..................................................................................................................... 163

3.3 Language ................................................................................................................... 185

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................. 208

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................... 214

VITA .................................................................................................................................. 226
INTRODUCTION

“Where children are, there is the golden age” - Novalis

Political ideologies and related notions are loaded concepts requiring explanations in order to be better understood. Racism, heritage, immigration, nationalism, socialism or anarchism - just to name a few - are difficult to define neatly and usually trigger controversy given their complexity and diverse connotations. In his *Le racisme expliqué à ma fille*¹, Moroccan author Tahar Ben Jelloun attempts to clarify such concepts as heritage, slavery, genocide, racism, and anti-Semitism for his ten-year-old daughter. Ben Jelloun has answers, and the child asks questions that will provide clarification and a better understanding of the above-mentioned terms. The words “Explained to My Daughter” present in the title of the book reveal the fact that the adult explains while the child listens to the explanations offered by her father. Following Ben Jelloun’s example, some narratives portray children as the recipients of such explanations, especially when important political concerns are at stake. However, at times, the voices of children release a counter-narrative that questions and renegotiates the adult narrative, allowing for nuances and different perspectives to be added to a story. In his novel, *Le Petit Prince*², French writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry focused on the importance of empowering the voices of children by narrating the story of a pilot stranded in the desert and a young boy fallen to earth from an asteroid. The pilot has chosen his career after an unsuccessful attempt, as a child, to convey meaning through his drawings to adults: “Les grandes personnes ne comprennent jamais rien toutes seules, et c’est fatigant, pour les enfants, de toujours et toujours leur donner des explications” (Adults never

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¹ Racism explained to my daughter
² The Little Prince
understand anything on their own, and it is exhausting for children to constantly offer them explanations. (2) Saint-Exupéry presents us with a fresh perspective in which children are endowed with agency and the ability to explain the world to adults. The writer suggests that the eyes of children have the ability to perceive certain nuances and details that might escape the eyes of the adults; consequently, their perspectives on the world are needed too in order to promote diversity and enrich narratives. From other examples, we can deduce that the voices of children explain experiences, even war-related ones, with a simplicity that can shock the audience:

My father died back in Algeria. France killed him. And my mother died in Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef. She died along with my sister. Before, when we were in the West, France came to beat us, burning things down, taking everything from us. [...] When we arrived in Sakiet-Sidi-Youssef, my mother went to get food with my sister and my aunt’s husband; they were wounded there, my aunt’s husband died. My aunt was wounded, and my mother and my sister died. I was with them but I stayed alive (The voice of the innocent: propaganda and childhood testimonies of war, 105).

The testimony begins with the missing father figure in the life of the child, but it ends with a positive message -- “I was with them but I stayed alive,” which emphasizes the continuity of a voice that will testify to the horrors of war. In this particular case, the child represents the only carrier of stories left in the family, and his memory helps him reconstruct images and emotions. His voice has the role of bringing information from the past and of transmitting it to an audience willing to listen to his story. Voices of children usually have a big impact on audiences and their messages move because of their simplicity and innocence. However, given the young age of children, testimonies can become misleading and initiate an “us versus them” discourse. In the above-mentioned testimony, the child uses the monolithic word “France” which does not allow room for nuances. According to the child’s narrative,
“France” killed his father and “France” came to beat them. All individuals from the country, with various beliefs and life values, are placed into a single camp - the one of the enemy - and they receive a single name: France. Storytelling allows knowledge to be transferred from one generation to another, from one community to another, therefore narratives - oral or written - act as archives that store testimonies and link the past to the future. Those allowed to narrate are able to negotiate various versions of stories and histories and present their opinions on events or people. The more voices are heard, the more opportunities arise to productively complicate dichotomies.

The child characters created by Emmanuel Roblès and Maïssa Bey visit and observe various communities, present their findings to others, then they question and negotiate old myths with the goal of understanding as well as helping others understand possible versions of the same story. This leads me to believe that the two authors portray children as cultural heritage brokers. A cultural heritage broker is an intermediary who has the role of orchestrating the dynamics of various parties and is expected to use diplomacy to bridge the parties and offer fresh ideas. According to Gerard Van Herk, cultural brokers are “people who participate in multiple communities of practice and bring ideas from one into the other, that is, people who introduce innovations in their social networks”. (What Is Sociolinguistics? 198) In the case of the cultural heritage brokers present in the novels of Roblès and Bey, we witness negotiations of identity and belonging. Pierre, a French child in Pierre sang papier ou cendre, questions his parents about the narrative affirming that Arabs are dirty. Pierre observed the Arabs in the privacy of their homes when he visited their community and he can testify about their customs: “Il a demandé à sa mère pourquoi partout on entendait dire que les Arabes étaient sales. Dans la maison de son camarade, tout est propre. Très propre. Les femmes passent leur temps à balayer, à essuyer, à secouer les tapis et à frotter les plateaux de cuivre. Il les a vues” (He asked his mother why everybody was saying that Arabs were dirty.
In his friend’s house, everything is clean. Very clean. Women spend their time sweeping, wiping, shaking carpets and cleaning copper platters. He saw them. (126) The myths and the child’s observations do not match, so he realizes that the information about the Arab community does not emerge from being in contact with the Other, but from inventing the Other3.

I have selected a male writer (Emmanuel Roblès) and a female writer (Maïssa Bey) with different backgrounds and colonial experiences to ensure the progression of the narrative from the middle of the 20th century to the present. The commonality that I can identify in the literary production of these two writers is the plea for nuances and for acceptance of differences. If child characters in Maïssa Bey’s novels promote change, inclusion and new perspectives at the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, Emmanuel Roblès’ characters do not fall short either and live up to the same task in the middle of the 20th century. Roblès’ characters observe divisions, restrictions and invisible fences, and they attempt to cross them each time the opportunity arises:

Nous connaissons mal les Arabes. Au cœur d’un quartier essentiellement espagnol comme le nôtre, nous n’avions en classe aucun camarade musulman. Tout nous maintenait séparés d’eux, les zones d’habitation comme la différence des langues, des religions, des coutumes. Mais, contrairement aux grandes personnes, nous étions sans préjugés à leur égard (We didn’t know the Arabs very well. In the middle of a predominantly Spanish neighborhood like ours, we didn’t have any Muslim classmates in our class. Everything kept us separated from them, the living areas as

3 The “Other” is a term used by Edward Said in *Orientalism* and it refers to the way the West represents the East (the Other): “The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.” (1)
well as differences of languages, religions and customs. But unlike adults, we were without prejudice towards them). (Jeunes saisons, 31)

In this situation, the eyes of children upset established myths by presenting their vision of the world to adults. For them, friendship does not revolve around social class, religion or skin color; a friend is a friend and occasional altercations are quickly forgotten. In the French Algeria of Emmanuel Roblès and Maïssa Bey, the adults - with certain exceptions - consider friendships to be dangerous outside their community, and even if some adults do not oppose these friendships, they fear their consequences. For those who oppose them, the reasoning is quite simple: they are not like us. Edward Said emphasizes the role that culture has when it comes to identity and human interactions: “In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates “us” from “them”, almost with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent ‘returns’ to culture and tradition.” (Culture and Imperialism, Xiii) Emmanuel Roblès uses Madame Quinson in Saison violente as the voice who tells the young child character that one should have only “acceptable” friends. By her definition, acceptable friends should match certain criteria as to the right social class, religion, education, and skin color. A poor friend, a Jewish friend or a friend who has a different skin color is banished from her club: “Je ris lorsqu’un soir Mme Quinson, ayant appris que j’ai Kalfon pour ami, s’exclame d’un ton courroucé: ‘Un juif! Mais tu es fou ?’ Je ne trouve rien d’insensé là mais au contraire de tout simple. ‘Tu ne peux pas te choisir des amis ‘comifô’, n’est-ce pas ?” (I laugh when one evening Mrs. Quinson, having found out that Kalfon is my friend, screams in an angry voice: ‘A Jewish person! But, are you crazy?’ I don’t see anything crazy about it, on the contrary, I think it’s normal. ‘You cannot find the right kind of friends for yourself, can you?). (Saison violente, 97) Children question preconceived theories uttered by adults and explore ways in which they can break down
traditional understandings of identity. Ethnicity is a loaded word, however, when addressing
the colonial population on Algerian land, some scholars choose to divide the inhabitants of
the main cities in Algeria into five main ethnic groups. For example, Alice Kaplan, in her
book *Looking for the Stranger*, states that Albert Camus “grew up in Algiers, a city of mixed
ethnicities – Spanish, French, Arab, Berber, Jewish – in a country conquered in 1830, which
France had not only colonized but annexed, turning the territory into three *départements*
(states).” (9) Alice Kaplan presents us with an inventory of the main ethnicities of colonial
Algeria, however, she does not mention the Italians or the Gypsies. Emmanuel Roblès
mentions the presence of Italians in French Algeria when his young mother announces to him
that she would like to remarry an Italian worker. He also mentions the Gypsies and offers
details about their customs and physical appearance. The Algerian Independence did not
resolve the problem of delimitations and fear of what was perceived as foreign. In her novel
*Bleu blanc vert*, Maïssa Bey warns us from the beginning – the title of her book – that even
colors are problematic in Algeria, shortly after Independence (1962). Ethnic groups that were
perceived as “non-native” became subject to exile and were forced to leave Algeria during
the Algerian War and shortly after the Independence. However, the physical removal of these
ethnic groups was not enough: the symbols that reminded of their presence had to be evicted
from the Algerian public memory.

As a next step, I will briefly describe the type of sources that appear in my
dissertation. I use literature, theory, interviews, documentaries, pictures, online articles as
well as Youtube videos connected to Algeria and to the tension existent around cultural
heritage. The theory of Edward Said is frequently used in colonial and postcolonial studies to
sketch the intricate relationship between the West and the East. Said was born in Jerusalem
during the British Mandate in Palestine. Later in life, he relocated to the United States and
started his career as professor of comparative literature. His most popular works are
Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism. His Orientalism argues that there is no “real” Orient, but simply versions created by narratives, and if certain narratives dominate without allowing other narratives to enter the dialogue, then monolithic expressions come to life in a *vitro* environment that ignores external factors and inevitable transformations. When multiple voices join debates, constructed images can be deconstructed and reconstructed according to new perspectives and life experiences. Factors such as age, gender, religion or ethnic group contribute to shifting images and redirecting gazes. His Culture and Imperialism emphasizes the role that negotiations and narratives play in the political world:

The novel is an incorporative, quasi-encyclopedic cultural form. Packed into it are both a highly regulated plot mechanism and an entire system of social reference that depends on the existing institutions of bourgeois society, their authority and power. The novelistic hero and heroine exhibit the restlessness and energy characteristic of the enterprising bourgeoisie, and they are permitted adventures in which their experiences reveal to them the limits of what they can aspire to, where they can go, what they can become. (Culture and Imperialism, 71)

According to Edward Said, novels empower voices, project ideas, and a careful inspection of their plot will reflect existent or desired power structures. Narrating is creating a platform for various voices to display their version of histories. He associates the idea of nation with narration and builds on the political implications that writing triggers. Culture and Imperialism was published in 1993, and the opening motto chosen by Said is a passage from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad’s quote also presents narratives as the precursors of actions:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the
back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to … (Culture and Imperialism, beginning quote, n.pg.)

Maïssa Bey builds on the same theory in her novels, especially in *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre* where she presents the vision of the count of Bourmont before the physical French invasion in Algeria even begins. Edward Said’s theories will help me underline the importance of narratives in the history of countries. Depending on the voices that gain an audience, political decisions can follow various courses: “For the enterprise of empire depends upon the idea of having an empire, as Conrad so powerfully seems to have realized, and all kinds of preparations are made for it within a culture.” (Culture and Imperialism, 11)

Edward Said – just like Bey and I Roblès – draws awareness about the danger of monolithic narratives and the destructive effect they have when they manage to gain control over the minds of people.

With over thirty-nine works published and two doctorates, the voice of Malek Chebel represents a valuable source for studies analyzing cultural heritage in Algeria. Chebel is the author of *L’imaginaire arabo-musulman*, a book published at the same time with Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). In *L’imaginaire arabo-musulman*, Malek Chebel reflects on customs related to music, dance, playing instruments as well as on language, calligraphy, genealogy, landscapes and aesthetics:

Bien que le Prophète ait stigmatisé toute recherche généalogique remontant à la période anté-islamique (‘C’est une science sans utilité et c’est une insanité sans conséquences nuisibles’, aurait-il dit), les Arabes […] eurent de nombreux généalogistes. Les plus connus en sont Zoubeir Ibn Bakkar (870 apr. J.-C.), Ibn Hajjar (vers 1449) et l’auteur d’Ansab al-Achraf (litt. La généalogie des nobles), Al-Baladhouri (895). (Even though the prophet has stigmatized all genealogical research
dating back to the pre-Islamic period (‘It is a useless science and a madness without harmful consequences’ it is supposed he would have said), the Arabs […] had many genealogists. The best known ones are Zoubeir Ibn Bakkar (870 AD), Ibn Hajjar (around 1449) and the author of Ansab al-Achrar (The genealogy of nobles), Al-Baladhouri (895). (L’imaginaire arabo-musulman, 38)

According to Chebel, genealogy enthused many researchers even though the prophet did not promote this practice. This leads me to believe that heritage was considered to play an essential role in knowing, and therefore in acting. Heritages enables claims regarding belonging, rights and limits. Devoted heirs will go to extremes to preserve what they consider rightfully theirs. The nostalgia for a past legacy often times reflects a need for a smooth continuity even when this desired smooth continuity is contradicted by reality. Malek Chebel discusses the Berber presence in Maghreb, therefore destabilizing the myth of the ‘pure’ Arab past in Algeria: “Prenons le cas du Maghreb. Entièrement berbère à l’aube du VIIIe s. après J.-C.” (Let’s analyze the case of Maghreb. Completely Berber at the beginning of the 8th century AD). (L’imaginaire arabo-musulman, 17) After this statement, Chebel also provides details about the various waves of people that found a home in Maghreb throughout the centuries, emphasizing the beginning of a process that led to future intricate heritages.

Evelin Kilian and Hope Wolf’s Life Writing and Space (2016) examines the connection between narratives and space, and argues that racial, social and sexual topographies are explored in discourses. The book mentions Lefebvre’s theory that links spaces with subjects, and therefore argues that space is constantly reshaped: “From Lefebvre and other studies influenced by his work, space emerges as a product of social relations and cultural practices. It becomes a force field of mechanisms of power and control, of inclusions, exclusions and social hierarchies.” (5) Movement and shifting create alternative spaces for subjects and escape fixed topographies and clear frontiers. Bachelard’s theory on spaces is
also discussed, and the authors present Bachelard’s opinions on illusory attempts to seal spaces from new influences. According to Bachelard, spaces that subjects left behind continue to accompany them and infiltrate themselves in the new spaces, thus creating interconnected layers that cannot be clearly separated: “An entire past comes to dwell in a new house.” (8) I mostly use this theory about spaces in the subchapters of my dissertation that focus on architecture in colonial and postcolonial Algeria.

Since Emmanuel Roblès’ novels bring to life the voices of children belonging to the Spanish community of Oran, I include the theory present in the collection *Emmanuel Roblès et l’hispanité en Oranie* (2012) to my research: “Que de plus naturel que ce retour d’Emmanuel Roblès à Oran où il est né le 4 mai 1914 dans une famille originaire d’Espagne, où il a grandi, entouré de femmes - son père, ouvrier du bâtiment, étant décédé dans les mois précédant sa naissance - jusqu’au remariage de sa mère avec (Oh, trahison de l'hispanité!) un ouvrier italien?” (What could be more natural than this return of Emmanuel Roblès to Oran, where he was born on May 4th, 1914 in a family from Spain, where he grew up surrounded by women – his father, a construction worker, having died in the months before his birth – until the remarriage of his mother (Oh, treason of the Hispanic heritage!) with an Italian worker?) (11) The collection contains the works of Guy Dugas, Yahia Belaskri, Pierre Rivas – to mention just a few – and articulates aspects of layered heritages in Oran during French colonialism: “L’élément espagnol, la population immigrée d’Espagne, a tenu une place considérable dans le peuplement de l’Oranie dès les débuts de la colonisation française, au point d’être à certains moments majoritaire” (The Spanish element, the immigrant population of Spain, has held a considerable place in the settling that took place in Oran from the beginning of French colonization at the point of almost becoming the majority at times). (101) This population of Spanish descent worried the political parties who attempted to keep them away from power and portray them as dangerous to society. Myths about their violence
and unpredictable behavior started to arise in popular narratives as well as in scholarly works. According to Pierre Rivas, a passage from *L’Algérie qui s’en va* (1887) by Docteur Bernard depicts the Spanish population as troublemakers who enjoyed killing and instigating the rest of the population:

> Oran n’est ni française, ni arabe. Les Espagnols, maîtres jadis d’Oran, le sont encore : batailleurs et turbulents, dont les sérénades nous cassent la tête, qui rossent nos agents. S’ils ne jouaient que de la guitare. Mais ils jouent aussi volontiers de la *faca*, ce petit couteau avec lequel ils savent si bien mettre du rouge sur les chemises blanches (Oran is neither French, nor Arabic. The Spaniards, who used to be the masters of Oran, still are to this day: belligerent and unruly, they drove us insane with their serenades and beat our agents. If they only played guitar! No, they also played with their *faca*, a little knife with which they turned white shirts red). (*Emmanuel Roblès et l’hispanité en Oranie*, 102)

Doctor Bernard’s narrative creates a monolithic block that includes all Spaniards without allowing room for alternative spaces. His discourse aims to stir up negative emotion among the audience who reads his text in 1887. During that time, Algeria had been under the French rule for fifty-seven years, yet it still faced revolts from the part of various ethnic groups who rejected their domination. The bias description follows the patterns described by Edward Said in *Orientalism* in the sense that Bernard’s discourse creates the image of Spaniards, an image that does not take into account the various personality types and actions of the Spaniards living in colonial Algeria. Bernard selects isolated events and incidents and presents them as the only characteristic of the Spanish community. In my dissertation, I will allow the voice of Emmanuel Roblès to expose his version about the customs and ideologies existent in the Spanish community of colonial Algeria, and I will superimpose the images created by multiple narratives.
Benjamin Stora was born in 1950 (the same year as Maïssa Bey) in Constantine, French Algeria. He is a French historian considered by many scholars an expert on North Africa. William B. Quandt states: “Benjamin Stora, the author of the first full-length history of Algeria in recent years, knows Algeria, its people, and its languages in a way that few Westerners do.” (Foreword, VIII, Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History). Stora was born in a Jewish community, so after Algeria gained its independence in 1962, he was forced – along with other groups of people perceived as “non-natives” – to leave the country. Among his most famous works, we can mention “La gangrené et l’oubli : la mémoire de la guerre d’Algérie (1998)”, “Histoire de l’Algérie depuis l’indépendance : 1962-1994 (1994)”, “La guerre des mémoires : la France face à son passé colonial (2007)”, “Les Guerres sans fin. Un historien, la France et l’Algérie (2008)” or “Juifs, musulmans : la grande séparation (2017)”. His book Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short Story was published in 2001, and discusses ways in which the past of Algeria mingles with the present. It emphasizes the fact that during the War of Independence violent confrontations were aimed not only at France, but they also divided the Muslim population. Stora nuances conflicts, opinions and events, thus complicating the tumultuous history and cultural heritage of Algeria. He aims to show that even the Muslims fought over the meaning of cultural heritage after 1962 and, while some claimed a “pure” Arab past, some rejected the monolithic discourse that ignored centuries of different influences. Stora mentions the fact that the values of Arab Islamism promoted after 1962 meant ignoring the Berber specificity as well, forging this way a present that the independent population struggled to embrace: “To embolden people to construct a future, it was necessary to promote the ambiguity of a national ancestral mythology, even if that meant letting go of Berber specificity. The creation of a nation forms a consensus without concerning itself with the ambiguities of real history.” (XII) Stora presents us with the dangers of dichotomies and clear identities and the violence they trigger. According to him,
Algeria is still confronted with the idea of the nation even forty years after the Independence of 1962. Furthermore, the relationship between France and Algeria continues today on both sides in the form of (il)legal emigration and tourism. This process highlights that the ethnic groups present in both countries cannot be perceived as an indecomposable bloc, but as a melting pot.

This dissertation also builds on the theory of Sara McDowell’s *Heritage, Memory and Identity* which discusses the existence of layers that can be peeled off in order to reveal nuances of identities. In McDowell’s opinion, heritage is a highly political process that is constructed and deconstructed according to the needs of power and it is used to validate decisions regarding rights, changes and principles. She emphasizes that people tend to “mark” places through their actions and confer them features that might or might not be easily debated. Some inflexible features attributed to heritages lead to protests since they don’t accept multiple narratives. In order to feel that they belong to a place, people will “mark” it with their language, their customs and with other signs of their presence. Individuals or small groups of individuals tend to focus on a few practices and declare them as the norm, thus ignoring other presences and their contributions. As a reaction, the ignored minorities might attempt – at times – to “unmark” the landscape and bring their language, customs and memories to a territory. In the case of both colonial and postcolonial Algeria, cultural heritages also became means of justifying access to power. Territories underwent “markings”, “unmarkings” and other “markings” as leaders gained control over Algeria. Languages, customs or signs attributed solely to previous political systems were banned from the narrative of the country. As an example, the French language was associated only to the colonizer and the MSA (Modern Standard Arabic) abruptly became the new chosen language after 1962. Even though Algeria was French for 132 years, the leaders of Independent Algeria fabricated a fresh cultural heritage that ignored anything that was not associated with Arab
Islam. This invented and unrealistic monolithic heritage placed the independent Algerian population in a state of displacement since they struggled to function in “their” new MSA. Sara McDowell quotes J. Tosh’s *The Pursuit of History* (1991) on the discrepancy often encountered between monolithic expressions of cultural heritages and historical facts: “Tosh suggests that while social groupings need a record of prior experience, they also require a narrative of the past which serves to explain or justify the present, often at the cost of historical accuracy.” (*Heritage, Memory and Identity*, 42) While Tosh’s argument brings an interesting perspective on the relationship between heritage narratives and historical accuracy, I will add that “accuracy” is a loaded word that can lead to inflexible versions of events. The historical “accuracy” perceived by the French during the colonialism process in Algeria differs from the one perceived by the colonized population. To take it a step further, even the French opinions were divided on the subject of colonial Algeria. Some individuals perceived the invasion of the Algerian land as a civilizing mission, while other intellectuals like Simone de Beauvoir or Sartre condemned the French war in Algeria and the brutal methods used by the French army to repress protests. So, the “accuracy” of the civilizing mission is disputed on various levels, and it is problematic to limit the meaning of this mission to a single interpretation.

When discussing cultural heritage, I focus on heritage debates in colonial and postcolonial Algeria, but I also provide a brief survey of current global tensions issued out of struggles over legacies. I use recent articles, as the online article from The Washington Post titled *These New Jersey Candidates Were Attacked with Xenophobic Messages. They All Won.* (2017) which presents the cases of Jerry Shi and Falguni Patel. According to the article, the candidates won two of the three open seats on the Edison Township Public Schools board, but not without drama. They faced slogans such as “Don’t let TERRORISM take over our town”, “MAKE EDISON GREAT AGAIN!” or “DEPORT!” Falguni Patel, a woman born in
the United States and a respected lawyer, declares: “I was born and raised in New Jersey. To see the word ‘deport’ on my picture – where are you going to deport me to?” The passion for clear heritages and untangled identities continues to haunt societies and a nostalgia for a “pure” utopian past where everything was great leads to acts of violence and threat of personal safety. Similarly, in postcolonial Algeria we can notice the desire to make Algeria great again, implying that those perceived as intruders – and that later on would be called “pieds noirs” – should abandon a space that belongs only to “natives”. In order to depict an official image of cultural heritage in Algeria, I use Youtube videos from the Al Jazeera channel. On the other hand, I use the videos of the youtuber HoudammDz https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sg4-8aUWsnM to provide a behind-the-scenes image of cultural heritage painted by ordinary citizens of Algeria.

The dissertation is organized into three chapters and each of them is divided into three subchapters. The first chapter traces monolithic expressions of cultural heritage in colonial and postcolonial Algeria and the violence that arises from claiming a monopoly on heritage. This chapter justifies my choice of insisting on language, customs and architecture, and it also alternates images of cultural heritage perceived on the Algerian political stage and behind-the-scenes. My second chapter discusses the complex cultural heritage of colonial Algeria present in the novels of Emmanuel Roblès with a focus on language, customs and architecture. The third chapter follows the format of the second chapter, but it discusses cultural heritage in the novels of Maïssa Bey. While this third chapter insists on postcolonial Algeria, at times, it alternates sequences of colonial and postcolonial images of cultural heritage. Throughout the second and the third chapter, I will address the role that the superimposition method has in creating alternative images of language, customs and architecture with the help of adult and child narratives. The main questions that my dissertation will answer are the following:
- How is the image of cultural heritage portrayed in the novels of a male writer of Spanish descent who focuses on colonial times in Algeria?

- How is this image portrayed by a female writer of Arab descent who focuses mostly on postcolonial times, but who also discusses colonial times based on her childhood experience as well as on her research?

- What aspects of cultural heritage interest each of the writers the most: architecture, customs, language or all? Why?

- Why do both authors employ child-like narratives and adult-like narratives when addressing the topic of cultural heritage in Algeria?

- What is their tone, message? Is it mostly descriptive, theoretical or does it rely on experience, observations and gathering data to back up their literary texts? What does this tell us about the Maghrebi novels that narrate cultural heritage in colonial and postcolonial Algeria?

- Do any of these writers confess that they rely on data when they write?

With these questions in mind – in tandem with others that will occur throughout the writing process – I will analyze the image of cultural heritage in Algeria constructed by Roblès and Bey with the help of child-like and adult-like narratives.
1.1 Colonial Algeria

Algeria was invaded by France in 1830 and, despite the numerous riots and protests throughout the years, it officially remained under the French rule until 1962. While some refer to this event as an invasion, other testimonies lead to believe that it was concomitantly perceived as a “civilizing mission” from early years. In Benjamin Stora’s *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short Story*, we find out that a violent reprisal in Ouled Riah in 1845 took the life of thousands of men. This event led to the following testimony: “That last incident led a member of the investigating commission, formed by the kingdom of France in 1833, to say: ‘We have surpassed in barbarism the barbarians we came to civilize” (5) Based on this testimony, we can see that part of the French authorities claimed that France arrived in Algeria with the intent to “civilize” the barbarians. Stora also mentions that the French presence in Algeria encountered debates over a limited or a total occupation: “The proponents of limited occupation were Berthézène (February-December 1831), Voirol (April 1833-July 1834), Desmichels (1834), Trézel (1835), and Damrémont (November 1936-1937)” (4). To these suggestions of limited occupation, Stora adds the plans of total occupation proposed and installed vehemently by Clauzel (1830-1831), Rovigo (1831-1833), Vallée (1830-1840), and, above all, by General Bugeaud. The final decision to make the overseas colony French initiated the formation of a monolithic image of Algeria that denied the presence of the various ethnic groups and their languages and customs on the colonized territory. Stora mentions that, as the French domination continued to grow in strength, various acts of reprisal continued in the form of forced marches, detentions and violent methods of torture: “The colons enjoyed full rights; the colonized were ‘subjects’ not ‘citizens’, liable to special provisions: tallage, corvée, and detention without due process” (6).
The use of the word “subjects” emphasizes the desire to not only create monolithic expressions of cultural heritage, but to also obliterate the right of the colonized individuals to be considered ‘citizens’ of Algeria.

The efforts to start and maintain a monolithic image of cultural heritage in Algeria are presented by Edward Said as well. Said starts his *Culture and Imperialism* with a quote from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and agrees that invasions of territories often times imply depriving the invaded population of their previous customs and imposing a new monolithic identity: “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (beginning quote, no page). The expression “taking away” suggests the lack of compromise and the beginning of heritage theft. Said continues his idea by mentioning the razzias meant to eradicate the Muslim protests through the use of extreme violence. Similarly to Benjamin Stora, Edward Said speaks of generals and officers that embraced the concept of total occupation and the establishment of a monolithic identity for Algeria: “Ruin, total destruction, uncompromising brutality are condoned not only because legitimized by God but because, in words echoed and re-echoed from Bugeaud to Salan ‘les Arabes ne comprennent que la force brutale’” (182). The name of general Bugeaud appears both in Benjamin Stora’s and in Edward Said’s presentations of political figures who promoted a monolithic identity for colonial Algeria.

The French total occupation was justified by the “civilizing mission”. The colonizer aimed to progressively assimilate the population by imposing their ideologies. In accomplishing this goal, language became an important tool, and, according to Osama Abi-Mershed:

The indigenous populations are absorbed, in principle, into the national citizenry, regardless of historical and cultural specificities. Accordingly, the second prong of
assimilation, the cultural corollary to the political integration of the colony, envisions remaking its natives, as well as its non-French settlers, in the image of France by propagating among them national education, language, aesthetics, and mores (*Apostles of Modernity*, 2).

It is interesting to observe that the French language was imposed not only on Arabs or Berbers, but on the other non-French settlers of colonial Algeria as well. The Algerian pied-noir writer of Spanish descent, Emmanuel Roblès (1914-1995), evokes the struggles of his Spanish community to maintain their language and customs. His autobiographical novel, *Saison violente*, displays linguistic confrontations between certain individuals from the French community and individuals from his Spanish community. The Spaniards fear losing any connection with their cultural heritage, and especially with their language. The signs of belonging to a linguistic heritage different than the dominant one becomes the target of mockery. In the above-mentioned novel, the French character, Mme Quinson, initiates a shaming discourse at the sound of the Spanish accent and she mocks the way French words are pronounced by a speaker from a different community. It appears that concessions or middle ground settlements were not granted to the colonized population. The “civilizing mission” did not aim for shared values and languages, but for a dominant culture.

Osama Abi-Mershed elaborates on the topic of the French “civilizing mission” and mentions that in the years 1889-1890, the assimilation was rejected in the favor of the association. The new generation of colonizers perceived assimilation as inflexible and unrealistic, therefore they advocated for a more collaborative approach. Abi-Mershed states that, while in theory, the association ideology was embraced, in practice, assimilation continued:

In 1919, Louis Vignon, a professor at the famed Ecole Coloniale, tried to put an end to the sterile ongoing political debates on colonial theory. Association, he observed,
was merely a ‘disguised tendency’ to assimilation, and certainly, from the vantage point of their objectives, the two policies seemed destined, in principle, to merge at some distant focal point (9).

The “civilizing mission” statement is contradicted by a second pretext for the French invasion in Algeria: the incident that occurred in 1827, when the Dey of Algiers hit the French Consul-general with a fly-swatter. According to this narrative, the French invasion did not have an educational purpose, but a punitive one. Patricia Lorcin states in Imperial Identities that the soldiers that embarked for Algeria had hostile attitudes towards the colony: “Some were imbued with the same religious exaltation that had spawned the Crusades; others felt a hatred towards the Barbary states kindled by the dire economic straits of the past few years. It was generally held that a settlement on the coast of Africa would provide precious benefits” (19). As we can notice, the colonial discourse in Algeria follows various paths instead of adhering to a single direction. There are multiple discourses, and, while some voices claim that the conquest sprung out of their desire to help Algeria through missionary work, other voices insist that their invasion meant to punish rebellious leaders who displayed disrespectful behavior. The work of Nicholas Thomas underlines the existence of what he calls “colonialisms” and states:

In this emphasis I am inspired by, if not rigorously following, the work of Pierre Bourdieu; his interest in located subjectivities informs an analytic strategy which situates colonial representations and narratives in terms of agents, locations and periods; these terms are conducive to a far more differentiated vision – of colonialisms rather than colonialism (Colonialism's Culture, 8/9).

Given all these differences in approaching the new conquered land, I will also offer an overview of the differences between the theoretical and the practical colonial policies that classified the “native” population of Algeria. In Imperial Identities, we read that the Kabyles were seen as
more malleable, unlike the Arabs who were characterized by fanaticism. Despite these theoretical classifications, the colonizer did not make a difference in practice between the Kabyles and the Arabs as very few French individuals had any contact with them. In addition, all other ethnic groups of colonial Algeria were sheltered under the same name: non-French settlers. This broad view of the colonized population allowed treating the population as a unified block that could easily be conquered and educated according to the same norms. Also, it is interesting to observe that the French seemed to have identified easier with the Kabyles since they were sedentary and not fanatically religious, while they could not easily identify with the Arabs since they were perceived as fanatically religious and nomadic. However, despite the preference for the Kabyles, the French troops still initiated violent attacks in an attempt to conquer and subdue them. In the case of the Arabs, the violence of the attacks was seen as the only solution for a rebellious and unpredictable population:

For general Bugeaud, the Arabs would always be elusive, difficult to control and a potential danger. Their nomadic social organization and their religion necessitated the use of force to keep them in order and served as a justification for the scorched-earth policy used against them. Arab belligerency was seen essentially in terms of religion (Imperial Identities, 32)

This superficial classification of the Kabyles and the Arabs was made with the purpose to conquer them, and not to understand their layered cultural heritage. Despite the claim that the “civilizing mission” was the final goal, the extension of mainland France to the Algerian land became the ultimate ambition. An initial intellectual curiosity about the Other cannot be overlooked, however, this curiosity progressed into a campaign of domination to be accomplished at all costs.

As follows, I will present certain key scenes regarding the French presence in colonial Algeria and I will use episodes from Maïssa Bey’s Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre, a novel that
depicts the conquest of Algeria through the lenses of the superimposition technique. Bey mixes adult narratives and child narratives, but, in this subchapter, I will insist on adult narratives that promote a monolithic image of Algeria and initiate a chapter of violence between the colonizer and the colonized population. Similarly to Benjamin Stora and Edward Said, Bey mentions historical figures and their discourses throughout the colonial process: “Tous ont en mémoire les paroles prononcées juste avant leur départ par le commandant en chef de l’expédition, le comte de Bourmont : ‘Les nations civilisées des deux mondes ont les yeux fixés sur vous ! La cause de la France est celle de l’humanité !’” (Everybody remembers the words uttered right before departure by their commander in chief of the expedition, the count of Bourmont: ‘The civilized nations of two worlds are watching you! France’s cause is the cause of humanity!) (18) The count of Bourmont (1773-1846) was named by Charles X in 1830 to lead the expedition in Algeria.

According to Bourmont’s discourse, France was justified to invade Algeria since its mission had the approval of all the civilized nations. However, the French “civilizing mission” encounters a violent reaction in 1832 from the Arabs, as they initiate a counter-mission led by Abd-el-Kader (1808-1883), the one chosen to fight the djihad against the French army:

Although Abd-el-Kader was a marabout, whose father had been a dignitary in the Qadiriya brotherhood, he assumed the mantle of leader and undertook to rid Algeria of the French, and later create an independent theocratic state, unsullied by any contact with European Christianity. His emergence as leader hardened resistance to the French, forcing them into a spiral of troop reinforcement and increasing encroachment into the hinterland (Imperial Identities, 17).

4 Holy War
5 Muslim monk
This dichotomous split of Algeria into Arabs versus French forces transformed the country into a battlefield that did not spare human lives from both sides for more than a century.

Both leaders portrayed their country as a “civilization” that could not approve of an unfamiliar presence. One of the most debated scholarly works regarding monolithic civilizations is Samuel Huntington’s article *The Clash of Civilizations?* published in 1993.

Huntington affirms:

> It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations (22).

Huntington’s article received its share of criticism from various scholars, including Edward Said. As a response, he affirms in *The Clash of Ignorance* (2001) that Huntington relies on a vague notion of something called “civilization identity”. Said also observes that Huntington opposes the civilization of Islam to the Western civilization. In Said’s opinion, the personification of enormous entities called “the West” and “Islam” is recklessly affirmed. In addition, he states that this personification is similar to watching a cartoon where Popeye and Bluto bash each other mercilessly. The plurality of every civilization is ignored and clear frontiers between identities are simplistically traced.

In *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre*, Maïssa Bey also criticized monolithic approaches and attitudes that do not allow room for nuances in colonial Algeria. She implies that decisions are taken in the private salons of the rich, without taking into account the pain they will inflict on ordinary people. In her novel, Bey imagines the reasons that one of Alexis de Tocqueville’s friends offers in order to justify the violence used in Algeria. Tocqueville’s
friend invokes the right of war and states that violence has the goal to maintain a necessary image of a dominant presence:

Ce sont là, suivant moi, des nécessités fâcheuses, mais auxquelles tout peuple qui voudra faire la guerre aux Arabes sera obligé de se soumettre… Je crois que le droit de la guerre nous autorise à ravager le pays et que nous devons faire soit en détruisant les moissons à l’époque de la récolte, soit dans tous les temps en faisant de ces incursions rapides qu’on nomme razzias et qui ont pour objet de s’emparer des hommes ou des troupeaux (These are, in my opinion, unfortunate measures that all people who want to fight the Arabs will be forced to apply… I think that the law of war authorizes us to destroy the country and we must do so either by compromising the harvests at the time of crop or at all times by executing fast incursions called razzias that aim to seize men or herds) (24).

Various parts of this paragraph become of great interest as Maïssa Bey attempts to convey certain subtle critical messages. The first message she transmits focuses on the desire of the French to continue validating their presence on Algerian land. The French man confesses the unethical use of violence, yet he justifies it later by stating that anyone who confronts the Arabs has no other solution to address their behavior than extreme violence. The second image that Bey creates evokes the real acts of violence inflicted upon the colonized population of Algeria. The proportions of this violence are highlighted by the third message of the author who uses the word “ou” in “s’emparer des hommes ou des troupeaux” to allow room for different interpretations. A possible interpretation would be that the French soldiers took men or herds during their razzias. However, this choice of words could also imply that the French soldiers did not make any difference between colonized men or herds, hence the clever use of “des hommes ou des troupeaux”. During violent reprisals of revolts in colonial
Algeria, the famous “enfumades”\textsuperscript{6} or “enfumages” were used by the French army to force the rebels to surrender when they hid in caves. The caves would be sealed and guarded by French soldiers while smoke was released inside. Refusing to surrender, many rebels died asphyxiated in those caves. The smoke out technique is usually reserved for bees, and beekeepers use a device called a bee smoker to generate smoke and calm down the bees while the beekeeper opens and rearranges the structure of the beehive. Later in the novel, Bey mentions this technique used by the French soldiers and states:

Sans omettre le moindre détail, ils raconteront tous les instants de cette formidable victoire sur des adversaires en partie désarmés. Ce que plus tard on appellera ‘enfumades’ – néologisme peut-être plus indiqué pour l’espèce humaine que le terme ‘enfumage’, réservé aux abeilles. Non sans expliquer pourquoi, à bout de patience ‘face au fanatisme sauvage de ces malheureux’, ils se sont vus obligés de mettre le feu aux fascines préparées dès le matin (Without omitting the slightest detail, they will narrate every moment of this amazing victory over their partly disarmed opponents. What will later be called ‘enfumade’ – a neologism probably more appropriate for the human beings than the term ‘smoke-outs’ reserved to bees. Not without explaining why, at the end of their patience ‘because of the savage fanaticism of these unfortunate people’, they saw themselves forced to start burning the wood prepared early in the morning) (34/35).

Bey states that the image of a dominant power in colonial Algeria will be justified to the future generations of France by explaining the need to “civilize” savage fanatics. She insists on the importance of creating – or forging – images through narratives. Images that manage to impose their validity will testify to the righteousness of actions initiated and perpetuated by

\textsuperscript{6} Smoke outs
the political leaders of countries. In this respect, the famous Colonial Exhibit of Paris (1931) had the role of presenting images of the benefits of the French presence on the land of various colonized countries. This exhibit was later called the First Human Zoo since it forced the population brought from different French colonies to enact the “savage”, and therefore justify the need of a “civilizing mission” in the eyes of the metropole. The monolithic image of a dominant French civilization that was contributing to the slow progress of “savages” was presented to a curious population in Paris. This image intended to demonstrate that the French efforts began to show promising results in the savage part of the world, and the colonized population was slowly modeled according to the image of mother France.

In *Pierre Sang Papier ou Cendre*, Bey also insists on the French attempt to impose the validity of its mission in Algeria: “Madame Lafrance n’écoute que ceux qui exaltent la noblesse de sa mission. Les thuriféraires qui savent et clament haut et fort que s’il est bien un devoir auquel ne peuvent se dérober les races supérieures, c’est le devoir d’humanité envers les races inférieures” (Mrs. France only listens to those who praise the greatness of her mission. She listens to the confident ones who know and claim loudly and clearly that if it is indeed a duty that the superior races cannot abandon, then it is the duty of humanity towards the inferior races) (56). The humanity and nobility of the “civilizing mission” leaves no room for other opinions that might undermine its legitimacy. Once again, Maïssa Bey stresses that the French political leaders are the ones in charge of the monolithic narrative, not the ordinary population who is forced to obey their orders. While many individuals from mainland France agreed with the decisions taken by their political leaders in colonial Algeria to subdue the colonized population, many others did not see the benefits of the French invasion on Algerian land. There are testimonies of French veterans who confess that, at the time, their refusal to fight was not accepted by the leaders of the French army. Therefore, to avoid being labeled as traitors, they become part of a war they were not willing to fight. Their
testimonies also state that none of the sides had a monopoly on savagery during the Algerian War. The French veterans testify that when French soldiers declined to perform certain acts of torture, harkis (Muslim Algerians paid to serve as auxiliaries in the French army) were hired to kill their own “brothers”. The French lawyer, Jacques M. Verges (1925-2013), was called “the devil’s advocate” for launching his famous provocative question: “Is a killer a terrorist or a patriot?” Verges defended the Muslim revolutionary Djamila Bouhired, sentenced to death for planting bombs in cafés during the Algerian War for Independence. Jacques Verges questioned the monopoly on evil and rejected the Us vs. Them narrative by insisting on tangled decisions throughout colonial time and even after 1962.

So far, I have presented “forged” monolithic images of colonial Algeria that are addressed in the works of various critics and historians, and I have also presented monolithic images addressed by Maïssa Bey in her literary work. I will continue with the pied-noir writer of Spanish descent, Emmanuel Roblès, and I will bring to light the voices that create a monolithic image of colonial Algeria in his novels. I will also use a passage from Patricia Lorcin’s *Imperial Identities* as a starting point. In this passage, she mentions that the population of Algeria at the time of French conquest was about 3 million, and it included Arabs, Berbers, Turks, Kouloughlis, Andalusians, blacks, Jews, and Infidels. Lorcin states: “During the colonial period the French were inclined to overlook this diversity and, Jews apart, to view the population as a dichotomy of Arabs and Berbers” (2). If the population of Algeria was perceived by the French as only Arab or Berber, it would be interesting to

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7 Many scholars address the issue of forged images, narratives or values in colonial Algeria. As an example, Benjamin Stora refers to the French attempt to forge a monolithic image of citizenship in colonial Algeria and states: “Citizenship, once established, would belong to them, not to Muslim Algerians, and by denying citizenship to others, they forged an extreme and acute version of nationalism” (*Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, XII Preface) As a consequence, rather than abiding by the famous “liberté, égalité, fraternité” values, the French leaders in colonial Algeria presented to the colonized population a distorted version of what it meant to be French.

8 A person who does not believe in religion
observe what place was reserved to the rest of the population and how they were classified. Emmanuel Roblès states that the population of Spanish descent was seen as almost French, but not “pure” French. Roblès states:

Les ‘Néo-Français’, comme on appelait les Algériens d’origine espagnole, étaient extrêmement chauvins, et leurs anciens combattants de 14-18 participaient à tous les défilés patriotiques, élisaient des députés affreusement réactionnaires, ne savaient comment manifester leurs bons sentiments pour être admis dans la communauté française. En dépit de quoi, on les tenait toujours pour des ‘Cinquante-pour-cent’ (The ‘Neo-French’, as the Algerians of Spanish descent were called, were extremely chauvinistic and their former veterans of 14-18 used to participate to all the patriotic parades, used to elect members who were terrifyingly reactionary, did not know how to manifest their good feelings in order to help them be accepted by the French community) (Jeunes saisons, 77).

As we can see in this passage, the Spanish population, despite its efforts to integrate in the French community of Algeria, was never fully accepted and was classified as the “fifty percent”, meaning only fifty percent French. Roblès also address the place of the Jews in this “Arab-Berber or French” narrow classification. In Roblès’ autobiographical novel, we see that, when the child Roblès demands to know why the Jews are the targets of hate and why they are depicted as dangerous, the answer comes promptly from a French citizen: “Ils se soutiennent trop entre eux, fils. C’est trop ce qu’ils se soutiennent” (They support each other too much, son. They support each other way too much) (Jeunes saisons, 85). It appears that the unity among the Jews was perceived as powerful and threatening to the rest of the communities, therefore it triggered hateful and, often times, violent reactions: “Il arriva qu’un matin le quartier juif, derrière le Théâtre, fut envahi par une foule d’énergumènes et qu’il y eut un mort rue de la Révolution. Il s’agissait d’un garçon de notre âge qui partait se baigner
et reçut une balle en plein front. ” (It happened that one morning the Jewish neighborhood, behind the Theatre, was invaded by a crowd of maniacs and there was a dead person on the Revolution Street. It was a young boy of our age who was going to swim and who got shot straight in the forehead) (86). Xenophobia collects victims of all ages and hate seems to trigger random acts of violence among the Jewish population. Their power to stay united worries the French leaders of colonial Algeria who do not accept any possible strong competition. The unity of the Jews is immediately associated with danger and with an imminent threat to the French dominance. It seems that, for the French leaders, unity has a positive aspect only if it applies to their growing community, but not when it applies to other communities that they don’t perceive as “pure” French.

I will briefly go back to the expression “cinquante-pour-cent”. This expression refers to all individuals in colonial Algeria who wanted to adhere to the French community but were never fully accepted and perceived as “pure” French. According to Roblès, the French leaders accepted the help offered by these individuals who were willing to become French, but they never considered them French. In addition, anyone who did not match the French standards was not allowed to join the French community. Skin color, language (accent, in particular), religion, customs and beliefs – all of these conferred or denied the right to be classified as “pure” French. The further individuals would deviate from the French standard image (therefore the more difficult to be assimilated), the less chances they had to be considered as possible future French citizens. In Imperial Identities, we read more details about the French monolithic standard in colonial Algeria:

The genuine religious differences between Arab and Kabyle were given an interpretation leading to the conclusion that the Kabyle, in contrast to the Arab, was indifferent to religion (thus could be a good subject for conversion) and his society was intrinsically secular, hence closer to the French (3).
The decision that all individuals belonging to the Kabyle community were not interested in religion - or in practices related to religion - led to stereotyping the entire community and to narrowing down its diversity. A monolithic cultural identity was forced upon them, thus ignoring their nuances and layers.

In the case of the individuals belonging to the Spanish community, we can notice prejudice linked to their skin color as well as shaming linked to their language and customs. In the novel *Saison violente*, the child Roblès has to suffer humiliation from the part of madame Quinson who questions even his Spanish descent given his dark complexion. She assumes that the child does not know his real father who, she assumes, was probably a Gypsy: “Ce que tu es brun! Un vrai gitan! Tu es sûr que ton père, ton vrai père, n’était pas un gitan? ” (You are so dark! A true gypsy! Are you sure that your father, your real father, was not a gypsy?) (108). Madame Quinson decides that anyone with a dark complexion must be classified as a Gypsy. She imposes her inflexible narrative on the child, thus creating an image of him that she considers real. When the young Roblès cannot pronounce French words with an impeccable French accent, she humiliates and criticizes him by mocking his accent. All the critique from Mme Quinson makes Roblès realize that the door of the French kingdom is closed for those belonging to the Spanish community in colonial Algeria: “Au contraire, ‘cinquante-pour-cent’ m’atteignait au vif tant, à mes yeux, cette expression marquait la volonté de me laisser à la porte, de m’empêcher d’entrer dans le royaume” (On the contrary, ‘fifty-percent’ hurt me the most since, in my opinion, this expression was marking the desire to leave me at the door, to stop me from entering the kingdom) (111). The kingdom who stated that its mission aimed to civilize seems to give up on those who cannot perform according to strict criteria. Any signs of a past “savagery” that could not be eradicated will prevent access to the dominant class. This restrictive attitude leads to a symbolic violence between the ones that are rejected and the ones who reject. Before arriving
at the stage of physical violence, this symbolic violence lingers in the minds of those who feel excluded and humiliated: “Puta! Cabrona! Basura!… Les insultes défilaient dans mon esprit, et si elles ne passaient pas mes lèvres elles devaient jaillir par mes yeux, car Mme Quinson parut les capter. – Et vous le voyez ! Vous le voyez ! Regardez cette tête ! S’il pouvait m’assassiner, il le ferait !” (The insults were marching in my head, and, if they did not come out of my mouth, they still seemed to have gushed through my eyes since Mrs. Quinson seemed very aware of them. – And you see him! You see him! Look at this face! If he could kill me, he would!) (Saison violente, 103) Violence is one of the first words that comes to mind when addressing colonialism in Algeria. The colonial process in Algeria as well as the Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962) are seen as the most violent outbursts from the colonies owned by France. We have observed that language was a reason for conflict in colonial Algeria, and any deviation from the main language – including an imperfect accent – excluded individuals and did not allow them to join the dominant cultural heritage of the country. In addition, customs that did not match French customs were another reason to remain at the kingdom’s door. Roblès mentions the superstitions that were deeply ingrained in the mind of the individuals belonging to the Spanish community. In an attempt to punish those who treated him unjustly, the young Roblès decided to make use of magic.

In Saison violente, he describes the way he used red ants to cast spells on his enemies. His French friend, Véronique, is a child of his own age who notices the red ants and does not understand his “practices”:


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9 Spanish for “Whore! Bitch! Trash!”
Véronique perceives him – in this situation – as the Other. She distances herself from him and from his unfamiliar practices and states: “On dit que vous autres, les Espagnols, vous êtes très cruels. C’est vrai ?” (We say that you others, the Spanish people, are extremely cruel. Is it true?) (150). She uses the pronoun “on” which implies that it is not clear who states that the Spanish population is cruel. These rumors place all individuals from the Spanish community into the same mold, and, even more importantly, they place walls between them and the “savages” they do not understand. This fear of the Other leads to separations and symbolic violence among the ones that are separated. In colonial Algeria, the languages, customs and beliefs of various ethnic groups merged and mutated, making it difficult to cut through tangled heritages. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said builds on the theories of Martin Bernal, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger and affirms:

Studies such as Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena* and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* have accentuated the extraordinary influence of today’s anxieties and agendas on the pure (even purged) images we construct of a privileged, genealogically useful past, a past in which we exclude unwanted elements, vestiges, narratives (15).
According to Said, cultural heritage is impure and tangled, and the desire for a monolithic image of cultural heritage implies forging narratives in order to create a dominant image of what it means to belong to a certain ethnic group. These forged and purged images of language, customs and landscapes pave the way for future tensions among groups who claim they are incompatible and separated by clear frontiers. Yahia Belaskri (1952-present) is an Algerian journalist, novelist and short story writer born in 1952 in French Algeria. In Oran l’espagnole, l’héritage oublié from the collection Emmanuel Roblès et l’hispanité en Oranie he states that, despite the monolithic image of a single language in colonial Algeria, various languages – including Spanish – were part of the active linguistic inventory of the country. Belaskri affirms: “Je me rappelle que, dans ma propre famille, tout le monde connaissait la langue espagnole” (I remember that in my own family everybody knew Spanish) (33).

Despite the exchanges among different ethnic groups and despite the existence of various languages in use, Algeria is portrayed solely as French. The plurality of the country is ignored, and a single cultural identity is invented.

This technique of creating a monolithic image of cultural heritage in French Algeria serves as a model for the leaders of postcolonial Algeria. The same blindness towards the plurality of the country is embraced by those who claim that, the morning of the Independence, Algeria is “purely” Arab. Both Said and Stora observe this continuation of denying layered cultural heritages. Stora states:

In addition, it brought the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) to power, a group that presented itself as the sole heir to Algerian nationalism. Benefiting from extraordinary popularity among the Algerian masses in 1962, it subsequently took root as the only party and, for nearly thirty years, negated any political or cultural pluralism (Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History, 29)
The new leaders of postcolonial Algeria most likely observed that the monogrammed image of French cultural heritage in Algeria seemed to have started because of an excessive national pride displayed by the French leaders. The Algerian colony had different names, such as “overseas France”, “là-bas”, but it was also labeled as part of the “empire”. I will insist more on the pride and the fall caused by this pride, and I will present the case of general de Gaulle who could not imagine France without grandeur. Also, the French radical politician Albert Sarraut (1872-1962) could not image the dissolution of the French Union. This union depicted the French colonies as entities inseparable from France, and Sarraut stated that the French Union was “a magnificent tunic of Nessus, which could not be pulled from the shoulders without tearing away the flesh itself” (The French Colonial Myth and Constitution-Making in the Fourth Republic, 1) According to his words, the colonies represented a reason for national pride and the loss of the colonies would have negatively affected France’s image. Charles de Gaulle expressed the same opinion and established high standards for the French conquest policy. During the war, the colonies became even more important in restoring France’s image as one of the greatest powers in the world. In 1943, de Gaulle stated during a discourse in Algeria:

    In the end, one is never wrong to believe in France; one never ultimately regrets having aided her or having loved her. […] Integrated into the old Europe…but spread out over the entire world by its territories and its humanitarian influence, the France of tomorrow will be among the front rank of the nations who are great. (The French Colonial Myth and Constitution-Making in the Fourth Republic, 84)

The enthusiastic support of colonialism ignored the many problems and rising tensions in colonial Algeria. This ignorance of problems is emphasized by the testimony of a pied-noir, Daniel Mesguish, an actor and movie director. He confesses that only after the pied-noir exodus of 1962 did he realize the discrepancy between the unrealistic image he had of French
Algeria and the image he discovered later in life: “Nous, Français, vivions tellement repliés sur nous-mêmes, dans une espèce d’aveuglement ou du moins de myopie monstrueuse” (We, the French, lived so focused on our own lives, surrounded by blindness or at least by a monstrous myopia) (*Mon Algérie: 62 personnalités témoignent*, 33). For the majority of them, French Algeria was a natural extension of metropolitan France and the existence of other ethnic groups – as well as their struggles – were overlooked, leading to a tension that built over the years and finally culminated in the violent War for Independence.

Mesguish admits that, in his youth, he was not even aware that Algeria was on a different continent than France:

> Je me souviens d’avoir découvert fort tard que l’Algérie faisait partie du continent africain. Le jour où, devant un atlas, j’ai réalisé que nous n’étions pas – comme je le pensais alors – dans un pays comme l’Italie ou l’Allemagne mais que nous vivions, que nous « marchions » sur une terre d’Afrique (pour moi l’Afrique, c’était Tarzan!), j’ai reçu un choc (I remember that I have discovered quite late that Algeria was part of the African continent. The day when, in front of a world map, I came to realize that we were not – as I was thinking all along – in a country like Italy or Germany but that we lived, we ‘walked’ on African land (for me, Africa was Tarzan!), I was in shock)


Mesguish’s testimony reinforces Said’s Orientalism theory regarding the way the West perceives the East. According to Said, through inflexible discourses, the East becomes a narrow fabrication of the West, thus denying its rich culture and values.

The superimposition method used by Roblès and Bey – a method that I will present in detail in subchapter 1.3 – broadens stereotypes and inflexible discourses regarding colonial Algeria. The rigid colonial policies blinded by pride, the ignorance of some French individuals, the
disdainful attitude of other French individuals, as well as the intentional attempt to segregate ethnic groups led to acts of rebellion throughout the years and, eventually, to the events of 1962.

In this chapter, I emphasized the continuous efforts of French political leaders to create a monogrammed image of Algeria and to label it as French in order to maintain the greatness and the grandeur of the growing French empire. In the subchapter that follows, I will insist on similar efforts but, this time, on the part of the political leaders of the newly independent Algeria. I will try to discover similarities and differences between the approaches followed by the French leaders and the ones followed by FLN leaders and draw conclusions accordingly. I will also insist on the myth of bringing greatness to Algeria again, and I will find out to what particular time of greatness Algeria was supposed to return. Since Algeria was not 100% Arab at the time of the French invasion of 1830, it would be interesting to see how far in the past the FLN leaders wanted to go in order to accomplish their goal of returning to a “pure” Arab country.

1.2 Postcolonial Algeria

In 1962, Algeria gained its independence after more than a century of French colonial rule. In *Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, Benjamin Stora states that both France and Algeria attempted to efface traces of their violent actions and impose discourses that “cleansed” their images. In the case of France, the amnesties that occurred at the end of the colonial presence in Algeria allowed people to forget a past that no longer made them proud. Also, “In Algeria, a commemorative frenzy founded the legitimacy of the military state, dissimulating the pluralism and clashes that had existed between the pro-independence movements and within the FLN itself” (*Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History*, 30) The new political leaders of Algeria promoted a monogrammed image of an Arab postcolonial Algeria.
as opposed to the previous monogramed image of a French colonial Algeria. It is interesting to observe how far in the past Algeria would have to return to (re)acquire its “pure” Arab past since, at the beginning of the French colonialism in 1830, Algeria was not “purely” Arab.

Yahia Belaskri affirms in the book chapter titled *Oran l’espagnole, l'héritage oublié*:

Tout le monde s’accorde à dire que la ville d’Oran a été fondée en 903 par des marins andalous. […] Et ces marins, musulmans ou pas – certainement musulmans – viennent d’Espagne, sont espagnols. Il faut signaler, à cet égard, qu’au temps de l’âge d’or de la civilisation musulmane, il était de bon ton, en Andalousie et en Sicile de se prénommer Ali ou Abdallah. Le roi Roger II de Sicile lui-même se targuait du titre arabe Al Mu’tazz bi-llah (Everybody agrees that the city of Oran was founded in 903 by Andalusian sailors. […] And these sailors, Muslim or not – certainly Muslim – come from Spain, they are Spanish. In this respect, it should be mentioned that at the time of the golden age of the Muslim civilization, it was trendy in Andalusia and Sicily to be named Ali or Abdallah.

The king Roger II himself boasted with his Arab title Al Mu’tazz bi-llah) (*Emmanuel Roblès et l’hispanité en Oranie*, 29/30).

Further, we find out that this Spanish presence lasts in Oran until 1792 when the Turks take over the city. But even after the Turkish invasion, the Spanish presence continues in Algeria and in 1837 the Spaniards “représentaient 40,86 % de la population européenne de la ville” (represented 40,86% of the European population of the city) (*Emmanuel Roblès et l’hispanité en Oranie, 30/31). Also, Algeria was home to Berber, Italian, Jewish, Gypsy and French communities that, despite the attempt to keep them segregated, interacted on a daily basis. These interactions led to mutations in different compartments of the Algerian society. Traditions, languages, beliefs and landscapes, all mingled and formed a hybrid society that, the morning of the Independence, was asked to forget its plurality. Amnesia became the main characteristic of the Algerian postcolonial society and any attempt to connect with anything
that was not “purely” Arab was perceived as a sign of treason. The FLN leaders promoted the image of a “pure” Arab Algeria, but they could function in French and not in the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) they imposed on the population.

Since in the previous subchapter I insisted on the colonial leaders who forged a monolithic image of a “pure” French Algeria, in this subchapter I will present the postcolonial leaders who claimed a new Arab Algeria. Ferhat Abbas (1899-1985) was one of the FLN members during the Algerian War for Independence. Initially, he was in the favor of a French Algeria, but after observing the unfair treatments of the Muslim population, he decided to change his opinion in the favor of “Algériens Algériens”\(^\text{10}\) (https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=ferhat+abbas+le+manifeste+du+peuple+algerian&
view=detail&mid=770DC67968145082A841770DC67968145082A841&FORM=VDRVR
V, minute 1:08). In this interview, Abbas claims that the escalating violent confrontations during the Algerian War for Independence did not make him happy and he attempted to find a way to end them. He testifies that there were many disagreements among the FLN leaders and he considers the entire war a drama. According to Abbas, a monolithic image of an Arab Algeria was negotiated among the strongest Muslim leaders. Abbas summarizes his past mission as an FLN member by three main duties: finding money, finding weapons and focusing on educating new FLN members according to the rules dictated by the most influential FLN members. Ahmed Ben Bella (1916-2012) was the first president of Algeria, elected in 1963 and overthrown by a military coup in 1965. In 1945, after hearing about the violent reprisals of Setif and Guelma\(^\text{11}\), he decided to get involved in the fight against the French colonialism in Algeria.

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\(^{10}\) In French, “Algériens Algériens”

\(^{11}\) In 1945, the French colons killed approximately 45,000 rebels, event that built up the tension that led to the Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962)
In 1962, Ben Bella declared that “the credo of Algeria’s political and diplomatic action will be the liquidation of colonialism in both its classic and disguised forms” (*Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora Since 1787*, 9) According to Ben Bella, any traces of the colonial past will be removed from the Algerian landscape and the country will return to its (imaginary) “pure” Arab past and cultural heritage. The writer Anouar Benmalek (1956-present) declared in October 2006 that Algeria took to the extreme the amnesia promoted by the FLN:

Notre pays, l’Algérie, semble avoir poussé au plus haut point la qualité paradoxale suivante : ne pas oublier d’oublier ! L’amnésie devient la caractéristique principale de notre comportement national, peuple et pouvoir confondus pour une fois (mêmesi c’est pour des raisons parfois antagonistes) face à la répétition des soubresauts sanglants endurée par l’Algérie (Our country, Algeria, seems to have pushed to the highest level the following paradoxical feature: don’t forget to forget! Amnesia becomes the main characteristic of our national behavior, people and power mingled for once (even if for sometimes antagonistic reasons) against the repetition of the bloody upheavals suffered by Algeria) (*Emmanuel Roblès et l’hispanité en Oranie*, 33).

Even though he advocated for the unity of all Arabs and for the return to a glorious Arab past, Ben Bella was soon replaced by Houari Boumediene. Afterwards, Ben Bella was “kept in detention until 1979 when he was placed under house arrest until 1980. After his release he went into exile in Europe and became an opponent of the FLN government” (*Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora Since 1787*, 10) It is interesting to observe how Ben Bella’s political views changed when he himself became the victim of extreme ideologies and erratic decisions. In *Bleu blanc vert*, Maïssa Bey mentions Ben Bella and his attempt to create a monolithic image of a “pure” Arab Algeria: “Parce que maintenant
on est des Arabes à 300%. C’est Ben Bella, notre nouveau chef historique, qui l’a dit : nous sommes Arabes, Arabes, Arabes. Comme ça, on a bien compris” (Because now we are 300% Arabic. It is Ben Bella, our new political leader, the one who stated it: we are Arabs, Arabs, Arabs. This way, we definitely got his message) (17). Corbin Treacy states in Contested Cartographies: Maïssa Bey’s Bleu, blanc, vert that the portrayal of Algeria as purely Arab created a conceptual violence against those who did not identify as Arab, “creating an antagonism dispensed along linguistic and ethnic lines” (405). It seems that after 1962, political leaders reconfigured independence in order to fit their political agenda, thus placing the new generation in a state of confusion.

The fight for political power did not come to an end in postcolonial Algeria, but it simply switched agents. Bey highlights the fact that children are the collateral damage of war and they are also part of the violence that divides the country: “Mais depuis qu’on est tout petits, on est dans la guerre” (But every since we’re young, we’re part of the war) (Bleu blanc vert, 64) The author emphasizes that even though for the political leaders people appear as simple numbers that cannot stand between them and their goals, in reality, war affects everyone from a young age. In Bey’s novels, the complex dynamics of decolonization and their effects on the population are presented in detail while focusing on individual war experiences rather than on vague concepts of returning to “normal”. I will further present another simplistic way of approaching the decolonization process and its effects on both the colonizer and the colonized. In Decolonization and Its Impact: A Comparative Approach to the End of the Colonial Empires, we read that Léon Blum12 addressed the Franco-Vietnamese tensions and affirmed:

12 Blum (1872-1950) was a French politician elected the Prime Minister of France on three occasions
According to our republican doctrine, colonial possession only reaches its final goal and is justified the day it ceases, that is, the day when a colonized people has been given the capacity to live emancipated and to govern itself. The colonizer’s reward is then to have earned the colonized people’s gratitude and affection, to have brought about interpenetration and solidarity in thought, culture and interests, thus allowing colonizer and colonized to unite freely (5).

Léon Blum chooses to portray the French presence in its colonies as a beneficial process for the colonizer and the colonized. Furthermore, he believes that the most rewarding effects of colonialism are to appear after decolonization. However, in the case of Algeria, the processes of colonization and decolonization triggered displacement on both sides as the leaders attempted to impose inflexible discourses regarding language, customs, beliefs and rights. Not only did the feelings of displacement not end in 1962, but they were accentuated by the massive exodus of the population that was considered “non-native” on Algerian land. The “native” individuals remaining in Algeria after 1962 were also denied the right to identify as they wanted, and they were forced to accept a rigid identity dictated by their new leaders. Another example of ignorance when addressing the colonies of the French empire comes from the part of Etienne Clémentel (1864-1936) who served as Minister of Colonies: “Appointed French Minister of Colonies in 1906, Etienne Clémentel is said to have exclaimed: ‘Ah, the colonies, I didn’t know there were so many!’” (Decolonization and Its Impact: A Comparative Approach to the End of the Colonial Empires, 17)

From the discourses of Blum and Clémentel we can infer that the leaders in charge of political decisions were often ignorant when it came to the realities that surrounded them. In many cases, traditions and values were invented, and some scholars argue that even the process of decolonization was invented since the radical changes presented by political leaders did not address the problems with which their countries continued to be confronted.
In *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*, Todd Shepard states that France invented the concept of decolonization in order to justify with logical reasons its separation from Algeria. In his opinion, France attempted to portray that it accomplished its mission and it was time to leave the colonial past behind. Shepard also states that the colonization and its effects did not suddenly stop in 1962, but they have had lasting consequences for both France and Algeria throughout the years. Shepard criticizes France for depicting the separation from France as a normal step in moving forward, thus ignoring the implications of a common past that its colonial policy created: “As we’ll see, French responses to the Algerian Revolution gave birth to the certainty that ‘decolonization’ was a stage in the forward march of history, of the Hegelian ‘linear History with a capital H’” (2). This linear History that Shepard brings into discussion is also criticized by the pied-noirs who were forced to leave Algeria after the Independence of 1962. Many of these pied-noirs confess that the linearity sketched by the political leaders of both France and Algeria does not exist. Furthermore, they find the term “pied-noir” simplistic, reductive, and they admit that they detest it because it classifies them all as the European population who left Algeria, without nuancing their stories, struggles and identity. Paule Granier, actress and former Art professor in Alger, affirms that she never liked to be classified as a pied-noir: “On a souvent prétendu que l’Indépendance était due au fait que les Pieds-Noirs (je déteste cette expression) avaient fait ‘suer le burnous’” (It was often stated that the Independence was caused by the fact that the Black Feet (I hate this term) made the colonized people work hard for them) (*Mon Algérie: 62 personnalités témoignent*, 30) Despite her genuine attachment to the Algerian land, she confesses that, after 1962, she felt isolated and unwelcomed. However, even after the exodus to France, she continues to identify as Algerian and to describe Algeria as her home: “L’Algérie! J’y ai laissé une fois pour toutes mon cœur, mon âme. J’ai demandé...

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13 *Burnous* – a long, loose hooded cloak worn by Arabs
que l’on mette sur ma tombe : ‘Née à Alger, Algérie, sa vraie Patrie” (Algeria ! I left there, once and for all, my heart, my soul. I asked to have written on my tombstone: “Born in Algeria, her real homeland”) (Mon Algérie : 62 personnalités témoignent, 31) As Paule Granier states, the term “pied-noir” was often a vague term used pejoratively. The movie director Alexandre Arcady\(^1\) attempts to nuance the definition of this vague term, and he offers us his perspective on what it means to be a pied-noir. He thinks that the carefreeness that one can encounter in Algeria is one of the many characteristics of a pied-noir. He gives the example of his father who decided to have a child at the age of fifty-eight and he affirms: “Lui aussi a été piqué par le virus de l’insouciance” (He was also contaminated by the virus of recklessness) (Mon Algérie: 62 personnalités témoignent, 28). He continues and states: “Ça, c’est très pied-noir. Il fallait vivre le moment” (This, this is very black-feet. One has to live the moment) (Mon Algérie: 62 personnalités témoignent, 28).

Lost between worlds, they longed for the Mother country that abandoned them. A lot of them testify that they were not fully accepted in France either, thus facing a double rejection and displacement. Arcady states that, despite the discourses that claimed the return of Algeria to a “pure” Arab past, many French colonial landscapes remained in their initial state:

Rien n’a changé, le square Bresson, la place du Gouvernement, la Mosquée, la Pêcherie, le Port, tout, quoi ! C’est une ville à grand spectacle qui continue à vivre comme avant 1962. Dans les rues, dans les immeubles des beaux quartiers, les couleurs, les odeurs sont les mêmes. On a seulement changé la figuration (Nothing changed, the Bresson Square, the Government Square, the Mosque, the Fishery, the Port, nothing, what! It is a spectacular city that continues to exist the way it did before

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\(^1\) Born in Algeria in 1947, he immigrated to France at the age of fifteen
1962. On the streets, in the buildings of the beautiful neighborhoods, the colors, the smells are the same. Only the configuration was changed) (Mon Algérie: 62 personnalités témoignent, 28).

As Arcady affirms, the postcolonial discourse portrayed the possibility of a quick return to a “pure” Arab identity with regard to the linguistic department, the traditions and the landscapes of Algeria. But this pride of creating a monolithic image of Algeria – also an ambitious objective of the previous French leaders – failed to succeed. This objective remained in a project-state without being able to become reality in postcolonial Algeria. Many other testimonies reinforce Arcady’s statement that postcolonial Algeria continues to store traces of its intricate colonial past. After visiting the Independent Algeria, other pied-noirs address the lack of linearity claimed by political leaders of Algeria, and they state that Algeria and France have an ongoing relationship that did not disappear during “decolonization”. Jean-Pierre Stora and Monique Ayoun return from a visit to Algeria in 1989 and confess:

Chose curieuse, la plupart des Algériens continuent d’appeler la place des Martyrs de son ancien nom : place du Gouvernement, la rue Didouche-Mourad, rue Michelet, et la rue Ben-M’hidi, rue d’Isly. Sur tel mur décrépi, de vieilles publicités pour Crush, Slim ou le chocolat Kohler n’ont pas été effacées. […] Passé et présent se côtoient et se superposent, formant une étrange mosaïque (Curiously enough, the majority of Algerians continue to call the Martyrs Square by its previous name: Government Square, the street Didouche-Mourad, Michelet street, and the street Ben-M’hidi, Isly street. On a certain wall in ruin, the old ads for Crush, Slim or Kohler chocolate were not erased. […] Past and present are merging and superimposing, forming a strange mosaic) (Mon Algérie: 62 personnalités témoignent, 19).
According to these testimonies, the linearity of a decolonized Algeria that started fresh in 1962 is illusory. Instead, the past and the present are intermingled with the country still harboring many traces of its hybrid past. The pied-noirs are not the only ones who miss the past and rejoice their return to Algeria. To their surprise, the Algerians, even after they discover that visitors are pied-noirs, welcome them without resentment: “Les jeunes gens furetaient autour de nous, ils se mettaient en quatre, ne savaient plus quoi faire pour nous aider. Nous aider à quoi ? Leur gentillesse nous faisait fondre” (The young people were snooping around us, gathering in groups of four, they didn’t know what else to do to help us. To helps us with what? Their kindness was melting our hearts) (Mon Algérie : 62 personnalités témoignent, 19). After hearing the confessions of pieds-noirs, we can observe that the official version of postcolonialism and the everyday life of individuals do not seem to match. The rigid “before 1962 and after” classification is not reflected in the language, traditions, landscapes and beliefs existing in Algeria or in France. In the statements of pied-noirs, we observe that many landscapes in Algeria still remind them of the plurality of the colonial past. Furthermore, traditions that were treasured in French Algeria are retained and transmitted from generation to generation by the pied-noirs who left in 1962. Arcady relates a personal detail from his life where he describes the importance of traditions related to food:

Depuis toujours, chaque vendredi ma mère prépare le dîner du « shabbat ». Au menu, notre couscous hebdomadaire. A Paris, elle a bien sûr continué de respecter cette coutume. Pour mes frères et moi, c’est l’occasion de nous retrouver autour de cette table, qui grandit d’année en année. Mon petit garçon, pour différencier ses grand-mères, a surnommé ma mère « Mamie couscous », et depuis tous ses petits-enfants la surnomment ainsi (Since always, each Friday, my mother fixes the shabbat dinner. On the menu, our weekly couscous. In Paris, she of course continued to respect this custom. For me and my brothers, it is an opportunity to get together around the table
which gets more and more crowded each year. My young son, in order to differentiate between his grandmothers, nicknamed my mother ‘Grandma couscous’, and, ever since this, all her other grandchildren call her so) (Mon Algérie : 62 personnalités témoignent, 28/29).

Part of the postcolonial literature from Algeria is written in French, despite the claim that the only language used by the independent population is Modern Standard Arabic. One of the writers that triggers the most ardent debates even nowadays is Albert Camus who is both rejected and accepted in Algeria. In postcolonial Algeria, the opinions regarding Camus are split between voices who either claim him as part of their cultural heritage or refuse to annex his name to their literary patrimony. In Camus brûlant, Benjamin Stora and Jean-Baptiste Péretié present the existence of voices that continue to sketch monolithic images of cultural heritage. These voices perpetuate the violence that started during colonialism and ignore the fact that Algeria is exhausted after years of bloodshed and tensions. In A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962, Alistair Horne affirms:

In 1962, a popular slogan heard among exhausted Algerians was ‘Seba’a snin, barakat!’ (‘Seven years, that’s enough!’) Yet, five decades after independence, a savage war still continued in Algeria. It was a country exhausted by seven years of senseless violence, of not knowing who were the ‘good guys’ and who the ‘bad’. As much as any other factor, it was this exhaustion that helped bring the civil war to an end (16).

Exhaustion, confusion, senseless violence and ideologies that rest on pride and personal interests – this forms the image of Algeria at the end of colonialism. Albert Camus was aware of the risks that dichotomies can trigger, and he advocated for nuances and compromises on

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15 Scandalous Camus
both sides. However, his diplomatic approach was not well received, and we find out that he felt isolated since both the Muslims as well as the French of Algeria considered him a traitor: “Dans un témoignage récent, accordé à France Culture en décembre 2012, l’écrivaine algérienne Wassyla Tamzali a raconté comment Camus était, dans sa classe de lycée, considéré comme un traître aussi bien par les élèves algériens que par les jeunes Français d’Algérie” (In a recent testimony, offered to France Culture in December 2012, the Algerian writer Wassyla Tamzali narrated how, in high school, Camus was considered a traitor by the Algerian students as well as by the young French people of Algeria) (Camus brûlant, 104). The young students in Camus’ class are not the only ones who perceive Camus as a traitor. When clear images are claimed, “ambiguous” approaches are not welcomed. Even after Camus’ death, many opinion-forming leaders declare that: “Dans ses engagements, Camus semble souvent lutter sur deux fronts”¹⁶ (In his commitments, Camus seems to often fight on two fronts) (Camus brûlant, 101). Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), French philosopher, novelist, literary critic and political activist is famous for criticizing Camus’ political opinions regarding French Algeria. Unlike Camus, Sartre’s views were clear: Algeria should be independent and separated from France. However, Sartre was not born in Algeria – and therefore not attached to it like Camus – so it was easier for him to portray Camus as a colonizer. It is also interesting to observe that, despite his vision of peace and independence, “Sartre juge incontournable et nécessaire le recours aux armes pour sortir du statu quo colonial” (Sartre considers it essential and necessary to resort to arms in order to escape the colonial statu quo) (Camus brûlant, 94). So, in Sartre’s opinion, violence is necessary to end violence. The loss of lives and the trauma that additional violence will trigger is disregarded, and political ideologies seem to ignore the everyday struggles of the Algerians and their exhaustion when violence is involved.

¹⁶ This statement belongs to the historian Benjamin Stora
Camus, on the other hand, attempted diplomatically to avoid violence and the loss of human lives. Benjamin Stora presents both the political views of Camus and those of Sartre, and invites his readers to draw the conclusions: “With the approach of the January 1956 elections, Camus launched an appeal for a reasonable compromise whereby the French would admit the failure of assimilation, and the Algerian nationalists would renounce their intransigence and the temptation of pan-Arabism” (Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History, 90)

But the pride that existed on both sides did not leave room for compromises, leading to more violence in an attempt to impose a dominant image of Algeria. According to the political leaders, the country could be either French or Arab, but not both, and, surely, not more. All other ethnic groups were classified as European and, after 1962, as pieds-noirs who had to leave the Algerian land. Sartre agrees with the nationalists’ attempts to “purge” the country of its “non-native” population and declares: “The only thing we can and must attempt, but it is the essential thing today, is to struggle beside both the Algerians and the French to deliver them from colonial tyranny” (Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History, 90).

Sartre was not the only one to perceive Camus as a threat to the well-being of Algeria, and, in Camus brûlant, Kateb Yacine states: “L’Algérie est belle mais il n’y a pas de people, on ne voit pas le peuple algérien. En fait il n’y avait pas la curiosité la plus élémentaire pour la vie de ce peuple, pour sa langue” (Algeria is beautiful, but there are no people in it, we don’t see the Algerian people. In fact, a basic curiosity for the life of this people, for his language is completely missing) (81). Kateb Yacine (1929-1989) – as many other scholars – perceives the death of the Arab in Camus’ novel L’étranger17 as the desire to annihilate the Arab presence in Algeria. A participant in the fight for the Algerian independence, Yacine was sent to prison at the age of sixteen because of his involvement in the demonstrations of May 8, 1945. It is not

17 The Stranger
problematic that Yacine interpreted Camus’ work according to his nationalist beliefs, but it is problematic that he did not leave room for other possibilities of interpretation.

As a short parenthesis, we can observe that whatever did not fit the mainstream narrative was condemned and isolated, just as in the case of some of Assia Djebar’s novels. If we take *La soif*\(^{18}\) as an example, we notice that Djebar chooses to change the tone of her storytelling, thus receiving the criticism of those who considered her writing inappropriate at the time. Published in 1957, *La soif* focuses on the intimate life of a girl, instead of focusing on the fact that Algeria was in the middle of a violent war. The critics immediately pointed out her disrupting discourse: “The French had hurled the first stone at this new writer accused of betraying her people. Algerian revolutionaries found Djebar’s exclusive preoccupation with sexual problems indecent at a time when Algeria was subject to a merciless war”.

(*Muffled Screams/Stifled Voices*, 172) As Sartre stated, it seems as violence was seen as the only way to counteract violence in the middle of an already violent war, while other narratives were distracting from Algeria’s “real” political struggles. If we go back to the case of Camus, we find yet another critic in the person of Edward Said (1935-2003) who portrays his novels as political and as a tool of imagining an Algerian society where the Arabs will slowly disappear while the French take over. Said thinks that all conquests begin with an idea, and he affirms that Camus attempted to plant the idea of a French dominant society through his literary works, heavy in promoting colonialism. The historian Benjamin Stora disagrees with Said and believes that his interpretation of Camus is done in a reductionist manner. According to him, Said’s critique ignores the metaphysical aspect of Camus’ literary work:

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\(^{18}\) The Thirst
Pour lui, [Edward Said], « tant L’Étranger que La Peste portent sur des morts d’Arabes, des morts qui mettent en lumière et alimentent silencieusement les problèmes de conscience et les réflexions des personnages français. Municipalités, système judiciaire, hôpitaux, restaurants, clubs, lieux de loisirs, écoles – toute la structure de la société civile, présentée avec tant de vie, est française, bien qu’elle administre surtout une population non française » (For him, [for Edward Said], ‘The Stranger as well as The Plague deals with the deaths of Arabs, deaths that highlight and silently feed the problems of consciences and the reflections of the French characters. Municipalities, the judicial system, the hospitals, the restaurants, the clubs, the entertainment places, the schools – the entire structure of the civil society, presented with such passion, is French, even though it administers mainly a non-French population) (*Camus brûlant*, 82).

Even in the twenty first century, Camus’ literary works are rejected from the literary patrimony of Algeria by certain personalities who, like Sartre, Yacine or Said, consider his nuanced approach towards the political status of Algeria ambiguous and detrimental to Algeria’s progress. Abdellali Merdaci, a professor of Comparative Literature, declares in *Le Soir d’Algérie*\(^\text{19}\) on March 15, 2010:

> En vérité, l’Algérie, hédoniste et solaire, qu’aimait et glorifiait Camus, cette Algérie des corps nus au soleil, n’était pas celle de populations autochtones dépossédées de leur histoire, de leur identité et de leur nom. […] Berbère ou Arabe, le colonisé était réduit, dans ses écrits et dans ceux de nombreux auteurs coloniaux, à la troublante et symptomatique appellation générique d’Arabe […] (Honestly, Algeria, hedonistic and solar, that Camus loved and glorified, this Algeria of naked bodies in the sun, was not)

\(^{19}\) The Algerian Evening
that of the native people deprived of their history, identity and name. […] Berber or Arab, the colonized individual was reduced, in his writings and in those of many other colonial writers, to the troubling and symptomatic generic term of Arab) (Camus *brûlant*, 76).

Merdaci chooses the word “autochtone” to refer only to Arabs and Berbers, thus recreating the same narrow and problematic discourse of which he blames Camus. The practice of imposing a monolithic narrative that silences all other narratives of Algeria is transmitted from the colonial French leaders to the Arab ones in Independent Algeria. The leaders on both sides had their individualized plans of bringing greatness to Algeria, however both attempts were unsuccessful, and many voices managed to divert the narratives in other directions. In postcolonial Algeria, the literature written in French as well as the impossibility of the population – including the political leaders – to function in Modern Standard Arabic are proof of this failed plan of greatness.

Postcolonial Algeria embraced a policy of correcting everything that deviated from the rule: “The media took over this offensive: a radio program called ‘Arabic on the radio’ was broadcast during prime time. The program relied on a simple Manichaean principle, which everyone remembers: ‘Say this. Don’t say that.’ It thus corrected all dialectal usages in favor of literary Arabic.” (The Algerian Linguicide chapter from *Algeria in Others’ Language, 46) The cultural heritage of postcolonial Algeria was strictly classified into good or bad, where anything that was not connected to Modern Standard Arabic or to Islam was banned. Since it took a long time for the population to begin to master their “native” language, the discourses of their political leaders were often not understood. The presidents also needed time to learn the language they were imposing on the population. I will further

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20 Native
present the unsuccessful attempts to separate Algeria from France, and I will discuss issues of immigration that started at the beginning of the War for Independence. According to Stora, “Apart from considerations regarding the delicate problem of nationality and citizenship (who, in effect, was Algerian in 1962, the year of the census in France and of Algerian independence?), one fact became clear: Algerian immigration to France had doubled between 1954 and 1962, the very years of the war”. (Algeria, 1830-2000: A Short History, 63)

In general, men were the ones who immigrated to France, looked for employment, and, when they eventually found it, began sending money home to the families they left behind. If Algeria initially lost its men because of the violent confrontations with the colonizer, during “decolonization” it started losing them again, but this time France lured them with employment they could not find at home. Determined to turn a previous crisis into an opportunity, Algerian men made use of their ability to function in French in order to increase their sources of revenue abroad. But why this economic crisis in Algeria, as well as in other Arab countries freed from the French oppression? One of the most obvious reasons is the increasing phenomenon of corruption. The population’s frustration was followed by a series of violent protests – known as the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring started in 2010 in Tunisia when Mohamed Bouazizi, a twenty-seven-year-old street vendor, set himself on fire in response to the continuous harassment and humiliations caused by the police who confiscated his small wheelbarrow of produce. He was immediately perceived as a martyr by individuals in other Arab countries – including Algeria – who began imitating his act of self-immolation, thus starting a circle of suicides and more violent protests in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Syria and Egypt – to name just a few. The greatness promised to occur the morning of the Independence did not materialize in any of the former French colonies. On the contrary, the economic situation deteriorated, and a large part of the population sought refuge
in France, thus creating the paradoxical situation of looking for the colonizer they were previously rejecting.

These tensions inside the country contradicted the image of unity and harmony promoted by the political leaders of postcolonial Algeria, and, in France, immigration led to multiculturalism. Identity became a concept no longer easy to define in the France metropole, and the past that France attempted to leave behind began haunting its present. Many voices in metropolitan France also embraced the monolithic image of a “pure” France, reopening another episode of violence between them and the former colony. The graffiti present on the walls of the Great Mosque of Saint-Etienne serves as the proof of increasing acts of racism. This image brings to mind the popular slogan that could be heard in Algeria in 1962 and that I mentioned earlier in this subchapter: ‘Seba’a snin, barakat!’ (‘Seven years, that’s enough!’). In the case of the confrontations between France and its former colonies, we can count more than seven years of violence and tensions between the “good guys” and the “bad guys”. For various reasons, individuals still attempt to label people as “good” or “bad” based on their ethnicity and refuse to see the transformation and plurality of their society. According to Stora and Temime’s *Imigrances: L’immigration en France au XXe siècle*, multiculturalism was clearly noticeable in France as early as 1962, and the Algerian presence increased with time: “Les Algériens arrivent en plus grand nombre après 1962. Ils étaient alors 350 000. Ils sont le double en 1975, le ‘regroupement familial’ ayant joué son rôle. D’autres Algériens viendront plus tard, dans les années quatre-vingt-dix, au moment où se dessine la menace islamiste” (The Algerians arrive in greater numbers after 1962. They were then 350,000. They double in 1975, the ‘family reunification’ having played its role. Other Algerians will arrive later, in the ‘90s, when the Islamist threat is getting stronger) (Introduction, Kindle edition).
Additionally, when ethnic groups that share the same land do not respect their differences and create monolithic images of cultural heritage, the initial symbolic violence transitions to physical violence.

On January 7, 2015, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, two brothers of Algerian descent, entered the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris and shot twelve people. In his online article *Charlie Hebdo: Paris Attack Brothers’ Campaign of Terror Can Be Tracked Back to Algeria in 1954*, Robert Fisk states: “For Algeria remains the most painful wound within the body politic of the Republic – save, perhaps, for its continuing self-examination of Nazi occupation – and provides a fearful context for every act of Arab violence against France” (http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/charlie-hebdo-paris-attack-brothers-campaign-of-terror-can-be-traced-back-to-algeria-in-1954-9969184.html) The cause of the attack was the use of images that were perceived as blasphemous, and therefore had to be punished by death in order to avenge the Prophet. As a consequence, images lead to violence and to the loss of human lives. In the opinion of the attackers, images could be attributed a single meaning, and, when other meanings were affixed to them, violence became the only answer. In France, the principle of laïcité\(^{21}\) promotes the concept of religion-blind practices. Therefore, religious symbols can be freely interpreted, reinterpreted and even satirized. French humorists consider that it is their right to speak freely and to satirize any symbols or individuals. According to certain Muslim religious leaders though, satirizing religious symbols, especially symbols related to the Prophet, becomes a valid reason for violence. The Charlie Hebdo attack sketches the neurotic attempt to place a monopoly on images and narratives, and, once again, brings to attention the violent

\(^{21}\) Separation of church and state
common past of France and Algeria. Given the increasing tensions throughout colonial and postcolonial times, violence appears as caught in a time loop.

So far, I have analyzed political leaders in colonial and postcolonial Algeria and their narratives, and I observed that they triggered or and promoted violence. This dissertation alternates child voices and adult voices with the goal of starting a conversation between the two sides rather than separating them. Child voices attempt to diminish the violence triggered by adult voices and instill an increasing curiosity about other individuals and their experiences. Thus, I look at curiosity as a possible way of reducing violence. When individuals become curious about the language, beliefs or customs of others, they attempt to know them, then to connect with them and, finally, to become part of this previously unknown world. In the novels of Roblès and Bey, I will look at voices that are part of the conversation debating cultural heritage, but I will also briefly analyze the absence or the near-absence of voices from certain ethnic groups, for example the ones of the Jews, Italians or Gypsies. Frequently, these ethnic groups are presented by others, and not allowed to speak for themselves.

In the novels *Jeunes saisons* and *Saison violente*, Roblès allows voices from the Spanish and French communities to speak. Occasionally, he mentions the Jews, the Italians, the Gypsies, and, as he calls them, the Arabs, but they do not speak. Roblès is the one who presents them, their language, their beliefs and their customs. When Roblès uses the general term “Arabs”, he justifies it as follows: “Selon la terminologie de l’époque ce mot désignait les Algériens, qu’ils fussent d’origine arabe ou berbère” (According to the terminology of the time, this word referred to Algerians, whether they were of Arab or Berber descent) (*Saison violente*, 45). Even when people from these communities are mentioned, the descriptions are brief, and, in most cases, they are not individualized as in the case of the French or the Spaniards. Roblès displays curiosity towards the Jewish community, but he states that
neighborhoods were rigidly delimited in colonial Algeria, so his random trips were the only ones that could offer a quick view of Jewish life: “Le quartier juif, derrière le théâtre, nous attirait aussi, mais le matin seulement, à cause du pittoresque de son marché. Nous y rencontrions, à notre ébahissement, de vieux juifs à calotte noire et papillotes, le sarouel retenu par une large ceinture multicolore” (The Jewish neighborhood, behind the theatre, also fascinated us, but only in the morning, because of its picturesque market. We used to find there, to our amazement, old Jewish men with black caps and sticks, with their pants held by a wide multicolored belt) (Jeunes saisons, 35). The Gypsies are also observed from afar, and Roblès comments on their language, customs and clothing: “[…] les gitanes, par exemple, les gitanes qui allaient pieds nus, les yeux hardis, les cheveux luisants, en balançant leurs jupes de couleurs vives dans une démarche aisée, libre et insolente” ([…] the Gypsies, for example, the Gypsies who used to walk barefoot, with their piercing eyes, glistening hair, swinging their brightly colored skirts as they walked naturally, freely and daringly) (Jeunes saisons, 12). The author mentions the importance that Gypsies attach to money, and, in his opinion, their attitude towards people would change as soon as someone was willing to offer them money for their palm reading or for the fabric they were selling: “D’abord humbles et suppliants, elles devenaient agressives si on leur refusait d’acheter, et les plus jeunes, en s’en allant, vous inventivaient, vous prédisaient les pires calamités, lisaient dans vos prunelles un malheur proche et s’en réjouissaient à cause de votre méchanceté, de votre ladrerie, de votre manque de cœur” (Initially humble and begging, they became aggressive if you didn’t buy from them, and the youngest ones, while walking away from you, would curse you, predict the worst disasters in your life, would read in your eyes an incoming misfortune and would be happy about it since you were mean, greedy and heartless) (Jeunes saisons, 12). The Italians of colonial Algeria are mentioned by Roblès in Saison violente and we discover that his mother plans to marry one. The name of the future Italian husband is not mentioned, but
his traits of character are described in detail. Other than the future step-father, no other individuals from the Italian community appear in Roblès’ *Jeunes saison* or *Saison violente*. Even though he does not individualize the voices of the Jews, Arabs, Berbers, Italians or Gypsies, Roblès mentions their presence on Algerian land.

In her novels, Maïssa Bey follows a different approach when addressing various voices. She does not assign them to separate communities, but to an Algerian community with layers. For example, she presents Mrs. Lill, their neighbor, and states:

Madame Lill s’appelle Simone. Elle s’appelle aussi Messaouda. Messaouda, qui veut dire la bien-heureuse. C’est un nom arabe. Mais madame Lill n’est pas arabe. Elle est juive. Mon grand-père m’a expliqué que les juifs sont français depuis pas très longtemps. Avant ils étaient comme nous. Mais Simone-Messaouda n’est pas du tout comme les Français d’ici. […] Elle parle arabe exactement comme nous, sauf qu’elle a l’accent du Sud (Mrs. Lill’s first name was Simone. Her name was also Messaouda. Messaouda means blessed. It is an Arab name. But Mrs. Lill is not Arab. She is Jewish. My grand-father explained to me that the Jews have been French for not very long time. Before, they were like us. But Simone-Messaouda is not like the French from here. […] She speaks Arabic just like us, except that she has the Southern accent) (*Bleu blanc vert*, 37).

As we can notice, Bey’s characters defy clear identities and express the hybrid heritage of Algeria. The author also mentions that certain adult voices mock those who do not clearly belong to a certain group. We find out that her neighbor Rabha is called “the sold one” because she is an Arab who married a French man. When all other Arabs are in danger, Rabha is protected by her new status, however, when Algeria wins its independence, she is no longer accepted in her country because of her mixed identity: “Elle, elle est restée même
quand l’OAS pourchassait tous les Arabes” (She stayed even when the OAS was chasing all the Arabs) (Bleu blanc vert, 39). Another presence that intrudes the territory of clear identities is Mrs. Anita Gomez, a woman who mixes the Spanish heritage with the French one: “C’était une Française. Une Française qui avait un nom espagnol. Madame Anita Gomez” (She was a French woman. A French woman with a Spanish name. Mrs. Anita Gomez) (Bleu blanc vert, 39). In this subchapter, I presented the rising aim to purge cultural heritages in colonial and postcolonial Algeria and maintain a linear trajectory of evolution when language, customs and landscapes are debated. I emphasized the violence that occurs each time individuals attempt to cross the frontiers built by inflexible adult narratives. In the following subchapter, I insist on general views on cultural heritage, on the reasons I chose language, customs and architecture, and, finally, I analyze how often each of these three aspects of cultural heritage are discussed in the novels I selected.

1.3 Cultural Heritage: On Stage and Behind the Scenes

Cultural heritage is stitched with paradox. It is about the desire to respect old rules and, at the same time, the desire to rebel against their inflexibility and add new trends. Strong and diverse emotions are connected to heritage: love, fear, rejection, shame or nostalgia. Child narratives refer to inflexible versions of heritage as fake images or lies:

A vrai dire, comment ne pas remercier les Algériens de m’avoir foutu un bon, un définitif coup de babouche au cul en faisant leur révolution. L’Indépendance a agi sur l’enfant que j’étais comme une sorte d’émancipation vis-à-vis de la propagande, vis-à-vis des mots, de la langue de bois des adultes. Quitter l’Algérie ce fut pour moi comme briser un cocon de mensonges (Honestly, how could I not thank the Algerian for having given me a nice kick in the butt when they started their Revolution. The Independence acted on the child that i was as a sort of an emancipation towards the propaganda, the words, the wooden
language of adults. Leaving Algeria was for me like breaking a cocoon of lies) (*Mon Algérie : 62 personnalités témoignent*, 55).

This confession belongs to Morgan Sportes, a French writer born in 1947 in French Algeria. At the age of fifteen, he had to leave his native country and relocate to France with his family. As we can see, Sportes critiques the “wooden language” used by adults and portrays their discourse as a series of lies. The writer is aware of the discrepancy between the image of heritage displayed on stage and the other image that can be discovered behind the scenes. Languages have messages that cast verdicts on what is allowed and what is forbidden. In colonial Algeria, what was said could make the difference between life and death, so words carried a heavy load of power. Morgan Sportes criticized the violent adult narrative of Jean-Paul Sartre and his ignorance during the Algerian War of Independence:

Cette capacité qu’ont les gens, dont le métier serait de penser, de dire n’importe quoi. De Jean-Paul Sarte (qui en appelait pour ainsi dire au massacre des Pieds-Noirs, tous associés à l’image stéréotypique du « colon », « un million de demeurés moraux » : « Il faut tuer », disait-il, planqué derrière sa tasse de café à la terrasse des Deux-Magots) à Michel Déon qui […] en appelait à la croisade de l’Occident […] (This capacity that people have, people whose job would be to think, to just ramble. Starting with Jean-Paul Sartre (who used to call, to put it this way, people to massacre all the Black-Feet, all those associated with the stereotypical image of ‘colonizer’, ‘a million of moral remains’: ‘You have to kill’, he used to say, comfortably hidden behind his cup of coffee at the terrace Two-Monkeys) and ending with Michel Déon who […] called for the Crusade of the West […]*) (*Mon Algérie*, 54).

Sportes’ critique underlines the cultural heritage “show” displayed on the political stage by certain French intellectuals who claimed they were aware of the struggles endured by the
population of French Algeria. Sportes refers to these superficial adult narratives as schizophrenic and dumb, and he points out that the violence perpetrated by their language targeted the everyday life of ordinary citizens, like him and many others. He evokes a snapshot of his daily life in colonial Algeria, thus personalizing, through his narrative, the struggles of pieds-noirs. Unlike Sartre’s case, the language inciting to violence represented more than an ideology for Sportes as he could visualize the deadly effects of hateful discourses: “Car ces mots pèsent leur poids de sang. Mais, ce sang-là, ce n’étaient pas eux, ces écrivains, qui y pataugeaient, c’était moi, marmot de quinze-six ans à l’époque de l’Indépendance (je suis né à Alger en 1947)” (But these words carry their weight in blood. But this blood was not theirs, these writers who waded all over it, but mine, a fifteen-sixteen-year-old kid at the time of the Independence (I was born in Alger in 1947) (54). Words that carry their weight in blood – this is the image constructed by child narratives when addressing the power of language.

_Mon Algérie: 62 personnalités témoignent_ contains the testimonies of various writers, filmmakers, actors, as well as the testimonies of ordinary people who found themselves in the situation of leaving Algeria. As a general observation, we can see that the pieds-noirs insisted more on what was said rather than on the language(s) used to express opinions. The message mattered more than the language choice, and the attention to details brings to light the struggles of a society in quest of its identity. I have chosen to analyze language in my dissertation because language reveals which topics bring individuals together and which ones separate them, thus causing tension and violence. In _Mon Algérie_, child narratives emphasize the preconceived ideas that caused isolation and fear in the past. During the French occupation, children noticed patterns in the vocabulary of their own parents, and they attempted to track down the reasoning behind them. As an example, they detected the use in tandem of the words “Jewish” and “dirty”. The actor Yves Vincent, born in 1921, spent part
of his childhood and adolescence in Algeria. He remembers his father screaming: “Je t’interdis de voir ce sale juif!” (I do not allow you to meet this dirty Jew!) (39) when referring to one of his best friends. Yves friend accepted the decision taken by his father, however, he had a question: “Pourquoi sale?” (Why dirty?) (39) When this question was asked, Yves realized that he never heard the word “Jewish” all by itself, but always attached to the word “dirty”, so he confesses that he was actually perceiving the two words as a single one. In *Maghreb divers: langues parlées, littératures et représentations des Maghrébins à partir d’Albert Memmi et de Kateb Yacine*, Alek Baylee Toumi is interested in what people say, but he is also interested in what language(s) individuals choose to express themselves. Additionally, he addresses predictions on language survival in the decolonized Maghreb. At the beginning of the book, Toumi announces his intent to demonstrate why the French language and literature did not disappear from Maghreb and, in particular, from Algeria: “La guerre d’Algérie, qui s’est terminée en 1962 est bien loin, et l’on n’arrive pas encore à expliquer pourquoi beaucoup de Maghrébins continuent de vivre à l’ouest, notamment en France, dans cet occident tant honni, vomi, combattu” (The Algerian War that ended in 1962 is a story of the past and we still can’t explain why a lot of people from Maghreb continue to live in the West, especially in France, in this so despised, spit out, violently rejected Occident) (*Maghreb divers*, 2).

Not only does the population of Maghreb continue to speak and write in the language of the French colonizer but, given the common past that still connects France to its former colonies, individuals seek for a new life in France. *Maghreb divers* focuses on Albert Memmi and Kateb Yacine and presents us with the trajectory of their linguistic predictions. Albert Memmi was born in 1920 in Tunisia, so during the French protectorate (1881-1956). In 1957, after Tunisia achieved independence from France, Memmi declared: “La littérature colonisée de langue européenne semble condamnée à mourir jeune” (The colonized literature written in
the European language seems to be doomed to die young) (*Maghreb divers*, 1). Memmi believed that independence would automatically lead to the disappearance of the French language from Tunisia’s linguistic inventory. He perceived language as closely tied to the identity of individuals, therefore he assumed that the desire for independence was equal to the abandonment of colonial identity. Toumi mentions Memmi’s novel *Portrait du colonisé*, where Memmi states that heritage is transmitted through two main channels: the education provided to children and the language. Intellectuals of Maghreb are aware of the role that language plays in connecting past and future values, and of the important role that children have in bridging generations.

However, despite Memmi’s predictions, the young generation of Independent Tunisia did not abandon the French language acquired from the colonizer. Therefore, in 1982 Memmi rectifies his statement from 1957 and declares: “La langue française n’a rien perdu au Maghreb, en importance et en prestige, mais quelles que soient les promesses, notables déjà, de la renaissance arabe, force est de le constater, les écrivains les plus neufs l’empruntaient à leur tour, avec le même naturel que leurs aînés, et, quelquefois même, avec plus de liberté” (The French language did not lose any ground in Maghreb, in importance or prestige, but whatever promises, remarkable already, of the Arab Renaissance, this must be noted, the newest writers also borrowed it, with the same ease as their predecessors and, sometimes, even with much more freedom) (*Maghreb divers*, 1). In 1957 Memmi admits that the linguistic uniformity paraded by certain individuals is illusory and defies the linguistic complexity in Maghreb. Building on Memmi’s updated awareness, Toumi asks additional questions that nuance the various linguistic needs of individuals. He gives the example of Algeria and starts with emphasizing the differences among the everyday language, the language used for reading, the one used at work, the one used with family, the one for writing letters, the one people use in the street, the language of the television – and his list continues.
He also poses the following question: “S’est-on jamais interrogé sur les conséquences que ces traductions permanentes, d’un dialecte à une langue et d’un dialecte à l’autre, peuvent avoir sur une littérature d’expression française ?” (Have we ever wondered about the consequences that these continuous translations, from a dialect to a language and from a dialect to another, could have on a literature of French expression?) (Maghreb divers, 5).
Indeed, the constant switching between languages implies what Toumi calls the everyday linguistic “gymnastics”.

Toumi creates a visual representation of the absurd concept of a “pure” Arab linguistic heritage in Algeria. He states that it is as ridiculous to claim that Arabic is the only language of Algeria as it would be to claim that, in Europe, the French speaks the same language as the Spanish, or the Portuguese speaks the same language as the Italian. He affirms that what would make it even better would be to claim that all Europeans are Christians. In his opinion:

On ne nous a que trop habitués au slogan de l’unicité, une seule langue et un seul peuple arabe uni et uniforme, une religion avec une seule interprétation officielle. […] Les décisions d’un gouvernement post-colonial d’Afrique du Nord n’ont rien à avoir avec le fait que, par exemple, Albert Memmi, Tahar Ben Jelloun ou Kateb Yacine ont écrit, écrivent et publient toujours en français (We got used too much to the slogan of unicity, of a single language and a single united and uniform Arab population, of a religion with a single official interpretation. […] The decisions of a postcolonial government in North Africa had nothing to do with the fact that, for example, Albert Memmi, Tahar Ben Jelloun or Kateb Yacine wrote, write and continue to publish in French) (Maghreb divers, 6).
Kateb Yacine is portrayed by Toumi as the most representative Maghrebi intellectual who opposes the idea of an exclusively Arab Algeria. He experiences several shocks throughout his life given the violent mutations that occurred in the Algerian society. At a young age, he had to move from his old Koranic school and embrace a French education until the end of the Second World War. In May 1945, at the age of sixteen, Yacine participated in the Setif riot that ended the life of over 45,000 Algerians. He escaped the massacre, but was imprisoned, an event that caused his mother to develop serious mental issues. A year later, he fell in love with a woman that he could never marry because she was his cousin. In an attempt to forget the traumatic events of his life, Yacine started drinking heavily at the age of seventeen.

Aware of the constant shifts in Algerian society, Yacine promotes the mix of classical Arabic, of the Berber languages and of French: “Il faudra lutter sur deux fronts: enseignement généralisé de la langue arabe et des dialectes berbères pour répondre aux exigences nationales, mais aussi maintien de la langue française pour accéder aux grands courants de la littérature moderne” (We have to fight on two fronts: generalized teaching of the Arabic language and Berber dialects to meet the national requirements, but we also need to keep the French language to get access to the major currents of the modern literature) (Maghreb divers, 43). It is interesting to notice that Yacine depicts language learning as a war strategy since he advocates for a “fight on two fronts”. Once again, cultural heritage is endowed with an initial symbolic violence that will, at times, turn into physical conflict. Yacine’s awareness of the need to connect with the rest of the world through other ‘intruder’ languages is portrayed – and taken a step further – by the next intellectual that I will present – Mohamed Benrabah.

Benrabah, a professor of English Linguistics and Sociolinguistics, was educated in Algeria and in the United Kingdom, and later relocated to France in 1994. His recent article titled Competition between four “world” languages in Algeria (2014) focuses on the
presence of other languages that are less discussed in the current Algerian linguistic landscape. He mentions the rivalry between Arabic, French, English, and, recently, Chinese. In his article, Benrabah mentions predictions about English replacing French, but not coexisting with it. He presents us with the statement of the Algerian writer, David Gordon, who affirmed in 1963 that in ten to fifteen years Arabic would replace French and that English would replace French as a second language since French is full of bitter memories for Algerians. In this article, Benrabah denies the predicted disappearance of French: “However, French is still the key language for studies in scientific disciplines in Higher Education” (46/47). Benrabah conducted a survey in 2004 in Algeria in order to observe the young generation’s perspective on the two “competitors”: English and French. Senior high school students had to agree or disagree with the following statement: “When I choose English, this does not mean that I reject French”. The results showed that, out of 1051 responses, 76.4% agreed with the statement. Thus, English was not perceived by students as a method of avoiding the language of the former colonizer, but simply as another way of connecting with the world. Even though French was not rejected by young Algerians in 2004, it was perceived by a large percentage of the young population that was part of the survey as the language of bitter colonial memories. Benrabah mentions that “With the statement ‘I associate French with colonization’, over 47% agreed or agreed completely, against 35.5% who disagreed or disagreed completely. As for undecided informants, their number was quite high: 17.4% had no opinion” (53).

Benrabah was interested in discovering why some individuals of the young generation would still connect French with the colonial heritage in Algeria. Why does French still represent, for certain youth, a language full of bitter memories in 2004? After a close examination of the participants’ status, he noticed that memories connected to language heritage depended on customs and, in turn, these customs were related to architecture. It
seems that the students who associated French with the painful colonial past belonged to less populated towns and cities where extended families had the custom of sharing the same house. In 2007 Benrabah concludes: “In these areas, where extended families with a rural or recently urbanized background tend to live together, resentment of French is easily transferred from one generation to the next” (54). For these participants, language(s), customs and architecture seem to be strongly interconnected when images of good or painful heritages are formed. But, despite these generational influences regarding the status of the French language, we can also see a curiosity towards “world” languages that would enable individuals to live easily in Algeria and abroad. The young generation reflects on its future and on the opportunities that languages can provide for them. Globalization shifts their focus and helps them navigate through various linguistic landscapes rather than remaining stuck in the past. The newcomer presented by Benrabah – the Chinese language – is the result of the increasing economic exchanges between China and Algeria: “Unknown in the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese writing became quite common as of the 2000s, especially on construction sites” (54). Benrabah includes in his article images of billboards present near construction sites in Algeria to visually emphasize that linguistic shifts occurred as a result of economic changes. Currently, the “pure” Arabic linguistic heritage has to compete not only with French, but also with English and Chinese. This article underlines the updated linguistic status of a twenty-first century Algeria that finds it increasingly difficult to prevent various languages from entering its landscape. New languages also find their way into the lives of the younger generation through technology – computers, cell phones, television, Facebook, YouTube and Tweets. The neurotic attempt to conserve linguistically “pure” heritages would only lead to increasing violence between adult and child narratives.

Customs represent another area of cultural heritage that revolves around violence. Often, violence arises when individuals believe that their customs are endangered and cannot
be transmitted to future generations. The difference between customs and traditions is the length of time associated with each of them. A custom is a practice common to a family or larger group, and when the custom is successfully passed on to other generations, it becomes a tradition. When addressing the customs and traditions of colonial Algeria, it is imperative to consult the pioneer framework established by the French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). A fierce critique of French intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre, who ignored the tangled heritage of colonial Algeria, Bourdieu analyzed the complex power dynamics in the Algerian society and the way this power was transmitted from generation to generation. Between 1958 and 1962, he resided in Algiers and started his research focused on various topics such as social structures, Berber tribes, Arabophones, colonial system, religion, customs, economy and deculturalization. All this research resulted in a book titled Sociologie de l’Algérie published in 1961. When he addresses the tendency that certain researchers have to separate the ethnic groups of Algeria and their customs into clear categories that do not cross frontiers, Bourdieu affirms: “Il n’est pas au Maghreb de monde clos et partant, pur et intact; pas de groupe si isolé, si replié sur soi qui ne se pense, ne se juge en référence à des modèles étrangers” (There is not such a thing in Maghreb as a world closed, and, consequently, pure and intact; no group so isolated, so focused only on itself who does not think and analyzes itself according to foreign models) (9).

Bourdieu traces specific elements of the Berber culture and of the Arab one, but he admits that traditions mingle as the result of every day exchanges between these groups as well as between these groups and other ethnic groups present in colonial Algeria. When referring to cultural exchanges between the Arabs and the Berbers, he states that they are so intricate that a clear delimitation would be recklessly claimed: “En sorte qu’il est à peu près impossible de faire, en toute certitude, la part de l’élément arabe et de l’élément berbère” (In such a way that it is almost impossible to delimitate, without any doubt, the Arab element
from the Berber one) (59). Bourdieu closely observes the way Arabs and Berbers speak, act and interact on a daily basis. When he addresses customs related to the main events in an individual’s life – birth, marriage, death – he mentions the important role that family plays in the decisions that are made in the Kabyle society. Marriage seems to be particularly problematic as it involves decisions taken by more than one family. For example, the father is portrayed as the pillar of the family and as the one who distributes chores, rights (or removal of rights) and even curses:

Le père, chef, prêtre et juge, donne à chaque ménage et à chaque célibataire sa place précise au sein de la communauté. Son autorité est généralement indiscutée. Il dispose de deux sanctions très redoutées, le pouvoir de déshériter et la malédiction qui est sans doute l’arme la plus puissante, en ce qu’elle est censée attirer le châtiment divin sur l’ingrat, le prodigue ou le révolté (The father, chief, priest and judge, gives each household and each bachelor their assigned place in the community. His authority is usually uncontested. He has the right to two very feared sanctions, the power to disown and the curse that is, without any doubt, the most powerful weapon, since it is supposed to bring the divine punishment over the ungrateful, the prodigal or the rebel) (14).

Thus, the father is the one in control of the power and he is the one who decides where and upon whom his power will be placed at his death. Usually, the oldest son is the one who inherits all his rights and, while the father is still alive, he might consult with a marabout in certain cases when his decisions are contested. At marriage time, women are “transferred” from one family to another, transforming the marriage process into “une affaire de la famille” (16). The fathers meet, discuss, and, when the decision is finalized, the women are finally

\[22\] Muslim monk
\[23\] Family business
informed. Bourdieu states that each custom has the role to remind women the superiority of men: the men make the marriage arrangements; a young boy’s birth is celebrated with lots of preparations and joy and the circumcision is also a reason of pride and celebration for the entire family. Marriage passes the young woman from her father’s authority to her husband’s, and, according to Bourdieu, her fears start increasing: first, the pressure to prove her virginity, then, the fear of sterility, then, the fear of not being able to offer her husband a male heir. If any of these requests are not met, the husband can easily repudiate her and end the marriage, therefore bringing shame on the woman’s family. To ensure her success as a wife and future mother, the woman resorts to religious customs: “A la hantise de la virginité, succède la crainte de la stérilité qu’elle s’efforce de conjurer par des amulettes, des pèlerinages, des promesses votives et toutes sortes d’agissements magiques” (To the obsessive fear of being found virgin follows the fear of sterility which she tries hard to conjure by amulets, pilgrimages, votive promises and all sorts of magical rituals) (16). These religious customs are transmitted from mothers to their daughters, thus turning them into traditions that will help the young women find prosperity in their life.

Algeria is known to be a country strongly attached to its traditions, and it is interesting to notice that even the French raised in Algeria display a desire to pass on certain memories and practices to children. In Mon Algérie, the famous Alexandre Arcady, Yves Vincent and Jean-Luc Allouche — just to offer a few examples — mention the fear of not being able to transmit customs to their children and, therefore, transform them into family traditions. The film director, Arcady, hopes to use his films as a reminder of these traditions: “Bien sûr, je conserverai au fond de moi les images, les parfums, l’accent chantant, mais je suis sûr que mon fils sera loin de tout ça, de toutes ces fêtes, de toutes ces traditions. Il restera peu de choses pour les lui rappeler. Peut-être mes films, oui, peut-être cela” (Of course I will keep deep inside me the images, the perfumes, the singing accent, but I am sure that my son will
move away from all this, from all these celebrations, from all these traditions. There will be very few things left to remind him of all these. Maybe my movies, yes, maybe that) (29). The conservation of customs reflects what David Lowenthal calls “possessed by the past”. Lowenthal refers to the cult of heritage and to the passionate – and often times violent – reactions triggered by the desire to preserve traditions:

We yearn for rooted legacies that enrich the paltry here and now with ancestral echoes, yet also encumber us with outworn relics and obsolete customs. We see what has happened as inalterable (not even God can change the past) and cleave to timeless tradition, yet we ever reshape what we inherit for current needs. Treasuring heritage as authentic history, we blind ourselves to our own legacy’s biased limits (Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History, XI).

However, child narratives weaken the myth of timeless traditions and refuse to follow practices that do not meet their current needs. Children observe the changes that occur around them and wish to incorporate new elements in their daily lives. The Arabic language television channel, Al Jazeera, broadcasted in 2014 a documentary about Algerian wedding traditions https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-DibXXjW4g&t=381s In this documentary, we see extravagance, luxurious wedding dresses, expensive gifts offered to the new couple and traditions like decorating the bride’s hands with henna.

As mentioned by Bourdieu in 1961, mothers and mothers-in-law attempt, through traditions, to ensure the prosperity of the newly wedded couple. The cheeks of the brides are sometimes decorated with a red and white circle, where the red symbolizes shyness and the white suggest that she will bloom like a flower. My dissertation brings to light the gradual discontinuity of rigid wedding traditions narrated by Bourdieu in 1961 and claimed by the Al Jazeera wedding documentary of 2014. The 2016 narratives of young Algerian women
present on YouTube strengthen the dissonance between the wedding traditions portrayed in the above-mentioned documentary and the everyday traditions practiced – or, better said, claimed to be practiced – by women. When analyzing wedding traditions behind the scenes, I researched youtubers like HoudamnDz who sees her YouTube channel as “Some Algerian color to the YouTube world”. Her videos are posted in English, and she alternates official versions of wedding traditions to everyday attitudes that one can encounter during Algerian weddings. In this video, for example, we observe the heavy and colorful make-up used in certain weddings that strictly follow traditions, then the removal of this make-up and the choice of a lighter one. Also, unlike the official version of wedding traditions presented by Al Jazeera, HoudamnDz’s video takes us through the back door and we can look, almost in a furtive manner, at the way women behave in the privacy of their homes during the wedding process. This unpolished version of traditions reflects foreign influences in many aspects of the Algerian life: the young generation listens to South Korean music and does not fear the various wedding related superstitions.

Also, in another one of her videos from 2016, she comments on RAI music in Algeria and tries to translate the language of certain songs she plays on her phone into English. According to these videos, the French language is not the only “intruder” in today’s Algerian culture. The young generation is exposed to other foreign languages, customs and landscapes through their daily activities. Technology helps this generation connect to the most updated trends that will, sooner or later, “contaminate” old traditions. HoudamnDz’s video called Arab/Algerian parents presents the parents’ attitude towards technology (computers, cameras, cell phones). In her opinion, “Algerian parents have three enemies: their neighbors, their bills and your cell phone”.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTLObCB3sy4
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH1XGdu-hzQ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVQILHziIY4&t=87s
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DauOqGybKyE
The adult narratives and the child narratives displayed in this youtuber’s videos paint a layered image of a twenty-first century Algeria where the tension of maintaining old practices and the effort of adding new ones already represents an ongoing struggle. To address a more scandalous aspect of wedding traditions in Maghreb – the virginity of the bride before the wedding night – I will present an online article titled *Behind Closed Doors: Virginity and Hymen Reconstruction in Morocco*.

https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2016/07/192550/behind-closed-doors-virginity-hymen-reconstruction-morocco/ This article addresses the ingenious methods used by young brides in Maghreb in order to be able to live the life they want, and, at the same time, display a fake obedience of what they consider outdated wedding traditions. In Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, this controversial medical procedure raises questions about women’s right, freedom and new discourses on marriage. Similarly to language and customs, the architecture of Algeria can also be perceived through different angles, depending on the voices that narrate it. Algerian political figures often worry about reshaping the public image of Independent Algeria, so the world can witness the transition between the colonial past and the postcolonial present and incoming future. Thus, former French churches or former French public squares are remolded according to the new status of the country. French street names are removed, and Arab names replace them, and the surface-architecture reflects a new Arab country that easily transitioned to its “pure” Arab past. For example, the Ketchaoua Mosque was the subject of cultural heritage controversy given its continuous image remodeling during colonial and postcolonial times. Initially built in the seventeenth century, it was converted into the Cathedral of Saint Philippe in 1845, during French colonialism. After the Independence of 1962, the cathedral was remodeled and transformed into a mosque again. My dissertation will not focus only on these public attempts to portray a purified Arab Algeria. Instead, it will also analyze the space that Benrabah sketches as the nest that breeds
heritage-related opinions: the house. As previously discussed, the house, the space where more generations live together, influences the way memories are transmitted. As Benrabah states in *Competition between four “world” languages in Algeria*: “The larger the city the fewer informants associated French with a painful past (colonialism), and vice versa” (53).

Benrabah observed that in less populated cities, where more generations shared the same house, the resentment towards the former French colonizer was transmitted from generation to generation. Of course, not all individuals will embrace, or fully embrace, the discourses presented to them by their elders, and this dissertation will focus precisely on the way the younger generation questions monolithic discourses related to cultural heritage and reshapes customs, languages and landscapes according to their current needs. The house, as a miniature diorama of the society, enables us to see how the members of the same family act and, also, how the inhabitants – related or not – of the same building interact. The house diorama offers us access to the daily struggles of the colonial and postcolonial Algerian society, and these individualized struggles of Algerians can be investigated in detail, thus avoiding a superficial analysis. Pierre Bourdieu classifies landscapes in Algeria as public spaces and private spaces. He associates the public space (hammam, suq, cafés) with the univers of men, and the private space (the house) with the univers of women:

D’un côté, au fond de la ruelle tortueuse et silencieuse, la maison, repliée sur sa vie intérieure, refuge de l’intimité, monde clos, réservé aux femmes ; d’autre côté, le monde ouvert, l’univers des hommes, le suq, la place ou le café, domaine de la vie publique, des relations hautement policiées et codifiées, des longs échanges de ‘médiasences spirituelles et de lieux communs indiscutés’ (On one side, at the end of

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24 Page 76
25 Turkish bath
26 Bazaar, marketplace
27 Bars
the winding and silent street, the house, focused on its interior life, refuge for privacy, closed world, reserved to women; on the other side, the open world, the men’s universe, the marketplace, the square where the bar, an area of the public life, of highly policed and codified interactions, of long exchanges of ‘spiritual gossips and of undisputed common spaces’) (Sociologie de l’Algérie, 65).

When addressing the private space of the house, the Algerian anthropologist, Malek Chebel (1953–2016) also sketches the situation of women. He focuses on the mother’s role in the privacy of homes and in the Arab society: “Tout d’abord, en s’appropriant l’espace familial, la mère arabe est privative d’un monde qui l’a barricadée à l’intérieur du foyer. Son attitude est calculée sur la demande collective. Ayant involontairement pris conscience de cette mise à l’écart du social, la mère a élaboré des stratégies denses qui lui permettent d’influer au mieux sur son univers proche” (First of all, by embracing the family space, the Arab mother is deprived of a world that barricaded her inside the home. Her attitude is calculated based on the collective demand. Having unintentionally understood this social gap, the mother elaborated strong strategies that allow her to influence as much as possible this universe so close to her) (L’imaginaire arabo-musulman, 46).

According to Chebel, once the woman becomes a mother, she gains more and more rights inside her home. He affirms that: “L’utérus est à la femme la signature qu’on appose au bas d’un document et qui lui donne une crédibilité nouvelle, qui l’avalse” (The uterus is for a woman the signature that we place at the bottom of a document and that confers it a new credibility, that certifies her) (48). The shifting structure of the houses also reflect the changes that occur in the society. Chebel talks about the isolation of women inside their house; however, he mentions that European influences contributed to a smooth transition of the
private space towards the public one. The moucharabieh allows some contact with the outside without endangering the family’s honor:

Il s’agit d’une fenêtre-balcon surmontée d’un ouvrage grillagé ou d’une avancée, en bois, en terre ou en ciment, qui permet aux femmes du gynécée de participer à l’activité publique du palais, du marché ou de la rue, sans être vues de l’extérieur et sans mettre en péril la respectabilité de la famille, respectabilité dont elles sont, à leur corps défendant, le symbole permanent! (It is a window-balcony surmounted by a screened opening or by a front element, of wood, soil or cement, that allows women from the gynoecium to participate to the public life of the palace, market or street, without being seen from the outside and without endangering the honor of the family, honor of which they are, with their protected body, the eternal symbol!) (264/265).

Architecture can reflect the fear of allowing individuals to connect with other landscapes that might affect the inner landscape of their house. The act of a woman who leaves the house without approval or “inappropriately” dressed is perceived as a defiance of traditions. But what if the outside world sneaked into the house? Computers, books or CD-s can bring new ideas, new music, new images inside the home without requiring people to leave the house, thus making the fortress design no longer effective. Slowly but surely, we observe that new worlds crawl inside, changing perspectives on language and customs. In the next two chapters of this dissertation, I will develop the concept of place-identity in the novels of Roblès and Bey, and I will show how spaces inside a building are a reflection of spaces in society. To enumerate just a few, we will observe power spaces, shaming spaces, safe spaces, marginalized spaces or spaces of riot. In this first chapter, I showed the various images of cultural heritage created by narratives in colonial and postcolonial Algeria. In the novels

28 Window enclosed with carved wood latticework
analyzed in the following two chapters, especially in Bey’s case, we will notice that many child narratives draw from real-life observations that can be backed up by “online vérité” – data collected by watching documentaries, reading surveys, listening to interviews or observing youtubers in realistic day-to-day situations. The superimposition of these child narratives with adult narratives will provide us with an intricate image of cultural heritage in colonial and postcolonial Algeria.
CHAPTER II : EMMANUEL ROBLÈS

2.1 Architecture

Emmanuel Roblès (1914-1995) is an Algerian writer of Spanish descent born in Oran, during French colonialism. At the end of colonial control, he left Algeria – just as many other individuals of European descent – and relocated to France where he continued to publish. His autobiographical novel, Jeunes saisons (1961), describes his childhood in Oran, and evokes places, customs, people and interactions. The tone is nostalgic, joyful and optimistic. The novel Saison violente (1974) also describes his childhood in Oran, but the tone changes. As the title suggests it, more violent emotions are experienced by the teenager who gains a different perspective on the world and on his own identity. In this subchapter, I am interested in investigating how the house can be sketched as a miniature diorama of the society. The house, therefore the colonial society with its various power structures, is portrayed a certain way by adult narratives, then re-imagined and contested by child narratives. We will notice that child narratives often depict images of houses inside houses, which suggest the layered presence of the many ethnic groups and heritages in colonial Algeria. I will begin with the more general landscapes that Roblès presents in Jeunes saisons, then I will transition into those of Saison violente, and I will show how Roblès’ discourse gradually narrows down landscapes to the intimate and intricate space of the house.

The novel Jeunes saisons opens with the image of the Santa-Cruz Spanish fort in Oran, Algeria: “La même joie, toujours neuve et légère, bondit en moi chaque fois que je retourne à Oran, chaque fois que mon regard, du plus loin, distingue enfin la crête de Santa-Cruz et son vieux fort espagnol, roux et trapu comme un lion couché” (The same joy, always new and light, leaps inside me each time I return to Oran, each time mye yes, from far away,
finally distinguish the crest of Santa Cruz and its old Spanish fort, ginger-colored and stocky like a sleeping lion) (9). Through this image, Oran is immediately connected to its Spanish heritage. Additionally, we can notice that feelings of joy and pride are expressed at the realization that Algeria still harbors traces of its layered past. From the top of the Spanish fort, Roblès takes us down to his neighborhood, and mentions that it is located between the train station and the cliffside that overlooks the port. All these details allow us to map the itinerary that he outlines for his readers. In 2017, his neighborhood has a different face and the streets that he mentions in his novel changed have their names:

https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Lourmel+street+oran+algeria&view=detail&mid=3F6E711B487D0BA3EDCA3F6E711B487D0BA3EDCA&FORM=VIRE. In the colonial Oran sketched in *Jeunes saisons*, Roblès insists on the beauty of his Spanish neighborhood. He does not neglect the Arab or the French presence, but he insists on the Spanish elements:

Tel était mon quartier à cette époque, ruelles montantes, maisons basses, sans un arbre pour attendrir la sécheresse des murs. Tout un petit peuple s’y pressait, d’ouvriers maçons, de fabricants d’espadrilles, de marchands ambulants, qui s’exprimaient en un patois espagnol, âpre et chantant. On y parlait peu l’arabe ou le français, et les premiers phonographes à pavillon faisaient surtout entendre des airs d’Andalousie (This was my neighborhood at that time, rising alleys, low houses, without a tree to soften the dryness of the walls. A small crowd of people lived there, masons, shoe makers, peddlers who spoke a Spanish dialect, rough and melodious. We spoke very little Arabic or French and the first phonographs played Andalusian songs) (18).

In *Jeunes saisons*, the child narrative regarding the landscapes of Algeria is mostly descriptive and emotional. Through the voice of the young Roblès, we start observing the

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29 Throughout his novels, Robles refers to both the Berbers and the Arabs as “the Arabs”
layers of the city, but conflictual discourses do not arise yet from the existence of these layers. However, spaces do begin to be contoured and portrayed as different or unknown: “Nous connaissons mal les Arabes. Au cœur d’un quartier essentiellement espagnol comme le nôtre, nous n’avions pas en classe aucun camarade musulman. Tout nous maintenait séparés d’eux, les zones d’habitation comme la différence des langues, des religions, des coutumes” (We didn’t know the Arabs well. In the middle of a predominantly Spanish neighborhood like ours, we didn’t have in class any Muslim classmates. Everything kept us separated from them, the living spaces as well as the different languages, religions and customs) (31). Each ethnic group seems to have an assigned space in Oran, but Roblès mentions that children trespass unfamiliar territories, fascinated by the world of the Others. The foreignness does not scare them; on the contrary, it draws them closer.

Curious children often explore the Arab neighborhood or the Jewish one: “Nous allions au ‘Village nègre’, le quartier arabe, pour manger des pastèques qui, nous en étions surs, avaient là-bas, plus qu’ailleurs, une saveur délicieuse” (We used to go to the ‘Black village’, the Arab neighborhood, to eat watermelons which, we were sure, had there, more than anywhere else, a delicious taste) (31). This space is observed in detail and described as poor, but full of life. Roblès’ novel appears to be a bildungsroman where we witness his growth and his continuous movement from one place to another. In the Introduction to Life Writing and Space, Eveline Kilian and Hope Wolf affirm: “Life writing can hardly be thought of without its connection to space: Who we are, and how we narrate ourselves, depends on our ability, our desire or failure, to locate our identities within space and with respect to certain places. Formation of the self often relies on spatial movement, on re(locating) the self in different places and social spaces” (1). The space also molds the way people behave and speak, so architecture, customs and languages become connected and interdependent.
An interesting episode in the novel *Jeunes saisons* occurs when Roblès’ friend, le Toni, decides to embark clandestinely on an English oil tanker that stops in the port of Oran. The oil tanker has Egypt as its destination, so le Toni arrives, to the great surprise of the sailors, in a new land. Le Toni does not get to visit the country but is immediately seen by the consul of France and sent home. However, when he returns to Algeria, le Toni narrates the image of Egypt that he pretends to have seen: “L’Egypte, tu sais… Les types vont tout nus, avec des plumes partout. Les femmes aussi. Et des perles” (Egypt, you know… Guys walk around naked, with feather everywhere. So do the women. And with pearls) (52). Roblès comments on this space forgery done by le Toni, and he concludes that it was done out of revenge. Le Toni risked a lot to travel so far and ended up finding exactly the landscape he had at home instead of a fascinating new place. He realized, however, that his narrative had the power to create another Egypt that matched his desires:

S’il transformait ainsi l’Egypte, c’est sans doute parce qu’il en voulait à la vraie de ne pas s’être accordée intimement à ses rêves. Pensez ! En Egypte, les femmes allaient voilées comme nos musulmanes ; les hommes portaient le fez ou le turban et on parlait aussi l’arabe ! C’était la même chaleur, les mêmes mouches, le même soleil ! Venir de si loin, risquer gros et retrouver l’Algérie, ah ! il ne pardonnerait jamais aux pharaons ! (If he transformed Egypt this way, it is without a doubt because he resented the real one for not having closely matched his expectations. Think about it! In Egypt, women were veiled just like our Muslims; the men wore the fez, or the turban and they also spoke Arabic! It was the same heat, the same flies, the same sun! Coming from so far away, risking big time and finding Algeria, oh! He will never forgive the Pharaohs!) (52).

This technique used by le Toni to distort a space reminds of Edward Said’s theory on orientalism where the East is represented, often through exaggerations and stereotypes, by the
eyes of the Others, so by the West. As Roblès emphasizes, images can be reshaped, remodeled and even forged in order to fit narratives and their goals. In the next novel, *Saison violente* (1974), we will observe the violence of these mutations as child narratives will challenge adult narratives inside the “House” of Algeria. We will see various images of the house, portrayed as colonial society, and we will observe how owners of houses change, how people are evicted from their houses and, we will also witness the power structures inside the houses and the violence that these power structures cause. From the big landscape of Algeria with its forts, streets and neighborhoods, we enter the smaller space of the house where the everyday struggles occur and where child narratives and adult narratives negotiate belonging.

*Saison violente* opens up with a proposal for change: Roblès’ widow mother asks the now teenage Roblès permission to marry another man and bring him in their house. The proposal shakes the ground of the teenager’s beliefs as he never imagined that someone could replace his father and assume the leader role in their house. His violent reaction scares the mother who abandons the conversation and attempts to calm him down:

Elle attendait, guettait ma réponse. Ainsi, elle avait rencontré un étranger, elle envisageait d’en devenir la femme ! Ils devaient tous deux se voir depuis longtemps, se rejoindre quelque part ! Et j’avais tout ignoré. Je n’avais rien deviné, pressenti. Je n’avais rien soupçonné : rien ! Ma mère avait pu me dissimuler une part si importante d’elle-même ! Oui, sourions, j’avais une réaction de mari trompé. (She was waiting for my answer. So, she met a stranger, she imagined becoming his wife! They must have dated for a long time, got together somewhere! And I didn’t know. I didn’t guess, I didn’t predict anything. I didn’t suspect anything, anything! My mother could hide such an important part of herself! Yes, let’s smile, I acted like she was cheating on me) (17/18).
If the foreignness did not scare Roblès as a young child when he explored the unfamiliar territories of the Arab and Jewish neighborhoods, at this time, when the foreignness enters his home, it becomes problematic. Whose house will it be when the step-father lives there? Will his father’s legacy continue, or will it be replaced by the step-father’s legacy? Roblès confesses that his father’s death represents a gap that he does not want to see replaced by a stranger. The proposal of multiple residents in the house and the layers of legacies that will result from their cohabitation are rejected by the teenager who feels that his “identity” is threatened. Sara McDowell affirms that “Heritage is political and often territorial, serving certain agencies and groups through communicating narratives of inclusion and exclusion, continuity and instability” (Heritage, Memory and Identity, 49)

In Saison violente, certain houses are destroyed, and sometimes entire neighborhoods are destroyed as well, because they exist in the territory of the Other. We find out that the houses in Roblès’ neighborhood are on the list of buildings considered inappropriate and dirty. A police officer announces to the residents that they will soon be evicted: “Heureusement que bientôt on va vous flanquer dehors, avec votre fumier, vos punaises et vos poux ! Il faudra ensuite nettoyer tout ça au lance-flammes !” (Luckily, we will soon kick you out, with your manure, your bedbugs and lice! Then we will have to clean the place up with a flamethrower!) (61). From the policeman’s threats, we find out that not only will the houses be destroyed, but the territory would have to be “purified” in order to ensure that no traces of the past Spanish residence will be visible. This narrative emphasizes once again the connection between heritage and violence, as well as the desire to destroy what is considered “impure”. When the decision to evict the residents is finalized, we notice that Roblès and his mother have different emotions regarding the process of moving to a different territory. The child is ready to let go of the past and focus on a new adventure, but the mother connects
their Spanish neighborhood to the main events in her life, and feels that something is dying at the time of their departure:

A l’idée de quitter ce quartier, ma mère se désespérait. Je la comprenais. C’est ici qu’elle avait connu mon père, ici qu’elle s’était mariée et que j’étais né. Ses plus clairs souvenirs se concentraient dans ces quelques rues. S’en éloigner revenait, pour elle, à laisser mourir une lumières qui flottait encore entre ces murs. Pour moi, abandonner le quartier ne me pesait guère. Je pouvais y revenir à ma guise, et mes amis, je les retrouvais tous les jours au collège (At the idea of leaving this neighborhood, my mother was desperate. It made sense. She met my father here, she got married here and I was born here. Her clearest memories belonged to these streets. To move away from it meant for her allowing a light still floating between these walls to die. For me, abandoning the neighborhood didn’t mean much. I could come back as I pleased, and I could see my friends at school) (81).

Roblès’ choice of words reflects the various relationships between individuals and their houses. In the mother’s case, the situation seems to be out of her control as if something is dying and cannot be kept alive. However, in the child’s case, we notice that the word “abandonment” is used, which suggests a desire to leave the past behind. Also, in the case of the mother, memories of the main events from her life are evoked – the relationship with her husband and the birth of her child – which suggest that she is the house. So, when the house is burned down, she feels that she is hurt as well. On the contrary, the lack of control and the victim status does not appear in Roblès’ case, and his agency is emphasized by the statement “I can come back as I please”. Rather than the place having control over him, he claims control over the place. The teenager’s narrative challenges the mother’s narrative, thus providing another possibility of relating to heritage. Instead of looking at heritage as
something that cannot be transported from one territory to another, the child looks at it as something transferrable and fluid.

The mother and the child finally find new homes, but they are forced to part ways. They are separated and they both live in the house of other people and with other people. The mother is hired in the house of a rich French man as a laundry lady: “Un soir ma mère m’annonça la nouvelle : en ce même après-midi elle avait accepté une place chez un riche négociant en vins du quartier Saint-Pierre, proche du nôtre.” (One evening, my mother announced me the news: this afternoon she accepted to work at a rich wine merchant from Saint-Pierre, a neighborhood close to ours) (82). The mother is not allowed to bring her child with her, and she cannot live anywhere else except in the house where she works: “Sauf le chauffeur, tout ce monde [les domestiques] logeait obligatoirement dans les dépendances de la villa. Engagée à demeure en qualité de blanchisseuse, on refusait à ma mère de me garder près d’elle” (Except for the driver, all the servants had to reside in the master’s house. Hired as a laundry lady, my mother was not allowed to bring me with her) (82). At the villa of the French man, only the people who serve in the house are allowed to reside there: the laundry lady, the maid, the cook, the gardener and the dressmaker. Those who serve the needs of the master are allowed to stay, while the others are kept at a distance. The villa is surrounded by railings, and the terms “railings”, “forbidden to cross” and “frontiers” appear along with terms that reflect emotional distress. Roblès was separated by his father, and, given the frontiers imposed by having to live separately, he is now separated from his mother as well:

Pour être un peu trop frais, cependant, ce stoïcisme ne me permit pas de surmonter ma tristesse le jour où j’accompagnai ma mère à la villa Voisin. Derrière la grille du jardin qu’il m’était interdit de franchir, je la regardai s’éloigner, mince et droite, sa valise à la main, et s’enfoncer dans l’allée bordée de palmiers. Un chat m’observait entre les pots de géraniums et, plus que la grille, semblait marquer mes frontières avec
ce domaine (To be a little too frank, this stoicism didn’t help me overcome my sadness when I accompanied mom to the villa Voisin. Behind the garden fence that I was not supposed to cross, I was watching her go, slender and straight, suitcase in hand and entering the palm tree alley. A cat was watching me between the pots of geranium and, more than the fence, seemed to mark the frontiers of this domain) (83).

The separation from his mother can be interpreted as a painful parting from his Spanish legacy. His father is dead, and his mother, his sole connection with his Spanish descent, is taken away from him as well by the new French boss.

In turn, Roblès will reside in a new house, the one of a rich French woman named Mrs. Quinson. Mrs. Quinson is a regular customer of the laundry services offered by Roblès’ mother, and she allows Roblès to live with her and with the rest of her servants. The day of the move, the child attempts to delay the transition into the new home as long as possible as a sign of his revolt against the new order. Through his narrative and attitude, the child attempts to widen the space that the French woman tries to narrow down. The evening when he is supposed to move into the new house, he chooses to roam the streets and to spend time near the Spanish fort Rozalcazar – a symbol of the legacy he wants to keep: “Au lieu de rentrer tout de suite chez Mme Quinson je préférai flâner, pris par un besoin d’errance et de solitude. Comme le vent soufflait je passai l’après-midi sur la promenade de Létang, en bordure du port, à regarder les lames bondir par-dessus la digue, ou à marcher le long des murailles du Rozalcazar, autre fort espagnol” (Instead of quickly returning to Mrs. Quinson, I preferred to roam the streets, filled by a need to wonder around and to be alone. As the wind blew, I spent the afternoon on the promenade Létang, at the edge of the harbor, watching the goats leap over the dyke or walk along the walls of Rozalcazar, another Spanish fort) (83). We witness an attempt to restage spaces, and, through the visit to the Spanish fort, Roblès makes it obvious that the territories which remind him of his legacy are not extinct, but slightly out of
his current reach. At the end of his wanderings, he finally joins Mrs. Quinson in her French house. He arrives late at night, when the house is surrounded by darkness, and expects a reproachful attitude from his new guardian. Contrary to his expectations, Mrs. Quinson adopts a different tactic: “Allons, mon garçon, j’espère que nous ferons bon ménage!” (Come on, my boy, I hope we’ll live well together!) (85). The child is well received in the house, but he will soon discover that the kindness will last only as long as he allows Mrs. Quinson to use her house as the space where she can transform him according to her own image.

The enormous house controlled by the French woman is built like a Russian doll: it has layers upon layers, and the servants who are allowed to reside there and who belong to different ethnic groups live on different floors. Mrs. Quinson occupies the top level of the building and does not share it with anyone else: “Je me souviens aussi de mon arrivé, à la nuit, chez Mme Quinson. Celle-ci occupait tout le troisième étage d’un immeuble neuf rue de Mostaganem” (I remember my arrival, at night, at Mrs. Quinson’s. She lived on the third floor of the new building, on Mostaganem Street) (84). Through heritage, the territory that Mrs. Quinson owns in Oran increased in size, and we find out that she inherited a large domain from her parents, while her brother, Denis, was administering it. The relationship between individuals and the place where they reside is analyzed by Clare Cooper Marcus in *House As a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home*: “A home fulfills many needs: a place of self-expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guard. A person without a fixed abode is viewed with suspicion in our society, labeled as ‘vagrant’, ‘hobo’, ‘street person’. The lack of a home address can be a serious impediment to someone seeking a job, renting a place to live, or trying to vote” (171, Kindle edition). It seems that individuals who have a home, have power and prestige, and the ones who do not have one – or are in the position of sharing the house of Others – suffer from the shaming discourses aimed at them. Besides the young
Roblès, other people are allowed in Mrs. Quinson’s house in order to help her on a daily basis. They live in different parts of the house, at the lower levels and far away from Mrs. Quinson’s rooms. Roblès shares a room with the Spanish servant, Dolores: “Je sus que je partagerais la chambre de Dolores. Dans cette chambre, à l’extrémité de l’appartement, on avait déjà disposé un divan pour moi.” (I knew I was to share the bedroom with Dolores. In this bedroom, at the extremity of the apartment, they place a bed for me) (86). The teenager shares a room with « the pain », and he admits throughout the novel that he suffers because of Mrs. Quinson’s humiliating discourses about his Spanish descent, Spanish accent and dark complexion.

Yasmina, Mrs Quinson’s Arab servant, has a slightly different relationship to the French house than the rest of the servants. She does not want to reside in the house, and only arrives during the day to help around. Unlike Dolores, whose husband died during the battle of Verdun, Yasmina is married and lives in her own house. The narrative of the young Yasmina does not approve of Mrs. Quinson’s view on life, and she often times displays a disdainful and rebellious attitude towards her boss. In turn, Mrs. Quinson treats her disrespectfully and refuses to call her by her real name. Instead, she refers to Yasmina as Fatma. The young Roblès finds Mrs. Quinson’s attitude disrespectful as, in his opinion, a name is closely linked to someone’s personality and when the real name of a person is ignored, the very authenticity of that person is denied. Yasmina is the one who opens the doors for the young Roblès to the most intimate space in Mrs. Quinson’s house – her bedroom. The forbidden place overwhelms the teenager with its luxury and extravagance. This new universe of the French upper class displays features that Roblès has only seen in movies:

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30 “Dolor” means “Pain” in Spanish
Alors Yasmina, l’œil plissé de malice, me fit pénétrer dans la chambre à coucher de sa maîtresse, lieu sacro-saint où je n’avais encore jamais eu accès. Cette chambre me rappela un décor de cinéma, le cinéma étant jusque-là le seul regard possible sur une société dont nous ne savions à peu près rien. Des rideaux de mousseline encadraient les fenêtres et le lit, créaient une intimité ouatée (So Yasmina, her eyes squinting with mischief, gave me access to her mistress’ bedroom, a sacred-holy place where I have not been before. This bedroom reminded me of a cinema décor, the cinema being the only access to a society unknown to us. Chiffon curtains framed the windows and bed, creating a padded privacy) (89).

In Mrs. Quinson’s house, many invasions of private territories occur. This visual invasion initiated by Yasmina is an attempt of reversing the visual invasion done by the French into the intimate territory of the Arabs and Berbers. The closed houses of the Arab and Berber population, as well as the veil that protected the faces of women from the outside world represented a fascinating territory that the colonizer wanted to discover. Zeynep Celik states: “Occupied by the French in 1830, almost a decade before the public announcement of the invention of photography, Algeria became the site par excellence to exploit its possibilities and to convey the ‘reality’ of the colony to the métropole. The conquest was repeated by capturing Algeria visually […]” (616). The child narratives in Saison violente present the numerous invasions that occur in the house and the way they escalate from symbolic to physical. These invasions that occur in the house are supposed to remain secret and hidden from the eyes of those who reside outside it. Roblès understands that he has to remain silent when he observes physical invasions of spaces. Mrs. Quinson’s brother, Denis, occasionally visits his sister and, inside her house, he harasses both Dolores and Yasmina:

Certains soirs je la trouvais en compagnie de son frère Denis, un homme épais, avec les mêmes petits yeux pointus que ma bienfaitrice. Jamais il ne me prêtait la moindre
attention. Pour lui, je semblais transparent. Yasmina et Dolores le craignaient,
Yasmina surtout et pour la raison plus précise qu’en arrivant il cherchait à lui palper
les seins et la croupe. (During certain evenings, I would find her in the presence of her
brother, Denis, a think man with the same sharp little eyes like my guardian. He never
paid any attention to me. For him, I was invisible. Yasmina and Dolores feared him,
especially Yasmina since, after arriving, he was always trying to touch her breasts and
her hips) (106).

If Roblès’ space is not invaded physically, it is however invaded emotionally. In her
house, Mrs. Quinson humiliates him, often times publicly, when she speaks to him. Their
interactions are monologues rather than dialogues wherein she tries to re-create his identity
according to his new status of a resident in her house. His previous customs, called customs
of a savage, as well as his Spanish language are the target of her mockery. When the child’s
narrative tries to make her aware that there are more houses in the House, and not just one,
Mrs. Quinson refuses to see the layers and forbids him to speak. She would always say that
no one talks back to her and that she does not appreciate those who have the courage to
contradict her. To Roblès, the house no longer seems to be a home, but a cage where he feels
treated like an animal. He confesses that he feels humiliated even more when Dolores, out of
fear, agrees with Mrs. Quinson’s way of treating him. Without sympathizing with him,
Dolores would walk between the dining-room and the kitchen, watching and approving what
Roblès called a “dressage” (91), so a way of training animals, not human beings. This
blindness of certain rich French individuals towards the customs, the beliefs, the languages
and the struggles of the other ethnic groups of colonial Algeria is also addressed by Daniel
Mesguish (1952-present), a pied-noir actor and movie director:

J’ai vécu là-bas dix années de ma vie. Sans doute les plus importantes puisque
c’étaient les premières. Ensuite il y a eu déchirure. En arrivant en France, nous avons
vécu l’humiliation. Celle de devenir pauvres. En Algérie, c’était l’Arabe qui était le pauvre. Je me suis rendu compte qu’il était possible de devenir l’Arabe. C’était surtout çà, je crois, la déchirure. (I lived down there for ten years. Probably the most important years since they were the first ones. And then the heartbreak occurred. Arriving in France, we experienced humiliation. The humiliation of becoming poor. In Algeria, the Arab was poor. This was mainly the heartbreak, I think) (Mon Algérie, 32/33).

The lack of a dialogue in the house creates a gap – the blindness that Mesguish mentions – between the residents. Mrs. Quinson’s bedroom is the perfect example of this isolation, and the words used to describe it “place where I never have access” or “the interior of a box of candies” reflects the invisible fences that separate individuals who, in theory, “share” the same house.

The teenager Roblès tests the frontiers and attempts to find ways to occasionally escape the house. In House As a Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home, Cooper states: “Even the prisoner, shut away by society because of a crime, is permitted to bring into prison certain effects that are personally meaningful (posters, pinups, family pictures). Even when stripped of all symbols of selfhood, all possibilities of choice, we do concede that the personalization of place is an inalienable right” (292, Kindle version) The young Roblès is not allowed to display any signs of his Spanish customs or beliefs, and, we witness the vagabondage episodes as a way of protest against the house, its structure and its rules. The novel returns to the initial image presented to us the evening when Roblès joined Mrs Quinson’s, so the one of roaming the streets in order to delay entering the house. Now, Roblès tries to find ways to roam the streets at night without Mrs. Quinson’s approval and while residing in her house. The author uses this subversive strategy to show us that the monolithic French house is gradually collapsing : “Avec les soirées qui devenaient plus
longues et plus douces, l’envie me revint de flâner après dîner, selon mon habitude du temps où je vivais avec ma mère, mais, passé huit heures, Mme Quinson m’interdisait toute sortie”. (Since the evenings became gradually longer and warmer, I felt like roaming the streets again after dinner, according to my habit from when I used to live with my mother, but, past eight o’clock, Mrs. Quinson did not allow me to get out) (Saison violente, 113). The escape episodes, planned with his Spanish friends, rather than representing a simple account of childhood events, symbolize the riots that occurred in Algeria before the forthcoming Independence. The frustration of not being able to escape Mrs. Quinson’s control creates images of imprisonment and rage. Roblès tells us that his friends would show up under Mrs. Quinson’s balcony, whistle and ask him to come down and go roam the streets with them. He mentions his frustration of not being able to joint hem and the rage of feeling like a prisoner in the House of the French. The teenager is fully aware that Mrs Quinson’s inflexible narratives are meant to depersonalize his space and include him in the monolithic house that she creates for all her servants. He feels compassion for the other “prisoners” of the house who refuse to fight and who accept their status. Dolores is portrayed as a bird trapped in the cage who forgot how to survive on her own and chose to blindly obey her boss:

Dolores esclavagisée, l’esprit réduit, amputé, atrophié ! Elle me rappelait irrésistiblement un oiseau que Fred avait libéré de sa cage et qui, après un vol très court, était revenu à ses barreaux, à sa mangeoire, à ses limites, comme affolé par l’excès d’espace et de lumière. Dolores ne désirait que sa tranquillité, s’accommodait de cette existence élémentaire. (Dolores turned into a slave, her spirit crushed, amputated, atrophied! She reminded me of a bird that Fred set free from its cage and that, after a short flight, came back to its bars, to its feeder, to its limits as if crazed by the excess of space and light. Dolores only wanted her tranquility and got used to this basic way of surviving) (113).
The mechanical existence of Dolores helps Roblès understand that he will share the same fate if he does not try to challenge the boundaries of the house even at the risk of losing his life – allusion that connects, once again, the vagabondage episodes with the violent riots in colonial Algeria that led to the loss of many lives. When discussing policies used to form spaces of confinement, Clare Marcus affirms: “Conversely, when society wishes to mold a group of individuals into a whole (military personnel), or the attention of the group is deliberately focused away from personal needs (religious orders), the personalization of space is consistently precluded” (292, Kindle edition). In *Saison violente*, Dolores refuses to help the teenager organize his escapes, and he waits until she falls asleep to venture into the night with his friends. The freedom that waits for him outside the house outweighs the fear of getting hurt, and, despite all warnings and threats from Mrs Quinson, the teenager begins his double life. During the day, he endures her inflexible discourses, but at night he continues to experience the freedom he used to have before entering the French house:

> A la fin, je n’y résistai plus. J’avais étudié les conditions d’une sortie clandestine. Après avoir vérifié le sommeil de Dolores et placé astucieusement mon traversin sous le drap, je grimpai sur une chaise, passai la fenêtre, en repoussant simplement les persiennes. Je pris pied de l’autre côté, sur la corniche qui était large et solide. Plaqué le ventre au mur, avec le puits de la cour derrière moi, je progressai vers la paroi suivante (Finally, I couldn’t take it anymore. I researched a way of escaping. After making sure that Dolores was sleeping and after strategically placing my bolster under the covers, I climbed on a chair, passed by the window by simply pushing the louvers. I got to the other side on the ledge that was wide and solid. Stomach on the wall, with the wells of the yard behind me, I was progressing towards the next wall) (115).

The teenager’s revolt begins with the metamorphosis that occurs each night. Roblès carefully hides his double identity from Mrs Quinson as he fears the repercussion that will result from
defying the monolithic discourse of the French house. One morning though, his double life is discovered. Dolores feels cold in the middle of the night and closes the window, thus blocking his access into the house. Caught and scolded by both Dolores and Mrs Quinson, Roblès is eventually thrown out of the house, as Mrs. Quinson was screaming that she would not keep a gangster in her home. The rebel becomes homeless, but one of his Spanish friends makes an effort to keep him in his family’s house until he can find a new home.

After Roblès’ departure from the house, we also witness his mother’s departure from the house of the French man that hired her. When the teenager surprises his mom with a visit, he notices that she also suffers humiliations and physical abuses in the French house. Her boss pushes her with his foot and laughs at her while she helplessly falls on the floor. The teenager does not tolerate the abuse he sees in the house: “Ma mère m’a déjà vu. Sa pâleur ! Ses yeux horrifiés ! Oui, ça ne doit pas être la première fois que ce malotru agit ainsi ! Je vais lui casser la gueule ! (Mais tais-toi ! Ne crie pas !) Cabron!31 Hijo de puta!32 Maricon!33” (My mother already saw me. Her pallor! Her scared eyes! Yes, this can’t be the first time this shmuck acts like this! I’ll smash his face! (Be silent! Don’t yell!) (137). The abuse that the teenager sees leads to violence, a violence confessed in an unapologetic way. The violence escalates to a point where the young man envisions himself as capable of killing the one who humiliated and hurt his family. The house of abuse is the target of his rage and his narrative – uttered in Spanish – does not show forgiveness towards the one who shamed his mother: “A certains moments de la journée, quand je redevenais spectateur de moi-même, j’évaluais ces ravages, j’admettais qu’au plus profond de ma crise je pouvais vraiment tuer. (During certain moments of the day, when I would see everything as a spectator, I would evaluate my heartbreaks, and, in the midst of my deepest crisis, I knew that I could kill) (141). This chain

31 In Spanish – “bastard”
32 In Spanish – “son of a b…”
33 In Spanish – “coward”
of resistance-violence present in this novel reminds of the numerous acts of resistance that were followed by violence in colonial Algeria. The author also emphasizes the tension caused by attempts to depersonalize, followed by attempts to personalize spaces, human beings and stories. If for the rich French man, the woman he humiliated was simply a poor woman, for Roblès, she was his mother and his only connection to his Spanish heritage. The novel *Saison violente* does not end with this one-angle perspective on the French presence in colonial Algeria. With the help of the narratives uttered by the voice of a French teenage girl, Roblès diversifies the French attitude towards the Others.

During his stay in Mrs. Quinson’s house, Roblès meets Véronique, a French teenager who lives close to their building, and he falls in love with her. Unlike Mrs. Quinson, who does not show any signs of curiosity towards Roblès’ customs, language or beliefs, Véronique approaches him and his universe with curious eyes. After Roblès’ departure from Mrs Quinson’s house and after his mother departure from the villa Voisin, the mother and son manage to rent an old apartment together: “L’appartement en question se trouvait au-dessus d’un entrepôt ‘d’huiles et graisses industrielles’. On y pénétrait par un couloir toujours encombré, à droite et à gauche, de grands fûts métalliques” (The appartment in question was located above a warehouse ‘of industrial oils and fats’. We could get inside it through a hallway still surrounded, left and right, by metal bars) (145). The new home is decorated according to their Spanish traditions since Roblès’ mother brought with her items belonging to previous generations. While Roblès’ eyes were accustomed to this décor, Véronique analyzes everything that surrounds her inRoblès’ house with mixed feelings of confusion and curiosity. She praises what she understands and finds interesting in the house, and she asks some questions about what she doesn’t fully understand: “Comme je lui expliquais le travail de l’Italien pour replâtrer tout le plafond, je m’aperçus qu’elle m’écoutait à peine et qu’elle examinait ce décor avec surprise. Cette attitude me troubla. Pour la première fois je
découvrais ma pauvreté dans le regard d’un autre” (As I was explaining her the work of the Italian who plastered the entire ceiling, I realized she wasn’t really listening and she was examining this décor with great surprise. This attitude worried me. For the first time, I was discovering my poverty in the eyes of another person) (148). When discussing the role of décor in a house, Clare Marcus makes an analogy between the objects present in the house and the self, and she considers the objects as the reflection of the self:

Objects, like people, come in and out of our lives and awareness, not in some random, meaningless pattern ordained by fate, but in a clearly patterned framework that sets the stage for greater and greater self-understanding. […] To continue the theatrical analogy, a play or drama also needs a set and props. In our own lives, we select the sets and props of different acts (or periods of life) in order – often unconsciously – to display images of ourselves […] (292, Kindle version)

Consequently, when Véronique analyzes the décor of Roblès’ house, she also analyzes Roblès. Roblès feels exposed as he becomes aware of the fact that his house reflects him. In her own way, Véronique understands the implications of her visual inspection, and she carefully avoids certain questions that she considers inappropriate. In Roblès’ new house, Véronique sees vases brought from the Balearic Islands, family pictures, statues of Jesus and of Saint Antoine de Padua, books and strings of dry peppers. Véronique is portrayed by Roblès as an outsider, but as an outsider who is willing to understand what she doesn’t know. He does not criticize the way that Véronique looks at his house, however, there is a certain sense of unease associated with her presence and with some of her questions. Almost at the end of the visit, when Véronique insists and asks for explanations about customs she considers cruel – customs that I will explain in detail in the following subchapter – Roblès states: “Ainsi doivent supplier certains ethnographes qui interrogent les indigènes d’une tribu primitive, sans douter un instant que ceux-ci vont taire leurs secrets et embrouiller leurs
réponses” (In such a way must have certain ethnographers begged when interrogating the natives of a primitive tribe without doubting for a minute that they would keep their secrets well-hidden and would offer vague answers) (Saison violente, 150). The objects with a religious connotation and the ones related to superstitions seem to attract the most intense conversations between the French and the Spanish teenagers. Roblès’ superstitions are immediately connected to his legacy – as we can notice from his confession – and his grandmother is portrayed as the one who transmitted these beliefs to future generations: “Je l’ai déjà dit, mon esprit ne se prononçait pas encore, de façon absolue, contre l’inconcevable, l’absurde, l’irrationnel. Il gardait encore une frange qui touchait à ce monde occulte auquel m’avait initié ma grand-mère andalouse” (I have already said it, my mind was not completely settled yet against the inconceivable, the absurd, the irrational. It was still nurturing a side that was connected to the occult world to which my Andalusian grandmother initiated me) (149). When Véronique distances herself from certain practices related to superstitions, she skillfully manages to do so without hurting her relationship with Roblès. Through her words, she attempts to make it obvious that she resents the action, but not the person, so she tells Roblès that she knows him and that she knows he is a kind human being. Both teenagers choose to address tensions in a respectful manner and initiate a dialogue where each party has the opportunity to explain the reasons behind their actions, and Roblès’ house becomes the house of meeting in the middle and accepting differences rather than the house of building frontiers.

In the following subchapter, I will address customs that are allowed – or not allowed – in the houses where characters from Jeunes saisons and Saison violente reside. I am interested to see how customs in a house are approached by different generations: are they only customs, do they become traditions or are they simply perceived as superstitions? I will
also pay attention to customs that occur without causing tension among the ethnic groups existent in colonial Algeria and to customs that cause violence and separate individuals.

2.2 Customs

In the previous subchapter, we noticed that the House influences what one can do and say, so the architecture of a space influences customs and languages. In Mrs. Quinson’s French house, we witnessed her adult narrative that demanded uniform customs and languages despite the existence of layered beliefs and discourses. Through Roblès’ voice, stories were told in an alternative way, and inflexible narratives on cultural heritage were challenged, thus often creating tension and violence. In this subchapter, I will analyze customs in *Jeunes saisons*, but I will insist on the problematics of customs in *Saison violente*. In *Jeunes saisons*, customs are approached similarly to the way architecture was approached, meaning that the style is mostly descriptive, and the tone is nostalgic. The first custom presented in the novel is related to music. Through a detailed description of images and sounds, we can reconstruct an episode that Roblès considers specific for his Spanish neighborhood – the serenade offered by two guitar players:

Parfois, ils jouaient des airs flamencos pour eux-mêmes, pour le plaisir, en s’encourageant mutuellement par des exclamations. Alors, seulement, ils souriaient ou, plutôt, quelque chose qui ressemblait à un sourire attendrisse le pli sévère de leurs lèvres noircies par le tabac. Ces deux guitaristes contribuaient à donner à nos rues une atmosphère andalouse qu’elles ont perdue aujourd’hui et qui subsiste pourtant dans certains coins du quartier de la Marine […]. (Sometimes, they played flamenco songs for themselves, for their own joy, while encouraging each other with exclamations. Only then they smiled or, rather, you could see something that looked like a smile softening the severe fold of their lips blackened by tobacco. These two
guitar players helped give our streets an Andalusian air, air they lost today, but which still exists in certain corners of the Marine district) (10).

In Roblès’ small Spanish neighborhood, customs that remind him of Andalusia are performed with great enthusiasm, and the entire community benefits from the joy they cause. In *Saison violente*, we find out that, even though Roblès’ father died shortly after Roblès’ birth, the customs he treasured are still passed on to his child with the help of his family friends.

Camilo evokes the times when Roblès’ father, Manuel, used to serenade his fiancée. He mentions that, in their entire neighborhood, this tradition lasted until the war occurred and people would rent the services of singers and guitar players, thus conferring the neighborhood a festive atmosphere. Soon after presenting this custom that reminds him of his Spanish legacy, Roblès diversifies the range of customs existent in colonial Algeria, and describes one related to the way the Arabs tried to control natural disasters. It is interesting to note that Roblès describes this Arab custom with even more enthusiasm than the Spanish one. He is charmed by the images and sounds that surrounded the event performed in order to bring rain. According to the episode related by Roblès, Arab monks would come to their neighborhood, dressed in a white robe and turban, asking for offerings while walking a small sacrifice bull that had its horns decorated with various multicolored ribbons. Additionally, they were marching while carrying colorful silk flags and while singing and playing their flutes, their drums and their cymbals to Roblès’ amazement. The Arab\(^\text{34}\) and Spanish customs intersect in Oran, and the child appreciates the diversity of practices that he notices around him. The growing Spanish community of Oran is mentioned in *Le people algérien : essais de démographie algérienne* (1906) of Victor Demontès: “La colonie espagnole forme une société complète, à la fois maritime et agricole, industrielle et commerciale. Aussi a-t-elle profité de toutes les causes qui ont favorisé le peuplement de l’Algérie, et sa croissance a été

\(^{34}\) Again, Robles uses “Arab” for both the Arab and Berber population of Algeria
régulière, continue” (The Spanish colony forms a complete society, both maritime and agricultural, industrial and commercial. Thus, it took advantage of all the causes that favored the settlement in Algeria and its growth was regular and continuous) (58).

The Spanish community of Oran finds joy in customs related to art. They appreciate music, and they enjoy the corridas\textsuperscript{35} that occur in their neighborhood. While certain narratives classify the corrida as a violent sport, Roblès classifies it as an art and a show where the matador\textsuperscript{36} bravely defies death. In Jeunes saisons, he describes the feelings of excitement that surround this event: “Nous acclamions l’arrivée des toreros en costumes de lumière, tout raides au fond d’un taxi ou sur la banquette de leur calèche. Ils avaient un air grave et lointain comme il convient à des hommes qui vont ‘tuer leur propre mort’. Un jour, l’un d’entre eux, l’attention captée par mes cris, tourna la tête vers moi tandis que sa voiture fendait lentement la foule” (We used to cheer for the arrival of the bullfighters in shiny costumes, all proud inside a taxi or on the bench of their carriage. They had a distant and serious expression just right for people who are about ‘to kill their own death’. One day, one of them, captivated by my screams, turned his head towards me as his car was moving towards the crowd) (35). In Bullfighting: Art, Technique and Spanish Society, McCormick affirms that a bullfighter cannot be compared to an athlete, and the corridas cannot be perceived as a simple sport:

The torero’s\textsuperscript{37} relationship to the public differs in essence from the athlete’s, because very little of his performance is predictable. The torero is a performer, like the athlete, but he is much more than a performer. He might be compared to the actor but for the fact that he writes his own script, in collaboration with the toro.\textsuperscript{38} Or he might be

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\textsuperscript{35} The bullfights
\textsuperscript{36} The bullfighter
\textsuperscript{37} The bullfighter
\textsuperscript{38} The bull
compared to the dancer, but for the fact that he is his own choreographer and his own composer, again in collaboration with the toro (4).

This controversial Spanish custom described by Roblès in *Jeunes saisons*, as well as other customs related to Spanish beliefs in supernatural forces are regarded through a different angle by people belonging to other ethnic groups. Roblès brings into discussion the savagery attributed to certain individuals, and he presents us with the voices that claim the “need” to civilize the savages that do not behave appropriately in the House of the French. These tensions will culminate in *Saison violente*, and Roblès will present various ways of approaching the customs of Others.

In *Jeunes saisons*, the Spanish customs related to religion are depicted through the eyes of the young Roblès and through the eyes of the women in his family – his mother and his grandmother. Both women are portrayed as pious, with a strong attachment to their family crucifixes, and to the statues of Jesus and Saint Antoine de Padua: “Elles allaient à la messe de loin en loin, mais ma grand-mère faisait tous les soirs sa prière, assise sur son lit, le chignon dénoué, engoncée dans sa bouffante chemise de nuit.” (They used to go to church from time to time, but my grandmother would pray each evening, sitting in bed, her hair bun untied, bundled up in her puffy nightgown) (39). The distinct features of his grandmother’s act of praying are also carefully presented and Roblès mentions that she wasn’t making the sign of the cross as most people do, so she was not touching her forehead, then her stomach and shoulder. Instead, with her right thumb, she would touch her forehead, her chin and her cheeks multiple times. In *Jeunes saisons*, Roblès focuses on custom-related differences among generations from the same ethnic group rather than on differences among the various ethnic groups of Algeria. His pious grandmother has her own statue of Saint Antoine de

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39 Saint Antoine de Padua (or Anthony of Padua) was a Catholic priest (1195-1231) of the Franciscan order
Padua with the child Jesus in his arms, but we find out that the young Roblès does not intend to perpetuate these religious customs as he does not believe in their power. Additionally, he decides to “remodel” his grand-mother’s statue of Saint Antoine de Padua according to his own imagination:

Ce saint Antoine avec au bras l’enfant Jésus (celui-ci tenait un globe dans sa main) n’avait pas ma sympathie à cause de son visage glabre à la fade expression, à cause aussi de son crâne rasé et de sa ridicule couronne de cheveux. Un jour de pluie, comme j’étais seul à la maison et que je m’ennuyais, je dessinai une araignée sur l’occiput du bon saint ainsi que sur des côtés sur le globe de l’enfant-dieu de sorte qu’il semblait vous tendre un melon ! (This Saint Anthony holding the baby Jesus (this one had a globe in his hand) was not my favorite thing because of his shaved face, shaved head and his ridiculous crown of hair. One rainy day, as I was home alone and bored, I drew a spider on the good saint’s back of the head as well as on the sides of the glob held by the child-God so that it looked like He was handing you a melon) (39/40).

Roblès rejects the religious customs that are practiced in his Spanish family, but, surprisingly, he is strongly attached to the superstitions presented to him by his grandmother. This attachment to superstitions could be explained by the hope to benefit from their use. One of the superstitions explained by the young Roblès implies capturing red ants that will help him either cast spells on his enemies when needed or avoid curses from others. The “mauvais sort” or “mauvais œil” and the customs related to it are present in the Arab and Berber culture as well, and various items are used to keep the evil away – for example, the famous

40 “Curse” or “evil eye”
Main de Fatma. Roblès’ amulet differs from the one used in the Arab and Berber cultures, and it consists of a living red ant closed in a box:

Nous savions, mes amis et moi, de nombreuses formules pour conjurer le mauvais sort. Contre les manifestations du diable il suffisait de porter sur soi une fourmi rouge enfermée dans une boîte d’allumettes, celle-ci percée d’un trou recouvert de papier transparent. Tant que la fourmi était vivante, le possesseur ne risquait pratiquement rien. En classe, au moment d’une interrogation difficile, nous frottions subrepticement la boîte sur le pupitre (We knew, my friends and I, many formulas to ward off the bad luck. Against these manifestations of the devil, it was enough to carry with you a red ant closed in a box of matches with a whole covered by see-through paper. As long as the ant was alive, the owner was not at risk. During class, when we had a difficult test, we would secretly rub the box on the desk) (42).

In this case, the red ant ritual is used by Roblès as white magic to protect him from evil and from the everyday difficulties that he encounters. The same red ant ritual, but in reverse, will be used against Mrs Quinson and against his mother’s boss from the Villa Voisin in Saison violente. With the help of the Spanish superstitions learned from his grandmother, the teenager Roblès will attempt to change the power structures that he considers unfair in the House and cast curses on the people that humiliate him and his family. The power of the red ant is tested in almost a corrida-like environment created by children. They place another ant, this time a black one, in the same box with the red ant and let them fight, anxiously waiting to see who the winner will be: “Pour vérifier sa combativité, nous la mettions en présence d’une fourmi noire, d’une taille égale. En général, la fourmi-gendarme étranglait proprement son adversaire entre ses terribles mandibules” (To check its fighting capacity, we used to put it

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41 “The hand of Fatma” – after the daughter of the prophet Muhammad
near another black ant of equal size. In general, the gendarme-ant would literally strangle its opponent between its strong jaws) (*Jeunes saisons*, 43). Even though the fetish ant wins against other ants, it is presented as powerless against the most feared image in their Spanish community – the one of skeletons. When the feared image appears during classes, the fetish ant needs additional amulets to intensify its power. According to Roblès, when they knew that the teacher would present something related to the human body, all students became terrified and, in addition to the box holding the red ant, they would bring snake skin in a little bag or oxen teeth in order to protect them and to ward off any possible evil. In this novel, where Roblès resides in his mother’s house, I was interested to find out which practices remain customs and which ones have the chance to become traditions. It seems that Roblès will not embrace his mother’s and his grandmother’s religious practices, but he embraces the superstitions that his grandmother shared with him and with his mother.

In *Saison violente*, when the house where the teenager Roblès resides changes, the customs change along with it. As seen in the previous subchapter, Roblès moves in with Mrs Quinson, a rich French woman who plans to model the young man according to her own image. The customs of the new house are rigid and do not match Roblès’ previous way of living. Mrs Quinson’s narrative does not allow any deviations from the norms that are clearly presented to the newcomer, and her desire to educate Roblès reminds us of the “civilizing mission” project in colonial Algeria. Multiple times, Mrs Quinson refers to Roblès as a savage who benefits from her education and advice. In turn, Roblès affirms that he feels like an animal trapped in a cage and humiliated by his new guardian. Using James George Frazer’s *Questions on the Customs, Beliefs, and Languages of Savages*, I will present the guide that Frazer provided for ethnographers and researchers when initiating contact with “savages” and their customs. I will compare the topics suggested in this guide with the

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42 The term “savages” is used by Frazer throughout his work and in the title of his work
topics addressed by Mrs Quinson in the process of educating Roblès and attempting to change his previous habits. Frazer (1854-1941) was a Scottish social anthropologist who was interested in the way “savages” perceived the world around them. Here is an example of the guide he put together to help researchers and missionaries find information about “savages”:

Do they eat everything edible? Or are certain foods forbidden? Are some foods forbidden (a) to every one without distinction; (b) to members of particular tribes, clans, or families; (c) to women, but not to men, or vice versa; (d) on certain occasions, as after a death, during pregnancy, war-time, hunting, fishing, harvest, etc; (e) at certain periods of life (childhood, puberty, adult years, etc)? What are the foods thus forbidden? What reasons do they give for these prohibitions? […] Do men and women eat together? And if not, why not? Do children eat with grown-up people? Does each person eat apart? And if so, why? (23)

The entire guide created by Frazer follows this format, and detailed questions are provided for different aspects of the human existence: birth, death, marriage, hunting, eating, property, inheritance, and so on. Frazer also states the importance of acquiring as much information as possible about “savages”: “All persons who are brought into close contact with savages have it in their power to render a service to science by carefully investigating and recording the customs and beliefs of the people who fall under their observation, for such records add to the sum of knowledge and may perhaps be of priceless value for the light they throw on the growth of human ideas and institutions” (8).

Mrs Quinson takes her role seriously as soon as Roblès enters her house. Instead of sending him to eat in the kitchen, she allows him to eat at her table so that she can observe

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In this guide, Frazer does not suggest interfering with the customs that the researchers observe. Also, he does not state that researchers should try to “civilize” or challenge the beliefs and values of the savages that they observe.
and correct his previous “savage” customs. Roblès helps us understand that customs vary across the many ethnic groups of Algeria, and, within those ethnic groups, they also depend on the social class of individuals. Consequently, we see that the customs of poor people do not match the ones of the upper class, despite their affiliation to the same ethnic group. Rich French individuals, like Mrs Quinson, benefit from a different house configuration\textsuperscript{44} than the poor French individuals. The house configuration of Mrs. Quinson allows her to separate people based on their descent, role, class, customs or language. Even though Roblès is a poor teenager of Spanish descent, he holds the status of a protégé\textsuperscript{45} in her house and the potential of being transformed according to her vision. The other servants are sent to eat in the kitchen, but Roblès is kept under Mrs Quinson’s careful supervision: “Un trait m’intriguait davantage : Mme Quinson me faisait l’honneur de sa table au lieu de m’envoyer avec les domestiques à la cuisine. A vrai dire, cette seconde solution, si j’avais été consulté, aurait eu ma préférence, mais il fallait bien se plier aux inexplicables fantaisies de ma bienfaitrice” (A habit got my attention in particular : Mrs. Quinson gave me the honor of her table instead of sending me to the kitchen with the servants. To be honest, this second approach, had she asked, would have been my choice, but I had to listen to the weird fantasies of my guardian) (\textit{Saison violente}, 85). From this passage, it is already obvious that Roblès cannot decide what role he holds in the house, but his status is decided by Mrs Quinson. The words “had I been asked” reflect the lack of agency that the teenager experiences from the very first days in the French house. When the first meal is served, Roblès expects a special event to occur in order to justify the luxury of the décor and the abundance of food. He explains that, according to his Spanish customs, such food is served when people celebrate the main events of their life. We find out

\textsuperscript{44} More space available, more rooms
\textsuperscript{45} A person under the patronage/protection of someone, usually an influential person
that Dolores serves dishes that accompanied important occasions like a marriage, a blessing or a first communion in the Spanish community of Oran.

Roblès also mentions that people valued these events to such a degree that they would willingly get into debt rather than humiliating themselves and not having enough food on the table for all the people they invited. Customs are portrayed as portals: they can help someone transition from a certain status to another, even if this transition is superficial or temporary. A display of luxurious customs can, even if temporarily, affix the individual to a different social class. Mrs Quinson is aware of this transition that Roblès could embrace, and she attempts to modify his previous way of living and behaving. The teenager’s shock is obvious, as he has never experienced such extravagant customs on a regular day: “Les pièces de porcelaine, d’argenterie et les cristaux brillaient dans la salle à manger, sous le lustre à pendeloques dont on avait remplacé les bougies par des ampoules électriques, véritable luxe de cinéma” (The porcelain and silver items and the crystals shone in the dining room under the chandelier with pendeloques which had electric light bulbs and not candles, a real cinema luxury) (85).

During the rest of his meals in the French house, the “savage” will be carefully observed, guided and offered the opportunity to let go of his previous customs in order to embrace “civilized” ones.

Mrs Quinson’s declared goal is to transform the young Roblès into a boy “comifô”46, a success that will reflect her good intentions as well as her educational abilities. She explains to him that his previous customs are the ones of a savage and that she only has his best interest at heart when she “educates” him: “Parfois même elle s’exclamait: ‘Oh, mais tu es un vrai sauvage!’ comme après une découverte incroyable, comme si elle s’était soudain aperçue que j’avais les dents limées selon la coutume de certains cannibales” (Sometimes, she would

46 Misspelled version of the French “comme il faut”, meaning “proper, right”
even say: ‘Oh, but you are a real savage!’ as if she just made an incredible discovery, as if she just saw that I had polished teeth according to the customs of certain cannibals) (90). The child narrative brings to light the identity attributed to him by Mrs. Quinson, the one of a savage – even a cannibal – who scares her with his primitive ways of behaving. Roblès sees himself as a cannibal through the eyes of Mrs. Quinson, so as the most violent version of a savage. According to many anthropologists, cannibalism is challenging the boundaries of cultural relativism. When discussing cultural relativism, anthropologists state that beliefs and practices are relative and depend on each person’s culture. However, anthropologists consider that there are certain practices and values that trespass acceptable human behavior, and cannibalism is listed as part of these problematic acts. Cannibalism is strongly linked to a lack of civilization, and those who are capable of devouring other human beings are often times perceived as subhuman. In Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System, Peggy Reeves Sanday affirms: “As for the relationship between cannibalism and hunger or other sources of stress, many societies can be observed in which hunger is severe or there is occasional famine but cannibalism is absent” (XII). Sanday mentions hunger as a possible stress factor and an “excuse” for such extreme behavior, but then she states that in certain societies where hunger is severe people still reject cannibalism, therefore suggesting that hunger is not the explanation behind such cruel practices. She further affirms that the act of cannibalism goes beyond the act of satisfying hunger, and it implies rituals where cannibals attempt to acquire the vital energy of those they eat, therefore gaining power through extreme violence: “Cannibalism is never just about eating but is primarily a medium for nongustatory messages – messages having to do with the maintenance, regeneration, and, in some cases, the foundation of cultural order” (3). Roblès suggests that, for Mrs. Quinson, representing him as the most violent version of a savage justifies the need for her “civilizing mission”. By approaching the topic of representing the Other, Roblès tries to bring awareness of the way
the colonized individuals were treated by some segments of the French population not only in French Algeria but also in the French metropole at the beginning of the twentieth century. In *Générations: Un siècle d’histoire culturelle des Maghrébins en France*, chapter *Du paternalisme à l’émeute raciste en 1914-1918*, Jean-Yves Le Naour describes the way Maghrebi immigrants were treated in France during the time of the First World War. Le Naour reports the language used by the journalist Georges de la Fouchardière in *L’Œuvre*:

> Il y a dans les poubelles des choses bonnes à manger : des épluchures de carotte, des écorces d’orange, des peaux de banane. Les Kabyles sont toujours en train de grignoter quelque chose, ça ennuie les chiens du quartier qui, eux aussi, ont coutume de chercher leur dessert dans les poubelles ; seulement, les chiens n’osent pas approcher parce qu’ils ont peur que les Kabyles leur donnent des puces (There are good things to eat in the dumpsters: carrot peelings, orange peels, banana skins. The Kabyles are always snacking on something and this annoys the neighborhood dogs who also have the habit to look for something sweet in the garbage; it’s just that the dogs are afraid to get near the Kabyles because they might catch fleas) (53).

Georges de la Fouchardière states that the Kabyles have the same eating “customs” as the dogs who go through garbage, and his statement resembles the humiliating discourses of Mrs. Quinson. Thus, we can observe that the narratives present in Roblès’ novels reflect real discourses that mock the customs of Others – in French Algeria as well as in France. In *Saison violente*, the customs of the Others are also the subject of parody since some features that do not exist in reality are added to ridicule people.

Roblès explains the new customs that Mrs Quinson tries to impose on him during the times when they eat. In his mother’s house, the only custom required at the table involved taking the hat off while eating. His grandmother seems to have been the only one who
insisted on this family “tradition”, and, in *Jeunes saisons*, we find out that Roblès embraces the tradition mostly out of fear. Roblès mentions that his grandmother was not impressed even if he told her that he was freezing, and she still insisted that it was rude to keep his hat on at the table. If Roblès stubbornly kept it on, she would remind him once again about her good-manners code, and, without additional explanations, she would aggressively grab the hat from him. In Mrs. Quinson’s house, there are many customs that need to be followed during meals, and these meals, instead of representing an occasion to get to know each other better, become a time of creating a gap between the one and the Other:

Non contente de me rabrouer, à table, sur ma façon de tenir et de manipuler fourchette et couteau, elle me donnait des tapes sur les avant-bras si j’oubliais d’appuyer les mains de chaque côté de mon assiette, et cela au vu et au su de Yasmina et de Dolores, ce qui me faisait de perdre la face. (Dans ce domaine nous étions tous Chinois). Elle m’imposait d’incroyable futilités, comme de m’essuyer les lèvres du coin de ma serviette et de boire à mon verre par toutes petites gorgées. (Unhappy just to scold me at the table over my way of holding and using the fork and knife, she would slap me on the forearms if I forgot to place my hands the right way on each side of the plate and all that while Yasmina and Dolores were watching which humiliated me even more) (*Saison violente*, 90).

The violence related to forcing new customs upon the teenager is portrayed both as symbolic and physical. The symbolic violence occurs when Roblès is not allowed to make choices or to reply to his guardian, and the physical violence occurs when Mrs. Quinson hits him when Roblès is not assimilating the new customs according to her standards. In silence, the young
man can only reflect on his condition and concludes: “Es necesario aguantar”\(^{47}\) (90). Roblès dedicates an entire chapter to the description of these new customs that were imposed on him, as well as to the humiliation to which he was subjected every day. Expressions such as “me faisait perdre la face”\(^{48}\), “sadisme”\(^{49}\), “supplice”\(^{50}\), “redresser mes imperfections”\(^{51}\) (90), “un clan si éloigne du mien”\(^{52}\), “ce dressage”\(^{53}\) (91) testify to the cruel behaviour displayed by Mrs. Quinson and of the increasing gap created between them.

When Mrs. Quinson realizes that her efforts cannot change Roblès, she reverts to mockery in front of her rich friends in order to humiliate the teenager even more. This public mockery described by Roblès reminds us of the famous movie *Dinner for Schmucks*, where some people are selected to participate in a dinner based on their “foolishness and savagery”. Later during dinner, the “fools” are scorned by the “normal” individuals at the party. In *Saison violente*, we witness a similar setting where Roblès is brought in front of rich people and presented as a failure:

> Le mardi, son jour de réception, elle accueillait dans le salon chinois une demi-douzaine de dames, qui, toutes, parlaient ‘pointu’. Dolores servait du café, du thé et des petits fours. Si je me trouvais à travailler dans ma chambre, Mme Quinson me faisait venir pour me présenter à ses amies avec une satisfaction vaniteuse : ‘-C’est le fils de mon ancienne blanchisseuse dont je vous ai entretenues. Que voulez-vous, il faut bien se montrer charitable !’ (On Tuesday, her reception day, she would receive

\(^{47}\) Spanish for “One has to endure”. Throughout the novel, when Robles addresses Mrs. Quinson directly, he speaks French, but each time he has conversations with her in his mind he uses Spanish and, most of the time, he resorts to slang or curse words.

\(^{48}\) French for “Made me look bad”

\(^{49}\) French for “sadism”

\(^{50}\) French for “torture”

\(^{51}\) French for “fix my imperfections”

\(^{52}\) French for “tribe so far away from mine”

\(^{53}\) French for “training for animals”
in the Chinese lounge about half a dozen ladies who all spoke pretentiously. Dolores used to serve coffee, tea and little cookies. If I happened to work in my room, Mrs. Quinson would call for me and present me to her friends with a vain pride: ‘-It is the son of my former laundry lady whom I have mentioned to you. What do you do, one has to be generous!’) (96).

In the French house portrayed as a cage, the “savage” is analyzed by Mrs. Quinson’s friends who, without any embarrassment, comment on his looks and intelligence. Her friends doubt the fact that he is only thirteen years old and they state that, especially for his age, he looks very stupid. In Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria, Lorcin discusses the stereotypes of the rich French against the colonized population that they considered inferior and states: “The choice of Algeria was made for several reasons. To begin with, it was the first formal colony in France’s nineteenth-century or second colonial empire, serving as the exemplar and experimental arena for later colonial acquisitions” (1). This experimental arena that Lorcin brings into discussion is represented, on a smaller scale, by Roblès in Saison violente. Mrs. Quinson’s house is sketched as the space where the French authorities attempt to violently organize the colonial society according to their rigid narratives. The child narratives that try to present a different way of behaving and speaking are mocked and silenced by certain groups of the French upper class.

This mockery transforms previous harmless customs into malicious ones. The custom of using red ants for protection transitions into black magic and is intended to hurt those who humiliate Roblès and his mother. Thus, the “savage” behavior of the Other becomes a self-fulfilled prophecy where invented violent acts eventually turn into a reality. The revenge is planned meticulously, mainly against the man who humiliated his mother. Véronique, Roblès’ French friend, is the one who discovers the plot against Mrs. Quinson and Mr. Voisin when she visits Roblès in his new house. Véronique herself was, according to Mrs. Quinson,
a taboo. The old French woman explained to Roblès that certain social customs could not be crossed, and that Véronique belonged to a different House where he did not have access. Roblès’ mother finds out about her son’s friendship with Véronique from Mrs. Quinson’s shaming discourse: “Et à ce propos […] je dois vous dire que ce garçon, à son âge, court déjà les filles. […] Et il ne s’attaque pas à n’importe qui, votre don Juan ! Il voulait séduire qui ? La propre fille d’un haut fonctionnaire ! Le directeur du cabinet du préfet ! Vous imaginez ma position ! La mère qui vient de protester auprès de moi.” (About this […] I have to tell you that this boy, at his age, runs after the girls. […] And he’s not interested in just anyone, your don Juan! Who did he want to seduce? The daughter of a famous government officer! The director of the prefect’s office! Imagine my situation! With the mother complaining to me about it) (103). Roblès understands that his relationship with a rich French girl upsets the rigid social customs of dating and getting married in colonial Algeria. However, he challenges Mrs. Quinson’s discourse on what is appropriate, and he continues his friendship with Véronique after he leaves her house. He understands that Véronique’s social status is different than his, but he wants to discover the limits on his own. Even while residing in Mrs. Quinson’s house, he reflects on the relationship with Véronique and on the troubles that it could cause. He realizes that he has crossed frontiers, but he finds it difficult to feel ashamed or guilty about the love he has for Véronique. With both of his parents missing from his life, he needs affection, and, since Mrs. Quinson cannot provide, Véronique remains the only one who could comfort him. Their discussions and their confessions give him the strength to endure the treatment that he has to suffer in the French House. Before giving up on Véronique, Roblès wants to know what she thinks, so he wants to compare her narratives with Mrs. Quinson’s and find out if, even though they share the same social status, the two women think alike. At this point, Roblès tries to discover if nuances exist, and, if so, how far they can be stretched. He invites Véronique into his house and allows her to see how he acts
and speaks in this space that differs from hers. The teenager saw himself through Mrs. Quinson’s eyes, and the image that she created was the one of a savage who caused fear and needed to be civilized. Now, Roblès wants to superimpose the image created by Mrs. Quinson with the one that Véronique will craft during her visit and obtain a layered image of how his identity is constructed by the Others.

The tour of Roblès’ house begins with a silent and curious visual inspection of the items that reflect the way people live and behave. Véronique does not know how to react when she notices dry peppers hanging throughout the house and she remains silent for fear of offending her friend: “Dans la pièce voisine elle reste toute perplexe devant un chapelet de piments rouges que ma mère a mis à sécher sur le côté de la fenêtre” (In the other room, she remains speechless when she sees a string of red peppers that my mother hanged to dry right next to the window) (148). Véronique is smart and aware that she is on foreign territory, so she acts with caution and, at the same time, she maintains an attitude of curiosity: “Elle continue d’explorer mon domaine” (She continues to explore my territory) (148). The words “my territory” reflect Roblès’ pride of having a house and not being at the mercy of Others, in their houses. Roblès is excited to share his customs and beliefs with Véronique and to see how she will interpret the new world displayed in front of her. The French teenager does not seem to be bothered by the unknown items that she sees, however, at the sight of the items that Roblès is using to throw curses on his enemies, she demands explanations in an aggravated tone. The red ants used by Roblès were kept in a tube that Véronique discovered during her search: “-Qu’est-ce que c’est que ça ? -Des fourmis, tu vois bien. -Pourquoi ? - C’est une expérience. -Quel genre d’expérience ? -Sur leur capacité vitale.” (-What is this? -Ants, as you can well see. -What for? -It’s an experience. -What kind of experience? -On their survival abilities) (150). Véronique’s reaction to a custom that she does not approve of becomes almost violent. However, it is important to mention that the custom does not upset
her because it is different from her customs, but because she considers it cruel: “D’un geste décidé Véronique débouche le tube et libère les fourmis. Elles réagissent. Elles ne sont pas mortes. Elles se mettent à bouger” (With a determined attitude, Véronique opens the tube and sets the ants free. They react. They are not dead. They start moving) (150).

Véronique disapproves of the “custom”, but she is interested in finding out the reasons behind it. She wants to understand what does not make sense to her, so she questions Roblès who, at this point, feels like a savage approached by an ethnographer: ”-Explique-moi, je t’en prie, dit-elle d’une voix pressante. […] Comme je ne dis mot elle boude un peu” (-Please explain all of this to me, she says in a demanding tone. […] As I remain silent, she silently shows her disapproval) (150). Véronique continues to wait, but since Roblès’ answer does not arrive, Véronique pronounces the verdict herself and states that, according to what it is said in her community, Spanish people can be violent and often cruel. Even though the verdict is pronounced, it is not personalized since Véronique uses the expression “it is said that”, suggesting that she is not yet willing to join the team that judges the customs of the Spanish individuals of Algeria. After this cautious approach, she mentions that the Spanish population is perceived as cruel. Despite this diplomatic approach, she uses the words “you Others” when she refers to the Spanish community which still betrays the difference that she acknowledges between the customs of the French and of the Spanish communities. At the end, she asks Roblès if these rumors are real, so the question “Is it true?” offers Roblès the opportunity to confirm or deny what it is said about the individuals belonging to his community, thus distancing Véronique’s narrative from the inflexible narrative of Mrs. Quinson. In her house, Mrs. Quinson did not want answers, on the contrary, she blocked them by stating that no one responds to her. She declared her discourse as the only valid discourse that did not need alternatives, and, during the few instances when Roblès attempted to show her a different way of regarding life, she violently criticized his behavior.
As noticed so far, opinions can be accepted, rejected or questioned. These opinions can be expressed in various ways, and novels often turn into channels that display the power games of narratives. In *Culture and Imperialism*\(^5^4\), Said emphasizes the role that narratives play on the cultural and political stage of nations:

Readers of this book will quickly discover that narrative is crucial to my argument here, my basic point being that stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history. […] As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narratives. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them (XII/XIII).

According to Said, the narratives present in novels, especially in novels discussing tensions existent during colonial times, have the role to present realities or desired realities. They negotiate beliefs, values, behaviors and identities while underlining the violence that these negotiations involve. Furthermore, he states that the very existence of empires breeds the cultural hybridity that these empires deny “Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic” (XXV). In *Jeunes saisons*, but mostly in *Saison violente*, Roblès also insists on the hybridity of cultural heritages in Algeria, and, with the help of child narratives, he challenge discourses that claim clear frontiers. He debunks the myth of a single powerful House, the symbol of the French colonialism, and shows us that there are other houses inside the big House, each of them hosting different ways of acting as well as

\(^{54}\) In his *Orientalism*, Said also insists on the power of narratives and on the way the East is silenced when it is portrayed by the narratives of the West. Throughout his work, Said associates narratives with power.
different ways of speaking. If, in this chapter, I insisted on the customs present in the layered House of Algeria, in the following subchapter I will address language problematics with a focus on the tensions existent between Spanish and French. In Emmanuel Roblès et *l’hispanité en Oranie*, the statement of Yahia Belaskri\(^5\) got my attention: “Je me rappelle que, dans ma propre famille, tout le monde connaissait la langue espagnole” (I remember that in my own family everybody knew Spanish) (33). This statement backs up the stories in Roblès’ novels, and shows that languages, similar to customs, mingled in colonial Algeria. I am interested in analyzing the languages that are presented by Roblès in both *Jeunes saisons* and *Saison violente*, and in portraying Roblès’ attitude towards these languages.

I will also explore how child narratives bring to light the language tensions in Algeria, and how adult narratives relate to these child narratives that do not share their frame of reference. We will observe that the main cause of the language tensions remains Mrs. Quinson who insists on the use of French and only French in her house. However, the teenager will find subversive strategies to defy her rules and will continue to use Spanish during his inner dialogues. He will also record his most intimate thoughts in Spanish, and he will employ his native language as a secret weapon that will allow him to keep secrets from Mrs. Quinson in her own house.

### 2.3 Language

A good friend of Albert Camus, Roblès dedicated to him the book *Camus, frère de soleil*\(^6\) where he describes Camus’ Spanish descent and his desire to learn more about the Spanish language. Published in 1995, so thirty-five years after Camus’ death, the book

\(^{5}\) Belaskri (1952-present) is an Algerian short story writer, journalist and novelist who insists on the intricate cultural heritages that existed in colonial Algeria and that were rejected in 1962, after the Algerian Independence

\(^{6}\) Camus, Brother of the Sun
includes snapshots of their conversations as well as passages from letters that they exchanged. Roblès displays a certain pride each time Camus shows interest in Spanish: “Plus tard, il me demandera des leçons d’espagnol, ce qui ne durera guère en raison de mes servitudes militaires, surtout à l’approche de l’affaire de Munich” (Later on, he would ask me for Spanish lessons, attempt that did not last long because of my military service, especially with the approaching Munich affair) (14). As we will see, Roblès’ pride in his Spanish linguistic heritage is also noticeable in the two novels – *Jeunes saisons* and *Saison violente*. In this subchapter, I will focus on language and emphasize the fact that language is a method of human communication that represents more than an amalgam of words. Similarly to customs, languages are portals that can provide access to other worlds and individuals. Consequently, when people refuse other languages, they refuse the opportunity to step into the unknown and discover the world of those who are different from them. Gerard van Herk exposes the tensions built around the possible coexistence of multiple language in Canada. The image of a multilingual city is received with violent reactions caused by the fear of abandoning monolithic linguistic heritages: “For example, during the most contentious years of Quebec’s linguistic debates, the English on stop signs was often painted out, and I remember anti-bilingualism graffiti in Montreal that read *Seuls les monstres ont deux langues* (‘Only monsters have two tongues’)” (What Is Sociolinguistics?, 169) In Algeria, the “monster language” alternated faces depending on the political changes that occurred in the country. If initially, the Arabic and Berber languages were portrayed as the odd-ones-out, after the Independence of 1962, French was the one that became the monster language – feared and needed at the same time. The tensions between Arabic/Berber versus French became the main show on the linguistic and political stage of Algeria during colonial and

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57 Van Herk is an Associate Professor of Linguistics at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada
postcolonial times, thus putting in a corner the problematics surrounding the other languages existent on this multilingual territory. Alek Baylee Toumi claims to describe a “diverse Maghreb” and focuses on the language problematics in Algeria, however, he discusses only the status of Arabic (literary and dialectal), the one of the Berber languages and the one of French:

Pourquoi les intellectuels maghrébins continuent à faire constamment appel à la langue française ? Pourquoi s’obstinent-ils à ne pas produire en arabe, tout en refusant en même temps de reconnaître la langue marâtre en question et de lui faire une place honorable dans leur patrimoine ? Nous allons d’abord tenter d’expliquer la complexité du contexte des langues parlées au Maghreb ainsi que celui de la langue française des deux côtés de la Méditerranée (Why do the intellectuals from Maghreb continue to use the French language ? Why do they resist when it comes to writing in Arabic, refusing at the same time to recognize their stepmother tongue and to make honorable room for it in their patrimony? We will first try to explain the complexity of the context surrounding the spoken languages in Maghreb as well as the one of the French language on both sides of the Mediterranean) (Maghreb divers: Langues française, langues parlées, littératures et représentations des Maghrébins, à partir d’Albert Memmi et de Kateb Yacine, 91)

In Maghreb divers, the linguistic inventory of Maghreb does not include Spanish or Italian, nor does it analyze either of these languages. Toumi, as well as other writers mentioned in the book – for example, Tahar ben Jelloun – focus on the Arab/Berber versus French debate, stating that it does not matter in which one of these languages one writes as long as one continues to write. Therefore, the writing itself is portrayed as important and not the language(s). While the advice helps encourage freedom of expression in literature, the
approach of a linguistically divers Maghreb in this study is lacunar since it does not cover a diversified language landscape in colonial and postcolonial Algeria as it claims.

In *Jeunes saisons* and *Saison violente*, Roblès focuses on the status of his native language, Spanish, however, he also mentions the existence and the status of other languages in colonial Algeria. He admits that, in his Spanish neighborhood, the Arabic and the French languages were not spoken much, and individuals functioned mostly in Spanish. He also mentions that the Spanish language sounded interesting as it was rough, and somehow melodious at the same time. The music played at the phonographs displayed throughout his Spanish neighborhood reminded him and the other individuals of Andalusia. After presenting the various languages that surround him, Roblès discusses the particular spaces where these languages are spoken, while stating that languages do not cross certain frontiers, and, when they do, violent repercussions arise. At home, the young Roblès functions in two languages, depending on the family members who start a conversation with him: “Je parlais espagnol avec ma grand-mère à qui je disais ‘vous’ et que j’appelais ‘madre’, tandis que je parlais français avec ma mère que je tutoyais et appelais ‘mamica’, petite mère. Celle-ci était, pour moi, davantage comme une grande sœur avec qui je montrais volontiers insolent” (I used to speak Spanish with my grandmother whom I would call ‘you – polite version’ and ‘mother’, while with my mother I would speak French and I would call her ‘you – informal version’ and ‘young mother’. This one was for me more of a big sister with whom I would happily be insolent) (20). Even inside his own house, Roblès switches between two languages on a daily basis. Since his mother works for French families, she can function well in French. Since Roblès speaks both Spanish and French, we can assume that the mother understands and can speak Spanish too; however, with her child, she speaks French. On the other hand,

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58 When Robles mentions the Arabs or Arabic, he admits that he uses the term to refer to both Arabs/Berbers or Arabic/Berber languages, “according to the customs of the time”

59 The Italian presence in colonial Algeria is also briefly mentioned
the grandmother seems to be the only one who uses the Spanish language in the house. Given this situation, Spanish can be considered as Roblès’ heritage language, meaning that it is a minority language learned by Roblès at home. However, since French is the dominant language in colonial Algeria, Roblès functions better and is more competent in French. As proof, he chooses to write his literary works in the language of the “Other”, while occasionally inserting Spanish words and phrases. If we analyze the situations where these Spanish words occur, we notice that they are related to highly emotional events – either negative or positive. For instance, when Roblès records his thoughts and feelings about Véronique in his journal or when he becomes mad because of the way Mrs. Quinson treats him, then his heritage language surfaces. As a consequence, many Spanish jargon terms or curse words appear during these episodes charged with intense emotions.

Roblès and his childhood friends display curiosity towards all the languages that surround them and perceive these languages not as a threat, but as opportunities to learn new things and to experiment with other cultures. When Roblès’ friend, le Toni, embarks on an English ship, he becomes friends with the sailors and pays attention to the way they speak. After his brief adventure, le Toni returns to Algeria and shares with the other children the new language that he claims he had learned: “Là où il devenait insupportable, c’était avec son anglais. Parce que les matelots du pétrolier lui avaient appris quelques mots de leur langue, il essayait de nous l’enseigner. Mais ses qualités pédagogiques étaient aussi limitées que ses connaissances en la matière” (The part that was getting extremely annoying was his English. Because the sailors from the oil tanker taught him some words from their language, he tried to teach us English. But his pedagogical skills were as limited as his knowledge of the subject) (54). Le Toni tries to share the new language and he is proud of the advantage he has over the rest of the group who did not get to experience his linguistic adventure. This is the method that le Toni approaches when he shares his findings with the others:
A small knife, you call it bistrinfling. Like this… But a big knife, no. A big knife is stringmifling… The problem was that, only three days later, in English, you would call ‘knife’ pinchping or another word ending in ‘ing’. (He was inventing a dialect just like he invented Egypt.) It is the ‘ing’ part that got his attention from the English language. He would tell you in a serios tone of voice: Careful! You will get my smoking dirty…) (54).

When he does not know, le Toni invents. He invents countries, languages and stories about other countries and languages. With the help of the invented narrative, he can make any identity that he wants his own. He can be the person who saw incredible images in Egypt or he can be someone who was recently educated in English. The invented language that he pretends to master offers him a new prestige in front of his friends. Le Toni realized that the “ing” that was specific to the English language can help him parade a fake belonging to a new world that he considered fascinating. This type of language approach is what sociolinguists call “borrowed linguistic prestige”, meaning that speakers cleverly use certain characteristics of a prestige language to make them look as if they belonged to the group which spoke that language. Le Toni’s new linguistic identity offers him a new status in front of his friends and he takes his pedagogic skills seriously when he tries to educate the rest of the group. Roblès affirms that none of the children could meet the standards required by their

60 Made up word in English
new English “instructor” and le Toni was never happy with their English accents. At his turn, Roblès uses parody to exaggerate the instruction process initiated by his friend:

Mais il était plus difficile à contenter qu’un authentique professeur. -The ! Comme ça : Zeu ! Ça veut dire : le… Exemple : zeu ouatère, la flotte ! … Dis : Zeu ! -Zeu ! - Mais non, fartasse ! Tu es bouché ou quoi ? Si c’est pas malheureux ! Fais comme ça, avec la langue entre les dents : Zeu ! … Et mème si on prononçait exactement comme il le recommandait, il ne se s’estimait pas satisfait. (But he was more difficult to be made happy than a real teacher. –‘The!’ Like this: ‘Zeu!’ This means: ‘le’ in French… Example: ‘zeu ouatère’, la flotte61! … Say: ‘Zeu!’ –‘Zeu!’ –‘But no, idiot! Are you stupid or what? What a misfortune! Do like this, with your tongue between the teeth: ‘Zeu!’… And even if we pronounced exactly like he recommended, he did not seem happy.) (55).

When le Toni realizes that his efforts are in vain, he gives up on the English lessons, but not before expressing his disdain towards the students who cannot keep up with his explanations. He resorts to style shifting and he starts addressing the students in a different register that he considers more appropriate for their level. According to Van Herk: “An individual’s speech changes according to differences in interlocutor(s), social context, personal goals, or external factors” (What Is Sociolinguistics?, 70) Consequently we notice that le Toni reverts to a speech full of curses and rage: “Il n’était jamais satisfait. J’ai retrouvé ce trait, plus tard, chez tous mes professeurs de langue, avec cette différence que le Toni, lui, piquait des rages à la Donald Duck et nous traitait de ‘boudins’, de ‘gourdes’ et de ‘bacorinos’!” (He was never happy. I found this attitude later on in all my language teachers, with the difference that le

61 ‘The Water’ in French
Toni was getting furious like Donald Duck and would call us ‘fat lumps’, ‘idiots’ and ‘…’ \(^{62}\) \((Jeunes saisons, 55).\)

Le Toni is not the only one who uses the English language in colonial Algeria. Roblès mentions that one of his grandmother’s friends has a son who joined a circus group that toured the world, including the American continent. Diégo sends home letters where he writes in English and Spanish, but his mother is disappointed with his choices:

Cette femme rousse est restée dans ma mémoire surtout à cause d’un grand chagrin que lui causa son fils ainé et dont longtemps elle souffrit. En effet, un jour elle vint nous voir tout en larmes et nous montra un prospectus écrit en anglais et en espagnol. On y apprenait que Diégo Padilla était l’homme à l’estomac d’acier et l’on y énumérait la liste des objets et des bêtes qu’il pouvait avaler au cours d’une seule représentation (This redheaded woman stayed in my memories mostly because of a great grief that his son caused her and from which she suffered for a long time.

Indeed, one day she came to see us crying and showed us a letter written in English and Spanish. From it, we found that Diégo Padilla was the man with a steel stomach and there were listed the objects that he could swallow in a single session) \(21\).

The letter does not make the mother proud, and she sends her son another letter where she reproaches him for his new lifestyle. The young generation in \(Jeunes saisons\) is portrayed by Roblès as a generation open to new adventures, new ideas and new languages that will offer them access to other worlds. They take pride in their hybrid identity and they attempt to share it with others. However, Diégo’s mother does not share her son’s enthusiasm about the new world or the new languages that he had discovered. On the contrary, she is critical and uninterested in exploring the universe that her son describes in his bilingual letter. Language

\(^{62}\) I could not find what ‘bacorinos’ means in Spanish or French
tensions grow in intensity in Roblès’ *Saison violente*, but they start appearing even in *Jeunes saisons*. Language and rules connected to certain languages – in this example, French – are argued by the inhabitants of Oran and those of Alger, and each side presents its unalterable view: “Les Algérois, entre autre choses, nous reprochent de mal prononcer le français, ce qui est vrai, et de dire ‘on’ pour ‘an’, ce qui est faux. En fait, un Oranais prononce: ‘citran’ et ‘melan’. Les Algérois prennent une mine ironique pour reprocher (à tort) aux Oranais leur manière de dire ‘compliment’ ou ‘fréquemment’” (The people from Alger, among other things, would reproach us that we did not correctly pronounce French, which is true and that we said ‘on’ instead of ‘an’, which is not true. In fact, a person from Oran would say ‘citran’ and ‘melan’. The people from Alger disdainfully and mistakenly reproach us our way of saying ‘compliment’ or ‘fréquemment ’) (*Jeunes saisons*, 71). This passage portrays language as property, in the sense that each group considers its way of “owning” the pronunciation of words as the right way, while reproaching the other group for their wrongful appropriation of French vocabulary. Roblès does not mention if these linguistic confrontations occur between individuals of the same ethnic group (and which one) or between individuals from different ethnic groups. He simply uses the general terms “les Algérois” et “les Oranais” to separate the groups he discusses.

As we will see in a different episode from *Jeunes saisons*, language tensions occur among children from different ethnic groups, and the French language is presented by a French child as the property of France and as the only prestigious language in Algeria. Despite being portrayed as the “property” of France, children from other ethnic groups use the French language correctly, and, at times, with even more proficiency than the children belonging to the French upper class. Roblès affirms:

Un de nos camarades de classe, Verneuil, avait un visage aimable et souriant. C’était un garçon un peu plus âgé que nous et qui ne brillait pas en classe. Ce qui le
tourmentait, par-dessus tout, c’étaient ses échecs en français. Presque sans effort, des Lopez et des Martinez qui, dans la conversation, utilisaient un jargon ridicule, se haussaient, en devoir de rédaction, aux premières places et n’en tiraient aucune vanité (One of our classmates, Verneuil, had a kind and smiling face. He was a boy a little older than us who did not shine in class. What upset him the most were his failures in French. Almost without any effort, the Lopez and Martinez who, when speaking, used a ridiculous jargon, were the first in class when it came to compositions and they were not even bragging about it) (78).

In the above-mentioned passage Roblès presents the case of a French child who fails at functioning well in French and who is outdistanced by a Spanish “intruder” on French territory. Irritated by the fact that linguistic frontiers are crossed in his disadvantage, Verneuil bullies Roblès and makes sure to tell him that he considers Spanish a stigmatized language:

Verneuil me surprit un jour à parler espagnol et fit une remarque désobligeante.

C’était la première fois que j’entendais l’expression ‘cinquante-pour-cent’ dans son sens injurieux et, piqué au vif, je répliquai par dépit, défi, amour propre blessé que je n’étais pas cinquante mais zéro pour cent de Français et que si les Français n’étaient pas contents ils pouvaient toujours retourner chez eux tandis que nous, ici, nous étions chez nous, parfaitement, chez nous et sans rien demander à personne, etc., etc. (Verneuil caught me one day speaking Spanish and made a derogatory remark. It was the first time I heard the expression ‘fifty-percent’ in an offensive way and, offended to the maximum, I replied out of spite, challenged, self-esteem hurt, that I wasn’t fifty, but zero percent French and if the French were not happy, they could always return)

63 A stigma is defined by the sociolinguist Van Herk as “A negative association, something viewed pejoratively” (What Is Sociolinguistics?, 48)
64 “Chez nous” is mentioned once
65 “Chez nous” is mentioned a second time
home and that us, we were home here, completely at home and without having to ask anyone for anything, etc., etc.) (78).

Throughout the dissertation, when I refer to child or adult narratives, I do not use only physical age to classify these narratives. I classify as child narratives those discourses that are characterized by flexibility and curiosity towards the values of others. According to this criterion, Verneuil’s narrative, despite his physical age, is not a child narrative, but an adult narrative that is characterized by inflexibility and resentment towards the values of others. Similarly to the narratives of the French instructors who forbid the use of the Spanish language in school, Verneuil’s discourse belittles the language of the Other and bans him from a territory that he considers his property. When discussing the French language and national identity, David Gordon presents ways of perceiving language as monolithic and set in stone:

The Frenchman tends to see his language as fixed, operating according to universal laws of logic, not as dynamic and ever-changing. French, to such Frenchmen is not something created by the individual; it is something he enters into possession of. This is, of course, the classicist tradition and while this tradition has had its rebels such as Hugo and Baudelaire, as will be discussed, the classical ideal still forms part of the French collective unconscious (The French Language and National Identity (1930-1975), 4/5).

According to Gordon, the French language is seen by certain Frenchmen as something that cannot be easily crafted by “outsiders”, but as something that can be – under certain circumstances – offered to them. This reminds us of the French civilizing mission where the French language was presented as a gift offered to the “uncivilized” and which, consequently,

66 In this case, French
contributed to their progress. As the young Verneuil also states in *Jeunes saisons*, the French language and identity cannot simply be appropriated by outsiders, it has to be offered to them. This right of appropriating the French language and identity is denied to Roblès since Verneuil declares that he is only “a fifty percent”, and not someone who fully benefits from belonging to the French community. Additionally, Verneuil makes it obvious that the French language will not coexist with other languages, so, when Roblès speaks Spanish, he is reminded of the *interdit*. Verneuil’s symbolic act of taking away the French rights bothers Roblès, even though he fakes a huge indifference towards Verneuil’s narrative, and, this intense conversation leads to a fight where the boys claim the territory of Algeria. We witness a riot in miniature where spaces and rights are disputed and negotiated by two young men who claim that Algeria belongs either to one or to the other – but not to both. Verneuil’s violent narrative triggers Roblès’ violent response which places Verneuil outside of an Algeria that Roblès considers *his*. Additionally, the words “chez nous” are repeated by Roblès twice to emphasize the Spanish possession of the Algerian territory. The French are portrayed by a furious Roblès as outsiders who are invited to return to their home, in metropolitan France, if the situation in colonial Algeria does not fit their expectations.

The last aspect related to language in *Jeunes saisons* appears in the episode where Roblès attempts to find the origins of his family name. He confesses a strong curiosity regarding the country where his parents were born, as well as a curiosity linked to the meaning of his Spanish name. One of his neighbors, Mr. Epry, a high school teacher, is the one who helps the young Roblès decipher the meaning of his name: “Il [M. Epry] me parlait beaucoup de l’Espagne qu’il visitait chaque été et parfois même aux vacances de Noel ou de Paques. Il avait passé quelque temps dans un village de Castille dont le nom était Los

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67 The prohibition – in this context, the prohibition of speaking the Spanish language
68 In the sense of “we are home here” – referring to the Spanish community
Roblès⁶⁹. Et de me révéler que ce nom signifiait ‘Chênes’ et qu’autrefois cette partie de la Castille avait été recouverte de forêts de chênes rouvres” (He [Mr. Epry] talked to me a lot about Spain, which he visited every summer and sometimes even during the Christmas or Easter breaks. He spent some time in a village in Castille and the village was called Los Roblès. And he told me that the name meant ‘oaks’ and that, formerly, this part of Castille was covered by forests of oaks) (96). The child finds out that Roblès means “Oaks” in Spanish, and, with the help of this information, he is able to paint an image of the village that carries this name. Since he is not allowed to speak Spanish in school and since he fears that a lot of his Spanish customs are overtaken by the French colonial system, Roblès views his family name as one of the few attachments to his Spanish descent. Despite the intense conversation that Roblès had with Verneuil over language, identity and belonging, Roblès admits that, out of vanity, he did not allow Verneuil to see his pain of not being accepted.

Roblès’ attachment to his Spanish language and customs does not imply a rejection of the French language or customs. On the contrary, he confesses that he wants the freedom to select what fits him from both worlds.

The character played by Roblès in the novel Jeunes saisons embodies numerous other intellectuals who were – and still are – put in the situation where they have to choose a monolithic language and identity. In In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong, the Lebanese-born French writer Amin Maalouf⁷⁰ states:

So am I half French and half Lebanese? Of course not. Identity can’t be compartmentalized. You can’t divide it up into halves or thirds or any other separate segments. I haven’t got several identities: I’ve got just one, made up of many

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⁶⁹ “Oaks” is “chênes” in French and “robles” in Spanish
⁷⁰ Member of Academie française, winner of “Prix Goncourt” in 1993 and “Prince of Asturias Award for Literature” in 2010
components in a mixture that is unique to me, just as other people’s identity is unique to them as individuals. Sometimes, after I’ve been given a detailed account of exactly why I lay claim to all my affiliations, someone comes and pats me on the shoulder and says: “Of course, of course – but what do you really feel, deep down inside?” (2).

Maïssa Bey, Emmanuel Roblès, Tahar ben Jelloun, Kateb Yacine, Abdellatif Laâbi – just to name a few writers from Maghreb – experienced the same kind of situations where they were asked to choose a side. At a conference in 1990, Laâbi\(^\text{71}\) was asked by an American student why he does not write or speak Arabic: “Pourquoi ne vous exprimez-vous toujours pas en arabe? Moi, je m’attendais à voir un poète marocain et un intellectuel arabe, parler en arabe! Vous, vous parlez français, vous êtes … presque français!” (Why do you still not express yourself in Arabic? Me, I was expecting to see a Moroccan poet and an Arab intellectual speak Arabic! You, you speak French, you are … almost French!) (*Maghreb divers*, 3).

Laâbi, just as many other intellectuals from Maghreb, speaks and writes in French simply because he prefers it to the other languages that he knows. Another Moroccan writer, Tahar Ben Jelloun, tells us in an interview that his native language is the Moroccan dialect, however, he states that he was also educated in Literary Arabic. But when it comes to writing, he admits that he feels more confident writing in French: “Je n’écris pas en Arabe littéraire parce que je massacre la langue arabe. Et, par respect pour cette langue que je ne maitrise pas au point d’écrire un roman ou une œuvre de longueur, donc… je peux écrire un article, je peux faire une conférence en arabe classique, mais, créer en langue arabe classique, je suis incapable (I don’t write in Literary Arabic because I massacre Arabic. And, out of respect for this language that I do not master enough to write a novel or a lengthy work, so … I can write an article, I can present at a conference in Classic Arabic, but, I am not capable of creating in Classic Arabic) (*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trG01CjJ0Ck*, minute 0.33-

\(^{71}\) Moroccan author, sent to prison and tortured for his political opinions; he writes in French
The honest responses given by intellectuals educated in various languages do not satisfy the expectations of certain individuals like the American student who wanted clear identities where a single language and culture are embraced. These adult narratives that want clear answers stopped growing and settled on monolithic views that reject the idea of linguistic movement, shifting and transformation. The student expresses certain expectations “je m’attendais à…” when he starts a conversation with the Moroccan author, he wants to be able to name and label him either as French or as Arabic, and, since Laâbi writes in French, he complicates the student’s task. Child narratives, on the other hand, continue to grow, question and negotiate languages, landscapes, customs and identities. Out of such different perspectives, we will notice tensions and violence rising, and, in Saison violente, language and - often times - hybrid identities connected to it become problematic.

Even before the French colonization of the 19th century that complicated identities and heritages, we witness the Spanish presence in Algeria as early as the 16th century:

La source d’inspiration qui servit à l’expansion espagnole vers le nord de l’Afrique fut le testament D’Isabelle la Catholique. L’artifice et maître d’œuvre de la conquête fut le Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, confesseur d’Isabelle la Catholique. Mers-el-Kébir tomba sous la domination espagnole en 1505, Oran en 1509 et en 1510, ce fut pratiquement toute la côte algéro-marocaine ainsi que Bougie, aujourd’hui Bejaïa, Tripoli avec un peu plus tard des incursions vers l’intérieur, conquérant par exemple le Royaume de Tlemcen en 1543 (The source of inspiration that helped the Spanish expansion to the north of Africa was the testament of Isabelle the Catholic. The head and master of this conquest was the Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, Isabelle’s confidant. Mers-el-Kébir fell under the Spanish rule in 1505, Oran in 1509

72 “I expected to …”
and in 1510, it was mostly all of the Algro-Moroccan coast as well as Bougie, today Bejaïa, Tripoli with incursions to the interior a little later, conquering for example the Kingdom of Tlemcen in 1543) (Oran et l’Espagne au XXème siècle, Kindle edition, Location 463).

As stated above by Lamine Benallou, the Spanish presence in Algeria dates before the French invasion of 1830 and continues to exist during the French colonialism. Benallou approaches the topic of “purity” as well and states that, given the presence of various ethnic groups on Algerian land, we cannot talk about pure identities or monolithic cultures: “Ces espagnols conservent leurs coutumes, leurs recettes, leur mode de vie. Ils renforçèrent le sens de la collectivité hispanique […] Ils développèrent également la prédominance linguistique des langues d’Espagne (espagnol, valencien, catalan) qui se parlaient dans les maisons, dans la rue et qui étaient ceux des loisirs” (These Spanish individuals preserve their customs, their recipes, their lifestyle. They strenghten the meaning of their Spanish community […] They also developed the linguistic predominance of their languages from Spain (Spanish, Valencian, Catalan) which were spoken at home, on the street and during leisure related activities) (Kindle edition, Location 596). The existence of the many variations of Spanish, of French, Italian, Arabic, as well as the existence of the Berber languages transform colonial Algeria into a land where language navigates different spaces – sometimes with certain repercussions. Many scholarly works debating the topic of language in Maghreb emphasize the violence connected to the use of Arabic/Berber languages or to the use of French. In Saison violente, Roblès raises awareness about the fact that the Spanish language was also the subject of violent confrontations. It is interesting to observe that when Roblès talks about the suffering he endures in Mrs. Quinson’s house, he uses both French and Spanish to express his feelings:
Cette Mme. Quinson qui allait m’accueillir, je la connaissais et me préparais à une période difficile, tout en me félicitant d’échapper à l’oncle Antoine. Mais quoi? Fred, Marco, le Toni et moi n’avions-nous pas formé une confrérie, dont le principe premier nous commandait de savoir en toute circonstance ‘tenir le coup’? En espagnol cela se dit ‘aguantar’, qui signifie souffrir, résister, endurer. (This Mrs. Quinson who was about to welcome me, I knew her and she was preparing me for a tough time, while congratulating me for escaping my uncle Antoine. But, so what? Fred, Marco, le toni and I, didn’t we form a brotherhood which relied on the principle of always resisting? In Spanish, we say ‘aguantar’, which means to suffer, to resist, to endure) (83).

A Spanish expression is used to emphasize his resistance in the French house, but this resistance is not a resistance to discovering a new world; it is a resistance to monolithic approaches. Roblès mentions that he loves interacting in French and reading in French, but that he does not like to be forced to choose a single identity. However, given his social status and his current situation, he realizes that he is helpless and that Mrs. Quinson’s discourse is the most powerful one as long as he resides in her house. She refuses to see the cultural diversity existent in colonial Algeria and she tries to guide Roblès towards a space of linguistic “purity” where French overpowers and eventually replaces the other languages. Not only does she encourage him to start speaking only French, but she wants to reverse any traces of other languages that might be reflected in his current identity. Therefore, she suggests that Roblès’ family name should be modified according to the new vision that she has for him:

Et dans une autre occasion, elle m’incita à franciser désormais mon patronyme, c’est-à-dire à le prononcer avec un e muet à la dernière syllabe. J’enrageais. (De cette expérience date l’accent grave dont j’affuble mon nom, accent qui n’existe pas en espagnol et, bien entendu, ne figure pas sur mes pièces officielles. […] Mais comment
protester? Elle ne supportait jamais la moindre opposition et matait mes velléités en me disant d’un ton cassant: -Je t’interdis de me répondre (And during another occasion, she encouraged me to make my last name French, meaning to pronounce it with a silent e on the last syllable. I was furious. (From this experience, I added an accent to my name, which, of course, does not exist in Spanish or in my official documents. […] But how to protest? She could not stand being contradicted and stopped my attempts by saying: -I don’t allow you to answer back to me) (94).

The young Roblès rejects Mrs. Quinson’s proposal of modifying his name and, contrary to her insistence, he emphasizes its Spanish origin by accentuating the “e” that was supposed to be silenced. In this novel, Roblès insists on the silence that Mrs. Quinson wants to impose on him and he mentions that, despite his suffering, he did not renounce his beliefs. When cultural heritage is negotiated, we observe that child voices are not willing to easily renounce initiative and agency. Rather than having a passive role where they wait for certain languages or customs to be passed on to them, child voices in colonial Algeria claim the right to actively construct their identity according to their needs. They want the opportunity to mix and match languages, values, and customs from the wide palette of existent options. Throughout his novels, Roblès shows us that Algerians belonging to different ethnic groups defy the strict segregation rules imposed on them by the authorities. Children in particular, but some adults too, trespass restricted areas and allow information of all kinds – including linguistic information – to navigate through spaces. In Oran et l’Espagne au XXème siècle, Benallou confirms what Roblès claims and shows us that different languages mingled and borrowed terms from each other. Benallou insists on Spanish influences present in the Arabic spoken in Oran and he provides examples of words that convey the same message: “Abuelo”

73 ‘Grand-father’ in Spanish
Language and frustration often appear together in Roblès’ *Saison violente* when Roblès is not allowed to speak out loudly. This frustration triggers the desire to curse, but not in French. The young man resorts to curses in Spanish to express his strong disagreement about the way that he is treated in the French house. The words do not come out of his mouth, yet they exist in his mind, and they even seem to be obvious to Mrs. Quinson despite the apparent silence that surrounds Roblès: “*Puta! Cabrona! Basura!* … Les insultes défilaient dans mon esprit, et si elles ne passaient pas mes lèvres elles devaient jaillir par mes yeux, car Mme. Quinson parut les capter” (The insults were marching through my mind, and if they were not pronounced, they must have been coming out through my eyes since Mrs. Quinson seemed very aware of them) (103). During the times when his family’s honor is at stake, the young man feels guilty for not speaking out and confronting the one who humiliates his family. Mrs. Quinson’s words attack everything: Roblès’ language, customs, beliefs and she

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74 ‘Old person’ in Arabic
75 ‘Grand-father’ in French
76 Sometimes used in Oran to laugh at or make fun of a young person who looks old
77 Arabic
78 What’s wrong with you? One would say you’re acting like an old person!
79 ‘Dance’ in Spanish
80 ‘Loud event, reunion’ in Arabic
81 ‘Reunion, dance’ in French
82 In Oran, it means a party with a lot of noise and agitation
83 Arabic
84 What is this circus?
85 ‘Whore! Bitch! Trash!’ – in Spanish
goes so far as to insinuate that Roblès’ father is not the one evoked by his mother. This humiliating discourse challenges Roblès’ heritage and, by stating that he might have a different father, Mrs. Quinson actually states that he might not even be of Spanish descent as he claims: “Elle se retourne, me voit: -Ce que tu es brun! Un vrai gitan! Tu es sûr que ton père, ton vrai père, n’était pas un gitan?” (She turns and notices me: -You are so dark! Are you sure your father, your real father, was not a Gypsy?) (108). Roblès underlines the fact that discourses have the power to change identities and transform them according to various needs.

When individuals do not negotiate discourses, they allow others to represent them in a certain light, idea which reflects Edward Said’s point of view described in Orientalism. The Other is molded and remolded by Mrs. Quinson to her will, and the young man realizes that she is creating a distorted version of himself – an act that will cause anger and guilt: “Je me reproche mon silence comme une véritable trahison à la mémoire de mon père, à la dignité des miens. Je rumine longtemps une revanche et je ne suis pas heureux” (I resent myself for my silence and I see it as a true betrayal to the memory of my father, to the dignity of my people. I plan a revenge for a long time and I am not happy) (108). “Treason, reproach, revenge, I am not happy” – these are the words related to the inability to speak out, and Roblès reacts to the words of Mrs. Quinson because he is aware of the effect that they can have on his identity. In The Emotions, Nico Frijda states that emotional reactions occur when discourses or actions aimed at a subject are perceived as able to trigger consequences: “Emotions are elicited by significant events. Events are significant when they touch upon one or more of the concerns of the subject. Emotions thus result from the interaction of an event’s actual or anticipated consequences and the subject’s concerns” (6). The adult narrative of Mrs. Quinson is making Roblès unhappy since it touches upon many of the young man’s concerns. He lost his house and he is already in the space of the Other. He is not allowed to
behave according to his Spanish customs, and now, he is the subject of mocking discourses that he cannot negotiate for fear of being homeless and a burden to his mother. In addition to unhappiness, Roblès is overwhelmed by shame and guilt since he does not confront the discourse that humiliates him and his entire family. Instead of a dialogue between Mrs. Quinson and Roblès, we witness a monologue that is perceived as a threat by the young man since it creates a precedent of who can speak and who will be silent in the House. However, Roblès promises a revenge against the way that he is treated, so he affirms that he plans to subvert Mrs. Quinson’s version of the story. The young man’s apparent silence does not represent an act of renouncing, but an act of planning. When discussing anger and reactions directed towards events or discourses that cause anger, Frijda states: “An angry person may fall silent, compress his lips, narrow his eyes and remain rigid until he either quits or snaps at the opponent or explodes (or recovers from his anger); the expression represents inhibitory withdrawal to choose one’s tack, the better to jump at the opponent at a later moment” (The Emotions, 20). Roblès’ promise to revenge the humiliating language aimed at him shows us that he is not willing to quit the confrontation with the Other, but that he is better preparing for it. Given the fact that the novel Saison violente describes life and interactions in colonial Algeria, this episode could also symbolize the latent revolt of the colonized individuals who did not quit, but better prepared the final fight that led to the Independence.

Mrs. Quinson does not accept languages other than French in her house. Furthermore, she does not accept foreign pronunciations of French words as these intruder intonations upset the “purity” of the prestige language existent in her house:

Comme si, en dix semaines, les résultats de ses soins et de son système d’éducation l’avaient profondément déçue, Mme Quinson se mit à me reprocher mon accent, à singer ma manière de prononcer certains mots et elle alla jusqu’à dire : ‘On aura beau faire, tu es et tu resteras toujours un cinquante-pour-cent.’ […] Au contraire [avec
autres appellations], ‘cinquante-pour-cent’ m’atteignait au vif tant, à mes yeux, cette expression marquait la volonté de me laisser à la porte, de m’empêcher d’entrer dans le royaume (Since, in ten weeks, the results of her care and educational system profoundly disappointed her, Mrs. Quinson started to reproach me my accent, to imitate my way of pronouncing certain words and she went as far as to say : ‘I can try all I want, you are and will always be only a fifty-percent.’ […] Contrary [to other injuries], ‘fifty-percent’ hurt me the most since, in my opinion, this showed the will to leave me at the door, to stop me from entering the kingdom) (Saison violente, 111).

As stated earlier, each conversation between Roblès and Mrs. Quinson – or, most of the times, each monologue – can be extrapolated to the colonial status of Algeria. During this episode, we witness Mrs. Quinson’s intention to transform Roblès’ language according to her rigid rules. If the educational process does not follow the itinerary imagined by her, Mrs. Quinson gives the verdict of exclusion while making sure that the subject who failed to follow the rules feels humiliated. Colonialism, according to Sefa Dei and Kempf, does not simply aim to conquer a land, but, also, to conquer minds:

As we engage the legacies of colonialism we are more certain today that the nonmaterial legacies are as important in our thinking as the material ones when we engage questions of resistance and recovery. The colonizer did not only seize land, but also minds. If colonialism’s influence had been merely the control of land that would have required only one form of resistance, but when information is also colonized, it is essential that the resistance must interrogate issues related to
Discourses have the power to distort the identity of individuals, and, on a larger scale, the identity of countries. Mrs. Quinson tries to impose a monolithic identity on Roblès and she also attempts to make him believe that a hybrid identity cannot exist. Roblès, however, is aware of his double identity despite the silence that he is forced to embrace in front of Mrs. Quinson, and he confesses: “Certes, j’avais une conscience très claire de ma double appartenance, toutefois, sur cette rive, l’Espagne n’était qu’un surgeon sans fleurs. Subsistaient des traditions plus ou moins abâtardies […] mais la langue elle-même se corrompait, contaminée par le français et l’arabe, et l’absence de livres, l’impossibilité d’exchanges […]” (Of course, I had a very clear understanding of my double belonging, however, on this shore, Spain was nothing but a tree branch without flowers. Some traditions, more or less corrupted, were still surviving […] but the language itself became corrupted, contaminated by French and Arabic and by the absence of books, by the impossibility to exchange […]") (Saison violente, 111/112).

The young man sees his access to both cultures blocked by various obstacles. In the case of his Spanish heritage, he runs into the obstacle of distance since he is far away from the land where his parents were born. Additionally, the French colonial system does not allow languages other than French to be used by children in schools. When children break the rules and use the language they speak at home – unless that language spoken at home is French –

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86 This work published in 2006 focuses on colonial education and distortion of narratives connected to legacies. The authors state that a colleague from Algeria exposed the lies children were told in school during the French colonialism: “I remember a colleague from Algeria saying to me that when the French ruled the country the students learned that their ancestors were the Gauls. When independence came to Algeria, he said, the people were taught that their ancestors were Arabs” (Foreword, x).
they suffer humiliations on the part of their French classmates as well as from their instructors. When Mrs. Quinson denies his access inside the French house, Roblès feels lost between worlds, with no place to call his own. He does not belong to the French house, but he is not a complete stranger to it either since he is classified as a “half-stranger”87. This classification makes the situation confusing and frustrating for a young man who is in the process of trying to understand his place in a French colonial system that simultaneously hosts and rejects the various ethnic groups existent in Algeria. In the chapter to follow, I will transition from the colonial times described by Roblès to the post-colonial times – occasionally alternating with colonial events – narrated by Maïssa Bey. Similarly to the way I analyzed Roblès’ novels, I will insist on issues of architecture, customs and language in Algeria and I will superimpose adult and child narratives regarding these topics in order to detect differences in their approaches.

87 A “fifty percent”
CHAPTER III: MAÏSSA BEY

3.1 Architecture

Maïssa Bey (1950-present) is an Algerian writer born in Ksar Boukhari, twelve years before Algeria gained its Independence. During the Algerian War for Independence that lasted from 1954 to 1962, Bey lost her father who was captured by the French in 1957, tortured for a night and executed the following morning. Seven years old at the time, Maïssa Bey witnessed his arrest in the middle of the night, as well as the way both her mother and her grand-mother begged the French soldiers to spare the life of her father. From her literary works, I have selected the novels *Pierre sang papier ou cendre*\(^{88}\) and *Bleu blanc vert*\(^{89}\) to help analyze aspects of architecture, customs and language. In her novels, Bey focuses on child voices and on the way war, heritage, and societal changes are perceived by children. When she discusses both colonial and postcolonial times, Bey relies on events and interactions that she has witnessed and/or researched. Consequently, in the novel *Pierre sang papier ou cendre*, Bey imagines how people – and especially children – must have seen the French invasion from its beginning to its end: “L’enfant est debout sur un promontoire recouvert de lentisques et de lauriers roses transpercés d’épineux. Il regarde la mer. […] Sur le ciel encore livide, d’étranges silhouettes sombres se profilent au loin – à fleur d’eau, à fleur de jour. Etranges silhouettes que ces bateaux immobiles aux flancs doucement battus par les flots !” (The child is up on a promontory covered by mastic and pink laurels pierced by thorns. He looks at the sea. […] On the sky that is still livid, strange dark silhouettes shape up

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\(^{88}\) Stone blood paper or ash  
\(^{89}\) Blue white green
in the distance – close to the water, close to the day. They’re so strange these shapes of the still ships with their sides gently hit by the tide) (9).

The nature acquires human characteristics, and the livid sky predicts the disaster that is slowly approaching. The ships have almost human shapes, and these unknown and strange looking silhouettes are starting to interact with the sea. The part of the Mediterranean Sea that is close to the Algerian shore hits the French ships, but, in the beginning, it is only a gentle act of rejection. As discussed in detail in subchapter 1.1 of this dissertation, France invaded Algeria in 1830 under the command of the Count of Bourmont. The 600 French ships traversed the Mediterranean Sea and landed in Algeria on June 14th, 1830. This day represents the beginning of a violent transformation of the Algerian land by the European power. Similarly to Roblès, Bey portrays spaces, customs and languages as portals that allow the transition from one state to another. The Mediterranean Sea, with its ships that bring the French troops to Algeria, acts as “la mer du Milieu”⁹⁰ between the colonizer and the colonized. The ships that land are seen by the child as a menace that will soon modify the configuration of the Algerian landscape:

Ce sont des dizaines, des centaines de bateaux, mâts et cordages dressés contre le ciel, pavillons hissés haut. Là, tout près, à portée de canon. Une sourde menace semble planer sur les lieux. C’est là. Sombre et pesant. A la fois précis et encore indéfinissable. La clarté se fait maintenant plus vive, et se répand telle une coulée de lave sur les eaux soudain parcourues de reflets sanglants (There are dozens, hundreds of ships, masts and ropes lifted towards the sky, pavillons hosted high. There, so close, within range of cannon. A deaf menace seems to hover over these places. It’s there. Dark and heavy. Certain, and, at the same unclear. The clarity is more

⁹⁰The Middle Sea
pronounced now and such a lava flow starts spreading over the water suddenly traversed by bloody reflections) (10/11).

Unlike Roblès’ novels, we can immediately discern a darker tone right as the novel begins. Words such as “sordè menace”\(^{91}\), “sombre et pesant”\(^{92}\), “eaux soudain parcourues de reflets sanglants”\(^{93}\) create a space that gradually builds tension. The current architecture of the country begins to weaken under the threat that awaits right before the child’s eyes. The foreign presence weighs heavily on the space soon-to-conquered and the color of the water anticipates the confrontations to come. Before presenting the invasion of the troops, Bey describes the Algerian land as it was before the invasion, in order to make more obvious the changes that the land will undergo: “Hors de haleine, il [l’enfant] arrive devant le mausolée du saint patron de ces lieux, Sidi Fredj. […] Plus tard, dans la langue des conquérants, dans leurs livres d’histoire – premier détournement ou première appropriation – Sidi Fredj va devenir Sidi Ferruch” (Out of breath, he [the child] arrives before the mausoleum of the patron saint of these places, Sidi Fredj. […] Later on, in the language of the conquerors, in their history books – first fraudulent appropriation or first appropriation – Sidi Fredj will become Sidi Ferruch) (12/13). The name change of buildings is already mentioned, even though the invasion has not yet taken place, and Bey suggests that change is on its way. The future French ownership of the Algerian land is highlighted by words such as “conquérants”\(^{94}\), “leurs livres d’histoire”\(^{95}\) and “appropriation”\(^{96}\). Additionally, the word “détournement”\(^{97}\) suggests a future politics of lies and forged images.

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\(^{91}\) Silent threat  
\(^{92}\) Dark and heavy  
\(^{93}\) Waters suddenly crossed by bloody reflections  
\(^{94}\) Conquerors  
\(^{95}\) Their history books  
\(^{96}\) Appropriation  
\(^{97}\) Fraudulent appropriation
After presenting the landing day through the eyes of the colonized, Bey switches the gaze of the reader to the other side and depicts the Algerian land as seen by the French troops. If the child perceived the foreign presence with fear and anxiety, we will notice that the European eyes look at the new land through completely different lenses: “C’est donc cela l’Afrique? C’est cela, leur nouvelle Amérique? Une terre dont ils ne savent rien. Une terre profonde. Mystérieuse. Inexplorée. Elle est là, enfin, cette Afrique, dite ‘Africa nova’ par d’autres conquérants, en d’autres temps. […] Elle est là, à portée de canon, cette terre qu’on leur a dit âpre et farouche” (So, is this Africa? Is this their new America? A land they know nothing about. A deep land. Mysterious. Unexplored. She is there, finally, this Africa called ‘Africa nova’ by other conquerors, from other times. […] She’s there, within range of canon, this land that they were told it was rough and untamed) (16). The new land is already seen by the conquerors as theirs “leur nouvelle Amérique”, even though they do not know anything about it – other than from narratives “on leur a dit âpre et farouche”\(^{98}\). This idea of narratives that attempt to create realities relates to Edward Said’s approach in *Culture and Imperialism*, where he states that each act of conquest has to start with an idea embodied in a narrative: “For the enterprise of empire depends upon the idea of having an empire, as Conrad so powerfully seems to have realized, and all kinds of preparations are made for it within a culture” (11). The curious eyes of the French soldiers analyze the surroundings to see if the narratives they heard match the land that they perceive in front of them: “Debout sur le pont recouvert de cordages et de malles remplies de fusils à baïonnette, d’arquebuses, de mousquetons et de munitions, ils scrutent la terre, toute proche, à portée de canon. […] Face à eux, les rivages encore paisibles de cette terre étrangère” (Up on the bridge covered by ropes and trunks filled with bayonet rifles, by arquebuses, carabiners and ammunition, they scrutinize the land, so close, within range of canon. […] Facing them, the still peaceful shores

\(^{98}\) They were told it was rough and untamed
of this foreign land) (*Pierre sang papier ou cendre*, 15/16). Bey presents what is inside each space and we notice that the colonizer’s space is full weapons and excitement, while the colonized land is represented by a fearful child who praises God to remove the threat that he perceives: “L’enfant, prosterné lui aussi, implore le saint, implores Dieu pour qu’il efface de sa mémoire ces ombres dressées contre le ciel” (The child, bowed low too, implores the saint, implores God to erase from his memory all these shadows raised towards the sky) (14). Given this initial approach, we perceive the French soldiers as the ones who harm and bring violence to the space and, on the other hand, we see the Algerian population as the victim and the subject of the incoming violence. The Mediterranean still separates the two parties, but not for long. In *Writing French Algeria*, Peter Dunwoodie addresses the binaries used in many literary works that focus on colonialism or postcolonialism:

The confrontational and dependent relationship displayed in contemporary metaphors such as center/periphery, mainstream/subsidiary, metropole/colony have been deconstructed by theoreticians of post-colonialism like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, who have shown how the monologism which generates such metaphorization underestimates, indeed ignores, the interactive processes operative in a colony and leads only to self-perpetuating closure because it ignores the resistance and disavowal originating with the colonized and impacting on colonial discourse (3).

Maïssa Bey’s novel starts with a polarized approach, but it will evolve towards exchanges – and, of course, towards confrontations as well. She confesses that she initially found it difficult to see any “benefits” of the French colonization, but, following periods of long reflection, she arrived at a point where she could see nuances and move away from monolithic approaches. Bey wrote the novel *Pierre sang papier ou cendre* at the request of Jean-Marie Lejude, a producer who previously adapted Bey’s *Entendez-vous dans les*
When Lejude asked her to write a novel where she describes the negative as well as the positive aspects of the colonial process, Bey experienced the anxiety of allowing painful childhood memories to resurface: “D’abord, j’ai refusé tout net […] Moi qui suis le produit de la colonisation française, que m’a-t-elle apporté ou enlevé ? Elle m’a ôtée une chose essentielle : mon père, tout en me donnant une autre chose essentielle : une culture et une structure mentale qui m’ont permis de penser cette contradiction qui me constitue” (First, I vehemently refused […]. Me, a person who is the product of the French colonisation, what did it give me and what did it take away from me? It deprived me of an essential thing: my father, while giving me another essential thing: a culture and a mental structure which allowed me to reflect on this contradiction which constitutes me)

(http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2008/04/03/Maïssa-bey-je-suis-le-produit-de-cette-histoire_1030437_3260.html). According to this confession, the French presence on Algerian land radically modified the architecture of homes as well as the architecture of minds through the French educational system imposed on the colonized population.

The architecture in *Pierre sang papier ou cendre* is represented by physical objects, but it is not limited to them. After Bey describes the buildings of Algeria, she also portrays people as the body of the country in order to emphasize the fact that a land has a physical architecture and a human architecture. France is also personified, and we see it as a woman leading the army during the colonial confrontations. She is described as proud, confident and all dressed in white, symbolizing the so-claimed innocence and nobility of the French colonial project. Bey envisions the colonized population bowing down before Mrs. France, as she advances on roads paved with violence and lies towards the goal she set for herself. As she advances, Mrs. Lafrance “remodels” the body of the country and leaves piles of bones behind her: “Sûre d’elle, impavide, elle avance sur des terres brûlées, sur des chemins

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99 Do you hear it in the mountains?
jonchés de corps suppliciés, de cadavres mutilés. Elle ne les voit pas. Elle ne voit pas les larmes des mères et les mains tendues des enfants. Elle avance, impérieuse et impériale”

(Sure of herself, fearless, she advances on burned lands, on paths covered by tortured bodies, by mutilated dead bodies. She does not see them. She does not see the tears of the mothers and the hands of children reaching out to her. She advances, authoritarian and majestic) (21).

The figure of the colonizer is presented as the opposite of the colonized population, and we notice that France does not experience any fear or lack of confidence as it advances among dead bodies. On the contrary, the subjects who resist her and block her way, suffer violent consequence and Bey refers here to the torture used by the French soldiers against the rebels. Moreover, women and children are added to this image to stress the idea that no individuals, despite their gender or young age, were spared by the physical and emotional violence caused by the French invasion. The violence is also highlighted with the help of the words “corps suppliciés” and “cadavres mutilés”, while France is ironically portrayed as “la liberté guidant le people”100 (21).

The reconstruction of Algeria is portrayed as the rise of one power to the detriment of another. In the name of “freedom” and of the “civilizing mission”, the lives of those who resist the vision of France are sacrificed. Bey’s narration follows a chronological approach, and she mentions that twenty years later, so in 1850, the country is still confronted with violent reprisals in order to accomplish the goal of making Algeria French. Bey insists on the spaces where the decisions to perpetuate the violence are taken, and she invites us to witness the conversations that occur in the antechambers or the salons of the French political leaders: “Dans la pièce assombrie par de lourds rideaux de velours pourpre, deux hommes. C’est une pièce d’assez petites dimensions. Un salon. Ou une antichambre peut-être. Ou un fumoir. Peu

100 “Liberty leading the people” – a reference to the famous painting of Eugène Delacroix where France is portrayed as a woman and as the justice leading the French people
importé. Les murs sont tendus d’une étoffe délicatement rosée. Le parquet luisant semble concentrer toute la lumière” (In the room darkened by heavy purple velvet curtains, two men. It is quite a small room. A living room. Or maybe an antechamber. Or a smoking room. It doesn’t matter. The walls are stretched with a delicate pink fabric. The shiny hardwood floor seems to capture all the light) (23). This room that separates the French leaders from the outside world seems to be a different universe, distant from all the atrocities that occur in colonial Algeria. While the rebels experience fear, pain and violence, the two men described in this episode seem to live a calm life of luxury.

Similarly to the house of Mrs. Quinson, this safe area is designed to hold its occupants away from all troubles. This space becomes an echo chamber where colonial decisions are taken and where leaders ignore the fact that the violence they promote targets not only buildings, but also the bodies of people. In this narrow space of the salon, decisions are not questioned by anyone, and the two men agree with each other when they justify the need for violence, while constructing a sort of a tunnel vision reluctant to points of view that differ from their rigid narrative: “Ce sont là, suivant moi, des nécessités fâcheuses, mais auxquelles tout people qui voudra faire la guerre aux Arabes sera obligé de se soumettre… Je crois que le droit de la guerre nous autorise à ravager le pays et que nous devons le faire […]” (In my opinion, these are unfortunate necessities to which, however, all people who will want to fight the Arabs will be obliged to adhere… I think that the law of war authorizes us to destroy the country and that we must do it […] (24). The monolithic discourse separates the land of Algeria into “Arabs” and “us”101, where the two strictly delimited spaces cannot merge. Other ethnic groups do not appear in the dialogue imagined by Maïssa Bey and, based on this image, the country seems to be divided solely between the Arabs and the French. Bey does

101 In this case, the French
not mention the other ethnic groups because she intends to replicate the terms employed by the French political leaders when referring to the diverse population of Algeria. In *Writing French Algeria*, Dunwoodie states that identities were destined to be incomplete because of what Said calls ‘structures of attitude and reference’ connected to Western cultural products. Dunwoodie also discusses “the terms applied by the French to the indigenous and colonial European populations, namely ‘Arab’ and ‘Algerian’ (where ‘Arab’ usually included the Berber and the Jewish communities, and ‘Algerian’ excluded all non-Europeans)” (4). In the exclusive space of the French upper class described by Bey, nuances do not exist, but are simplistically replaced by binaries of “us” versus “them” and of “good” versus “bad”. Consequently, we observe the debates of like-minded individuals who feed on each other’s justifications, thus narrowing the colony’s ethnic configuration. There is a lack of movement between the closed space of this salon and the events that occur outside of it and this static state leads to a dead-end. Without any negotiations accepted from the Other, revolts occur, then they are repressed, therefore perpetuating the colonial violence of the land: “Voilà plus de vingt ans que madame Lafrance ne cesse pas d’envoyer ses troupes de fantassins et de cavaliers de territoire en territoire, pour mater des révoltes sanglantes et traquer les responsables de ces insurrections – des hommes, ô scandale, obstinés dans leur refus de soumission” (It’s been more than twenty years now that Mrs. France has sent her troops of infantry and cavalry from land to land in order to subdue the bloody riots and to chase down the ones responsible for these revolts – men, oh how scandalous, stubborn in their refusal to surrender) (25).

As decided in the echo chamber, the architecture of Algeria will be reconfigured by means of violent measures, and, Bey uses a child narrative to personalize the dry discourse of the two French political leaders. Rather than employing the general terms of the men who

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102 They use “Arabs” to describe both “Arabs” and “Berbers”
discussed in the salon, such as “Arabs”, Bey allows a child to individually mention the people that disappeared from his small family circle. Each person that was killed during the confrontations receives a name as well as a short story connected to their name. Despite the disappearance of many individuals, Bey announces that there is still hope since some people survived and will continue to fight and to tell their version of the colonial story, therefore unmasking the devastating effects of war covered by monolithic narratives. The child is one of these survivors who coped with difficulties, but who continues to resist and speak for the ones who are no longer have a voice:

Le père, Aïssa. Le grand-père, Mohamed. Ses frères. Tous, oui, tous. Les petits, les grands. Abdelkader, Ahmed, Abderrahmane, Boualem. Tous, oui, tous. Et puis les femmes. Toutes les femmes de la tribu. Tout bas, il dit le nom de sa mère, Fatima, et il retrouve la lumière de son regard posé sur lui, son odeur, sa voix. Il appelle doucement sa grand-mère, Djedda Aïcha. Au tour de Khadidja, maintenant. Khadidja, sa sœur… […] Lui seul ne les a pas suivis (The father, Aïssa. The grandfather, Mohamed. His brothers. All of them, yes, all. The young, the old. Abdelkader, Ahmed, Abderrahmane, Boualem. All of them, yes, all. And then, the women. All of women of the clan. In a low voice, he pronounces the name of his mother, Fatima and he remembers the light of his eyes warming him, her smell, her voice. He calls in a soft voice his grandmother, Djedda Aïcha. It’s Khadidja’s turn now. Khadidja, his sister… […] He is the only one who didn’t follow them) (31/32).

The child is orphan at an early age and this situation makes the connection to his heritage more difficult. Usually, the parents are the ones who explain to children the values appreciated by their family and expose them to what makes their community special. With these sources removed from his life, the child will have to struggle and try to connect all the heritage puzzle pieces on his own. He will have to asses all possible risks, to ask the right
people the right questions about his past and to pay attention to spaces that will allow him to safely practice the customs that he chooses to embrace.

Bey underlines the fact that when certain taboo spaces are crossed consequences arise. The rebels are confined to spaces of torture where they suffer for having tried to upset the monolithic space promoted by the French colonizers and for having tried to resist their discourse. The spaces of torture have different names and these names are constantly updated in order to best fit the colonizer’s narrative. Consequently, the smoke-outs\textsuperscript{103} were initially called ‘enfumages’, then renamed as ‘enfumades’. The rebels knew that they would be punished either inside their hiding space or outside it, so, often, they chose to stay in the caves – sometimes with their families and belongings. Bey resorts to almost all the five senses in order to describe as powerfully as possible the places where the rebels are punished. Based on her detailed description that relies on actual acts of reprisal in colonial Algeria, we can see the faces tortured people and we become aware that children were present too, we can hear the rebels and their animals scream, and we can imagine the smell of the smoke coming out of the cave. “Des cris déchirants, des appels et des pleurs d’enfants très vite couverts par le crépitement des flames déchaînées. Aux mugissement furieux des bœufs pris au piège, répondaient les hennissements des chevaux excités par le feu. Puis le silence” (Heartbreaking cries, calls and children crying, all this soon covered by the crackle of the raging flames. The furious roar of the trapped oxen was soon accompanied by the neighing of the horses agitated by the fire. Then silence) (35). The historian Mohamed El Korso considers that the term ‘genocide’ is more appropriate than ‘smoke-outs’ or ‘reprisals’ when referring to the violent acts of the French colonizer in Algeria. He proposed a law regarding the criminalization of

\textsuperscript{103} A technique used for bees where fire is started under the bees’ nest. This fire will generate smoke, used to signal that the current home is unsafe and that it is time for them to find a new home soon
colonialism, but the law was never taken seriously. El Korso addresses the issue of the ‘innomable’\textsuperscript{104} in the context of colonial events and suggests how certain acts of violence should have been named:

L’historien et ancien président de l’association du 8 Mai 1945, Mohamed El Korso, ne mâche pas ses mots. Pour lui, il est indéniable que le mot ‘génocide’ s’applique parfaitement aux crimes coloniaux perpétrés par la France en Algérie. […] ‘Les enfumades et les emmurements qui ont décimé des tribus entières, comment qualifier cela ?’, martèle-t-il, avant de lancer : ‘Le colonel Montagnac disait : tuez tous les hommes jusqu’à l’âge de 15 ans. Est-ce que ça, ce n’est pas un génocide ? (The historian and former president of the association of May 8\textsuperscript{th} 1945, Mohamed El Korso, doesn’t hold back his opinions. For him, it is undeniable that the word ‘genocide’ fits perfectly the colonial crimes perpetrated by France in Algeria. […] ‘The smoke-outs and the other asphyxiation methods that decimated entire tribes, how to qualify that?’, he screams, before stating: ‘The colonel Montagnac used to say: kill all men younger than 15. And this, this is not genocide?) (https://www.legrandsoir.info/la-france-une-attitude-schizophrenique.html).

Genocide, smoke-outs, reprisals – whatever the name chosen for these actions, Bey mentions that their violence affected not only the ones who died, but also those who witnessed these acts and have to live with their memory. In Pierre sang papier ou cendre, she creates the image of the child-witness to show how those who experienced violence will tell stories about their trauma in an attempt to find healing and answers.

The novel continues with the presentation of violent acts in the form of shaming discourses. After executing the rebels and clearing the space in front of her, we see Mrs.

\textsuperscript{104} What is not named – in this case, the genocide
France advance and continue to reshape the physical architecture of the country. Using an ironic approach, Bey presents a confused Mrs. France who cannot find her way in a space s’poorly’ designed by the Other. Consequently, she destroys churches, houses and monuments that do not fit her style and demands. According to Bey, Mrs. France is afraid to get lost in cesspits while following the confusing and narrow roads. For her, these places are nothing but disgusting areas that do not match the new status of the almost civilized country. We can notice that, in this novel, the shaming discourses are not aiming only people, but also at spaces. The former constructions designed by the colonized population are mocked and criticized for their ugliness and lack of practicality. To this problem, Mrs. Lafrance\textsuperscript{105} proposes a solution which implies rebuilding the country and adapting it to civilized standards. Bey uses the term ‘rebaptize the streets’ (38) to underline the rebirth proposed by the new colonial system.

She mentions, insisting on the names and their historical significance, certain streets that were renamed to reflect the new order in Algeria: “La rue Aïn el Hadjel ou rue de la Fontaine des Veuves, la rue Lalla Khadîdja el aaryana ou rue de la ‘Toute-Nue’, la rue Beît el Mel, la rue Sebââ t’baren ou rue de Sept-Tavernes, la rue Ali Khodja et tant d’autres, n’existent plus que dans les mémoires des habitants qui ignorent les nouvelles appellations”\textsuperscript{106} (The street Aïn el Hadjel or the street of the Fountain of Widows, the street Lalla Khadidja el aaryana or the street of the ‘All Naked’, the street Beît el Mel, the street Sebââ t’baren or the street Seven-Taverns, the street Ali Khodja and many others only exist now in the memory of the people who are unaware of the new names) (38). Bey makes it clear that Mrs. France experiences a strong feeling of frustration each time she observes the space of the Other. This frustration arises from not understanding the surroundings or from

\textsuperscript{105} Or in English “Mrs. France”
\textsuperscript{106} Bey provides the old street names, followed by the new French names. The old street names are not displayed anymore, but they persist in the memory of people
not being able to access them, and we see the obstacles appear under the form of unknown languages or customs that limit what the eyes of strangers can observe. Words or expressions such as “corps enroulé”¹⁰⁷, “ne laissant apparaître”¹⁰⁸, “fenêtres fermées, toujours fermées”¹⁰⁹, “les enfants se cachent”¹¹⁰, “sous les porches”¹¹¹, “derrière les murets”¹¹², “ne laissent entrevoir qu’un visage hostile”¹¹³, “elles baissent la tête”¹¹⁴, “resserrent […] leur voile”¹¹⁵ reflect the obstruction experienced by the eyes who want to invade the unknown land. This desire of invading private spaces is reflected in the paragraph that describes the attempt of the French to capture – via photography – the spaces of the Arab and Berber population. The French men are “armed” with cameras and chase the people, especially the women, in order to discover faces, bodies and habits: “Et puis des hommes en noir, armés d’une boîte noire qu’ils braquent sur les passants, sur les maisons aux fenêtres fermées, toujours fermées” (And then men in black, armed with a black box that they move towards the people who pass by, towards their houses with closed windows, always closed) (39).

This invasion of the private space is presented from two angles; there is the angle that shows the frustration of the French, but, also, there is the angle that shows the panic of the Other and the attempt to hide from the chase. The veiled women seek refuge in the last safe space, the intimacy of their home, to protect themselves from curious eyes. Passed from generation to generation, the religious custom of wearing a veil in public is threatened by the foreign presence. From 1954 to 1962, the French photographer Marc Garanger was stationed

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¹⁰⁷ ‘wrapped body’
¹⁰⁸ ‘does not allow to appear’
¹⁰⁹ ‘closed windows, windows that are always closed’
¹¹⁰ ‘the children hide’
¹¹¹ ‘under the porch entrance’
¹¹² ‘behind the low walls’
¹¹³ ‘barely always a hostile face to be seen’
¹¹⁴ ‘they [women] lower their heads’
¹¹⁵ ‘tighten their veil’
¹¹⁶ The quoted words/expressions are selected from Pierre sang papier ou cendre, page 39
in Algeria and, since he refused to fight a war that he did not support, he was given the option to become the personal photographer for one of his French superiors. His mission was to take pictures of certain people, especially women, and report back to his supervisor. This is what Garanger states in 2010 during an interview for New York Times: “’You have to understand that this is a military camp’, said Mr. Garanger who is now 75. ‘This was war and they were forced to be photographed, so there was no communication. This had to happen. I had to take the picture, and they had no choice in being photographed’”.

https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/14/showcase-161/ After seeing the first rounds of photographs, his French supervisor ordered that, despite the tradition of wearing the veil in public, he should photograph the women without their veil. The author of this article narrates the women’s reaction: “Unused to showing their full face and hair to anyone outside their family, they stood before Mr. Garanger’s camera as if they were naked. Some looked lost, others seemed to seethe. Mr Garanger remembers feeling that while the Algerian men were doing the fighting, these women were combatants, too. ‘They were firing at me with their eyes,’ he said” (https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/14/showcase-161/). In this video, Garanger confesses his anger towards the “degrading opinions” that he would hear on a daily basis and he states: “These people were not considered human” (https://vimeo.com/11764560).

From Garanger’s child-like narrative that criticizes monolithic approaches of private spaces, we can see that the safe space of the Other is shrinking, and, through this shrinking, values are monopolized by the French side. There are some questions that arise: is there any space left for the traditions and values of the Other? Can the Other still speak, and if so, what continues to function as a voice? In Pierre sang papier ou cendre, we observe that the architecture in Algeria is gradually molded to the image of France. Streets were renamed in order to evoke French heroes and to carry on their heritage in French Algeria; additionally,
the photographs imposed on people forced women to appear in public according to the European social norms. The customs and traditions of the Arabs and Berbers were ignored, and the desire to see women in a state that made them uncomfortable is qualified by certain voices as a visual rape: “This work is very important because of the visual rape of the women who were forced to appear uncovered’, said Mr. Ritchin, the author of ‘After Photography’ (2008). ‘You feel a distress, a defiance, an anger, a vulnerability because they’re not used to showing their face outside their immediate family’” (https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/14/showcase-161/).

Spaces are portals, and, while the access to foreign spaces is denied under certain circumstances, it is not however denied when these spaces are explored with a child-like curiosity that does not intent to modify it according to new customs. Bey balances the narrative in Pierre sang papier ou cendre when she presents the way that two children from different ethnic groups act when they visit each other’s house. The child that symbolizes Bey’s voice in the novel becomes friends with Pierre, a French classmate. Despite fear, curiosity prevails, and frontiers are crossed:

Ils n’habitent pas le même quartier. Pierre rentre chez lui. Il habite au pied de la ville arabe, dans le quartier européen. Quelques centaines de mètres plus loin, l’enfant retrouve les siens dans la Casbah. Certains jours, il arrive que Pierre, sans le dire à sa mère qui tremble pour lui en ces temps troublés, accompagne l’enfant jusque chez lui. Ensemble, après avoir passé les barrages des militaires, ils parcourrent les ruelles de la vieille-ville (They don’t live in the same neighborhood. Pierre goes back to his house. He lives at the foot of the Arab city, in the European neighborhood. A few hundred meters further, the child finds his own family in Casbah. Some days, it happens that Pierre, without telling his mother who fears for him during these troubled times, accompanies the child to his house. Together, after having passed the military roadblocks, they roam the alleys of the old city) (124).
Pierre is invited into the child’s house and he becomes an eye witness of the Arab customs, interactions and values. Instead of bringing his own view or customs into his friend’s house, Pierre – similarly to the character of Véronique in Roblès’ Saison violente – watches, enjoys and asks questions when he notices discrepancies between the adult narratives and his own observations. The space is approached with respect towards the customs it hosts and with a declared desire to learn more about others. When the child’s grandmother approaches Pierre and wants to start a conversation with him, Pierre confesses his regret at not understanding the words that are addressed to him in this unfamiliar, yet welcoming space: “Il regrette de ne pas comprendre ce qu’elle lui dit. De ne pas pouvoir lui parler.” (He regrets the fact that he cannot understand what she tells him. He regrets that he cannot talk to her) (Pierre sang papier ou cendre, 125). Bey mentions that, on the way to the child’s house, the children have to pass through “des barrages des militaires”.

Frontiers are crossed, and, despite the confrontations that continue to occur in Algeria, children want to interact. Bey ends the novel with the image of the War for Independence that approaches inevitably and with Mrs. Lafrance’s desperation at the thought of having to leave the House that it meticulously built for herself during more than a century of French

117 Unlike Pierre, “the child” who represents Bey’s voice does not have a name in the novel. This raises questions about who is allowed to not name Arab/Berber characters when writing French Algeria. For the exact same approach, Albert Camus was criticized when writing The Stranger, a novel where he gives a name to most characters, but he does not give a name to the Arab killed on the beach. In The Meursault Investigation, Kamel Daoud, among other intellectuals, criticizes the lack of a name and he re-writes the story of the Arab’s death, ensuring that the character does have a name in his novel.

118 We can deduce that Pierre is visiting an Arab home given the question that Pierre asks his mother when he returns home: “Il a demandé à sa mère pourquoi partout on entendait que les Arabes étaient sales. Dans la maison de son camarade, tout est propre” (He asked his mother why we could hear everywhere that Arabs were dirty. Inside his classmate’s house, everything is clean) – (126).

119 “The army’s roadblocks”
colonialism. We find out that she is worried and feels divided while people are rebelling more often than usual on her streets.

Architecture is sketched by Bey as a living body that absorbs and then releases traces of events, interactions and feelings, and she states that the walls seem to ooze a smell of fear and hate. Spaces also retain a heritage of violence that becomes increasingly difficult to whitewash. The blood that can testify to the violence that occurred from all sides is erased, yet still visible to the attentive eye. The sidewalks are power washed after each bombing or bloody event, but they still maintain a brown color that seems to be forever imprinted in the cement. Similarly to the opening image of the ships that land in Algeria in 1830, Bey closes the novel with another image of ships, but this time these ships carry the French population back to metropolitan France shortly before and after the Algerian Independence: “À peine les passerelles sont-elles descendues que les bateaux sont pris d’assaut. Et l’on se presse, l’on s’écrase, l’on se bat presque pour y trouver place, pour quitter cette terre devenue à jamais étrangère” (No sooner have the footbridges come down that the ships are stormed by people. And they push, they run over each other, they almost fight each other to find room on the ship and to leave this land that became forever foreign to them) (162). Furthermore, we can notice that the roles are now reversed. If, at the beginning of the novel, the child’s space was filled up with fear at the sight of the French ships landing in Algeria, now, it is the space of the former colonizer that is overwhelmed by anxiety while the child calmly watches the “Middle Sea” regain its serenity: “Posté sur une des terrasses de la ville blanche, l’enfant, sentinelle de la mémoire, observe l’étrange ballet nautique sur la mer bleue et calme” (Resting on one of the terraces of the white city, the child, sentinel of memory, watches the nautical ballet on the blue and calm sea) (162).

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120 Bey refers to the Mediterranean in her novels as “La Mer du Milieu” – “The Middle Sea”
Similarly to the beginning of the novel, the nature is endowed with human characteristics once again. If the Mediterranean Sea was traversed by bloody reflections as soon as the French ships touched the Algerian shore, now, the sea regains its serenity and natural color. Despite the initial impression of a simple return to the pre-colonial status, we will observe that the hybrid architecture of Algeria crafted during a long colonial occupation will not vanish overnight. The physical departure of the European non-Muslim population did not equal to a return to a “pure” Arab past as claimed by the new political leaders of an Independent Algeria. The problematics related to the complex postcolonial architecture will be addressed by Maïssa Bey in *Bleu blanc vert*, and, following the same technique we observed in *Pierre sang papier ou cendre*, she will alternate child narratives and adult narratives to bring to light tangled spaces still noticeable on the Algerian land.

Maïssa Bey’s *Bleu blanc vert*121 (2006) is a novel that presents the life of Lilas and Ali from childhood to adulthood. When they become teenagers, Lilas and Ali meet, fall in love, and, years later, they marry and have a child. The author alternates political events from Algeria (1962-1992) with the everyday life of simple citizens who struggle to build their dreams in a country torn by violence and confusion. The title of the novel refers to the disagreement between Ali and his teacher over the use of colors in the classroom. The teacher bans the trio blue-white-red (blue ink, white paper and red for underlining) since it represents the colors of the French flag, and, in his opinion, this trio can now be affixed exclusively to France. The teacher proposes to replace the old trio with blue-white-green as it better represents the image of postcolonial Algeria. Contrary to the colonial times, the classroom is now used to reverse the French heritage and to revive the “Arab” one, thus ignoring not only the long French influence in Algeria, but also the presence of the Berbers. In the classroom, students are remodeled in order to fit the new ideology of the independent country : “Il [le

121 “Blue white green”
professeur] nous a dit que, si on écrivait avec un stylo bleu sur la feuille blanche et qu’on soulignait en rouge, ça ferait bleu blanc rouge. Les couleurs de la France. Celles du drapeau français. Il a dit qu’on était libres maintenant. Libres depuis quatre mois. Après cent trente-deux ans de colonisation” (He [the teacher] told us that if we wrote in blue ink on the white page and we underlined in red that made blue white red. The colors of France. Those of the French flag. He said we were now free. For four months. After a hundred and thirty-two years of colonization) (13). The professor’s narrative creates confusion among children since they notice that the forbidden colors continue to exist in the landscape of Independent Algeria. Through child narratives, Bey draws awareness to the danger that monolithic discourses can trigger. With the help of Ali’s voice, Bey points out that the buildings in Algeria still retain the image of the former colonizer: “Notre immeuble est peint en blanc, mais le dessous des balcons est bleu. Bleu plus foncé que le ciel. […] A Alger, il y a beaucoup de très grands bâtiments tout blancs. C’est pour ça qu’on l’appelle la ville blanche. Mais quelquefois il y a des femmes qui mettent à sécher des vêtements rouges sur les balcons de l’immeuble” (Our building is paint in white, but it is also blue under the balconies. A blue darker than the sky. […] In Alger, there are many tall buildings, all white. That’s why we call it the white city. But, sometimes, there are women who dry red clothes on the balconies of their buildings) (20). The child-like narrative points out that the forbidden colors are still part of the Algerian architecture even after the Independence, therefore complicating the monolithic discourse of his teacher and underlining the contestable aspect of his ridiculous demand.

This amnesia that was demanded in Algeria was also claimed in France. Both sides attempted to ignore the history they built together over more than a century. In Algeria, the new leaders intend to unmark the Algerian landscape and whitewash the country’s memory of the French colonial presence. They propose a blank landscape with no remaining traces of
the past and with only one direction to follow. In *Heritage, Memory, and Identity*, Sara McDowell emphasizes the fluidity of landscapes and the constant reconstruction they undergo in societies. She states that landscapes are formed of layers and “These layers stem from changing economic, political, cultural and demographic factors affecting a particular society and are testament to diverse histories and geographies, and as such they can be peeled away to reveal the cultural aspirations and struggles of society. Landscape then, like society, is in a constant mode of flux, as it consistently develops and mutates” (38). The attempt to “purge” the landscape of certain traces from the past reflects the problem that unwanted heritages pose: they are perceived as threats that continue to haunt the present of a society. The narratives of the political leaders regarding unwanted landscapes perpetuate the war for power and remind the former colonized population that the colonizer has physically left the space of the colony, but it still haunts its *imaginaire politique*.122

In 1962 the ships transported the pieds-noirs123 to metropolitan France, but in *Bleu blanc vert* Bey mentions that the buildings they abandoned are still present, and the inside of these buildings continue to hold the items that belonged to them. Lilas, the other main character in the novel, searches through the empty buildings with a child-like curiosity directed towards unexplored spaces: “J’ai fait le tour de tous les appartements qui ont été laissés ouverts, mais je n’ai jamais rien pris. Ma mère m’a fait promettre de ne jamais rien prendre. Je voulais simplement trouver des livres” (I visited all the appartments that were left open, but I never took anything. My mother made me promise to never take anything. I just wanted to find books) (22). As the child goes through the items abandoned in the apartments, she realizes that spaces remind of living bodies that speak to the one who visits them:

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122 Political space crafted by narratives
123 Population of European descent who had to leave Algeria in 1962, also known as “black feet”
Chaque maison a son odeur. Celle que je préfère, c’est celle du quatrième droite dans notre bâtiment, le A. Dès qu’on ouvre la porte, on sent tout de suite la rose fanée et le caramel un peu brûlé. Tout est imprégné de cette odeur : les murs, l’intérieur des tiroirs et des armoires, les draps et les serviettes qui y sont encore rangés. L’odeur d’un lieu, c’est comme les signes particuliers sur une carte d’identité. C’est comme si la maison voulait me dire : tu vois, je suis encore pleine d’une autre vie (Each home has its own scent. The one that I prefer is from the fourth apartment to the right in our building, the A one. As soon as you open the door, you smell the faded rose and the caramel a little burnt. Everything is covered in this scent: the walls, the interior of drawers and dressers, the sheets and towels that are still stored there. The scent of a place it’s like the particular marks on an identity card. It’s like the house told you: you see, I’m still full of another life) (22).

If in Pierre sang papier ou cendre we saw that the French colonizer was frustrated with houses that were inaccessible and tried to break into these unknown spaces and explore them, now, in a postcolonial Algeria where the doors of the French houses are open, we see the former colonized population searching through the space of the Other with the same curiosity and fascination. In Bleu blanc vert, Lilas and Ali notice around them spaces that are hybrid, yet they are forced by the political leaders to admit that they are monolithic. This sudden amputation of the hybrid body of Algeria deepens the colonial wound instead of allowing it to heal. The change imposed the morning of the Independence denies the long-term changes that occurred in the cultural, social, political and religious life of the country. In Wounded Cities: Memory-work and a place-based ethics of care, Karen Till presents us with the complex process that is necessary for landscapes to heal, similarly to human bodies, after they become open wounds:
I define ‘wounded cities’ as densely settled locales that have been harmed and structured by particular histories of physical destruction, displacement, and individual and social trauma resulting from state-perpetrated violence. Rather than harmed by a singular ‘outside event’, these forms of violence often work over a period of many years – often decades – and continue to structure current social and spatial relations, and as such also structure expectations of what is considered ‘normal’ (6).

Lilas and Ali realize that the Algerian space is wounded and that the return to ‘normal’ will not occur by denying the French heritage that is still present in Algeria. On the contrary, the healing process will only begin when the former colonized population will be ready to acknowledge their layered heritage and their ongoing relationship with France. The apartment that smells like France and is visited by Lilas is testifying about the blurry lines that the children continue to see in their independent country. Ali also reflects on the sudden state of being caught between spaces since the young generation is told that France is no longer their country, however, they see themselves surrounded by France on a daily basis. The “before” and “after” narrative used by the political leaders to recklessly delimit the colonial time from the postcolonial one is questioned by child narratives and is portrayed, rather than as a quick birth, as a space of agony where the body of the country is trapped between death and a future life: “Avant, c’était la France notre mère patrie. Mais on n’a pas encore fini de naître. Ou plutôt de mourir” (Before, France was our mother country. But we’re not reborn yet. Or maybe we didn’t finish dying) (31). When Ali reflects on the accommodation window needed by his country, he compares the body of Algeria with a human body that was trapped for too long in the darkness and now struggles to see clearly: “Les pupilles, dilatées par l’obscurité et gênées par la persistance des sensations rétiniennes, ont besoin d’un temps de latence pour se retracter, accommoder et retrouver ainsi leur fonction naturelle” (The eye pupils, dilated by the darkness and bothered by the persistence of retinal sensations, need a certain time of
latency to retract, to accommodate and thus regain their natural function) (265). In a postcolonial House under construction, the previous colonial influences continue to affect customs, ideologies and voices.

In the following subchapter, I will present the effects that more than a hundred years of French colonialism left on the Algerian land. The long exposure to the traditions of the Europeans allowed the colonized population to witness other lifestyles, mentalities and choices, thus creating the desire, as well as the practical need, to experiment with new customs.

### 3.2 Customs

In *Pierre sang papier ou cendre*, the first custom presented by Maïssa Bey is related to religion. As the French ships prepare to land, the child hears the sound of the muezzin\(^{124}\) reminding people that it is the time for prayer: “Venue de la plus haute tour et portée par la brise, la voix du muezzin déroule ses intermittences avant de se perdre au-dessus des collines. L’enfant, fasciné par ce qu’il contemple dans le lointain\(^{125}\), ne l’entend pas” (Arriving from the highest tower and carried by the soft wind, the voice of the muezzin unfolds its irregular rhythm before vanishing over the hills. The child, fascinated by what he sees in the distance, doesn’t hear it) (10). With the help of this scene, where the child’s attention is distracted from a custom important to his community because of the French arrival, Maïssa Bey presents us with omens of indivisibility. She suggests from the beginning of the novel that the French presence will not allow separate values to co-exist and that the population will be forced to listen only to one voice and move only into a single direction. The child cannot hear the voice of the muezzin because he watches the French preparing to step foot on his land. Afraid of

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\(^{124}\) A man appointed to call Muslims to prayer from the minaret or from the mosque

\(^{125}\) Reference to the landing of the French ships that the child is observing
the foreign presence that he notices, the child runs away and finds refuge near the mausoleum of the Saint Sidi Fredj, and, upon his arrival at the sacred space, he witnesses ancient rituals practiced by his community. Bey describes the Sharia Law, so the set of principles that guide the Muslims in various aspects of their private and public life. In this particular scene, Bey focuses on charity and prayer, and she sketches the image of beggars sitting on the ground in front of the sacred place waiting for people to hand them various goods as soon as they finish praying:

Aux portes de la petite bâtisse chaulée de blanc, quelques pauvres hères, pour la plupart des vieillards enveloppés dans un burnous\(^\text{126}\) couleur de terre, sont couchés à même le sol. […] Puis, accroupis au soleil, la main tendue comme d’habitude, ils solliciteront les visiteuses, des femmes venues parfois de très loin, qui pénètreront dans le lieu saint pour y accomplir des rituels séculaires (At the doors of the small whitewashed building, some poor beggars, for the most part old men wrapped in brown burnooses are sleeping on the ground. […] Then, crouching in the sun, the hand outstretched as usual, they ask for charity from the women arrived there from far away and who will get into the sacred place to fulfill their secular rituals) (13).

The strong religious character of the Arab community will not be well received by the French colonizer. Paradoxically, even though the French often referred to both Arabs and Berbers as “Arabs”, they were however aware of the differences existent between the two communities and use these differences to identify more with one group and to reject the other: “The Kabyles, being ‘sedentary’ and ‘industrious’, were defending a patrimony the French could easily identify with; the Arabs, being ‘nomadic’ and ‘fanatically religious’, were defending an ideal the French abhorred” (Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice & Race in

\(^{126}\) Large cloak worn by Arabs
At the beginning of the novel, the child seems to be pulled between these two voices that cannot fuse: the one of his community that asks people to follow their daily religious customs and the one of the French that attracts with its noise and novelty. The child is initially afraid of the foreign voice and rejects it, running to the mausoleum of the saint Sidi Fredj where he prays that the French presence will disappear.

After the colonizer settles on Algerian land, the child, along with many other children, are exposed to the customs and values of France with the help of education. They learn from their French instructors that France is their country and that they should master the new language which will provide access to the customs they need to embrace:

Assis derrière leurs pupitres, bras croisés, les enfants attendant. Face à eux, sur le tableau noir, au-dessous de la date du jour, soigneusement calligraphiée en lettres cursive, cette phrase : ‘J’aime mon pays, la France’. Accrochée sur le panneau droit du tableau, une carte de géographie. C’est la France. Ses plaines et ses montagnes. Ses fleuves et ses rivières. Ses villes et ses villages. (Sitting behind their desks, arms crossed, the children wait. In front of them, on the blackboard, under the date of that day, carefully handwritten in cursive, this phrase: ‘I love my country, France’.

Hanged to the right panel of the board, a geography map. It’s France. Its plains and mountains. Its rivers and streams. Its cities and villages) (Pierre sang papier ou cendre, 43).

In the classroom, children see the image of a France that they hear about in speeches and, by looking at the map, they are offered the proof of its physical existence. Since Algeria is portrayed by the teacher as an extension of metropolitan France, children can observe their mountains, their rivers and the other half of their country. Additionally, the slogan “I love my country, France” seen on a daily basis on the board, becomes a habitual image. Maïssa Bey’s
narrative insists on the importance that is given to the visibility of customs and suggests that what is seen can be reproduced and performed easier than what is abstract, especially in the case of children. Also, since a custom is an action that is done regularly by individuals, the colonizer relies on the force of habit when it comes to embracing new practices and values, and we witness how the teacher encourages the children to repeat that they love France: “Un à un, avant de la recopier, les élèves doivent répéter après la maîtresse la phrase écrite au tableau. ‘J’aime mon pays, la France’. Il y a ceux qui débitent d’un trait cette profession de foi. Avec conviction, avec ferveur” (One by one, before recopying, the students must repeat after the teacher the sentence written on the board. ‘I love my country, France’. There are those who fly through this confession of faith. With conviction, with passion) (44).

Certain children do not oppose any resistance to the new values presented to them, however, the Child deviates from this attitude and cannot pronounce the phrase that would declare his loyalty to France. The child’s narrative refuses the daily practice of declaring loyalty to the new colonial power, and, despite the teacher’s persistence, he does not pronounce the desired phrase correctly. Bey tells us that Mrs. France moves towards the child without anger, but with pity and a desire to help him, knowing that the intellectual capacities of these children were not similar, in her opinion, to the ones of her French children.

Similarly to the narrative in Roblès’ *Saison violente* we notice that children who do not fit the French mold are represented as individuals with “savage” customs and reduced mental capacities. The persistence in transformative exercices continues outside the classroom, and we find out that customs are forbidden if they do not match the goals of the colonial project:

Quand on a interdit à son père l’entrée de la mosquée, dans laquelle il allait faire quotidiennement ses prières, parce que madame Lafrance avait décidé qu’elle serait dorénavant consacrée au dieu des chrétiens, l’enfant s’est joint aux prières faites en plein air, dans la petite cour de l’école coranique, il a rendu grâce à Dieu pour son
immense miséricorde et son chagrin s’est apaisé (When they did not allow his father to enter the mosque where he used to pray daily because Mrs. France decided it would for the God of christians from then on, the child joined the prayers done outside, in the little yard of the Koranic school, he thanked God for His great mercy and his sorrow was appeased) (62).

The architecture of the country is modified in an attempt to eradicate customs – mostly religious ones – but the actions do not lead to the expected results as the Muslim population continues its prayers and rituals outside the mosques transformed into Christian churches. In another instance, we are told that the custom of visiting and caring for the tombs of ancestors is attacked as well since the French leaders ordered the destruction of cemeteries. The French troops worked on constructing roads over the bones of the dead without worrying about upsetting secular traditions. The ethics of this gesture that eradicates the visual continuity of ancestors on Algerian land is brought into discussion by Bey, who wants to underline the fact that this colonial action contradicts the professed moral values of France. The words “supreme outrage”\(^\text{127}\) are assigned to the immoral conduct of the colonizer, and the loss of cemeteries is mourned by the women and portrayed as another act of extreme violence towards their ancient customs. When referring to the importance attributed by the Arab and Berber communities to cemeteries and to the customs that surround this sacred space, the anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu states:

> Le cimetière, immense ombre portée de la cité vivante, est sans doute, comme plus généralement en Afrique du Nord, le fondement et le symbole de l’attachement irréductible qui unit l’homme à son sol. Les Abadhites\(^\text{128}\) sont tenus de se faire enterrer au Mzab. Chaque fraction y a son cimetière distinct portant le nom de

\(^{127}\) “Ultimate abuse”

\(^{128}\) Berber group
According to Bourdieu, burial traditions require the knowledge of a code, and strict social norms are followed not only during the individuals’ lifetime, but also after their death. Consequently, everything matters, especially the place where the person will be buried. Bourdieu also mentions that the ancestor after whom the cemetery is named represents the object of annual worship and is perceived as the center reuniting the tribe on specific dates. As part of the ceremonies that accompany this worship, we witness the transmission of advice to the younger generation. According to Bey, the most important man of the tribe evokes the memory of the dead saint and, in front of a large group gathered at the cemetery, he enumerates the rules to be followed. The saint that is celebrated even after his death continues to bring the community together and influence current and future views and values. Maïssa Bey mentions that individuals strongly believe that the saints – dead or alive – could change the course of their lives if the rituals performed in their honor followed the religious principles governing that particular tribe: “Les femmes déposeront leurs offrandes au pied du tombeau incrusté de bois précieux et recouvert d’étoffes de soie. Puis elles se prosterneront, diront quelques prières, baiseront le catafalque et, dans des murmures incantatoires, solliciteront aide et protection auprès du saint révéré pour sa science et ses pouvoirs prodigieux” (The women will deposit their offerings at the end of the tomb encrusted with precious wood and covered by silk fabrics. Then, they will bow down, say their prayers, kiss the catafalque and, in incantatory whispers, will ask help and protection from the saint revered for his knowledge and miraculous powers) (Pierre sang papier ou cendre, 13).
Early during the colonial process, the French political leaders realized that religion played a central role in the life of both the Arab and the Berber communities, a role that could influence actions aimed at the colonial administration. Patricia Lorcin states that the French leaders’ desire to access the religious codes and customs of Islam was motivated by the need for security on Algerian land:

Religion as an institution, on the other hand, received close attention. In the first place there was the question of the religious leaders who, because of their great influence on the people, needed to be studied with great care. […] If the religious hierarchy could be understood and even penetrated, security would be easier to achieve, for the seditious impulse provided by the more fanatical of these leaders could thus be hampered. (*Imperial Identities*, 55).

The religious leaders and the customs of Islam had a great impact on the Muslim population, but Bey underlines the fact that certain attitudes required by their religious laws were not accepted by all. She presents an attitude towards tragic events that occur in life and that are accepted with resignation - since complaining would be a sign of questioning the divine will. Bey states that, when violent times destroy the balance of their society, people resort to saying “Mektoub!” and they accept the hardship they endured: “Mais il [l’enfant qui représente la voix de Bey] ne pose pas ces questions. Il ne pose aucune question. A personne. Parce qu’il ne veut plus entendre ce mot, pour lui synonyme de résignation, de consentements au malheur: *Mektoub!*” (But he [the child who represents Bey’s voice] does not ask these questions. He does not ask any question. To anyone. Because he doesn’t want to hear this word, for him a synonym of resignation, of consenting to misfortune: Mektoub!) (*Pierre sang papier ou cendre*, 65). The child’s narrative contests the passive attitude of his own

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129 In Arabic, “So it was written!”
community as well as the lack of questions regarding the injustice that they have to endure. Questions are presented as an opportunity to open new paths while refusing to settle on discourses of blind acceptance.

In *Pierre sang papier ou cendre*, we observe that customs and architecture are mutually dependent, as a change in the space configuration triggers a change of customs. Once again, Bey insists on the importance of visibility, and we learn that French customs are displayed to the public eye in spaces transformed to fit their new societal needs. The mosques where Muslim used to pray are now churches that receive the Christians for their Sunday services. Bey mentions white churches with bells that announce the Sunday service and that gather crowds of Christians who arrive from far away in their carriages and dressed in their festive clothes. The child’s eyes observe the shifting of power and the subversive methods used by the colonizer to create monolithic spaces and customs rather than layered ones. The newly transformed spaces host customs that often times are compared and contrasted by Bey with the previous ones to underline the displacement of political power:

Depuis bien longtemps l’enfant a compris que les Roumis\(^{130}\) ne sont pas comme eux. Et que les siens ne seront jamais comme les Roumis. […] Pour manger, ils s’assoient autour d’une table haute, sur des chaises, et leurs assiettes contiennent des mets prohibés qu’ils apprécient particulièrement. Ils boivent du vin. Ils ne prient pas Dieu de la même façon ni dans les mêmes lieux ni dans la même langue. On dit même qu’ils ne seraient pas circoncis (The child has understood for a while now that the Roumis are not like them. And that his people will never be like the Roumis. […] To eat, they sit around a high table, on chairs and their plates have forbidden foods that they love. They drink wine. They do not pray to God the same way, nor in the same

\(^{130}\) Used to designate the French population
places, nor in the same language. It is even said that they’re not circumcised) (*Pierre sang papier ou cendre*, 73).

By firmly opposing the customs of the Arabs with the ones of the French and by not leaving room for nuances – as stated in the sentence “And his people will never be like the Roumis” – the child now adopts an adult-like narrative, inflexible and unwilling to see hybrid identities instead of binaries. Intensifiers such as “never” highlight the doubt that the child has regarding future mutations in the Algerian society. Additionally, we notice a long list of negations “do not, nor, nor” when the child contrasts customs regarding prayer, places of prayer and the language of prayer: “Ils ne prient pas Dieu de la même façon ni dans les mêmes lieux ni dans la même langue”. When men are analyzed, the child uses the religious custom of circumcision present in his community to set French men apart from Arab ones. When women are observed by the child’s eyes, we notice that the problematics of the veil becomes the element that sets Arab women apart from French women.\(^{131}\) The child tells us that the French women are not like Muslim women because they do not cover their head and they wear short dresses that allow men to see their naked arms and legs. The veil problematics that differentiated Muslim women from non-Muslim ones in colonial Algeria continued to be a subject of controversy in France in 1989 when the law supported by the separation of the state by the church denied Muslim women the right to wear the hijab\(^ {132}\) in French public schools. Known as the *Islamic scarf controversy*, this topic sparked intense discussion that revolved around rejecting difference, minority assimilation and Islamophobia.

The child’s voice in Bey’s novel refers to customs that separate Muslim and non-Muslim

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\(^{131}\) As well as from other European non-Muslim women in Algeria, but Bey only insists on the French women in this passage. Also, since the child belongs to the Arab community, we can conclude that he speaks about Arab men and women in this context when he states “les siens” – “his people”\(^ {132}\) A veil worn by some Muslim women which covers the chest and head
communities and cause violence, but it also predicts future conflicts that arise when these communities share the same space, but not the same customs and values.

The child also insists on spaces that welcome Arab/Berber women and on spaces that welcome French women and allow them to spend time in the company of men. The custom of joining men in public spaces differentiates the two categories of women once again, and we find out that the French women and men share the spaces of cafés as well as the right to speak freely and to laugh loudly. The *interdit*\(^{133}\) of sharing the public places with men\(^{134}\) does not apply to the French women, and actions that are habitual for these women such as laughing, speaking loudly or dressing without covering their arms and head are perceived as shameless and therefore criticized. If, according to Edward Said\(^{135}\), the West distorts the image of the East because it looks at it through its own perspective, other scholars argue that, at times, the East also creates a deformed image of the West that it criticizes based on its own values. Consequently, the eye criticizes when it switches angles, no matter to which community it belongs. The voice of the child in this instance represents the individuals who cannot accept different customs and who define the others based on their own criteria. Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit discuss how the West can also be perceived as a monolithic entity and criticized by individuals who do not share its values. However, the two scholars mention that there is a difference between simply disagreeing with the customs of others and pursuing violent actions towards them:

A distaste for some aspects of modern Western, or American, culture is shared by many, but this is only rarely translated into revolutionary violence. Symptoms become interesting only when they develop into full-blown disease. Not liking Western pop

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\(^{133}\) French for “prohibition, taboo”  
\(^{134}\) Present in certain communities of colonial Algeria  
\(^{135}\) See *Orientalism*
culture, global capitalism, U.S. foreign policy, big cities, or sexual license is not of
great moment; the desire to declare a war on the West for such a reason is. The
dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies is what we have called
Occidentalism (Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies, 5).

The violence triggered by the difference in customs and values that Buruma and Margalit
refer to could be seen in France in 2015 during the Charlie Hebdo attacks when the two
Algerian brothers, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, entered the offices of the French satirical
newspaper and shot the people inside the building for what they called blasphemy.\(^\text{136}\) In
Pierre sang papier ou cendre, the child points out the difference that he observes between the
Arab/Berber and French customs, but his discourse does not escalate into violence, nor does
it invite violent acts.

After the child’s voice presents a world full of French customs that he does not
understand, it also brings to our attention the fact that his Arab world is not well known by
the French, and, as a result of this ignorance, the customs of his community become the
subject of shaming discourses. In the classroom, the French teacher explains to her students
that being French implies adhering to the customs followed by their community: “Pour bien
leur expliquer ce qu’elle attend d’eux, madame Lafrance écrit au tableau: Le bon élève est
propre. Il se lave tous les matins. Il apprend la langue française. Il sait calculer, cultiver les
légumes et les arbres fruitiers. Il connaît l’Algérie, il aime la France, sa mère patrie” (To
explain well what she expects of them, Mrs. France writes it down on the board: A good
student is clean. He washes every morning. He learns the French language. He can calculate,
grow vegetables and fruit trees. He knows Algeria and loves France, his homeland) (77).
Using an ironic tone, the child reiterates the advice given by Mrs. Lafrance and brings back

\(^{136}\) The cartoonists were killed for satirizing the prophet Muhammad via their drawings
into discussion the concept of the “civilizing mission” declared by France as the ultimate goal of the colonization process in Algeria: “Pour plaire à madame Lafrance […] il faut se laver, parler sa langue, aimer son pays à elle, et cultiver la terre. C’est cela, être Civilisé. Rien que cela” (To please Mrs. France […] one must wash, speak its language, love her country and cultivate the land. This is what it means to be Civilized. Nothing but this) (77).

Additionally, through an accusation disguised as a question, the child states that France is building monolithic identities where individuals face the impossibility of choosing values from different communities: “Mais … comment être en même temps un bon Arabe et un bon Français?” (But, how can one be, at the same time, a good Arab and a good French person?) (77). The child tells us how Mrs. Lafrance shows her followers the path they have to pursue in order to inherit the status of civilized people. While Mrs. Lafrance leads the people from the child’s community towards progress, she does not promise them the inheritance of the French citizenship, but only the status of educated individuals. The inflexible narrative of Mrs. Lafrance meets the child’s counter-narrative which challenges the way the Arab community is depicted. The child admits that the individuals in his community do not benefit from the updated resources that the French own; however, they have their own way of cleaning, working and educating themselves: “L’enfant n’ose pas dire à la maîtresse que chez eux, à la maison, tout le monde se lave. […] Bien sûr, il n’y a pas ce robinet qu’on tourne pour faire couler de l’eau comme dans les maisons des Français. Mais on va à la fontaine ou à la source et, avec l’eau ramenée parfois de très loin, on fait ses ablutions avant de prier. Cinq fois par jour, pas seulement le matin.” (The child does not have the courage to tell his teacher that, in their house, everybody washes. […] Of course, there’s no tap water like in the French houses. But we go to the fountain or to the river and, with water brought from far away, we do our ablutions before praying. Five times a day, not only in the morning) (78). According
to this statement, the custom of bathing five times a day\textsuperscript{137} is connected to religion, and, based on previous customs mentioned by the child, we can observe that religion acts as a gravitational center for the majority of customs – as well as taboos – existent in the Arab community.

Later in the novel, Bey discusses the presence of French Law that gradually weakens the customs in the child’s community. To talk about the chaos caused by this law, the author relies on a word game and uses the words “Si”, “la” and “loi” to create an expression that the child believes to signify “Mister Law”. The confusion arises from the fact that, in Arabic, “Si” is a honorific employed in front of the names of respectable individuals and is translated as “Sir/Mister”, but in French “si” means “if”. When the child hears the expression used by the authorities “si la loi” – “if the law” (in French), he misinterprets its meaning and thinks that a certain “Mister” called “Laloi” requires people to follow his strict rules and renounce their old customs: “Si Laloi est craint de tous. Sur toutes les lèvres, en toutes occasions, l’enfant entend ce nom. Mais pour lui, le mystère demeure. Qui est-il ? Qui est donc cet homme qui hante ses nuits, qui est à la source de toutes ces errances, de tous leurs malheurs ?” (Mister Law is feared by everyone. On all lips, on all occasions, the child hears this name. But for him, the mystery remains. Who is he? Who is this man who haunts his nights, who is at the source of all this chaos, of all this trouble?) \textsuperscript{(87)} Language can play various roles: it can facilitate access to a world or it can act as an obstacle in understanding this world’s new rules, customs and the values. In some situations, rather than acting as cognates\textsuperscript{138}, certain words mislead individuals given their identical form, but different connotation in various languages. This concept of illusory sameness is used by Bey to emphasize the various layers that a term or an identity might carry. In this case, “Si Laloi” is

\textsuperscript{137} Reference to “Wudu” – the purity ritual of Islam which involves washing the body before each praying session (usually 5/day)
\textsuperscript{138} Words of the same or similar nature
perceived by the child as a man who subverts the customs present in his Arab community when, in fact, this term refers to a narrative that justifies the decisions of the colonizer. In the novel, we find out that if French law opts for ending social customs revolving around the *djemââ*\(^\text{139}\), then individuals must obey the new orders unless they are willing to suffer violent repercussions: “Les hommes de la djemââ du village ont gardé, malgré tout, l’habitude de se retrouver […]. Mais depuis quelques années déjà, leurs paroles ne sont plus écoutées. […]” (The men of the village djemââ held, despite everything, the habit of gathering […]. But for a few years now, their words are not heard anymore) (86). This scene portrays the replacement done by the French authorities in order to help institute new customs among the population.

The actions of the individuals now in charge are described as inflexible, punitive and authoritarian, leaving no room for negotiations of habits and making it obvious that the previous law and the current one cannot coexist. These strict rules apply not only to customs displayed in public places, but to customs that occur inside the people’s houses and that will deprive individuals from the presence of their close family:

De même, ils [les Arabes] n’ont plus le droit d’organiser chez eux de grandes fêtes où seraient conviées, comme le veut la tradition, toutes les tribus alliées. Une limite a été fixée, au-delà de laquelle on ne peut plus recevoir de convives. Ils doivent compter, recompter et exclure de nombreux membres de leur tribu, au prix de mille inimitiés, pour ne pas dépasser le chiffre fatidique de vingt-cinq invités. La liste est longue de toutes les privations qu’engendrent les exigences de Si Laloi (Likewise, they [the Arabs] do not have the right to organize big parties at home anymore where, according to the tradition, all the allied tribes would be invited. A limit was fixed, beyond which guests cannot be allowed. They must count, recount and exclude a lot of people)

\(^{139}\) In Maghreb, The Assembly of the Elders – designed to deliberate important situations and events of the Arab community
of members of their tribe, at the cost of many resentments, not to exceed the fatal number of twenty-five guests. And the list of all restrictions imposed by the demands of Mr. Law is long) (90).

With the help of a child’s voice, Bey also mentions that old traditions are closely connected to feelings of pride and the taking away of this pride leads to acts of violence and revolt triggered by a desire to end humiliation. The novel *Pierre sang papier ou cendre* underlines the injustice of aligning customs without offering some wiggle room for differences. This alignment that is imposed by the French does not aim to create collaboration and negotiations between the colonizer and the colonized population, but subordination to a clearly established set of rules from which individuals cannot deviate without suffering violent consequences. In the next novel that I will analyze, we will observe the same tendency of aligning customs, but, in this case, we will see this reinforcement aiming at individuals who belong to the same community. In *Bleu blanc vert*, conflict arises from the fact that the young postcolonial generation of Algeria rejects customs that are perceived as outdated, thus upsetting the ideology promoted by the new political leaders who impose a return to a “pure” Arab past.

*Bleu blanc vert* offers the image of bricolage\(^{140}\) customs, where habits and rituals from the most expected to the least expected are brought together in the novel, presented in detail, then strongly contested by certain groups and defended by others. Children play with dolls and in doing so they enact actions that they observe around them, thus attempting to test through their game consequences that might occur in real life. Something that appears as an innocent act can however become problematic in a postcolonial country where everything is contested and forbidden if it does not match the new narrative. The main characters of the novel, Lilas and Ali, marry and have a daughter – Alya – and the young child born after the

\(^{140}\) In the field of art or literature, the term “bricolage” refers to mixing and creating something with various resources available
Independence is caught between conflicting narratives that refuse a middle ground. If colonial education focused on implementing French customs and values, postcolonial education aims to build the foundation of an Islamic nation where religion plays a central role according to which spaces, languages and customs are molded. Lilas narrates the experiences lived by her daughter at school and the ideologies promoted by her teacher:

Alya est rentrée ce soir avec de nouvelles résolutions. Elle a demandé un sac en plastique à sa grand-mère. Elle y a mis toutes ses poupées, et m’a demandé de les ranger dans le débarras. La maîtresse vient d’expliquer à toute la classe que toute représentation du corps humain était interdite en islam. Et que les poupées n’étaient qu’une invention des mécréants pour détourner les petits enfants de la parole de Dieu. (Alya came home this evening with new resolutions. She asked her grandmother for a plastic bag. She put all her dolls inside it and asked me to store it in the closet. Her teacher just explained to the entire class that any representation of the human body was forbidden in Islam. And that dolls were an invention of the infidels to keep little children away from the word of God) (263).

In the teacher’s rigid narrative, no difference is made between the multiple intentions that exist behind creating images. According to her discourse, any ritual that involves handling an image can only be associated with revolt against the sacred word. According to Titus Burckhardt, images can serve numerous purposes, even in Islam, despite the hostility displayed by certain parties towards them: “In Sunni Arab circles, the representation of any living being is frowned upon, because of the respect for the divine secret contained within every creature, and if the prohibition of images is not observed with equal rigor in all ethnic groups, it is none the less strict for everything that falls within the liturgical framework of Islam” (Art of Islam: Language and Meaning, 29). However, Burckhardt states that there is the paradox of criticizing images, yet having the sacred art of Islam where, in the Koran, God
is imagined with a face and hands (29). Through this statement, he emphasizes the nuances that exist when using imagery, and he also highlights the fact that the intention behind the creation of an image cannot be ignored. Following the same child-like narrative that supports flexibility in approaching rituals, habits and rules, Lilas explains to her daughter that dolls are not made with the intent to replace the divinity as they are simply a ludic custom popular among children:

J’ai passé beaucoup de temps à trouver des arguments pour lui démontrer que la maîtresse avait confondu les idoles de l’époque antéislamique avec de malheureuses poupées destinées tout simplement à permettre aux fillettes de jouer. Je lui ai expliqué que ces jeux existent depuis des temps très reculés, et qu’autrefois les petites filles fabriquaient parfois elles-mêmes leurs poupées avec des roseaux (I spent a lot of time finding arguments to prove to her that the teacher confused the idols of the preislamic time with the poor dolls destined to simply allow the girls to play. I explained to her that such games exist for a long time and that, in the past, girls used to make their own dolls using reeds) (Bleu blanc vert, 263).

The classroom indoctrination was present during colonial times, and we can notice that during postcolonial times it continues, but it chooses a different inflexible narrative to propagate to students. Instead of representing a space of inquiry and discovery, the classroom turns into a space where children are forced to accept ideas and customs without critically reflecting on them. The teacher’s discourse is received with fear and Alya does not have the courage to question it, despite her mother’s reassurance: “Elle n’a rien voulu entendre. Elle a dernièrement refusé d’inviter ses camarades à son anniversaire, parce qu’on lui a seriné que fêter un anniversaire autre que celui de la naissance du prophète était une hérésie, une tradition chrétienne.” (She did not want to hear anything. She ended up refusing to invite her classmates to her birthday because it has been repeated to her that celebrating the birthday of
someone other than the prophet is a heresy, a Christian tradition) (263/264). The expression “on a lui seriné”\textsuperscript{141} reminds us of the episode from \textit{Pierre sang papier ou cendre} where the repetition of French values was also the technique applied by the French teacher who demanded her students to keep saying “J’aime mon pays, la France”\textsuperscript{142}. In postcolonial Algeria, the tactics used to indoctrinate children remain the same, while the values are radically modified by the new political leaders. With the help of this episode, Bey shows us that everything that was previously learned, now has to be unlearned and permanently removed from the country’s memory. Certitudes are embraced, leaving no room for different interpretations of values and customs, and the path of a monolithic narrative initiated by the French colonizer increases in size rather than declining.

Dolls are forbidden to little girls and, as far as women are concerned, we find out that the lack of virginity is condemned. Female children grow only to realize that there are additional images condemned by their society. The image of a woman who is not found to be a virgin during her wedding night brings shame and humiliation both on her as well as her family. Around this custom, there is an entire set of other rituals developed in order to present to the community the image of the woman’s abidance of societal rules. In \textit{Bleu blanc vert}, Bey narrates the story of a family relative, Fatiha, and of her husband and mentions that after the couple spends some time together during their wedding night, their relatives knock at the door to require the “proof of virginity”:

\begin{quote}
Au bout d’une demi-heure, ses copains sont venus frapper à la porte en l’appelant. Parce qu’ils étaient impatients de voir. Il y avait sa mère avec eux. Alors il a ouvert et il a jeté la combinaison de la mariée. C’est ma tante, l’aînée des sœurs, qui a dansé avec. En la tenant des deux mains au-dessus de sa tête. Pour qu’on voie bien. Dessus,
\end{quote}
\textsuperscript{141} In French, “it has been repeated to her” 
\textsuperscript{142} In French “I love my country, France”
il y avait des taches et des traînées de sang. Et toutes les femmes ont poussé des youyous (After thirty minutes, his friends came to knock at the door, calling him. Because they’re impatient to see. His mother is with them. So, he opened and threw the bride’s nightgown. It was my aunt, the oldest of sisters, who danced with it. Holding it with two hands above her head. So that we could see well. There were stains of blood on it. And all the women cried with joy) (58/59).

The verb “voir”\textsuperscript{143} appears twice in this description: first, the friends are impatient to see, and second, the aunt dances with the bride’s clothes, holding them up so everyone could see well. It is not enough to say that the bride was a virgin on her wedding day, but the proof of her honor must be publicly displayed. If women have strict rules to respect, men are not spared by them either. Bey approaches another sensitive topic in the novel, the one of homosexuality, an identity that is classified as non-existent in the Arab world. When customs related to the man’s presence in certain social circles are upset, the society reverts to anger, and, often, to denial or even to violent actions that aim to kill the individuals who deviate from the mainstream narrative. In Maghreb, the “difference” is not accepted and all customs must align and revolve around the rules dictated by religion. In Bleu blanc vert, the character Samir, Lilas’ brother, tries to hide his habits that differ from those of other men, and his mother forces him to comply to habits that are considered appropriate for the men in their community: “Ma mère était souvent obligée de lui demander de sortir, d’aller jouer avec ses camarades au lieu de rester avec nous dans la maison presque toujours investie par des femmes. La différence et la souffrance étaient déjà inscrites en lui” (My mother often found herself forced to ask him to go out, to play with his friends instead of staying with us in a house almost always full of women. The difference and the suffering were already engraved in him) (231). Religion acts as the axis mundi around which all customs are designed, and

\textsuperscript{143} In French, “to see”
rituals regarding eating, getting married, playing, fashion, prayer, or war are all imposed by the Koran.

If Bey’s novel only briefly touches on the topic of homosexuality, the literature of Maghreb does not lack works that address this subject in detail. Abdellah Taïa, a contemporary Moroccan writer and filmmaker, was forced to leave his country because he feared for his life. Since his homosexuality did not fit the religious customs of the Islam, he relocated to France where he published literary works that address the condition of homosexuals in the Arab world. Among these works, we can mention Mon Maroc, Le rouge du tarbouche, L’armée du salut, Un pays pour mourir, Celui qui est digne d’être aimé ou Infidèles. The “infidels” search for a safe space, but just as during colonial times, the safe space is narrowing for all those who do not fit the mainstream narrative, and they realize that exile to a different country or the silence that surrounds their condemned identity are the only solutions available for them. Men and women have to follow paths designed for them by the Arab society. In 2016, the importance of female virginity was underlined in the Arab World by the Egyptian Parliament Member, Elhamy Agina, who proposed that all female students should be forced to take a virginity test before admission to the university

https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2016/10/197741/egyptian-mp-calls-women-undergo-virginity-tests-prior-university-admission/ In 2015, a bride from Morocco committed suicide because her husband doubted her virginity

https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2015/10/170721/morocco-bride-commits-suicide-after-her-virginity-was-questioned/ With all this societal pressure to follow strict rules, people resort either to suicide or to methods that help them display a fake obedience to rituals that they consider outdated. In Bleu blanc vert, Bey mentions that children fear the society’s

144 See subchapter 1.3, pages 80-82, article on hymen reconstruction in Maghreb
judgement from an early age, and, given the inflexible narratives that they hear in educational institutions on a daily basis, they second guess every decision they make:


According to Bey, a certain space configuration can help control and hold people accountable for living their lives according to the customs dictated by the society. The narrower the space, the easier it is to scrutinize people’s actions. For example, if the wedding is taking place in the proximity of the family, then the relatives can hold the bride and groom accountable for complying with the established wedding customs. As we have seen in the case of Fatiha’s wedding day, the family knocked at the door to request the proof of having lived according to the customs of their community. The character Lilas becomes aware of the role that these narrow spaces play, and she also understands that the transmission of customs thrives in the vicinity of family members. Consequently, if individuals create distance between them and their relatives and allow the space of narratives to grow larger, then the pressure of respecting customs will have fewer opportunities to occur. After witnessing Fatiha’s wedding experience, Lilas states: “Moi, quand je me marierai, j’irai loin. Très loin. Pour qu’on ne me
le fasse pas. Et je n’épouserai pas quelqu’un qu’on aura choisi pour moi” (As for me, when I get married, I will go far away. Very far. So no one can do such things to me. And I will not marry a person chosen by someone else for me) (Bleu, blanc, vert, 59).

Distance saves those who do not respect strict customs, and, sometimes, it does not only save their reputation, but their life. As mentioned earlier, the Moroccan writer, Abdellah Taia speaks about the violence endured in the Arab world by those who do not fit the narrative. In his case as well, distance saved him from abuse, additional verbal violence and humiliation. After a traumatic childhood experience, he relocated to France and placed distance between him and the country that couldn’t accept his difference:

It all came to a head one summer night in 1985. It was too hot. Everyone was trying in vain to fall asleep. […] Suddenly, the familiar voices of drunken men reached us. We all heard them. The whole family. The whole neighborhood. […] These men, whom we all knew quite well, cried out: ‘Abdellah, little girl, come down. Come down. Wake up and come down. We all want you. Come down, Abdellah. Don’t be afraid. We won’t hurt you. We just want to have sex with you’. They kept yelling for a long time. My nickname. Their desire. Their crime. (A Boy to Be Sacrificed, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/opinion/sunday/a-boy-to-be-sacrificed.html)

People are held responsible and, in many instances, running away from the place that threatens with its violence becomes the only answer in a frustrated society that demands monolithic languages, spaces and customs. In this subchapter, I insisted on customs and on the way customs and spaces are intertwined, and I also presented how child-like narratives subvert adult-like narratives that claim uniformity. In the following subchapter, I will discuss the language tensions in Maïssa Bey’s Pierre sang papier ou cendre and in Bleu blanc vert,
and I will alternate images of language painted by child-like narratives and images claimed by adult-like narratives.

3.3 Language

*Pierre sang papier ou cendre* opens with the image of the French soldiers preparing to land in Algeria, while the child representing the main character in the novel is watching them. There is a discrepancy between the narrative crafted for these soldiers in metropolitan France and the landscape they get to witness for the first time. Prior to the invasion of the land, language was used by the French political leaders to create a scenery that justified the “civilizing mission” and Algeria was depicted as an almost deserted island waiting to be conquered:

Elle est là, à portée de canon, cette terre qu’on leur a dit âpre et farouche. […] Les maisons en escaliers, les arbres, les dômes des mosquées. C’est un somptueux tableau qui s’offre à leurs yeux émerveillés. Un tableau aux dominantes vert et blanc sur le fond sombre de la colline. Ils s’étonnent. On leur avait dit : ni arbres ni arbrisseaux ni herbes. Rien que de la terre nue, sous un soleil nu. Ils s’étonnent. On leur avait dit : à peine, à peine quelques habitats épars rongés par le soleil, les vents et la poussière (She is there, within range of cannon, this land that they have been told it was rough and savage. […] The houses with stairs, the trees, the domes of the mosques. It is a sumptuous picture unraveling before their amazed eyes. A picture with a lot of green and white on the dark background of the hill. They are amazed. They have been told: no trees or shrubs or grass. Nothing but naked land under a naked sun. They are amazed. They have been told: a few, barely a few scattered habitats destroyed by the sun, the wind and the dust) (16/17).
The eyes of the soldiers are surprised to see the land’s architecture, and the expression “Ils s’étonnent”\textsuperscript{145} appears twice in this episode to highlight the gap between the language used for the soldiers’ indoctrination and their actual experience. To further underline the idea of indoctrination, Bey uses the expression “On leur avait dit”\textsuperscript{146} three times. Not only did the narrative burden the soldiers with preconceived ideas about the architecture of the land, but it also distorted their vision about the inhabitants of Algeria: “Cette terre, c’est Algérie, une vaste et nouvelle Amérique, peuplée, leur a-t-on dit, de moustiques mal armés, inconstants, lâches et malpropres” (This land, it is Algeria, a large and new America, inhabited, they have been told, by some mosquitoes poorly armed, undecided, cowardly and dirty) \textsuperscript{(18)}. Bey’s voice challenges the rigid narrative of the French political leaders, thus transforming her novel into a political platform from where other voices present different versions of Algeria and of its communities. Brinda Mehta focuses on the role that novels which narrate colonial and postcolonial times play on the political stage and states: “My book examines the ways in which these women’s writings [Maïssa Bey is included] provide the blueprint for social justice by ‘voicing’ protest and stimulating critical thought, particularly in instances of social oppression, structural violence and political transition” \textit{(Dissident Writings of Arab Women: Voices Against Violence, 2)}. According to Mehta, Bey’s voice protests against the monolithic narrative initiated by the French political leaders and breaks the silence covering many aspects of the colonial process.

Through violence, French individuals in power attempt to silence other voices while imposing their perspective as the only accurate one. Bey’s \textit{Pierre sang papier ou cendre} mentions the language used by the French soldiers in charge of reprisals to justify their violent acts. We can notice that the blame is passed from one person to another, thus creating

\textsuperscript{145} In French, “They are amazed”  
\textsuperscript{146} In French, “They have been told”
a diversion meant to move the gaze from the individual to a vaguer collectivity. After a
smoke-out described in detail, Bey imagines some survivors alongside with their torturers
and states that each party will have its own version of the story for future generations:

Toujours est-il qu’après le dégagement des ouvertures, une poignée d’hommes et de femmes est sortie des grottes. Hébétés, hagards, mais vivants. Ceux-là rapporteront les faits. Ils rapporteront ce qui pour beaucoup ne sera qu’un point de détail de l’histoire. D’autres encore témoigneront.147 […] Ils étaient présents sur les lieux. Parmi eux, certains ont allumé et entretenu les feux. Comme tout soldat discipliné, ils n’ont fait qu’obéir aux ordres de leur chef. Ils ont tout vu (Always, after opening the caves, a handful of men and women would get out. Dazed, distressed, but alive. They will testify. They will testify an event that, for many, will only be a detail of the story. Others will testify as well. […] They were also there. Among them, some of those who lit up the fire and kept it going. As disciplined soldiers, all they did was follow the orders of their boss) (34).

The Story is divided in two: on one side, we have the voices of those who were traumatized, and, on the other side, we have the voices of those who traumatized. According to Bey, experiences cannot be compared since an event of dramatic proportions for the rebels might be overlooked by history if the number of dead people did not reach a rate as alarming as the one of other reprisals. In this episode, Bey aims her discourse at the voices from Algeria that informed the leaders from metropolitan France about the success of their colonial project aimed at eradicating linguistic, social, political and religious habits that did not match the

147 Reference to the French soldiers in charge of the smoke-outs
colonial vision. This colonial strategy of creating a tabula rasa\textsuperscript{148} is discussed by Djamila Saadi-Mokrane who analyzes the concept of linguicide and language-related violence:

The issue of language arose with such violence that, in the space of half a century, the death of three languages was predicted: of Arabic during colonization, and of Berber, and French after independence. ‘Linguicide’ stands as a strategy elaborated to subjugate and reshape the identity of the country and its inhabitants by separating them from their points of reference. For the French colonizer, it was necessary to cut to the quick the Arabic and Islamic roots of a conquered land in order to crush its core values, which offered a refuge and thus a source of resistance (Algeria in Others’ Languages, 44).

Language, among other cultural values, is perceived as a site of resistance that must be conquered to impose different ideologies and habits on people. Children are targeted in the classroom and the French language and civilization are presented to them as opportunities that they have the chance to embrace. While the children experience the violence of this linguistic change, the colonizer insists on the advantages that they offer them, using insults when the colonial subjects seem to not appreciate the so-called educational process:

“Regardez-les, regardez ces enfants! Des gueux innombrables, vermineux, loqueteux, barbouillés d’ordure et puant la bête ! S’ils avaient une âme, ils auraient peut-être conscience de la chance que nous leur offrons ! Ils étaient opprimés par une milice avide et féroce, et nous sommes venus à eux en libérateurs” (Look, look at these kids! Countless beggars, filthy, ragged, smeared and stinking like animals! If they had a soul, they could maybe be aware of the chance we’re offering them! They were oppressed by a greedy and fierce militia and we came to save them) (Pierre sang papier ou cendre, 54/55). The language of political

\textsuperscript{148}Blank slate
leaders dismisses the stress experienced by children who are not allowed to mix the spoken Arabic, the Berber languages and French during their daily activities. Children become aware that each language has a territory reserved for it, and the trespassing of linguistic zones would bring punishment and humiliation. The French colonizer assumes that the Arabic and Berber languages will eventually be forgotten by the population who will be able to function exclusively in French.

The alienation brought by these rigid narratives is expressed by many intellectuals, among whom we can mention Kateb Yacine. Yacine did not reject the presence of the French language in Algeria, but its monolithic aspect, and he pleaded for a layered linguistic patrimony: “De plus, Kateb parle d’une ‘culture nationale en formation’ alors que le pôle dominant rattachait la culture nationale au vieux monde arabe mythique, avec sa langue, l’arabe classique, son interprétation du texte religieux, et toute cette culture déjà établie et sa civilisation nées et développées au Moyen-Orient” (Also, Kateb talks about a ‘national culture in formation’ while the dominant pole linked the national culture to the old mythical Arab world, with its language, the classical Arabic, its interpretation of the religious text and with all this culture already established and with civilization born and developed in the Middle East) (Maghreb divers, 41). Another colonial writer who pleaded for an under-construction linguistic patrimony is Albert Camus, a writer whom Maïssa Bey mentions in Pierre sang papier ou cendre. Her discourse on Camus is multifaceted as she does not paint only one side of his literary narrative that focuses on the landscape and on the beauty of Algeria; she also describes the side of Camus that was sensitive to the violence and to the injustice and poverty experienced by many, including those of French descent. Thus, Bey creates a complex portrait of Camus the writer and of Camus the human.
When Bey refers to Camus’ literary works, she insists on his novel *L’étranger*, and she mentions the famous episode where the sun was blinding Meursault and therefore led to the shooting of the Arab on the beach: “Nombreux sont ceux qui se sont laissés prendre à ces mirages. Leurs livres, leurs discours, leurs œuvres regorgent de ces soleils insolents, aveuglants, parfois meurtriers, de ces certitudes clamées ou instillées goutte à goutte par des esprits libres, au-dessus de tout soupçon. Ainsi cette terre serait une ‘terre de volupté’. Désirs d’Orient. Rêves d’Orient…” (There is a great number of those who left themselves caught by these mirages. Their books, their discourses, their works abound in these insolent suns, blinding, sometimes even deadly, in certitudes claimed or instilled drop by drop by the free spirits, beyond all doubt. So, this land will be a ‘land of voluptuousness’. Desires of Orient. Dreams of Orient…) (80/81). Camus’ language is presented as the language of an Orientalist, but, later in the novel, Bey imagines a conversation between Camus and another man where Camus criticizes the colonial injustice and the poverty of many individuals, especially those from Kabylie. In his *Misère de la Kabylie*, Camus denounced what he calls ‘an adaptation to poverty’ and criticized the colonial order, and this critique is mentioned by Bey in her novel *Pierre sang papier ou cendre*:

‘Te souviens-tu de ce que j’écrivais il y a seulement six ans, après mon séjour en Kabylie en 1939 ? Je les revois encore, ces enfants en loques qui disputaient à des chiens kabyles le contenu d’une poubelle … et ces autres qui s’évanouissaient de faim dans les écoles. C’était la vérité ; une vérité criante mais révélatrice. J’ai dénoncé en son temps cette exploitation intolérable du malheur (‘Do you remember what I used to write only six years ago, after my stay in Kabylia in 1939? I still see them again, those children in rags who were arguing with the Kable dogs the contents of a trash can…

149 In French, “The Stranger”
150 Coastal mountain region in the North of Algeria
151 In French, “Poverty of Kabylie”
and the others who would faint in school because of hunger. It was the truth; a painful but revealing truth. I denounced this intolerable exploitation of misfortune) (101/102).

By mentioning that Camus insists on the Algerian landscape and by also presenting his interest in the poverty of the colonized population, Bey sketches a Camus whose narrative oscillates between an adult voice and a child’s one\(^{152}\), thus placing him at a crossroads and turning him into a controversial figure of the literary and political world. In his *L’étranger* \(^{153}\), Camus describes an Algeria where people enjoy the sea, the beach and the sun, but this story also presents an Arab who is killed and has no name. This controversial narrative of the dead Arab is continued by Kamel Daoud\(^{154}\) in *Meursault, contre-enquête* who, unlike Camus in *L’étranger*, offers the Arab character an identity. The Arab receives a name and a family in Daoud’s novel, and we notice that language, in both cases French, is used by the two writers in their novels to present different versions of a (colonial) story. Camus novel is interpreted by many intellectuals as a philosophical work, however, many other intellectuals find it difficult to analyze the story without referring to the colonial past of Algeria. The historian Benjamin Stora approaches this complex position adopted by Camus, as well as the many debates caused by his literary and political discourses. Stora states that Camus was not adept at rigid narratives since the colonial occupation created layered identities and strong emotional attachments to the Algerian land on all sides.

Even though Camus was of European descent, he loved the country where he was born and narrated almost a visceral connection to it in *Noces*\(^{155}\). Stora describes Camus as a

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\(^{152}\) Camus was often criticized for insisting more on the geographical beauty of Algeria in his novels rather than on the people who lived in Algeria and struggled with poverty and injustice.

\(^{153}\) In French, “The Stranger”

\(^{154}\) Daoud (1970-present) is an Algerian writer and journalist.

\(^{155}\) In French, “Wedding”
stranger who could not embrace the radical solutions proposed by the FLN\textsuperscript{156}, but who also criticized, as Maïssa Bey describes it in \textit{Pierre sang papier ou cendre}, the injustice and the monolithic approaches of the colonial system: “Lui, le fils d’une femme de ménage analphabète, l’orphelin de père, l’enfant d’un quartier pauvre d’Alger, ne peut se considérer comme un agent de l’oppression coloniale. Il se sent au contraire en affinité immédiate avec les miséreux et croit en la fraternité des humbles, quelle que soit leur origine.” (Him, the son of an illiterate maid, orphan of father, living in a poor neighborhood of Alger, cannot consider himself an agent of the colonial oppression. On the contrary, he feels more connected to the poor and believes in the fraternity of the humble, whatever their descent might be) (\textit{Camus brûlant}, 68). It is not surprising that Camus’ voice is debated by numerous historians like Stora or by novelists like Bey who discuss the language problematics in Algeria. During colonial times, discourses on possible solutions for Algeria were crafted by intellectuals who were directly or indirectly involved in the colonial story. These discourses constituted a site of resistance against the independence or a site of support for the independence, or, as in Camus’ case, a site of demanding compromise and better colonial policies.

Bey dedicates almost an entire chapter to Camus because of the approach that Camus supported, that is a flexible and oscillating perspective on the complex colonial situation in Algeria. Similarly to Camus, Bey rejects clear frontiers and criticizes voices that ask for the death of other narratives and that often times use violence to impose only their perspective. She proposes a superimposition of discourses that will lead to detecting patterns from the images created by various narratives: “Qui sait pourquoi les voix multiples des hommes les plus lucides sont toujours celles qui ont le plus de mal à déchirer l’opacité des silences?”

\textsuperscript{156} FLN – The « Front de Libération Nationale » (National Liberation Front) was formed in 1954 by revolutionaries who wanted the end of the colonial occupation in Algeria and the complete separation from France
(Who knows why the multiple voices of the most lucid men are always the ones who have the most trouble piercing the opacity of silences?) (*Pierre sang papier ou cendre*, 113). A plurality of voices was difficult in colonial Algeria, but it was needed in order to write, then rewrite stories that might have covered the colonial experience only partially or untruthfully. Lies are a concern for Bey as well as for many other intellectuals or ordinary citizens who listen to the testimonies presented to them. In her novel, Bey lists random French names of people to underline the fact that many individuals from metropolitan France disagreed with the overseas colonial decisions: “Car il est des hommes et des femmes qui refusent que d’autres femmes et d’autres hommes outragent, défigurent cette France-là, et parlent, agissent en son nom. En leur nom. Ils s’appellent Henri, Germaine, André, Alexandre, Madeleine, Maurice, Max, Pierre, Annie, Daniel, Jacqueline, Jacques, Francis, Fernand, Paul, Leon-Etienne, dit Mohamed, Et d’autres, Tant d’autres…” (Because there are men and women who refuse that other men and women insult, distort the image of France and speak and act in its name. In their name. They are Henri, Germaine, André, Alexandre, Madeleine, Maurice, Max, Pierre, Annie, Daniel, Jacqueline, Jacques, Francis, Fernand, Paul, Leon-Etienne, called Mohamed, And others, So many others…) (*Pierre sang papier ou cendre*, 114/115/116).

These anonymous voices represent the other narrative of metropolitan France, a narrative that supports kindness, freedom, friendship and equal rights and that criticizes the crimes committed by certain French political leaders in Algeria in the name of the “values” supported by the entire population of France. This nuanced view of France and of its citizens is further developed in the episode where the French child, Pierre, visits the house of the Arab child and wants to start a dialogue between him and the people who live in the Arab house. Unfortunately, language represents a barrier and he finds himself in a situation where he cannot communicate his thoughts, nor understand the opinions of those who speak Arabic. Through this testimony of a French child, we find out about the linguistic situation in schools.
The Arabic language and the Berber languages are not taught in the hope of forcing children to forget them and in an attempt to cut all ties with their pre-colonial culture. The French language, on the other hand, is promoted in the classroom as the only language that will lead the country towards civilization and progress. Additionally, the French child mentions that the people in his family stopped questioning the linguistic policy adopted by the colonial system in Algerian schools: “A l’école on n’enseigne pas l’arabe. Il ne sait pas pourquoi. Lorsqu’il a posé la question à son père, celui-ci a semblé étonné. Comme s’il n’y avait jamais pensé. Puis il a répondu qu’ici tout le monde était Français, parce qu’on était en France, et qu’en France, la seule langue est le français” (At school, they don’t teach Arabic. He doesn’t know why. When he asked his father, he seemed surprised. As if he had never thought about it. Then he answered that here, everybody was French because they were in France and in France the only language is French) (125).

Words form opinions and what is said shapes mentalities and ideologies. If the mainstream narrative promoted by the French leaders states that Algeria is France, then, as witnessed by the above-statement, certain individuals embrace this discourse as the truth without questioning it. However, child-like narratives contest these “truths” and upset the order established by the political class. Child characters allow Bey to use the lack of experience and the curiosity of children in order to create a diversion and in order to approach a path different from the established discourse. Children hear the explanations offered by the adults, and they state that they don’t understand their perspective, thus needing additional explanations. When Pierre’s father claims that they live in France and, consequently, they only speak French, Pierre appears confused:

Il [Pierre] n’a pas très bien compris son explication. D’abord parce que la France, c’est un autre pays, de l’autre côté de la mer. Ici, c’est l’Algérie. Et aussi parce que pour lui et pour tout le monde, les Arabes sont simplement des Arabes. Son oncle
Fernand, lui, les appelle les crouilles, les bougnoules ou bien les ratons, ou bien encore les bicots. Sans doute pour les distinguer des Français ou des Européens. Mais personne ne penserait à dire d’eux qu’ils sont Français (He [Pierre] didn’t understand very well his explanation. First of all because France is another country, on the other side of the sea. Here, it is Algeria. And also because for him and for everybody, the Arabs are just Arabs. His uncle Fernand calls them crouilles\textsuperscript{157}, wogs or raccoons or crows. Without a doubt to clearly distinguish them from the French or the European. But no one would think to say of them that they are French) (125/126).

The French child claims that he does not understand his father’s explanation; however, he understands that it is inaccurate since he notices that one statement contradicts the other. If they are all in France as the main narrative claims, then they should all be considered French citizens. However, based on the shaming discourses directed at the population of non-European descent, the child draws the conclusion that the image portrayed by his father’s language is, at best, vague. The same monolithic discourse regarding linguistic policies that is present in colonial Algeria will be adopted in postcolonial Algeria, though the roles will now be reversed. If previously, French was considered the prestige language and was forced on the colonized population, after the Independence, the language of the former colonizer is portrayed by the discourses of the new leaders as the language of oppression and as the obstacle that stands between the Algerians and their “pure” Arab past.

In 1962, Ben Bella\textsuperscript{158} strongly supported the Arabization process in Algeria, therefore intending to replace all other languages with Literary Arabic. The spoken Arabic was the language used by Algerians on a daily basis, while the Literary Arabic was not mastered by

\textsuperscript{157} I could not find what it means, I only found this “a racist term used to address Arabs in North Africa”

\textsuperscript{158} The new Algerian president after the Independence of 1962
the majority of the population. In addition, the Berber languages (Tamashek, Mzab, Shawia, Kabyle) were used by many individuals, so the Arabization process ignored the Berber presence in Algeria. In *Berber Culture on the World Stage: From Village to Video*, Jane Goodman states:

April 20, 1993. I am standing with my video camera on a hill overlooking the entrance to the University of Tizi Ouzou […] One banner poses a question, in French, that Mammeri had asked years before: “If we are Arabs, we don’t need to be Arabized. If we are not Arabs, why Arabize us?” As demonstrators begin to march, they chant, fists raised, in French and Tamazight: “We are not Arabs, Tamazight in the Schools” (34)

As reflected by the protests of the population, Literary Arabic was not happily embraced by all individuals. Jane Goodman also mentions the humiliating experiences that Kabyle children had to endure when they were caught using Kabyle in school. The teachers would use the “nail technique”, something similar to the American hot potato, and force a child caught speaking Kabyle to hold the nail in their hands until another child was caught speaking the forbidden language. At that point, the nail would be passed to the next child and the last one holding the nail would be physically punished. Goodman shows us how children found an interesting method to protest against the absurd linguistic rules imposed on them: “This time though, one child decided to test the limits of the nail’s power by trying to find out what counted as linguistic expression. Pointing to another child, he cried out: ‘Mister! He just laughed in Kabyle!’” (36) The use of the French language further complicates the linguistic inventory of Algeria. During colonialism, the French imposed their language as the only language of the country and, contrary to the linguistic amnesia requested by the new postcolonial leaders, French continued to be used and appreciated as the language of business.
It is important to specify that the French colonizers predicted the disappearance of all other languages that were used by the various ethnic groups of colonial Algeria. In *Competition Between Four “World” Languages in Algeria*, Benrabah affirms “Moreover, in the euphoria of the centenary of Algeria’s conquest by France, William Marçais, a colonial academic and dialectologist, predicted the death of all indigenous languages, Berber, dialectal, and Literary Arabic” (44). Following the example of the French colonizers, Ben Bella predicted the death of all other languages, and attempted to implement solely Literary Arabic. In *Bleu blanc vert*, Maïssa Bey satirizes Ben Bella’s opinion on language policy and identity, while emphasizing the condescending tone that the new president uses to address a population expected to accept a decision already taken in their name: “Parce que maintenant on est des Arabes à 300%. C’est Ben Bella, notre nouveau chef historique, qui l’a dit : nous sommes Arabes, Arabes, Arabes.” (Because now we are 300% Arab. It’s Ben Bella, our new historical leader, the one who told us: we are Arab, Arab, Arab) (17). As seen in this statement, all individuals are categorized under the same name – Arabs. The president attempts to implement a single language – Arabic – as well as a single identity, therefore ignoring the Berber presence on Algerian land.

In order to accomplish the Arabization process in schools Ben Bella made the decision to import teachers from Egypt. Paradoxically, Ben Bella was not able to function in the Arabic he promoted, and, during a visit in Egypt, he was publicly humiliated when he could not address his audience in Arabic. The Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, agreed to send instructors to Algeria, but the monolingual initiative proved to be a failure and the language shock therapy only led to additional confusion among students and to frustration among the Egyptian instructors. Maïssa Bey emphasizes the difficulty of Literary Arabic and the children’s struggle to switch between the standard version and the spoken one on a daily
basis. The author then takes us through the back door to provide a glimpse of the chaos that reigns in the classrooms instructed by Russian, Bulgarian and Egyptian teachers:

Mon professeur de mathématiques, par exemple, il a dit à Myriam qu’elle ne réussirait jamais parce qu’elle était toujours « couchée avec lui » et qu’elle ne s’intéressait pas à son cours ! Il voulait dire qu’elle dormait pendant la leçon. Il n’a même pas compris pourquoi toute la classe a éclaté de rire. Il y a aussi des Égyptiens, pour les cours d’arabe. Mais ils s’énervent souvent. Parce qu’on ne comprend pas facilement ce qu’ils disent. Ils ont un drôle d’accent (My Math teacher, for example, told Myriam that she will never succeed because she always ‘sleeps with him’ and she does not care about his class! He wanted to say that she always sleepy during his class. He didn’t even understand why the entire class started to laugh. There are also the Egyptians for the Arabic classes. But they get mad a lot. Because we cannot easily understand what they say. They have a funny accent) (54).

Children take a sad situation where confusion is encountered during their educational process and turn it into an opportunity to laugh at the paradoxical status of a country which claimed to have immediately returned to its ‘native’ language yet failed to function in it. In this snapshot of the everyday life, Bey denounces the pretentiousness of this new and ‘pure’ linguistic identity in postcolonial Algeria as well as the discrepancies between the adult-like and child-like narratives. As noticed throughout my dissertation, when I refer to “adult”, I do not perceive the term solely as a physical age, but I nuance it as a physical or mental age. So the adult-like voices are represented by the discourses of individuals who have settled on their decisions rather than maintaining a child-like mentality that is inquisitive, displays curiosity and is receptive to new ideas.
The adult narratives in postcolonial Algeria that promote a linguistic *tabula rasa* follow the same pattern that the colonizer used in the past and re-open a chapter of language-related violence. France portrayed the invasion of Algeria as an educational project where their language had the role of civilizing an uneducated population. Amelia Lyons begins her *The Civilizing Mission in the Metropole* with a brief history of the “civilizing” project, and states that thinkers from Marx to de Tocqueville justified violence as a method to bring Algerians out of ignorance and into the modern era. Lyons also mentions the 1884 discourse of the French prime minister, Jules Ferry, during which the French leader proclaimed that superior races have a right and a duty to civilize the inferior races. Ferry stressed that France would not fail in accomplishing its duty. Education and, when needed, violence were portrayed as necessary tools to “civilize” the colony. However, the very concept of using force to educate defies the definition of civilization and the professed values of the French Republic. While civilization implies progress, refinement and sophistication, violence is affixed to primitiveness and decline. Jules Ferry was confronted in 1885 by Georges Clemenceau about his speech on superior races: “Races supérieures! Races inférieures! C’est bientôt dit. Pour ma part, j’en rabats singulièrement depuis que j’ai vu des savants allemands démontrer scientifiquement que la France devrait être vaincue parce que le Français est d’une race inférieure à l’Allemand” (Superior races! Inferior races! It is so soon said. For my part, reject it completely ever since I saw German experts trying to scientifically prove that France must be defeated because the French is a race inferior to the German) (Ozouf, 79). The superimposition of these opinions allows us to observe the various reactions to the “civilizing” project in the colonies. Clemenceau’s new perspective implies that, once the superior race ideology wins credibility, it might extend its application to other countries, including France. He cleverly mentions the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the theory
declaring the superiority of the German race over the French one in order to support his opinion and the risks of selecting superior and inferior races.

As in the case of the French colonial policy, we see that in postcolonial Algeria the adult narratives also sketch the image of two distinct civilizations – the “native” and the European one – that can be abruptly separated the morning of the Independence. One of the most debated scholarly works regarding monolithic civilizations is Samuel Huntington’s article *The Clash of Civilizations?* published in 1993. According to Huntington:

> It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations (22).

Huntington’s article received its share of criticism from various scholars, including Said. As a response, Said affirms in 2001 in *The Clash of Ignorance* that Huntington relies on a vague notion of something called “civilization identity”. Edward Said also observes that Huntington opposes the civilization of Islam to the Western civilization. In Said’s opinion, the personification of enormous entities called “the West” and “Islam” is recklessly affirmed. In addition, Said sarcastically states that this personification is similar to watching a cartoon where Popeye and Bluto bash each other mercilessly. The plurality of each civilization is ignored and clear frontiers between identities are simplistically traced. In *Bleu blanc vert*, the Egyptian teachers sent to Arabize the Algerian population trace frontiers between civilizations as well. They tell their students that the previous European civilization that formed them during colonialism now makes them incompatible with the Arabo-Muslim civilization they try to embrace: “Avec des professeurs égyptiens inénarrables, qui passaient
eux aussi leur temps à nous reprocher, dans des diatribes que nous laissions filer au-dessus de
nos têtes, d’avoir un esprit et des comportements incompatibles avec notre culture arabo-
musulmane” (With indescribable Egyptian teachers who spent their time reproaching us,
during sessions of criticisms that we ignored, that we had a mind and a behavior incompatible
with our Arab-Muslim culture) (225/226).

Through the voices of children, Maïssa Bey questions the existence of monolithic
civilizations in postcolonial Algeria, and she suggests that the frontiers between civilizations
are blurry. Since children were part of the colonial trauma alongside with the adults, they
assume that their voices matter as well. In Maïssa Bey’s Bleu blanc vert, the novel Le petit
prince is mentioned as a treasured book. Lilas, one of the main characters, states : “Mon livre
préféré, c’est Le Petit Prince, d’Antoine de Saint-Exupery. On ne croirait jamais que c’est un
adulte qui l’a écrit” (My favorite book is ‘The Little Prince’ of Antoine de Saint-Exupery.
Difficult to believe that an adult wrote it) (27). The famous novel mentioned by Bey focuses
on the importance of empowering the voices of children and Bleu blanc vert skillfully
presents us with a hierarchy of voices where children must listen to the elders, the wives must
obey their husbands, and everybody has to obey the political leaders. In this context, voices
vary from whispers to screams, and, sometimes, there is the deep silence of those who cannot
speak. These language tensions can be observed when individuals interact, and I will first
present some interactions among children and elders. During the conversation that Ali has
with his teacher, violence arises, and the teacher creates a gap between him and Ali through
the language he chooses: “Le professeur a ajouté sur un ton menaçant et en agitant un doigt
encore plus menaçant sur nous: vous devez respecter l’Algérie indépendante et ses martyrs.
Je respecte l’Algérie. Et ses martyrs aussi” (The teacher added on a menacing tone and
shaking an even more menacing finger at us: you must respect our Independent Algeria and
its martyrs. I respect Algeria. And its martyrs too) (14). The adult separates himself from the
children by using the pronoun “je” instead of “nous”. His narrative dominates all other possible narratives that might question his beliefs. He criticizes the past, yet he performs the violent narrative of the past and dismisses the opinions of his students. The dialogue seems to be replaced with a demand for obedience – reminding once again of the colonial approach. Children do not miss the opportunity to emphasize the contradictions they observe, and their narratives create alternative spaces during the process of linguistic decolonization.

Children question adult narratives and encounter menacing attitudes from their teachers when they confess that the French language persists in their memory despite the political changes that occurred in the country: “Il a dit qu’on devait maintenant oublier la France. Le drapeau français. Et la Marseillaise. Mais moi, je me souviens encore des paroles” (He said we must now forget France. The French flag. And the Marseillaise159. As for me, I still remember the words) (14). The statement “mais moi, je me souviens encore des paroles”, underlines the resistance of the young postcolonial generation who refuses the language amnesia imposed by extreme ideologies and who rejects the simplicity of their approach. Children deny the monolingual image of Algeria and complicate the adult discourse by reminding of the education they received during the recent colonial times. If we analyze a different conversation, the one between Lilas and her grandfather, we can once again observe the violence that appears when children attempt to make their voices heard and when taboo topics are approached. When young Lilas is told that her dead father is in heaven, she wonders if he is a sort of god now, watching over his family. The grandfather does not like her question and establishes threatening frontiers between the child’s narrative and the mainstream narrative regarding divinity in Islam: “Pour toute réponse, mon grand-père m’a donné une gifle. Je m’en souviens encore. Je n’ai pas compris pourquoi. Et comment on peut répondre à une question par une gifle. Mais peut-être que c’était mal. Mal de poser des

159 The national anthem of France
questions sur Dieu. Il faut faire très attention avec les dieux” (Instead of a response, my grandfather slapped me. I still remember that. I didn’t understand why. And how you can respond a question with a slap in the face. But maybe it was bad. Bad to ask questions about God. You have to be really careful with these gods) (39).

The power groups in Algeria state their ground clearly, and any deviation from the norm encounters repercussions. In the case of women, their language has to be carefully molded to fit the narrative that their husbands need to hear. Comments that are considered inappropriate – or sometimes even the silence – can create conflictual situations. Lilas highlights the situation of one of her neighbors, Aziza: “Aziza a maintenant trente ans. Six enfants. Un mari qui l’humilie, l’exploite, et la bat dès qu’elle se permet de faire une remarque, ou simplement quand il en a envie” (Aziza is thirty now. Six children. A husband who humiliates her, takes advantage of her and beats her if she dares to make a comment or simply if he feels like it) (82). The hierarchy of voices reaches its peak with the political leaders of Algeria, and an illusionary obedience is often times displayed as the answer to their narratives. Maïssa Bey focuses on the importance of keeping up appearances for fear of violent reprisals, and in many cases children, women and men choose silence. When the radio announces the civil war that ravages the country, Ali’s father hides his discontentment and chooses silence as an answer to the political situation of his country: “Mon père est de plus en plus silencieux, de plus en plus absent” (My father is increasingly silent, increasingly absent-minded) (29). Authorities attempt to intimidate and silence nuanced narratives and promote block identities that fit their ideologies. However, despite the constant intimidations, child narratives still exist and foretell the change. They deviate from the block narrative and, under carefully crafted masks, they hide what Maïssa Bey calls “the unspeakable”. In the privacy of homes, whispers come to life, and women confess their secrets to other women while children discuss their forbidden adventures and problematic desires. Some secrets though are
too painful to confess, and we can only guess the desires hidden by silence. Samir, Lilas’ brother, has to hide his identity that differs from the accepted norms of their Muslim society. Lilas reveals that her brother is homosexual and that he understands there is no room for him in the inflexible narrative created by the political leaders:

Et pourtant, ils sont nombreux ceux qui vivent dans et avec cette particularité, innommable en arabe, sauf en termes grossiers et insultants. J’ai reçu plusieurs d’eux en consultation, qui tous avaient la même réaction. Celle de vivre leur homosexualité comme une véritable tragédie. Une tragédie qui conduit certains au suicide. […] Nombreux aussi ceux qui mènent une double vie, toujours dans le silence et la préservation des apparences (However, there are many who live with this distinctive feature, unspeakable in Arabic, except in rude and insulting terms. I received several of them in consultation and all had the same reaction. That of living their homosexuality as a real tragedy. A tragedy that leads some of them to suicide. […] A lot of them live a double life, always surrounded by silence and by making sure appearance are preserved) (232).

According to Bey, the double, the mixed and the different do not have a voice in Algeria. There is no place for homosexuality in Islam, and, those who attempt to declare their difference are to be punished by death. The language of this legal framework is meant to affix fear and shame to homosexuals. Bey further uses the example of Samir to underline the presence of another “intruder” in the linguistic landscape of the country. Samir listens to songs in English and he uses silence as the language of protest against a society that does not accept him: “Samir ne parle pas beaucoup. […] Je sais qu’il aime la musique. Les chansons anglaises et américaines. Genre Elvis et les Beatles” (Samir does not talk much. […] I know he likes music. English and American songs. Like Elvis or Beatles) (56). The latent voices of the underground silently prepare the revolt to follow, and the young generation rejects the
norms imposed on them by rigid adult narratives. Bey’s *Bleu blanc vert* predicts in 2006 the linguistic changes confirmed by studies done in 2013 by Mohamed Benrabah. He offered students at the University of Mascara, in the west of Algeria, a questionnaire where he asked: “Out of the following 10 languages, what is the language you consider the WORLD language today? (ONE choice only)”. Here are the findings:

The 10 language options were presented in French alphabetical order with their Arabic translation as follows: German, English, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, French, Hindi, Japanese, Portuguese, and Russian. […] In their 204 responses, students chose six languages which are in the first column of Table 3. Out of the total number of responses, 188 chose English – that is over 92% – and only 16 chose some other language. So, English outdistances the other five languages by a very large margin (52).

When Algeria does not offer the nuanced environment that the young generation needs, immigration is perceived as the alternative. The postcolonial generation who cannot connect with the monolithic social, political and linguistic heritage proposed by the authorities decides to transform former crises into opportunities and use the “intruder” languages they master to secure a better future for themselves outside the country. In *Bleu blanc vert*, Samir dreams to leave and to reconstruct his dreams abroad. As we see, not only did the leaders of postcolonial Algeria cause the departure of the pieds-noirs in 1962, they also caused the departure of numerous “native” citizens given the adamant decisions that threatened those who demanded diversity. Inside or outside the country, the languages of Others are spoken by Algerians, and French continues to be the language used by many writers even after Independence. The children of harkis continue to write in French and present their version of the colonial trauma. Fatima Besnaci-Lancou (1954-present) focuses on presenting the memories of harkis, and her writing, many decades after the independence, reflects the
ongoing linguistic relationship between France and Algeria. Also, the presence of both French and Arabic words and expressions throughout the literary works of Algerian writers reflects overlapping languages and histories. The various factors that affect societies on economic, political and cultural levels are transformed generation after generation. Languages, influenced by societal transformation, mutate as well. Often, for political reasons, leaders attempt to delegate official “owners” of dominant linguistic heritages. In Possessed by the Past, we read that:

Heritage passions impact myriad realms of life today. They play a vital role in national and ethnic conflict, in racism and resurgent genetic determinism, in museum and commemorative policy, in global theft, illicit trade, and rising demands for repatriating art and antiquities. Decisions about what to conserve and what to jettison, about parenthood and adoption, about killing or converting or cosseting those of rival faiths all invoke heritage to explain how we feel and to validate how we act.

(Introduction, X)

With so much at stake, cultural heritage narratives, especially in postcolonial countries, become an undeniable source of political power and valuable means of reshaping images, statuses and rights. They issue verdicts on public memory and history, and therefore influence the path followed by a country in its quest for identity.

The role of the superimposition method used by Maïssa Bey is to detect differences between images of language presented by adult narratives and images of language presented by child narratives. Bey investigates tensions among various voices and addresses the issues of monolithic images of language in postcolonial Algeria. In Bleu blanc vert, she highlights the fact that the images created by adult narratives perpetuate the very violence they criticize. The new monolingual policy continues to mutilate the body of the country and cause feelings
of displacement among the young generation. Bey questions the mythical image of an Arabic mother tongue through the voices of children who refuse to become the victims of yet another “educational mission” imposed by nationalist agendas.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation has focused on the works of Emmanuel Roblès and Maïssa Bey and offered an analysis of three aspects of cultural heritage in their novels: architecture, customs and language. The first chapter started with a general view of colonial time (1830-1962) and postcolonial time (1962-present) in Algeria in order to offer a background for the controversy that surrounded and continues to surround spaces, values, customs and language(s). For the close text analysis, I selected two novels by Roblès and two novels by Bey. My choice of novels was guided by the fact that they contained the most data linked to cultural heritage and were supportive of my thesis about how child-like and adult-like narratives constructed a layered image of architecture, customs and languages. I began with Emmanuel Roblès (1914-1995) and continued with Maïssa Bey (1950-present) to better understand the chronological trajectory of cultural heritage and to help perceive it as a living body endowed with a life story marked by intense events narrated through various angles. This life story of cultural heritage in colonial Algeria is told by Roblès, a male writer of Spanish descent, who evokes personal experiences and observations in the city of Oran during colonial times. He also presents us with events that occurred during the Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962) and with events that took place right before the exodus of 1962 when, along with other individuals of European descent, Roblès was forced to leave the country out of fear for his safety. Unlike Maïssa Bey, Roblès does not cover postcolonial events, but Bey seizes the baton and continues to narrate the tumultuous story of cultural heritage in an independent Algeria. When he presents spaces, customs and languages in colonial Algeria, Roblès insists on the place where he was born and where he spent his childhood – Oran – without referring much to other locations. Occasionally, he mentions the differences between the individuals from Oran and those from Alger, but these descriptions are brief and vague. Consequently, we
notice that his novels oscillate around a space that is familiar to him. Similarly to Bey, Roblès uses child-like narratives to criticize monolithic images of spaces, customs and languages and suggests that heritages cannot be forces on people without causing violent reactions on their part. He also points out that the biggest flaw of adult-like narratives is the attempt to pass on values to future generations while ignoring the lack of connection that might exist between the young generation and these past values. When this connection does not exist, the young generation will either openly reject the ideologies and values that do not fit their needs or they will find ways to mimic an obedience to these rules while secretly living according to their own standards. Roblès’ novels are a mix of description and invitation to change, but they mostly remain descriptive, especially when he proudly mentions places in Oran that are connected to his Spanish heritage.

Despite the occasional tense situations that take place particularly in *Saison violente*, Roblès uses humor throughout his descriptions of colonial events. Unlike Bey, he finds it easy to laugh when narrating his relationship to often times rigid spaces, imposed customs and firm linguistic landscapes. Also, unlike Bey, he is not concerned with accurate historical data or with the real names of political leaders or intellectuals who played a decisive role in determining the fate of cultural heritage in colonial Algeria. Even though he was a good friend of Albert Camus, he does not mention Camus’ political opinions in neither one of these two novels that depict colonial times. Historical accuracy or historical data do not play an important role in the construction of the novels’ plots. The character who causes the highest tension in the novels analyzed in this dissertation is Mrs. Quinson, but this is a fictional character who represents colonial oppression in general. While Roblès insists on his Spanish community in Oran, he also pays attention to and evokes other communities in Algeria, for example the one of the Arabs, of the Jewish and of the Gypsies. He states that he interacted

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160 In French, “Violent Season”
with people from these communities and appreciated their values from a distance, but the interactions occurred on a superficial level since everything in colonial Algeria was designed to keep communities segregated. The curiosity was present, but the language difference and the different customs made close interactions difficult, but not impossible as some individuals still crossed the invisible frontiers. In the novels of both writers, emotions run high when the topic of cultural heritage is approached. The emotions and feelings that appear at a high rate in Roblès’ discourse are the following: pride, love, excitement, joy and occasional anger. The aspect of cultural heritage that is the most often associated with anger is the linguistic one, as Roblès rebels against Mrs. Quinson in *Saison violente* and resorts to cursing her in Spanish when Mrs. Quinson’s words attack his family, especially the memory of his father. When architecture is presented, we discover that the Quinson house cannot confine him, as he finds a way to escape each night and roam the streets while enjoying the feeling of freedom and the company of his childhood friends. While the customs related to eating and behaving properly annoy him, they do not anger him as strongly as Mrs. Quinson’s language. Lastly, Roblès avoids biases in his novels by presenting various attitudes towards his cultural heritage from the part of the French upper class. Unlike Mrs. Quinson, young Véronique is curious about his way of life and approaches his alternative world with caution and respect.

If Roblès limits his descriptions to colonial times, Maïssa Bey covers both colonial and postcolonial events. Born in 1950, she was only twelve at the time when Algeria gained its Independence from France. However, by this young age she experienced colonial trauma, particularly at the age of seven when her father was tortured and executed by the French soldiers. If Roblès insists on actions that occur in the privacy of houses, Bey covers a larger area in her novels. She does focus on the intimate space of houses as well, but she also presents us with the way the space of Algeria is reshaped by the French colonizer in order to make Algeria French. We learn that buildings are destroyed throughout the country, that
streets are renamed and that even cemeteries are covered by new construction sites. In her novels, Bey does not focus only on a particular city, but on events that occur throughout Algeria since her goal is not to simply narrate her childhood, but to use her childhood experience as a testimony to how spaces, customs and languages were affected by the colonial trauma. Having only witnessed certain years of colonial violence, she resorted to research in order to be able to narrate the French occupation from its beginning in 1830 until its end in 1962. Unlike Roblès, Bey gathered data and turned her novel *Pierre sang papier ou cendre* into a research project presented artistically and filled with emotion. In *Maïssa Bey: “Je suis le produit de cette histoire”*, Bey talks about the research she conducted in order to be able to accurately narrate colonial events in her novel *Pierre sang papier ou cendre*:

Driven by her own questions, Maïssa Bey will start gathering documents, books and testimonies before immersing herself into this longue and painful history: ‘This took me almost three years of research and verifications because I was heading towards a slippery ground. For the same event, I would find contradictory versions. I had to detangle all this and continuously get rid of certain sources as not to make a historical error) (http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2008/04/03/Maïssa-bey-je-suis-le-produit-de-cette-histoire_1030437_3260.html).

According to her statement, Bey wanted to portray an accurate image of spaces, customs and languages and avoid historical errors. It is interesting to observe that her literary work does
not rely solely on theory, but it also includes a factual approach to the colonial story. Given this approach, we can conclude that Bey aims to transform her literary work into an archive where future generations can find accurate colonial information narrated in a powerful and emotional way. Like a scientist, Bey gathers data, filters it by comparing multiple sources, tries to avoid errors and then proceeds to sketching the image of cultural heritage by superimposing child-like and adult-like narratives. This technique is also used in forensic anthropology where scientists reconstruct faces by superimposing various images on top of a skeleton in an attempt to reconstitute the identity of a mutilated body. This forensic type of literary text brings to light the face of a mutant cultural heritage where spaces, customs and languages mingled and became hybrid despite denial and claims of “purity”. The desire to reconstruct the face of cultural heritage with the help of accurate data places Bey’s novels at the intersection of science and literature. She surpasses the purely descriptive approach embraced by Roblès and confesses that the act of writing became for her a method of investigating the past.

The same technique can be noticed in the literary work of another Algerian writer, Kamel Daoud, who figuratively exhumes the dead body of the Arab killed on the beach in his novel Meursault: contre-enquête\textsuperscript{161} and reconstructs his identity. The Arab is placed within a space where people recognize him and give him a name. According to the Arab customs, his death is treated with respect and he is not forgotten by his community. Consequently, customs, spaces and language are restored by superimposing other images on the pre-existing image crafted by Camus’ narrative. This child-like narrative that complicates a previous story helps Daoud upset monolithic approaches of heritages. Similarly to Daoud, Bey figuratively exhumes the monolithic dead body of colonial cultural heritage and gives it a hybrid identity. She follows the same method in Bleu blanc vert where she challenges the “purity” of

\textsuperscript{161} A novel written as a response to Camus’ “L’étranger” – “The Stranger”
Algeria’s postcolonial cultural heritage. She states that spaces continue to hide traces of the colonial past, that customs are influenced by the French values and that the French language continues to exist in a country that could not forget its past overnight. The theories used in this dissertation, particularly the ones espoused by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*, allowed me to emphasize the importance of narratives in constructing images and in influencing political decisions. While Roblès employs various voices to describe the layered image of cultural heritage during his childhood in colonial Algeria, Bey takes it a step further and uses child-like and adult-like narratives to demonstrate how monolithic images of spaces, customs and languages led to violence and to the loss of human lives. The many voices that speak in her novels call for diversity, flexible solutions and for a dialogue between different parties. The child-like narratives unmask the hybrid face of cultural heritage that is hidden behind forged images crafted by adult-like narratives.

Given the length of this study, I analyzed only the novels of a writer of Arab descent and the ones of a writer of Spanish descent, so the voices of writers belonging to the other communities that existed in colonial Algeria – for example the Jewish, Berber, Italian or Gypsy communities – are not included. Further studies could investigate the methods approached by these writers and thus add new perspectives on spaces, customs and languages. This dissertation contributes to an already rich field by adding a voice belonging to the Spanish community to the Arab and French discourses that focus on cultural heritage in colonial and postcolonial Algeria. At the same time, it also offers a new perspective on literary texts from the Maghreb in which certain writers rely on authentic events as a factual foundation for their novels.
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