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“WHAT SOCIETY REFUSED YOU, BOOKS GAVE YOU”: SELF-IDENTIFICATION AND  
FRENCH EDUCATION IN THE WRITTEN WORKS OF MOULOU D FERAOUN,  
YASMINA KHADRA, MARIAMA BÂ AND KEN BUGUL

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the French language literature of two male Algerian authors, Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra, and two Senegalese female authors, Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul, to analyze how these authors and their characters self-identify in the colonial and postcolonial periods. All four authors received a French education during the colonial periods in Algeria and Senegal, and this thesis is interested in the role of education in the identity formation of these authors and their characters. It is especially relevant to analyze how these authors and their characters understand themselves in light of the differences between the French presence in Algeria and Senegal. The writings of Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon serve as a frame for this study, and an examination of traditional relationships among women in rural Africa further contextualizes the Senegalese portion of this thesis. Each of these authors and their characters protest dichotomies of self-categorizing as exclusively French or “Other.” This research ultimately seeks to allow the authors and their characters to speak for themselves about their identities, and contributes to scholarship seeking to understand the psycho-social consequences of colonial rule and its remnants.

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## Introduction

When I say that I am French, I give myself a label that each French person refuses me. I speak French, and I got my education in a French school. I have learned as much French as the average Frenchman. What am I then, dear God? Is it possible that as long as there are labels, there is not one for me? Which one is mine? Can somebody tell me what I am!

-Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, 1962<sup>1</sup>

“Ken, money is important, but intelligence, culture, knowledge, those are not important, they only create problems. Everything in this world requires money, people are not interested in what you have to say. Men like you. Ken, *you are a black woman*, you could make a fortune.”

-Ken Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 1982<sup>2</sup>

“I am an Algerian!” the deranged young man yelled, as he attempted to wrestle a machine gun away from a French soldier. During the Algerian War for independence between 1954 and 1962, Martinique-born psychologist and revolutionary philosopher Frantz Fanon recorded a case study of this young man who had been hearing voices calling him a coward and traitor for some time, and he spent most of his days locked away in his room, refusing to come out. He had been primarily focused on his education and obtaining his career objective of working with multicopying machines, and now his ambivalence toward his people’s nationalist goals racked him with guilt. In a state of madness, this young man sought to “prove” that he was one of the oppressed. He felt like everyone around him believed he was “with the French.” While the authorities ignored him, he felt the contemptuous glances of humiliated Algerians undergoing police persecution. His loud proclamation of his identity triggered the desired

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<sup>1</sup> Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 65-66.

<sup>2</sup> Ken Bugul, *Le Baobab Fou*, (Paris: Presence Africaine Editions, 2009), 148; emphasis in original.

response. The French army quickly apprehended and questioned him. Concluding that he was mentally ill, the army delivered the young man to the hospital.<sup>3</sup>

In oppressive situations, violence against the oppressor often lends itself as a way for someone, like the young man in Fanon's case study, to define him or herself in relation to the oppressor. This response to oppression is conducive to perpetuating dichotomies of "us" vs "them," "colonizer" vs. "colonized," and "French" vs. "Other," when, in reality, self-understanding is not so black and white. In the French colonial context, Algerian writers Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra and Senegalese writers Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul and their educated characters reject the rigidity of self-identifying as "French" or "Other," as well as the use of violence to define themselves. Across all of these authors' books, a French education plays a significant role in each educated character's sense of self, yet "Frenchness" is not the center of their self-understanding. The decision of these authors not to indulge their characters in violence against the colonizer or symbols of colonization as a way of self-identifying is an indicator that violent revolt was not the only way the formerly colonized peoples affirmed their sense of self. I argue in this thesis that Feraoun, Khadra, Bâ, Bugul and their educated characters were free through their French education to define themselves without the use of violence, and, thus, protest Manichean colonial categories.

The processes of colonization and obtaining independence, however, was incredibly oppressive and violent. Algerians generally resisted and protested the French presence in Algeria from its initial conquest in 1830 to its independence in 1962. Algerian writer Mouloud Feraoun grew up during the French occupation of Algeria, received a French education, and died just before the end of the Algerian War for independence. Yasmina Khadra received a French education and wrote following Algeria's independence. Both authors' self-identification as French *and* Algerian is complicated by the political history of Algeria and the nature of the Algerian war for independence.

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<sup>3</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York, NY: Grove Press Inc., 1968), 272-275.

Because of Algeria's proximity to France and its agreeable Mediterranean climate along the coast, the French settler population grew rapidly during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Divided into three French departments in 1848, Algeria became part of France, yet the native Algerians were largely excluded from Algerian politics even though they significantly outnumbered the settler population. Europeans occupied the majority of the parliamentary seats and government positions. Even though Algeria was French soil, the process for Algerians to obtain French citizenship was incredibly difficult and complicated. Meanwhile, Spaniards and Italians were offered French citizenship as an incentive for settling in French Algeria.

The Algerian war for independence was a ruthless guerilla war where suspicions ran high on both sides of the conflict and where each individual's allegiance to one side or the other was incredibly important for one's personal safety. Demonstrating loyalty to the "right" side was crucial because perceived treason could lead to ostracism or death. However, for someone like Mouloud Feraoun who had strong ties to both the French and the Algerians—since he was a French schoolteacher in Algeria—it was more difficult to firmly pick a side between French and Algerian without endangering his life.

Mohammed Moullessehoul alias Yasmina Khadra was born toward the end of the Algerian struggle for independence. The son of an Algerian military hero of the war for independence, Khadra went on to become a lieutenant, captain and major in the Algerian army. Though his true passion was to write in French, Khadra felt that he had to pick his "Algerian-ness" over his "Frenchness" because he had a duty to serve his country like his father. In order to prove his loyalty to Algeria, he wrote under a penname and refrained from revealing his true identity until the end of his military career. Both Feraoun and Khadra challenge the Manichean view of "French" versus "Algerian" identities in their written works and decry the use of violence. Their decision not to pick a side must be understood in the highly politically-charged Algerian context of the colonial and postcolonial periods.

Identity is deeply personal and the extreme emotion that transpires in Fanon's case study and in Feraoun and Khadra's writings is also evident in the works of Senegalese authors Mariama Bâ and Ken

Bugul. The French conquest of Senegal was more gradual and entailed much less settlement by Europeans than the French occupation of Algeria. The French had been present as traders in Senegal since the fourteenth century and established Saint-Louis as a permanent settlement in 1659 at the mouth of the Senegal River.<sup>4</sup> Between 1848 and 1887, France reasserted her presence in Senegal after temporarily losing the colony to the British during the revolutions of 1848. Saint-Louis and newer coastal settlements on Gorée Island, Rufisque, and Dakar were all granted French “commune” status, thus invested, in principle, with the same rights as their counterparts in metropolitan France.<sup>5</sup> The African inhabitants of the Four Communes, the *originaires*, enjoyed privileges approximating French citizenship. On the other hand, the French considered “subjects” the Senegalese living outside the Communes, and they submitted to “the *Code de l’Indigénat* [the colonial penal code].”<sup>6</sup> Unlike the heavily disenfranchised Algerians, the *originaires* participated in the political life of the Communes by voting and sending black representatives to the French National Assembly to represent the Four Communes. France formally organized her West African colonies into *L’Afrique Occidentale Française* (AOF) in 1895—incorporating modern day Mauritania, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Benin. Senegal gained its independence in 1960 following resistance and protest on behalf of the Senegalese people, but not with the extreme violence that characterized the French fight for and eventual retreat from Algeria.

French-educated Senegalese women still faced an identity conflict, though, less from a political standpoint and more from the social pressures of tradition. When traditional female roles and values no longer suffice to define these women, Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul’s characters explore and defend their identities as modern educated women. These educated female characters experience certain freedoms and

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Vanderbort, “Senegal in 1848,” *Encyclopedia of the Revolutions of 1848*, n.d, <http://www.ohio.edu/chastain/rz/senegal.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Mamadou Diouf, “The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation and the Civility of the Originaires of the Four Communes (Senegal): A Nineteenth Century Globalization Project,” *Development and Change* 29, (1998): 672; Maelenn-Kégni Touré, “Four Communes of Senegal (1887-1960),” *The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed*, Accessed April 19, 2014, <http://www.blackpast.org/gah/four-communes-senegal-1887-1960>; Vanderbort, “Senegal in 1848.”

<sup>6</sup> Touré, “Four Communes of Senegal (1887-1960).”



opportunities as a result of their education and use this new freedom to define themselves and their own directions in life. They demonstrate a non-violent response to Fanon's call for violence and reject Manichean self-categorization as "French" or "Other."

It is significant that each author chooses to explore self-identification using the French language, which points to the lasting impacts of a French education on these individuals. A French education was a crucial component of the French *mission civilisatrice* which implied "the inculcation of new needs and wants, and the spread of French institutions and values deemed to be universally valid" within the newly occupied territories.<sup>7</sup> Adopting the notion that they had "a special obligation to be generous toward those different from themselves and even to make them French," the French colonial administration established a policy of assimilation at the start of the civilizing mission.<sup>8</sup> According to Elsa M. Harik, the most common meaning of assimilation demonstrated a desire to mold the colonized people into Frenchmen—"or at least to strive for a close harmony of races within the embrace of France civilization."<sup>9</sup> Assimilation attempted to reconcile humanitarianism and the harsh reality of French colonial rule and became an umbrella term for a "kind of generous cultural imperialism that suggested that the French government should undertake to make the colonies a carbon copy of France in institutions and in culture."<sup>10</sup> It was believed that assimilation would be accomplished through promotion of the French language, education systems, and laws and by training local populations to act as if they were French.<sup>11</sup>

French colonial schools, a center-piece of the civilizing mission, were sites where French language, values, history, and literature could be directly communicated to native Algerian and Senegalese youth. Feraoun's French education led him to an identification with the French in Algeria and a desire for pacific cohabitation of Algerians and French in Algeria. Discovering as a young boy that he

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<sup>7</sup> Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>9</sup> Elsa M. Harik and Donald G. Schilling, *The Politics of Education in Colonial Algeria*, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1984), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Spencer Tucker, "Assimilation Versus Association," Edited by Spencer Tucker and Paul Pierpaoli, *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011), 77.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

wanted to be an author, Khadra's French education solidified for him that French would be his *langue de plume*. Bâ and Bugul's female characters' French education leads them to break from traditional values and affords them access to new opportunities and freedoms in the post-independence world.

*Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi*

The context of the Algerian War and the strong European settler presence in Algeria heavily influenced Feraoun and Khadra's self-identification and that of their characters. I argue that an identity conflict occurs between these individuals' learned French identity and their traditional Algerian culture and demonstrate how they do not choose one identity over the other. This goes against Frantz Fanon's argument that the reconciliation of French and Algerian identities is impossible because of European rejection. According to Fanon, the European settlers and their progeny need not fear the competition of "those whom it exploits and holds in contempt;" European prejudice towards the colonized people is "a racism of contempt; it is a racism that minimizes what it hates."<sup>12</sup> Fanon argues that the "native intellectual" who still attempts to belong to the colonizer's culture, or tries to adhere to both the cultures of the colonizer and that of the nation fighting for its independence, will choose to abandon one of the cultures:

It will also be quite normal to hear certain natives to declare... 'I speak as an Algerian and as a Frenchman...' The intellectual who is Arab and French or Nigerian and English, when he comes up against the need to take on two nationalities, chooses, if he wants to remain true to himself, the negation of one of these determinations.<sup>13</sup>

In Fanon's view, the colonizer's insistence on the colonized people's dependence upon them exacerbates this impossibility of complete identification with the culture of the colonizer. The objective of colonization was to persuade the colonized people that the occupying power came to "lighten their darkness;" the colonizers sought to convince the native population that if the settlers were to leave, they

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<sup>12</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 163.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

would return to “barbarism, degradation, and bestiality.”<sup>14</sup> Fanon argued that colonialism is violence, physical and mental, “in its natural state,” and the only way out to escape the oppressive colonial system was through a violent uprising by the native population.<sup>15</sup>

Tunisian author Albert Memmi believed, like Fanon, that it was impossible for the colonized to completely assimilate to the culture of the colonizer because of racism. According to Memmi, those colonized people who seek assimilation typically grow tired of the “exorbitant price” they must pay and which they “never finish owing.”<sup>16</sup> The price is twofold: the alienation of the French-educated from their own people, and the French’s rejection of them. Describing the alienation of the native intellectual, he writes, “It is a dramatic moment when he [the intellectual] realizes that he has assumed all the accusations and condemnations of the colonizer, that he is becoming accustomed to looking at his own people through the eyes of their procurer.”<sup>17</sup> Assimilation or complete identification with the colonizer is impossible because “everything is mobilized so that the colonized cannot cross the doorstep” into equality with the colonizer.<sup>18</sup>

Fanon and Memmi both describe the impossibility of assimilation as a structural problem—colonization cannot exist without the exploitation of the colonized—but they are also attuned to the power of the colonized people’s desire to assimilate. Fanon writes that the colonized greedily try to make European culture their own, like adopted children:

[The native intellectual] throws himself in frenzied fashion into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavorably criticizing his own national culture, or else takes refuge in setting out and substantiating the claims of that culture in a way that is passionate but rapidly becomes unproductive.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 210-211.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press. 1965), 123.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 218, 237.

According to Fanon, no matter how much European education the “native middle class” acquires, they will always fail to replicate the Europeans and remain caricatures of the occupying power.<sup>20</sup> Fanon and Memmi want the colonized to understand that since complete assimilation will never occur, the only escape from the oppressive colonial system is through violence and revolt. They locate the colonized individual within the system and associate the resolution of the individual’s identity problems with the end of colonization. Fanon and Memmi’s convictions do not allow for the middle ground Feraoun and Khadra claim for themselves. Feraoun, Khadra and their educated characters reject Fanon and Memmi’s arguments that assimilation and identification with the French is impossible and defend their self-identifications as both French and Algerian.

#### *Traditional inter-female relationships in rural Africa*

The educated female characters in Bâ and Bugul’s books are confronted with the same dilemma regarding the (im)possibility of assimilation to the culture of the colonizer. However, instead of picking one national identity over the other—Senegal versus French—these educated female characters’ negotiate their place between traditional female roles and embracing western modernity. For Bâ and Bugul, it is ultimately up to their educated female characters to define for themselves what kinds of people they want to be in the post-independence world. Analyzing female characters’ interactions with matriarchal figures in Bâ and Bugul’s books helps draw out how these women see themselves.

In general, women in rural Africa constantly worked incredibly hard, regardless of the ecology or the religious beliefs of the community in which they live.<sup>21</sup> Women and young children lived apart from the world of men, who even ate meals prepared for them by their wives separately.<sup>22</sup> Polygamy was not uncommon in Muslim households and women engaged in subsistence activity and child rearing while

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<sup>20</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 175.

<sup>21</sup> Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

men conducted war, built houses, and hunted.<sup>23</sup> Fertility and the ability to work determined a woman's value.<sup>24</sup> Although women were subject to the men in their societies, these societies were often matrilineal and a hierarchy within the community of women emerged:

Older women, the husband's mother in particular, gained particular authority because of their role in transmission. Their power was recognized when they reached menopause, which excluded them from the reproductive cycle. They exerted this power over their daughters-in-law, their younger co-wives, and, of course, slave women.<sup>25</sup>

In some places, future wives were described as “the in-laws' horse.”<sup>26</sup> Mothers-in-law and older women had considerable influence over their sons and their families in traditional rural African society. Education allowed the characters in Bâ and Bugul's novels to protest these traditions that narrowly define the value of a woman and that delegate a tremendous amount of power to the older women over their younger daughters-in-law or co-wives. These two Senegalese authors give their educated characters both the time and the space to establish their own identities as they explore the various freedoms they are granted as a result of their education.

### *Selected authors and their works*

Feraoun, Khadra, Bâ, and Bugul write in separate generations in two different Francophone territories with distinct political histories. Concerned with both the authors and their works, each chapter of this thesis will present a short biography of each author and his or her education, and then analyze the selected texts for the way the author handles questions of identity—whether his or her own or that of fictional characters. Chapter I will cover Mouloud Feraoun's *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher* and *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*. Both of these works exhibit Feraoun's desire to put his native Kabylia on the map and demonstrate his profound attachment to France and the French ideals that he learned in school and that he taught and embodied himself as a

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<sup>23</sup> Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

schoolteacher in a French school. Feraoun's writings about his childhood and the Algerian War show that he truly desired peace and fraternity between France and Algeria. He abhorred the war and never picked a side, contrary to what Fanon and Memmi would expect, but rather lamented the sad state of humanity as a whole and professed attachment to both his Kabyle roots and his adopted French identity.

Yasmina Khadra's father was a hero of the Algerian war and Khadra felt destined to follow in his footsteps and serve his country one day as an Algerian soldier. After independence, fighting in Algeria turned into a civil war and Khadra served in the army as a lieutenant, meanwhile secretly publishing books in French under his pseudonym. Chapter II deals with his books *L'Écrivain (The Writer)* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit (What the Night Owes the Day)*. The former work reveals Khadra's difficulties with choosing to serve the country that he loves and pursuing writing in the French language that he has come to admire and appreciate in school. *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* is a fictional story that takes place during the Algerian War. The main character, a young Algerian boy named Younes is adopted into a French-assimilated family, receives a new name, Jonas,—similar to Khadra's decision to take on a pseudonym—and experiences internal conflict between choosing to support the French side or the Algerian side of the war for independence.

The military confrontations occurring in Algeria deeply influenced Feraoun and Khadra's writings. The decolonization of Senegal, however, while difficult, was not nearly as violent as the decolonization of Algeria. Feraoun and Khadra's self-identification was highly politicized in the dichotomy of "French versus Algerian" since they could be killed or considered a traitor depending on which side they chose—which makes their negotiation of Fanon and Memmi's claims all the more significant. In the absence of such a painful separation from France in Senegal, Bâ and Bugul's writings revolve less around a politicized identity as French *or* Senegalese, but more around a social identity and a personal self-understanding within a familial, national, and global context. Chapter III presents an analysis of Mariama Bâ's books *Une si longue lettre (So Long a Letter)* and *Un chant écarlate (A Scarlet Song)*. These books highlight the differences in opportunities for uneducated and French educated girls.

Through her educated female characters' conflicts with matriarchs, Bâ creates portraits of financially and sexually independent women who break from traditional female roles, pursue what they believe is best for them as individuals, and form their own opinions, all without abandoning strong ethical values. Finally, Ken Bugul's *Le baobab fou* (*The Abandoned Baobab*) also emphasizes the impact that education can have on a woman's opportunities. Chapter IV will examine the ways in which Bugul's educated female protagonist tries to define herself in the absence of a dissenting matriarchal figure and allows others to assign her an identity, but she ultimately realizes that it is up to her to decide who she is.

The emotion present across all of these authors' works in their discussions of identity is reminiscent of the disturbed young Algerian man from Fanon's case study who screams, "Je suis Algérien!" Across the works of Feraoun, Khadra, Bâ and Bugul one hears a cry of "Je suis moi!" which is interesting itself because all four authors chose to express their identities and those of their characters in French, the language of the former colonizer. In *Une si longue lettre*, protagonist Ramatoulye writes to her friend Aïssatou to congratulate her on her acceptance to the Interpreter School in France: "What society refused you, books gave you."<sup>27</sup> The authors and characters live in societies that often do not accept their self-definitions and even shun them or declare them traitors. Their French education, however, remains something that they are deeply attached to and gives them an outlet through which they can express their identities freely. These different authors' self-understandings and that of their characters bring to light the complexities of identity in the colonial and post-independence periods. This research contributes to scholarship on the psycho-social consequences of colonialism.

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<sup>27</sup> Mariama Bâ, *Une Si Longue Lettre*, (Dakar, Sénégal : Nouvelles Editions Africaines du Sénégal, 2000), 51.

## Chapter I

### Mouloud Feraoun's *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher and Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French –Algerian War*

“Feraoun? C’était un Français!”

-Monique Gadant-Benzine, « Mouloud Feraoun, un Algérien ambigu? », 1978 <sup>28</sup>

The encyclopedia entry for Mouloud Feraoun in the 1983 *Grand Larousse Universel* reads, “Algerian writer of the French language (Tizi-Hibel, Grande Kabylie, 1913- El-Biar, 1962).”<sup>29</sup> This summary of Feraoun’s life is ambiguous: What does it mean to be an Algerian writer of the French language from Kabylia? Ties to Algeria, France, and Kabylia all at once complicated Feraoun’s self-identification and this chapter explores Feraoun’s reconciliation of these identities in two of his autobiographical works. Mouloud Feraoun was born on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1913 in Tizi-Hibel in the Kabylia region of northern colonial Algeria to a family of poor *fellahs* or peasants. He was the third of eight children and the first boy. Feraoun’s father habitually traveled to France to work and provide for his family until 1928, when he was injured in an accident and, as a result, received enough financial compensation to eliminate the need to continue to travel to France. Feraoun won a scholarship to attend *sixième* at the *Collège de Tizi-Ouzou*. In 1932, at nineteen years old, Feraoun entered *l’École normale d’instituteurs* in Bouzaréa, on the outskirts of Algiers, where he received the necessary training to become a schoolteacher.<sup>30</sup> After *l’École normale*, Feraoun was assigned to teach in Kabylia and eventually served as a principal. He married his cousin, according to Kabyle custom, with whom he had seven children.<sup>31</sup> Feraoun did not leave Kabylia until 1957 when he became an inspector and co-director at the *Centres de*

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<sup>28</sup> Monique Gadant-Benzine, « Mouloud Feraoun, un Algérien ambigu? » *Peuples Méditerranéens* 4, (July 1978): 3.

<sup>29</sup> Sylvie Thénault, « Mouloud Feraoun. Un écrivain dans la guerre d’Algérie », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 63, (July 1999): 65.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; Lucy R. McNair, “An Algerian-American Primer: Reading Mouloud Feraoun's *The Poor Man's Son. Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 10, no.2 (August 2006): 189.



*Services Sociaux Éducatifs* at Château Royal near Algiers.<sup>32</sup> He was assassinated on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1962 by French terrorists in the *Organization de l'armée secrete* (OAS).

The analysis of Feraoun's work centers on *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher* and *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*. I chose *The Poor Man's Son* because it is an autobiographical novel whose protagonist's name is Menrad Fouroulou, an anagram of Mouloud Feraoun. Fouroulou's coming of age story and family life mirrors Feraoun's own life story and reveals useful information relevant to the author's identity struggles throughout his life. *Journal 1955-1962* is Feraoun's almost daily journal, which chronicles his experiences during the Algerian War. Feraoun's personal writing offers insight into his daily life as well as a glimpse into what the war meant for him and where he placed himself in the conflict between the French and the nationalist Algerians.

#### *French education in colonial Algeria*

As a student in the late 1920s and 1930s, Feraoun was one of the relatively few Kabyle to receive a French primary education after the French government established French education in colonial Algeria. Feraoun's French education played a prominent role in his life as a student and as a teacher. When France began its conquest of Algeria in 1830, the colonial administration promised not to interfere with Islam—the religion of almost all Algerians—or to attack personal status as defined in Muslim law. Thus, French officials ignored the activities of the established Qur'anic schools and the *madaris*—"secondary" schools run by mosques or independent Islamic scholars—but managed to indirectly undermine the existing free-school system by offering a French alternative.<sup>33</sup> By 1883, the French colonial government imposed the same education system that existed in metropolitan France in Algeria.<sup>34</sup> In 1895, the teaching of both Arabic and French was strengthened in French-sponsored *madaris*; the colonial government sought to

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<sup>32</sup> McNair, "An Algerian-American Primer," 189.

<sup>33</sup> Alf Andrew Heggoy, "Arab Education in Colonial Algeria," *Journal of African Studies* 2, no. 2 (1975): 150-151.

<sup>34</sup> Fanny Colonna, "Training the National Elites in Colonial Algeria 1920-1954," *Historical Social Research* 33, no.2 (2008): 285.

create schools for advanced Muslim studies under French guidance.<sup>35</sup> Despite this aspiration, French efforts to educate Algerian children were limited in scope; for instance, there were only 33,000 young Algerians in official French schools in 1907 out of close to 1.75 million children in Algeria. It was not until 1917 that primary education was made compulsory for boys, but this decree could not be enforced because there were not enough schools or trained teachers to accommodate all the potential new students.<sup>36</sup> A few years later—during the 1920s—Mouloud Feraoun began his colonial primary schooling in the Kabylia region of Algeria.

In the 1930s, returning Algerian migrant workers from France who witnessed first-hand the benefits of a French education began to pressure the colonial government for better access to public education for their children. However, the enormous cost of building schools and training enough teachers in conjunction with the deep distrust the majority of Algerians felt toward all French institutions presented obstacles to this expansion of education, and compulsory primary education for all Algerian children seemed unrealizable.<sup>37</sup> Despite these setbacks, the colonial school system trained Algerian teachers to teach in the French schools alongside European teachers. Fanny Colonna argues that one of the main objectives of the French in training native Algerian teachers—like Feraoun— was to create cultural mediators whose charge consisted of spreading French culture.<sup>38</sup> While the French built new schools to teach French literature, history, and cultural values, traditional Islamic schools struggled to continue to attract a significant number of students and to retain funding for their education programs. This conflict between French public schools and traditional free Islamic schools occurred against the backdrop of the larger issue of Arabic being recognized by the French government as an official language in colonial Algeria. When the French took over the administration of Algeria in 1848, Arabic lost its official language status and French became the sole official language in colonial Algeria. The Arabic

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<sup>35</sup> Heggoy, “Arab Education in Colonial Algeria,” 151.

<sup>36</sup> Alf Andrew Heggoy, “Education in French Algeria: An Essay on Cultural Conflict,” *Comparative Education Review* 17, no.2 (1973): 185-186.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>38</sup> Colonna, “Training the National Elites,” 289.

language would not be given official status until 1947 following World War II as a “reward” to the Algerians for their participation in the French armed forces during the war.<sup>39</sup> In Colonna’s view, the colonial school system structured society beyond the colonial period: “Arab [*sic*] speakers were and are still today in an inferior, dominated position.”<sup>40</sup> She concluded that the colonial system is not a dichotomy, “it’s not [two] worlds that ignore each other but on the contrary, worlds which observe each other with envy (but the envy only goes one way.)”<sup>41</sup>

During the Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962), the French military became involved with colonial education because it could be used as a counterinsurgency program. The French military had an interest in bettering the lives of the Algerian people in order to discourage them from joining the revolutionary movement. Additionally, education provided a context in which the French could continue their “civilizing” mission and instill French values in the native Algerians, which the French hoped would foster loyalty to the colonial regime. Counterinsurgency education programs fostered personal contact between the French administration and the Algerian people; this contact enabled the French military to gather the intelligence information they desperately needed to combat the Algerian revolutionaries during the Algerian war.<sup>42</sup>

The French military developed programs such as the Special Administrative Services (SAS) where soldiers served as colonial administrators and civil servants, the *Service de Formation des Jeunes en Algérie*, the *Centres de Services Sociaux Éducatifs*, the *Formation Professionnelle Accélérée*, and the *Formation Professionnelle des Adultes*. These programs focused on improving and expanding primary, vocational and technical education for the Algerians. However, despite the French military’s efforts to rehabilitate the education system and offer better opportunities for Algerian children and adults—while also serving their own “civilizing” and militaristic goals for the colony—many Algerians remained

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<sup>39</sup> Heggoy, “Arab Education,” 151-152.

<sup>40</sup> Colonna, “Training the National Elites,” 288.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Alf Andrew Heggoy, “Kepi and Chalkboards: French Soldiers and Education in Revolutionary Algeria,” *Military Affairs* 37, no.4 (December 1973): 141-142.

unaffected by these programs. It proved difficult for the basic education programs to keep up financially with an annual population increase of 2.85%. The military took advantage of ties to families involved in these educational programs to gather intelligence, though often resorting to torture or other violent means to extract information about the Algerian revolutionary cause. This brutality exposed the superficiality of the perceived benevolence of these military-sponsored educational services and motivated Algerians to join the resistance movement. The Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) began to see the officers of the SAS in particular as their most dangerous enemies.<sup>43</sup> Feraoun joined the *Centre de Services Sociaux Éducatifs* as an inspector and co-director in 1960, and it is interesting to note that while Feraoun seemed “to trust the aims of the *Centres Sociaux*, he openly distrusted the role of the SAS in the Algerian conflict and comments on it frequently” in *Journal 1955-1962*.<sup>44</sup> The education initiatives by the French military were not as influential or far-reaching as they could have been. The SAS, one of the more successful programs, was undermined by its association with the gathering of intelligence through the use of torture<sup>45</sup>

#### *The Poor Man’s Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*

A schoolteacher and a civil servant, Feraoun initiated a third career as an author when he began a manuscript in 1939 that became *Le fils du pauvre* (the original French title) or *The Poor Man’s Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*. Over twelve years, Feraoun worked on this manuscript, writing in school notebooks. An exercise in “auto-fiction,” *The Poor Man’s Son* won Feraoun the Grand Prize of the City of Algiers—the first time this prize was awarded to a non-European Algerian.

Initially self-published, *The Poor Man’s Son* was reissued by Éditions du Seuil in 1954. The English translation is divided into two parts and documents the daily life of an individual in a poor, rural, traditional Berber community in Algeria in the 1920s and 30s; the story traces the introduction of the

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<sup>43</sup> Heggoy, “Kepi and Chalkboards,” 141-144.

<sup>44</sup> James D. Le Sueur, Introduction in Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), xviii.

<sup>45</sup> Heggoy, “Kepi and Chalkboards,” 144.

main character—Menrad Fouroulou—into the larger context of the colonial world.<sup>46</sup> The main character's name—Menrad Fouroulou—is an anagram of Mouloud Feraoun and the first edition of *The Poor Man's Son* was dedicated to Feraoun's beloved professors, “à mes maîtres vénérés,” a testament to the significant impact his French education had on his life.<sup>47</sup>

“In a writing style that was more concerned with a heartfelt layering of personal and collective observation than with literary esthetics,” according to Lucy McNair, “Feraoun's novels were written and presented by himself as historical testimony: they provided internal witness to the abject yet ignored misery of Colonial Algeria.”<sup>48</sup> McNair provides a useful literary and historical context for interpreting the novel as a direct response to the writers in the *École d'Algers*—European-Algerian writers like Albert Camus and Emmanuel Roblès. Even though these writers “broke taboos by exposing the brutality of colonial life in opposition to the exotic travel journals French audiences were accustomed to reading,” native Algerians were left out of their texts.<sup>49</sup> For Feraoun, this absence of non-European Algerians shed light on the sad truth of the “brutal, ingrained indifference and ignorance between the Algerians and the European *colons*.”<sup>50</sup> Feraoun also interpreted this absence as an invitation for individuals like himself who managed to look beyond their ethnic identities and imagine a common reality to write his stories, “speak as a witness, and bring to light the truth.”<sup>51</sup>

McNair addresses two criticisms of Feraoun's writings: First, that he used the language of the colonizer, and, second, that his style of “folkloric realism” did not address the harsh realities of colonial rule. She suggests that Feraoun, who belonged to the first generation of non-European Algerians capable of mastering written French because of the education he received, wrote in French as “the language of

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<sup>46</sup> Lucy R. McNair & Mouloud Feraoun, “Mouloud Feraoun's *Le fils du pauvre*: Introduction,” *The Journal of Twentieth Century/Contemporary French Studies Revue d'études français* 5, no. 2 (2001): 412.

<sup>47</sup> Jeanne Adam, « Les débuts littéraires de Mouloud Feraoun: de "Menrad Fouroulou" au "Fils du pauvre" », *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 6, (November 1981) : 945.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> McNair, “An Algerian-American Primer,” 189.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

universal values, of human rights, of political and individual freedom.”<sup>52</sup> The “folkloric realism” of the novel takes up the oral models of his ancestors and contributes to Feraoun’s aspirations to put Kabylia and his people on the world map, thus restoring a historical omission.<sup>53</sup>

It is significant to note that before the French Éditions du Seuil published *The Poor Man’s Son*, the editors asked Feraoun to remove the parts of his narrative. The 1954 edition omits Feraoun’s time at *L’École normale d’instituteurs*, his first few years as a teacher in Kabylia, and the entire second part of the original book, which discusses the Algerians’ dire living conditions during and following World War II.<sup>54</sup> This cut is significant because it is in these sections of the book that Feraoun frankly exposes his frustration with the French administration of Algeria, the Vichy regime, the Gaulists, and the “roumis” or small-town European settlers. These pages contain Feraoun’s assessment of the intersections and dislocations between the French and the Algerian cultures. The truncated second edition of the novel ends with the protagonist Fouroulou—too old to enter the *L’École normale d’instituteurs*—instead contemplating going to Algiers to find work.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the second edition carved out Feraoun’s criticisms of the French during and following World War II to produce a tale with a more manageable ending for European audiences.

*The Poor Man’s Son* is a coming of age story and the voice of the narrator changes in its different sections from intimate to more formal, thus broadening the focus of the novel from the life of an individual to the portrait of a people.<sup>56</sup> In the first part of the novel, the personal pronouns “I,” “my,” “me” provide the intimacy appropriate for the narrator’s introduction of Fouroulou’s family life and his early experiences in school and in his village. The narrator shifts in the second part of the book to the third person, “Fouroulou,” “he,” and “his,” and in this section, the hero lives away from home while attending the *École Primaire Supérieure*. The main character has grown up, and he is motivated to study

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<sup>52</sup> McNair, “An Algerian-American Primer,” 190.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Adam, « Les débuts littéraires de Mouloud Feraoun, » 951-952.

<sup>55</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction, xii.

<sup>56</sup> In this paragraph, I am referencing this English translation of the novel, Mouloud Feraoun, *The Poor Man’s Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

to ensure his success alongside his more affluent classmates; more importantly, he dreams of becoming a teacher. Finally, in the third part of the book, the focus shifts from Fouroulou's life to the more general plight of his fellow Kabyles; thus a universal narrator, aware of the broader issues beyond Fouroulou's life, takes over. Fouroulou's experience is still emphasized and serves as a lens through which the reader can acknowledge the suffering of his countrymen. Dalila Belkacem notes that in the preface of the second part of the French version of the novel, "Le Fils aîné," Feraoun introduces a narrator who is an unnamed, close friend of Fouroulou: "Fouroulou is passing the pen to a friend...whether out of modesty or out of bashful timidity... [Fouroulou,] you want the narrator to be quiet. No, let him be. He likes you well. He'll tell your story."<sup>57</sup>

This shift between narrators in *The Poor Man's Son* allows Feraoun to back away from his personal story and present a more complete portrait of his people; the transition between different narrators points to the ambiguous genre of the book itself. Feraoun began writing *The Poor Man's Son* in 1939 and finished the book in three years from 1945 to 1948. The time Feraoun spent away from writing refined his idea for the novel; at first purely autobiographical, Feraoun later decided to widen the scope of Fouroulou's story and, consequently, turned it into a "novel." The effects of World War II inspired Feraoun to record the second half of Fouroulou's life alongside the difficulties that befell all of Kabylia (this is one of the parts Éditions du Seuil cut from their edition). In Belkacem's view, the transition to the third person narrator separates the autobiographical part of Feraoun's work from the "novel" part of the book.<sup>58</sup> Although *The Poor Man's Son* never stops telling the story of Fouroulou/Feraoun, this shift in the narrator calls into question the "true" genre of the book.

Feraoun reconciled the personal nature of autobiographical writing with conventions of privacy—"on garde sa vie pour soi" ("we keep our lives to ourselves")—by attributing his own life story to a character, Menrad Fouroulou, and by shifting from the first person to the third person he makes the reader

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<sup>57</sup> Dalia Belkacem, « Du texte autobiographique au texte romanesque dans "Le Fils du pauvre" de Mouloud Feraoun », *Insaniyat* 29, no.3 (2005) : 159-173 (my translation).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

aware of this construct.<sup>59</sup> The book, “entre-deux,” is a cross between autobiography and novel, and a bridge between North African and European cultures. Just as his “autobiographical novel” is not easily classified as one genre or the other, so is it difficult to classify the author as an Algerian or as a Frenchman or, more specifically, as an Algerian writer or as a French writer.

Feraoun’s primary identity is Kabyle. Aware of the uniqueness of his education and achievements, Feraoun decides to describe Fouroulou—and himself—as an “every man,” as a Kabyle like any other. This is another angle on his perception of himself as *évolué* while deeply connected to his native Kabylia. In the first part of the book, Fouroulou is privileged because he is the only son in his family:

My mother, her sisters, my maternal aunts—my true aunts—adored me; my father gave in to all my wishes; my grandmother, who was the village midwife, spoiled me with all the good things given to her...my uncle, who knew the value of a man at the *djemaâ* and for whom I represented the future of the Menrads, loved me as his son... I remained the sole boy of the household. I was destined to represent the strength and the courage of the family.<sup>60</sup>

Cherished and protected as the only son, Fouroulou understands from a young age that he is special.

This exceptionalism continues in the second part of the novel when Fouroulou takes advantage of his privilege to continue his studies and get closer to his dream of becoming a teacher. On the night he learns that he has received the family scholarship to attend the *École Primaire Supérieure*, Fouroulou is the “hero of the evening. His sisters already look upon him with respect” and his mother “prepares supper in his honor.”<sup>61</sup> The third part of the novel marks the end of Fouroulou’s uniqueness. “The times grew difficult. Very difficult. For the Menrads and for their countrymen;” Fouroulou is only trying to survive like the rest of the Kabyles.<sup>62</sup> Fouroulou struggles to make sure everyone in his family eats during WWII when grain supplies were rationed among the entire village by the French military:

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<sup>59</sup> Belkacem, « Du texte autobiographique au texte romanesque », p.159-173, (my translation).

<sup>60</sup> Mouloud Feraoun, *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.



Was it not Fouroulou who told us that couscous—barley, in other words—was the sole staple of the people here? Take barley away from a Kabyle and you sentence him to starvation. It was not taken away. It was given out at warehouses. There were warehouses all over. Even at Beni Rassi, the Menrad's *douar*.<sup>63</sup>

Feraoun uses this transition from “exceptional” to “common man” to affirm that his successes in his studies and in his professional life do not separate him from the suffering of his people. This humility is evidence of his identification with the starving Kabyles. This concentration on the suffering of the Kabyles in the final part of Fouroulou's story also contributes to Feraoun's goal of placing Kabylia on the world map.

Feraoun's strong connection to his ethnic identity did not stop him from including many European literary references in his autobiographical novel. According to I.C Tcheho, Feraoun employed these literary references to demonstrate that he wished to produce an original work that is “immersed both in his native culture and in the foreign culture.”<sup>64</sup> Integrating both cultures in this manner shows the reader that it is possible for an “African writer to use models from the foreign world.”<sup>65</sup> In the first of the European references Tcheho identifies, Feraoun compares traditional Kabyle heroes to Ulysses, the famous hero in Greek mythology. In another instance, Fouroulou declares that “these heroes are as skinny as Don Quixote.”<sup>66</sup> *The Poor Man's Son* opens with a quote ascribed to Chekhov, the Russian dramatist and short story writer of the nineteenth century. Feraoun may be drawing a comparison between himself and the Russian writer; according to Tcheho, like Chekhov, “Feraoun elaborates on his characters' helplessness in the precarious conditions which they are forced to live.”<sup>67</sup> Feraoun also evokes Jean de La Fontaine's fable entitled “Le Savetier et le financier” (“The Cobbler and the Financier”) when describing an Algerian landowner who, like La Fontaine's cobbler, has become a slave to his wealth. Feraoun introduces the second part of the novel, “Le Fils aîné,” with a quotation from the French historian

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<sup>63</sup> Feraoun, *The Poor Man's Son*, 138.

<sup>64</sup> I.C Tcheho, « European Literary References in Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, » *Revue CEFLAN* 1, no.2 (1982) : 19.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Michelet, whose writing advocates a philosophy of “resistance to pain, of tolerance and patience” in circumstances such as those in which the non-European Algerians live.<sup>68</sup> Feraoun alludes to French writer Alphonse Daudet when Fouroulou “affirms that in the past the Kabyle land was full of ‘Des héros (...) aussi fiers que Tartarin’” (“Heroes (...) as proud as Tartarin”).<sup>69</sup> Finally, Feraoun quotes his contemporary, Albert Camus, “Il y a dans les hommes plus de choses à admirer que des choses à mépriser” (“There are more things to admire than to despise in men”).<sup>70</sup> For Tcheho, this citation represents a plea for a “return of confidence in man.”<sup>71</sup>

Feraoun’s novel provides evidence of his mastery of French writing and literature. *The Poor Man’s Son* is his story, and it is significant that he chose to include European literary elements in his narrative. Feraoun exhibits the qualities of the *évolué* writer while telling the story of his cultural upbringing in and attachment to Kabyle, and Feraoun’s autobiographical work is a testament to his effort to integrate French culture with Kabyle culture.

In conclusion, I found several manifestations of Feraoun’s interest in exploring identity in his first book, *The Poor Man’s Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*. First, the ambiguous genre of the book points to multivalent perspectives on identity. This ambiguity is expressed through the shift in narrators—from the first person in the opening parts of the book to the third person in the final parts of the book—which causes the genre of the book to transition from an autobiography to a novel. Though he writes an “autobiographical novel”—an occidental narrative form—Feraoun simultaneously honors his North African culture’s respect of personal privacy by using the character Menrad Fouroulou to tell his story. Furthermore, Feraoun attempts to reconcile his assimilated French culture with his Kabyle upbringing by recounting his personal journey as a Kabyle while using European literary references. Mouloud Feraoun—a Kabyle educated through the French colonial education system—explores his identity and

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<sup>68</sup> Tcheho, “European Literary References,” 20.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

presents a hybridic resolution through the integration of cultures in the narration of *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher* and its mixed genre.

*Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*

For seven of the eight years of the Algerian War, Mouloud Feraoun kept a journal of the conflict—from 1955 until his death in 1962. A valuable first-hand account of France's "bitter and long overdue withdrawal from its most prized colonial possession," Feraoun's *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* manifests his desire to represent the war as he saw it, without illusions and without self-censorship.<sup>72</sup> He understood that the only way to reach future generations was to honestly capture the war from the inside, from personal experience. According to James D. Le Sueur who wrote the introduction to the 2000 English translation of *Journal*, Feraoun saw the collapse of French power in Algeria and North Africa as bittersweet. He welcomed the right of the Algerians to reclaim their soil and their identity from the French occupiers. Feraoun acknowledged that French and Algerian intellectual cultures were deeply intertwined and that it would take generations to untangle the knots of more than a century of colonization. Feraoun hoped that his daily notes could guide future generations as they strove to reconstruct an "Algerian" Algeria.<sup>73</sup>

The war troubled and excited Feraoun as he both welcomed and feared the cultural and political destruction it would leave in its wake. Feraoun felt pressured to support violent revolutionary methods he did not approve of. In his opinion, the Algerian nationalists distorted the revolution and the colonial situation to pursue their agenda. Feraoun critiques these national leaders several times in *Journal*; these negative feelings toward the nationalist party nuanced and complicated Feraoun's view of the war. He frequently refers to "the dangers of revolutionary mythology, especially the absurd notion that all remnants of colonialism, good or bad, could and should be destroyed."<sup>74</sup> Though he was supportive of the

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<sup>72</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction, ix.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., xxvi.

revolutionaries' actions in 1955, the following year Feraoun witnessed the development of another “authoritarian beast (perhaps as dangerous as French colonialism)” within the resistance.<sup>75</sup> In particular, he found the Front de Liberation Nationale's (FLN) expectations of the civilians to be “excessive and disappointing.”<sup>76</sup> In *Journal*, Feraoun characterizes the prohibitions the FLN imposed on the Algerian people—such as forced observance of Islam and tobacco and alcohol restrictions—as fanatic, racist, and authoritarian; “in a way,” he writes, “this is true terrorism.”<sup>77</sup> However, Feraoun avoided a complete condemnation of the FLN because he recognized that the French army was also to blame for the violence of the resistance movement and that brutality is typical of wartime dynamics.<sup>78</sup>

Feraoun agreed with Frantz Fanon that violence was a legitimate reaction against the French occupation and military violence, but not unconditionally – the end did not necessarily justify the means. Feraoun was concerned about the effects of prolonged and devastating violence on post-war society, and it is important to remember that Feraoun was himself a victim of the war's extreme brutality. Feraoun's fear of a “new ‘colonization’” by Algeria's FLN leadership also contrasts with Fanon's optimistic view of the outcome of violence directed against oppression.<sup>79</sup> Although a practicing Muslim, Feraoun found it difficult to accept the extreme religiosity of the FLN, especially their combination of patriotism and Islam. An entry in *Journal* reads, “And so the people of Tizi-Hibel [his hometown], once the most villainous on the surface of the earth, have found their faith again; they are now paying the salary of the muezzin and frequent the mosque assiduously. God is great!”<sup>80</sup>

Feraoun also condemned the FLN's destruction of French-created schools even though he understood that the French military provoked these attacks by quartering troops in these buildings, Feraoun still saw this destruction as a waste of limited resources.<sup>81</sup> On January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1956 he recorded his

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<sup>75</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction, xxvi.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., xxvii.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>80</sup> Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962*, 68.

<sup>81</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction, xxviii.

indignation when he heard that the resistance had burned down his childhood school in Tizi-Hibel: “I am angry at my people. I am angry at all those who did not know how to prevent this, who could not prevent it. Shame on all of us forever. Poor kids of Tizi, your parents are not worthy of you.”<sup>82</sup>

Not only were schools lost, but, as Feraoun observed, a divide developed between French and Algerian educators as the two sides “realize[d] the stakes” of the war.<sup>83</sup> He recorded his growing frustration with his French colleagues when they realized that their traditional, racist privileges in Algeria were losing currency.<sup>84</sup> Feraoun leaves no doubt that he wanted some form of Algerian independence, but the death of colonialism forced him to wrestle with the paradox of his own identity; in many ways, this led him to feel “‘more French’ than the French.”<sup>85</sup> Feraoun still cherished the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity instilled in him by his French education and was heartbroken that the French themselves seemed to have forgotten these values. His belief in these values prompted him to insist that the French recognize that the Algerians “no longer wanted to be French and had a right to reject French rule as illegitimate.”<sup>86</sup> Feraoun maintained that France’s racist domination of the Arabs, Berbers and Muslims in Algeria for more than one hundred and thirty years had caused the French-Algerian war because the war forced the *maquis* to fight violently with any means they could against the French. Feraoun had no doubts that France and her so-called *mission civilisatrice* were morally bankrupt.<sup>87</sup>

*Journal* proclaims the end of hypocrisy, the lifting of the mask, the end of the lie that oppression could continue forever without Algerian resistance. Hatred toward the “other” and protesting against the lies of the colonizer permits someone like Feraoun to maintain his dignity: “You can be convinced that I am just as culturally French as you. To think otherwise is disrespectful. I can renounce my culture, but do

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<sup>82</sup> Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962*, 64.

<sup>83</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction, xxxv.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., xlvii.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

not think that I disown myself, that I will accept your superiority, your racism, your anger, your hatred, or your lies. A century of lies!”<sup>88</sup>

The reader gets the sense in *Journal*, that Feraoun felt like he had been thrown back on his “Algerian-ness” by a bad mother—France; but like all bad mothers, France has her admirable qualities that help justify “her children’s” love for her in spite of herself.<sup>89</sup> Here, I draw a parallel between a good “son” and a good student, as Feraoun can “appreciate” what mother-France “did for him” when he performed well in school and he obediently carried himself like a “good son” or a “good Frenchman.” A *Journal* entry reads, “[France] has perhaps tricked us for a century to preserve her memory: the best image that our childhood could assemble of her.”<sup>90</sup> In another profession of his allegiance to opposing ends of his identity, Feraoun writes in *Journal*, “Vive la France, as I have always loved her, Vive Algeria, as I had always hoped she would be!... Yes, Vive Algeria...but when she [Algeria] comes alive and lifts her head, I hope that she will remember France and all that she [Algeria] owes her [France].”<sup>91</sup>

Feraoun manifests his disdain for the way in which the French and European presses wrote about the Algerian situation in *Journal*; these media made it seem as though the Algerian uprising happened all of a sudden, as if a slumbering, exploited people abruptly shot awake, while in reality, Algerians had resisted French rule from the very beginnings of colonization.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, Feraoun resented the French efforts to prevent the Algerian question from coming to the floor of the United Nations.<sup>93</sup> In 1958, Feraoun expressed his hope that General Charles de Gaulle would bring closure to the war, “De Gaulle is a wise man. That is what I think.”<sup>94</sup> However, Feraoun stopped writing *Journal* in July 1959 because he thought that the French army had won after several Kabyle villages rallied to the French side. When the European settlers organized a barricade rebellion in the streets of Algiers in January 1960, Feraoun

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<sup>88</sup> Gadant-Benzine, “Mouloud Feraoun,” 11 (my translation).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* (my translation).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* (my translation).

<sup>92</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction, xxxvi.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxv.

<sup>94</sup> Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962*, 250.

resumed writing *Journal*.<sup>95</sup> Feraoun admired De Gaulle who took on the stubborn settlers who remained unwilling to relinquish control of Algeria.<sup>96</sup>

*Journal* shows that Feraoun “was a man trapped by the infernal logic of colonial warfare.”<sup>97</sup> For Feraoun, the complexity of colonial history could not be simply explained in terms of the opposition of the two camps of the colonizer and the colonized. *Journal* features Feraoun’s frequent confessions of pain at his uncertain placement in the “no-man’s land of colonial identity during the war.”<sup>98</sup> He lamented:

When I say that I am French, I give myself a label that each French person refuses me. I speak French, and I got my education in a French school. I have learned as much French as the average Frenchman. What am I then, dear God? Is it possible that as long as there are labels, there is not one for me? Which one is mine? Can somebody tell me what I am! Of course, they may want me to pretend that I am wearing a label because they pretend to believe in it. I am very sorry, but this is not enough.<sup>99</sup>

This quote from *Journal* captures Feraoun’s identity struggle as he cries out for a “label” or for someone to ascribe one to him even though, as he writes at the end, the very “existence” of such labels is a fiction. This distress is again apparent in his entry dated March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1956: “The French, the Kabyle, the soldier, and the *fellagha* [rebels] frighten me. I am afraid of myself. The French are inside me, and the Kabyle are inside me. I feel disgust for those who kill, not because they want to kill me, but because they have the backbone to kill.”<sup>100</sup> These entries of Feraoun’s journal show his identification with the French, the Algerian rebels and the Kabyles in different ways. His condemnations of the actions of both sides during the war point to the difficulties inherent in this mixed identity and show him to be a man of conscience.

Since Feraoun was one of the Algerians who achieved social mobility thanks to his French education, supporters of French Algeria assumed that he would also rally behind the European cause; this expectation is apparent in *Journal* as Feraoun regularly received invitations from the French military to

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<sup>95</sup> Thénault, « Mouloud Feraoun », 71.

<sup>96</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction, xxxvii.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., xxxi.

<sup>99</sup> Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962*, 65-66.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 90.

attend official receptions.<sup>101</sup> Feraoun found these considerations flattering, but he believed that the Algerian nationalist side viewed him with just as much esteem, trust, and caution.<sup>102</sup>

For Fanon and Memmi, the effort to assimilate associated with French education sows seeds of rebellion. The colonized learns to value the ideals of the French Revolution, but finds that in the eyes of the colonizer they do not apply to him. The unstated objective of the *mission civilisatrice* was to turn the Algerians into Frenchmen, but to prevent them from becoming “too French;” this civilizing mission demanded the submission of the Algerians while simultaneously cultivating a frustration within them that would lead them to revolt.<sup>103</sup> The revolutionary war called into question what it meant to be Algerian for a schoolteacher like Feraoun who served his people as an educator and sought to enable them to define themselves in and against the colonial context.

Feraoun asserted his right to define himself in the face of French racism and ostracism. In response to the comments of his French-Algerian friends Emmanuel Roblès and Albert Camus concerning the FLN’s brutal attacks and fascist tendencies—especially Camus’ indignation toward the idea of one day entering Algeria with a foreigners’ passport—Feraoun delivered a passionate cry for understanding in his *Journal* entry from February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1957:

I understand quite well what each man is saying, but I would like them to understand me as well. I would like them to understand those of us who are so close to them and so different at the same time. I would like them to put themselves in our place. Those who told me what they really thought last week, who told me that I was not French. Those who are in charge of French sovereignty in this country have treated me as an enemy, they would like me to act as a good French patriot; not even that: they would like me to serve them just as I am, for no other reason than the gratitude for the fact that France has made a teacher, a school administrator, and a writer out of me; for the fact that France pays me a large salary that enables me to raise a large family. In simple terms, I am asked to repay a debt as if everything I do does not deserve a salary, as if this school had been built for my pleasure and filled with students to entertain me, as if my “teaching” were a generous gift that costs me only the pain of extending my hand to take it, as if this writer’s talent with which I am a little infatuated were another gift, involuntary this time, but no less generous, one quite obviously destined to defend the cause of France at the expense of my own people, who may be wrong but who die and suffer the scorn and indifference of civilized countries. Quite simply, I am asked to die as a traitor in return for which I will have paid my debt.... I would like to tell Camus that he is as Algerian as I am, and that all Algerians are proud

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<sup>101</sup> Thénault, “Mouloud Feraoun,” 73.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Gadant-Benzine, « Mouloud Feraoun », 5.



of him. I would add, though, that it was not so long ago that an Algerian Muslim had to show a passport to go to France. It is true that the Algerian Muslim has never considered himself to be a Frenchman. He has no such illusions.<sup>104</sup>

In this passage, Feraoun echoes the frustration with assimilation articulated by Fanon and Memmi when he asserts that the French never considered him a Frenchman before, yet now they expect his loyalty. Feraoun sarcastically describes how the French portray themselves as generous benefactors who give everyone an opportunity to succeed, but had that been the case, there would have been many more Algerians like Feraoun. Though he did “owe” the French for his success he refuses to pay this “debt” with what he saw as treason toward his compatriots.

In *Journal*'s final entries—culminating with Feraoun's final *mise-en-garde* hours before his assassination— Feraoun expresses his fatigue and bitterness toward the brutality of the war. Following the end of the 1960 settler barricade revolt, Feraoun confesses in *Journal* that the war was draining his energy: “[A]s the war drummed on, his [*Journal*] entries become leaner and he is less willing to record his impressions,” Le Sueur observes.<sup>105</sup> According to Feraoun, “it was childish to narrate—for myself and in my own style—what the front page of the press from all sides throw at us every day.”<sup>106</sup> The violence and the murders of Feraoun's friends and family members by the French military took a toll on his compassion to the point where he became generally indifferent to the misery he witnessed, especially as the French escalated their modernizing educational efforts.<sup>107</sup> Even a promotion did not illicit a significant reaction from Feraoun, who expresses ambivalent feelings concerning his decision to serve in the *Centre de Services Sociaux Éducatifs* as an administrator.<sup>108</sup> Around the same time, the “ultras”—*colons* extremists—decided that the *Centre Sociaux* could not retain its apolitical position, and they decided that the *Centre* had to be on the side of the Algerian national movement. Between 1957 and 1959, the ultras “discovered” that a handful of *Centre* members had links to the FLN, which made Feraoun an

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<sup>104</sup>Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962*, 185.

<sup>105</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction, xxxvii.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., xlvii.

easy target.<sup>109</sup> Three days before the definitive Franco-Algerian cease-fire, on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1962, Feraoun and five colleagues from the *Centre Sociaux* were marched outside and machine-gunned at the hands of a commando squad of the *Organization de l'armée secrete*—a French army-settler terrorist organization.<sup>110</sup>

This tragic, abrupt end to *Journal* adds to the work's poignancy.<sup>111</sup> For Le Sueur, the overall message of *Journal* is clear: “[W]ar is hell, even justified wars of liberation with all of their psychological, political, military, and racist repercussions.”<sup>112</sup> Le Sueur concludes his introduction to the 2000 translation of *Journal* by qualifying Feraoun as a “realist, an insider, and teacher” whose identity became increasingly complicated as the war progressed.<sup>113</sup> In Le Sueur's opinion, Feraoun “represents the best of two irreconcilable worlds.”<sup>114</sup> However, Feraoun struggled with this notion of irreconcilability in *Journal*, and is not as quick as Le Sueur to declare his Frenchness and his Algerianness incompatible.

*Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* by Mouloud Feraoun presents the reader with a detailed, personal, and heartfelt chronicle of the French-Algerian War. The entries reveal much about the daily occurrences of the war, Feraoun's struggle with his personal identity, his disdainful opinions of the FLN and the French army, and his cautionary approach to the violence of the war. The brutality on both sides of the conflict and the end of Feraoun's hopes of a fraternal relationship between France and Algeria took a toll on the author that became apparent in *Journal*. The poignancy of the journal was sealed within its abrupt ending, the final entry written the morning of Feraoun's death on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1962.

Through his journal entries, Feraoun explores and laments his identity conundrum. He both admired France and felt duped by her unfulfilled promises; in his eyes, France no longer embodied a long-standing tradition of the universal values of liberty, equality, and fraternity since she embarked on

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<sup>109</sup> Martin Thomas, “Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 29, no.2 (2001): 191.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction, xlvii.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., xlviii.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

this violent crusade to hang on to colonial Algeria. Feraoun never denied his allegiance to French culture and to the Algerian national movement and he stayed true to his Kabyle heritage. He both criticized and loved the opposing sides of the French-Algerian conflict. Throughout *Journal*, Feraoun exposes the reader to the complexities of his identity as he tries to reconcile his multifaceted nature as the conflict wore on.

Feraoun makes clear to the reader that he did not passively watch the war unfold or let his identity crisis destroy him. Rather, *Journal* reads as a warning about the continued use of violence, the dangers of the FLN's blending of patriotism and Islam, and the stubborn desire to decimate all remnants of the colonial period. Feraoun is especially indignant over the destruction of school buildings and the growing power of the national party. Unfortunately, heart-wrenching lamentations like the following remain unanswered as *Journal* suddenly comes to an end: "What am I then, dear God? Is it possible that as long as there are labels, there is not one for me? Which one is mine? Can somebody tell me what I am!"<sup>115</sup> Tragically relieved from the difficulties of establishing his identity and having written his final journal entry, Feraoun died assassinated by French terrorists, neither a traitor nor a hero.

### *Conclusion*

Attentive readings of Mouloud Feraoun's *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher* and *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* reveal Feraoun's personal identity struggle as a French-educated Algerian prior to and during the war for independence. Both works shed light on the difficulties of self-identification for a man who felt deeply connected to France and to Algeria and defined himself through his mixed loyalties. In his first novel, *The Poor Man's Son*, Feraoun recounted his early upbringing in Kabylia, the various stages of his French education, and the harsh realities of life in Kabylia during and following World War II by effortlessly blending his sense of belonging to both cultures. He accomplished this through the ambiguous nature of this autobiographical

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<sup>115</sup> Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962*, 65-66.

novel, his use of the French language to write about life in Kabylia, and his choice to ascribe his life story to a character, Menrad Fouroulou. He also uses European literary references to talk about his upbringing in Kabylia. This combination of French and Algerian elements points to the internal identity *mélange* Feraoun experienced as he reconciled his ties to both cultures.

*Journal* allowed Feraoun to meditate on the effects of the war on both sides of the conflict. His identity struggle is apparent in his daily musings because the war affected him and those around him on a personal level while he lived first in Kabylia and later when he moved to Algiers. A number of entries reveal Feraoun's concern for post-colonial Algeria, especially the effects of violence on Algerian society, the growing power of the nationalist party, the FLN's dangerous intertwining of Islam and patriotism, and the determination to annihilate all remnants of the colonial period—Feraoun was especially intolerant of the destruction of school buildings. Feraoun's *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* not only recorded his feelings about his own identity, but also the shift in the way that those around him treated him. Crying out against the lies that his “adoptive French mother” fed him, Feraoun came to terms with the fact that although he felt culturally French, no one else would ever recognize him as French. His discussion of the lies the colonial system told the Algerians about their eventual qualification for French citizenship demonstrates his disenchantment with France and her treasured universal values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Along with his disappointment in his adoptive culture, Feraoun abandoned his hope for a fraternal partnership between France and Algeria as the war droned on.

Mouloud Feraoun, an ambiguous Algerian, amidst his struggle to define himself in a politically-charged period of history, consistently acted upon his loyalty to both his French and Kabyle culture. In *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher* and *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, his admiration for the French is evident in his choice of profession as a schoolteacher and, in his writing, his use of devices and concepts he learned through the colonial education system. On the other hand, his allegiance to and love for the Algerian people are evident in his honoring of North African traditions, his warnings against future strife in Algeria, as well as his insistence against ever

betraying his people. . Mouloud Feraoun, an “Algerian writer of the French language,”<sup>116</sup> did not die “seated between two chairs,” but very well seated on his own.<sup>117</sup> Adopting a hybrid identity drawing on both French and Kabyle cultures, Feraoun was saddened by the failure of the French to live up to their proclaimed values, yet remained hopeful for the future of Algeria, and sought to reveal the realities of the colonial situation to help guide future generations of Algerians.

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<sup>116</sup> Thenault, Mouloud Feraoun, 65; (my translation).

<sup>117</sup> McNair, “An Algerian-American Primer,” 190.

## Chapter II

### Yasmina Khadra's *L'Écrivain* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*

“I feel deeply that I was brought into this world to write.”

-Yasmina Khadra to Youcef Merahi, *Qui êtes-vous, Monsieur Khadra?*, 2007<sup>118</sup>

This chapter examines the ways in which Algerian author Mohammed Moulessehoul, alias Yasmina Khadra, developed and defended his identity as both a French writer and an Algerian soldier in his written works. In an interview with Youcef Merahi, this former commander in the post-independence Algerian army explained that he always felt destined to become a French writer. Similar to Mouloud Feraoun, as a result of Algeria's history as an extension of metropolitan France, Khadra's self-understanding combined two politically-charged identities: French writer and Algerian soldier. Feraoun and Khadra were both criticized for their hybrid identities, and the backlash experienced by Khadra shows that the Manichean, colonial mindset of strict categorization of individuals, with no room for “traitors” or “hybrids,” did not disappear with Algerian independence. Adopting a stance similar to Feraoun, Khadra's insistence on the viability of his hybrid identity also rejects Fanon and Memmi's claims that the “native intellectual” will be forced to pick one identity over the other and that the only way for the colonized to experience a sense of justice and avoid identity anxiety is through revolt and revolution.

Khadra, was born on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1955 in Kénadsa in the Sahara Desert of southwestern Algeria and belonged to the Doui Meniâ tribe. Khadra is married with three children and currently lives in Aix-en-Provence, France and in Cuba. He was the director of the Algerian Cultural Center in Paris from 2007

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<sup>118</sup> Yasmina Khadra, Youcef Merahi, *Qui êtes-vous, Monsieur Khadra?* (Algiers, Algeria: Éditions Sedia, 2007), 20. This and all subsequent translations are my own.

until May 2014.<sup>119</sup> In November of 2013, he announced his candidacy for the Algerian presidency, but he did not win enough votes in the April 2014 election.<sup>120</sup> Unlike Mouloud Feraoun, Khadra's French education came through the Algerian military academies and for most of his life as a writer he was also a soldier.

In September 1964, when he was nine, Khadra's father dropped him off at *l'École Nationale des Cadets de la Révolution*, a military academy near Tlemcen where he would begin his military career. Khadra went on to serve in the post-colonial Algerian army for over thirty years as a lieutenant, a captain, and a major. During this period he published twelve books under his pseudonym—Yasmina Khadra, his wife's first two names. Shortly after leaving the army in 2000 to devote himself entirely to his literary career, Khadra revealed his true identity to the shock of fans and critics of his works. Khadra's writings had enjoyed great success in France by a readership who assumed he was a woman and understood her/him to be “a writer who would, finally, give insight into what Arab women were really thinking.”<sup>121</sup> Though he later explained that he had originally taken the name to avoid military censorship of his works, his feminine pseudonym was misleading in ways that raised uncomfortable questions about his intentions and his readers' expectations. His identity as a soldier also proved controversial at a time when the French media was critical of the violent conflict taking place between the Algerian military and Islamic extremists. Nevertheless, Yasmina Khadra continued to defend his cross-cultural identity as both a French writer and an Algerian soldier.

Khadra not only crosses identity borders through his chosen professions, but also through his choice of a female penname, which allows him to represent women as well as men in a unique way. The first question Merahi asked Khadra in his 2009 interview was how the interviewer should address the

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<sup>119</sup> Violaine Morin, "Yasmina Khadra Limogé Du Centre Culturel Algérien De Paris," *Le Figaro*, May 30, 2014, Accessed December 13, 2014, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/culture/2014/05/30/03004-20140530ARTFIG00203-yasmina-khadra-limoge-du-centre-culturel-algerien-de-paris.php>.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Stuart Jeffries, “G2: Inside Story: Reader, I'm a he: When novels by 'Yasmina Khadra' first appeared, literary France thought it had at last found the authentic voice of the Arab woman. But then she turned out to be a man—and not just a man but a veteran Algerian army officer. Stuart Jeffries meets Mohammed Moulessehoul,” *The Guardian* (London), June 22, 2005.

author; Khadra replied that Merahî could address him “like everyone else does, as Yasmina Khadra.”<sup>122</sup>

This interview provided an outlet for Khadra to respond to the hostility he experienced after his “coming out” as Yasmina Khadra. Asked why he continued to write behind a woman’s penname, he replied that he does not wish to shed the name that made him and his works well-known:

To renounce a story like that—because the story of my pseudonym is a long one, so close to that of my country—would be to betray all of my prayers, all of my wishes that I cling to in the midst of so much waste and hopelessness. It’s not just a pseudonym, it’s also an oath sworn in pain and mourning, sadness and fear, anger and commitment.<sup>123</sup>

Khadra’s penname evokes deep emotions because it came about at a time when he needed something to keep him grounded against the backdrop of his military career. He wrote to survive the harsh realities of military life, and took a penname out of necessity, not for his own amusement.<sup>124</sup>

In the interview, Khadra also mentioned that his choice of a female name was a way for him to defend femininity, and that he is well-aware of the courage and the strength of women: “I am proud to write under a woman’s penname. It increases my self-esteem and places me on the same level as all of the women whom I love and admire: my wife, my mother, my daughters, my sisters, Hassiba Boulmerka...”<sup>125</sup> Khadra especially admires the Algerian women who fought against colonialism and participated in the resistance against the French during the war for independence:

Were they [Algerian women] not the first to rebel, faces unveiled, against the barbarianism that almost swept us all away? Did they not have a front row seat before all of the violence, were they not the first to be sacrificed, the first to deal with cowardice on one side and disdain from the other side without ever giving up or betraying anyone?<sup>126</sup>

In Khadra’s view, Algerian women never turn their backs on their people or break promises in trying times.<sup>127</sup> Writing under his wife’s names, he says, allows Khadra to identify with the female role models he admires and adopt the same steadfast attitudes of these women—in the face of biting criticism

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<sup>122</sup> Khadra, Merahî, *Qui êtes-vous*, 17.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>125</sup> Boulmerka was the first Algerian to win an Olympic gold medal. She won the 1500m race at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics; Khadra, Merahî, *Qui êtes-vous*, 19-20.

<sup>126</sup> Khadra, Merahî, *Qui êtes-vous*, 19.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 20.



of his self-identification as “Yasmina Khadra” – when he defends himself as both a French writer, and an Algerian soldier. “There were many misunderstandings because people found it hard to understand a writer who was a soldier,” Khadra confided in an interview with a British newspaper, “I had to really fight against those who did not appreciate my work because they pigeonholed me as some sort of brute who was responsible for military massacres.”<sup>128</sup> In response to the allegations accusing the Algerian army of massacring civilians during the repression of the Islamic radicals, Khadra countered, “In the eight years I led the fight against terrorism, there were no massacres. Let me tell you, it was a hard battle—there is no honesty or integrity among the pseudo-intellectuals I had to take on. There’s much more honesty and integrity among soldiers, trust me.”<sup>129</sup>

Writing under the name Yasmina Khadra in itself gave the penname meaning: it conjured an individual a part from the Algerian soldier and another perspective on social norms. The penname originated from Khadra’s need to escape military censorship in order to publish his books freely and keep his identity as a French writer and as an Algerian soldier separate. Following the critical reception of his revelation of his true identity at the end of his military career, Khadra’s penname became a way for him to defend and combine all facets of his identity. In his 2005 interview with *The Guardian* while promoting his book, *L’Attentat (The Attack)*, Khadra describes his cross-cultural identity as an asset because of his immersion in two literary traditions: “I have written a western tragedy, but also a book that is filled with eastern storytelling. When there are two perspectives there’s a better chance of [mutual] understanding.”<sup>130</sup> Khadra’s penname, in this light, harmonizes the different identities he represents. Indeed, as a man educated in French and in Arabic, as a former Algerian army officer and as a French novelist, as a man writing under a woman’s name, Mohammed Moulessehoul, alias Yasmina Khadra, embraced his multi-faceted identity and denied its contradictory nature. He rejected the categories of “soldier” or “Arab woman writer” as definitive, responding in his own way to Fanon and Memmi’s

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<sup>128</sup> Khadra, Merahi, *Qui êtes-vous*, 19.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Jeffries, “G2: Inside Story: Reader, I’m a he,” 4.

expectations about the “native intellectual” who was incapable of subscribing to contradictory identities. For Khadra, violence and revolt were not the answer to the colonial and postcolonial “native intellectual’s” discomfort with his or her identity. Rather, unity and harmony between seemingly incompatible groups provided a solution for Khadra, as evidenced by his defense of his right to his penname, even if his public might see him as a man with a mask or as a (woman) writer who turned out to be a fraud.

Two books by Yasmina Khadra that I have chosen to read for this study that further expand on his visions of unity and harmony between different groups and demonstrate his passion and admiration for all facets of his identity are *L'Écrivain (The Writer)* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit (What the Day Owes the Night)*. *L'Écrivain* tells the autobiographical story of Khadra’s upbringing and the beginnings of his military career in the military academies at Tlemcen and Koléa he attended as a young boy and as a young adult. The story centers around his education in the academies and his self-definition as a writer as evidenced by the title of his autobiography. This work is not merely a report of Khadra’s early life, but rather a rich source of information regarding Khadra’s early identity struggles growing up in post-colonial Algeria and what it meant and currently means for him to see himself as a French writer and as a member of the Algerian military.

*Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* steps away from Khadra’s personal life and explores the politically-charged identities of French and Algerian during the years leading up to and following the Algerian War for independence. The novel tells the story of Younes, a poor boy from the Algerian countryside who comes to live with his uncle and his French wife in the European part of Oran and Ríó Salado in Algeria. Renamed “Jonas” and educated in a French school, the young boy’s self-identification evolves throughout the novel as he experiences pre-independence, wartime, and post-war Algeria. This first-person narrative offers significant insight into the personal experience of the protagonist concerning his internal identity strife during a historically emotional period. The personal identity crisis of Younes/Jonas reflects

Khadra's ideas about embracing and seeking harmony among cross-cultural identities in the face of opposition in his own life.

### *L'Écrivain*

*L'Écrivain*, published in 2001, was the pivotal work in which Yasmina Khadra revealed his true identity as Mohamed Moulessehoul. In the midst of this “unveiling” of his military identity, Khadra passionately recounts his early literary pursuits and insists on his destiny to become a writer:

It was while reading *Le Petit Poucet* that the light came on and I received a revelation. The verb was a gift from above. I was born to write! In reading this beautiful book, thumbing through the splendidly illustrated pages, dazzled with profound affection, I was incurably fixated: I had to write books... I was *fascinated* by words... this assemblage of dead characters who, arranged between a capital letter and a period, suddenly came back to life, became sentences... and exhibited strength and spirit.<sup>131</sup>

In 1966, at ten years old, Khadra wrote his first text: A readaptation of the *Le Petit Poucet* in Arabic. He submitted his story to his teacher who relayed it to the one of the lieutenants at the academy. Khadra's inaugural attempt at writing literature earned him a spot on the list “des récompensés” or the list of students who performed well enough in their classes during the week and received the privilege of attending a soccer game at the local stadium on Saturday afternoons.<sup>132</sup>

During his first few years as a cadet, Khadra excelled in his Arabic classes, but did very poorly in his French classes until he entered middle and high school at the military academy at Koléa. There, no matter how well he did in his Arabic classes, his Arabic teachers took offense to the fact that a young boy attempted to produce traditional Arabic poetry. Khadra informs his readers that, in fact, he was a descendant of revered Algerian poets of old such as Sidi Abderrahmane Moulessehoul and Sidi Ahmed Moulessehoul.<sup>133</sup> Even though he was deterred from writing in Arabic and continued to struggle in his French classes, Khadra received more encouragement from his French language teachers and gradually

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<sup>131</sup> Yasmina Khadra, *L'Écrivain*, (Paris, France: Julliard, 2001), 88-89.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>133</sup> Khadra, Merahi, *Qui êtes-vous*, 20.

improved. He credited his eighth grade French teacher, M. Kouadri for solidifying French as his “writer’s language.”<sup>134</sup>

Even though he ended up choosing French as his language of composition, Khadra still felt a deep connection to the land of his ancestors, Algeria, and her people. In a particular passage, he romanticizes the *souk* market he frequented while visiting his mother in Petit Lac, a slum of Oran:

Since I was a little boy, I have always been drawn to markets. Their fairground atmosphere takes me back to my long-lost tribe, replenishes me in my authenticity. This is also another way for me to escape the blues. Every time I feel down, I head to a market—any market—and I experience lasting relief. In addition to its therapeutic virtues, the *souk* represents Algeria: profound, hardy and rough, bustling and stubborn, conscious of going adrift but not caring enough to prevent it.<sup>135</sup>

Khadra consistently confesses his admiration for the mystery and hidden beauty embedded in his ancestors’ lives and in his country’s history. The concept of an enduring “native” Algerian culture—exemplified by the *souk*—soothes him and, in a way, helps to remind him of who he was and his origins as he seeks his place in the world.

Khadra continued to develop his Francophone literary talents, and even started a drama club at the military academy—under the guidance of Algerian author and playwright Slimane Benaïssa—and he wrote and produced plays in both Arabic and French. Khadra regularly produced short stories and essays, which one of his friends faithfully critiqued for him. Another one of the cadets acted as Khadra’s literary agent and sold his works for a share of the profits. Khadra earned the respect of his peers through his genius as a playwright, an actor, and as a storyteller. While at Koléa, Khadra’s classmates highly anticipated his return from a visit home because he would satisfy their craving for excitement with funny or sometimes gripping stories. According to Khadra, as soon as his silhouette became visible as he approached the academy, someone would alert the others, “Hey, guys! Moulessehou! is coming!” and the cadets would fill the dormitory to listen to his latest whimsical narratives.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Khadra, *L’Écrivain*, 151.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

Khadra is able to balance his identity as a storyteller with his strong sense of belonging to his military “family.” Instead of seeing the military as simply the environment in which he lived, Khadra exhibits a strong sense of identification with and affection for the military. After his father left his mother and their seven children to be with another woman, Khadra’s respect for him decreased and he recognized the military academy as his true home. One summer, while the cadets spent their break at Port-aux-Poules, a camp fifty kilometers west of Oran, Khadra’s father paid his disillusioned son an impromptu visit:

His visit shook me, as though lightening zapped through me. But I stood my ground. Somewhere, I believe that he [Khadra’s father] will always be the man I used to think could be God, I just lost faith in him. He was not alone... A little ways away, a pregnant woman was watching me... I was not upset with him, no, I just felt like we did not have anything more to say to each other. This saddened me; I was much sadder than him, sadder than the entire world... For me, a universe had crumbled and an age had come to an end. Without giving him the chance to hold me back, I took a step back, brought my hand to my temple in an impeccable salute, turned around and returned to my instructors [*moniteurs*], to my *real* family... My heart had officially switched sides.<sup>137</sup>

At this point, Khadra accepts his military “family” as his “real” family. This passage is especially important because Khadra’s father had been a military hero during the Algerian war for independence, and in this encounter between father and son, Khadra seems to separate his identification with the military from his identification with his veteran father.

Khadra soon discovered, however, that his strong sense of belonging to his military family did not stop the high-ranking authorities from restricting his self-identification as a writer. In the army, no one was supposed to stand out or be special; everyone had to be on an equal plane so as not to jeopardize the established hierarchy of power. Khadra uses the following story to convey the strict limitations on personal attainment in the military. During Ramadan one year, some boys were late to the mess hall to eat the morning meal before the observation of the fast. When the supervisors did not let the tardy boys in, they began to kick at the doors and bang on the windows of the mess hall and their comrades eating inside the hall demanded that their peers be let in to eat. Chaos ensued, including a fight involving academy

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<sup>137</sup> Khadra, *L'Écrivain*, 92-93, emphasis in original.

officials and students who demanded to speak to the commander in chief of the academy. Since such mutiny had no precedent, the administration was unsure of how to handle such behavior.

During these events, Khadra had been sitting in a classroom working on a collection of short stories; he heard the commotion, but did not participate in the protests. Nonetheless, he received the blame and was punished for the cadets' behavior because all of the cadets talked about him. He was too popular and the military would not tolerate "celebrities" or "superstars." This marked his first encounter with military censorship and the reality that it would be difficult for him to pursue his aspirations to be a writer in the depersonalizing culture of the military. Though he would go on to publish nine works under his real name during his military career, Khadra later realized that the censorship prohibited him from writing the stories he truly wanted to share and decided to adopt his pseudonym to escape these restrictions.

In *L'Écrivain*, Khadra details the construction of his identity as a member of Algeria's armed forces and as a French writer. He strongly identified with his military family and his native Algeria, and also credits the military academies for promoting his early interest in writing and French literature. However, Khadra's embodiment of both an Algerian soldier and a French writer was challenged first by the military who rejected and suppressed his literary talents through censorship, and later by the French literary community who ostracized Khadra because of his military past. As a result, Khadra sees himself as an outsider: "If I had to sum up my life in one word, I would choose the word 'exclusion,' I feel like that word was created for me."<sup>138</sup> Khadra himself rejects all restrictive labels and others' attempts to limit who he is and how he expresses his identity. For Khadra, he is *l'écrivain*, the French writer. This self-identification allows for "Yasmina Khadra" and all that he/she represents—French literature, the Algerian military, and Algerian women—to coexist in peace: "To write is to be free."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Khadra, Merahi, *Qui êtes-vous*, 25.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

*Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*

Turning away from his own life, Khadra's novel, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, published in 2008, is significant to this study because of Khadra's development of Younes—the protagonist and the narrator of the novel—who embodies the individual divided between two cultures and two facets of his identity. Younes was a poor, illiterate Arab boy from the countryside, who was adopted by his well-to-do Arab uncle and his European wife at a young age. Renamed “Jonas,” the young boy becomes an assimilated, French-educated, young man living in a European-Algerian coastal town who struggles with his self-understanding as an Arab and as a “European” through education and assimilation.<sup>140</sup>

Khadra decided to situate this novel during the years Fanon and Memmi referenced when they wrote about the inevitability of revolt against the colonial system, and Khadra responds to the theorists' claims about the “native intellectual” through the character of Younes. The novel begins in the 1930s, chronicles the American forces' entry into Algeria during World War II, the 1950s and 1960s leading up to and during the Algerian War for Independence; the narrative is interrupted in 1964, and resumes in 2008 in the final chapter. Khadra's novel centers on a character who is pressured to pick “sides”—between the French or the Algerian side, between “Jonas” and “Younes”—but Younes ends up choosing not to “rebel” with the Algerian nationalists. Khadra thus explores the possibility for individual self-realization in ways other than revolt, challenging Fanon and Memmi's argument that rebellion against the colonizer was the only way for the colonized to satisfy his or her sense of justice and fully assert his or her humanity. In his sympathetic portrayal of Younes, Khadra demonstrates the difficulty of the choice between the two cultures and suggests that choosing not to fight and seeking harmony between seemingly opposing identities can be an act of defining oneself that is just as meaningful as choosing to fight.

One of the ways Khadra develops Younes' cross-cultural identity is by making him the adopted child of a mixed couple and his acquisition of a new name. Younes and his biological family relocated

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<sup>140</sup> I will refer to the protagonist of the novel by his Arabic name, “Younes.”

from the Algerian countryside to the slums of Oran when his father's fields were destroyed in a fire; in the slums, his father was robbed by a notorious mugger and lost all of his savings. As a result of these misfortunes, Younes' father entrusted the well-being of his only son to his brother, Mahi—a native Algerian—and his wife Germaine—a European. This mixed couple had no children of their own and ran a pharmacy together in the European part of Oran. Through Mahi and Germaine's marriage, Khadra demonstrates the possibility of shared partnership between the Europeans and the Algerians. Mahi and Germaine accepted Younes as their own and renamed him "Jonas." Though initially confused, Younes comes to accept his new name, which marked the beginning of his metamorphosis into an assimilated European man.

Khadra uses several key events in the novel to highlight the difficulties Younes faces in understanding and defending his self-identification with both Arabs and Europeans during a politically difficult period in Algeria. Most of the novel takes place in Río Salado, another Algerian coastal town a few miles away from Oran, where Younes moves with his adoptive family. The town's dual character reflects Younes' internal division, yet also reassures the young boy during his initial transition to living with his adoptive parents. Though Río Salado was primarily a European town, there were many vineyards and small farms and Younes connects with Río's agrarian character because it reminded him of his own rural roots, or his identity before his assimilation to European culture. Mesmerized by his radiant, sun-bathed, coastal surroundings, Younes feels right at home:

Born and raised in the fields, I recovered my old points of reference, the smell of agriculture and the silence of the earth. I was reborn as a farmer, happy to discover that my city clothes had not corrupted my soul. If the city was an illusion, the countryside will be an ever-deepening emotion.<sup>141</sup>

The idyll of Río, however, proves to be superficial as Younes struggles to reconcile his assimilated European identity with his native Algerian identity in the face of opposition. One day in elementary school, Younes witnesses the humiliation of one of his Algerian classmates who, having

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<sup>141</sup> Yasmina Khadra, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, (Paris, France: Julliard, 2008), 123.



forgotten his homework, is forced to stand in front of the class and attribute his absentmindedness to the supposed faineance of his “race.” Appalled and embarrassed for his classmate, Younes comes home from school angry and asks his adoptive father if Arabs are lazy. Mahi replies, “We are not lazy. We just take the time to live... for [the Europeans], time is money. For us, time has no price attached to it. A cup of tea is sufficient for our happiness, but for them, no happiness is enough.”<sup>142</sup> This early embarrassment in elementary school shows Younes that while his identification with native Algerians was something positive—as evidenced by Mahi’s comparison with Europeans—his choice to continue to identify with this group would come at the cost of negative stereotypes. Even though he becomes more Europeanized and successfully joins up with a group of European boys in Ríó who treat him as an equal and as a friend, Younes is never able to escape completely the uncomfortable encounters with racism that result from his continued, albeit, at times unintentional, identification with native Algerians.

As a young adult, Younes is increasingly unsure of where he stands in relation to his European friends and the native Algerians whose mistreatment he sometimes witnesses. He is aware of his “exceptionalism” since his European friends do not openly discriminate against him, but this puts him in an uncomfortable position vis-à-vis the native Algerians with whom he still identifies and who identify with him intentionally or unintentionally. This *entre-deux* position makes Younes especially vulnerable when the Algerian war for independence breaks out and he is still uncertain of which “side” he is really on. Khadra demonstrates the young man’s dilemma through several encounters Younes has with his European friends and Jelloul, his friend André’s Arab valet.

During one such encounter, Younes and his European friends are spending the day at the beach during a serious heat wave. However, the young men’s fun swimming and drinking cold drinks, is punctuated by André sending Jelloul on petty errands back and forth from the beach to Ríó on foot. The fourth time André sends Jelloul back to the village, two of Younes’ friends, Fabrice and José, increasingly

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<sup>142</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 94.

disturbed by André's intentionally poor treatment of Jelloul, directly confront André, while Younes remains silent:

- “It's the only way to keep him awake,” André said, putting his arms behind his head. “If you let him alone one second, you'll hear him snoring.”
  - “It's at least 37 degrees [Celsius],” José pleaded. “The poor devil is skin and bones like you and me. He's going to get sunstroke....”
  - “This is none of your business José, you don't have any valets... the Arabs are like octopi [*poulpes*]; you have to beat them into submission.”
- Realizing that I [Younes] was one of them, he rectified:  
 -“Well... some Arabs.”<sup>143</sup>

Once André moves out of earshot, Fabrice confronts Younes about his silence:

- “You should have shut him up, Jonas.”
- “On what subject,” I said, disgusted.
- “The Arabs. What he said was unacceptable and I was waiting for you to put him in his place.”
- “He already is in his place, Fabrice. I don't know mine.”<sup>144</sup>

Younes' last reply demonstrates the young man's uncertainty about his place in the colonial dynamic of European dominance and his ambiguous place among his friends. This ambiguity is also felt by Younes' friends, evident in the way Fabrice calls him “Jonas”—his European name—even as he expects Younes to defend Jelloul as a fellow Arab. However, faced with André's continued mistreatment of Jelloul, Younes eventually can no longer afford to be silent and has to confront his anomalous situation as an Arab among Europeans.

Interactions between Jelloul and Younes again show the young man the degrading price attached to his Algerian identity, but also reveal for Younes an alternative to his silence: fighting in the Algerian resistance during the war for independence. During the first of these encounters with the valet away from his European friends, Younes gets a glimpse of the grim circumstances of Jelloul's life. This revelation is important because although Younes lived in poverty before his adoption, he is now accustomed to a different way of life and he is greatly disturbed by the depressing conditions in which Jelloul and the other Arabs live and the squalor in front of him offends him as an Algerian. One evening, Jelloul comes

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<sup>143</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 145-146.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

to Younes in need of money to feed his family for a few days because André had brutally beat him and then sent him away without paying him. While Younes is appalled and does not hesitate to give the valet some of his pocket money, Jelloul assures him that André will call him back to work for him sooner rather than later: “André can’t do without me. He’ll come get me before the end of the week. He won’t find a better dog on the market.”<sup>145</sup> When Younes asks Jelloul why he characterizes himself in such a harsh manner, Jelloul offers this reply:

You, you can’t understand. You are one of *us*, but you live *their* lifestyle... When you are the only breadwinner of a family composed of a half-crazy mother, a double-amputee father, six brothers and sisters, a grandmother, two disgraced aunts and their kids, and an uncle who is sick year-round, you stop being human... Between the dog and the jackal, the docile beast chooses to have a master.<sup>146</sup>

According to Jelloul, Younes is an Arab, but because he is removed from the current reality of how most Arabs live under the colonial system, it would be difficult for him to fully assume this identity, which, for Younes, is not what he wants to do anyway.

When Younes takes Jelloul back to his *douar* on the back of his bike, he has the experience of the “other world” that shocks him out of his complacency. There, he is struck by the stark economic division between the European and Arab communities and his eyes are opened to the exploitation and misery of his people. Upon their arrival at the edge of the Arab village, Younes, repulsed by the overwhelming filth and stench emanating from the hamlet, watches in alarm as little boys play naked in the dust as flies buzzed noisily around the whole establishment. Jelloul senses his companion’s uneasiness and mocks Younes’ distance from the community he should or could identify with, reinforcing his previous statement that Younes simply cannot understand what the Arabs are going through since his level of assimilation grants him certain privileges:

This is how our people live, Jonas. Our people who are also your people. Except that they remain stagnant while you’re taking it easy... What’s wrong? Why aren’t you saying anything? You can’t believe it, right? ... Now I hope you understand why I was talking to you about being a dog. Even animals would not accept to fall so low.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 186.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* ; emphasis in original.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

Sick to his stomach with the collective despair and the foul odors before him, Younes tries not to vomit as Jelloul continues, “Take a good look at this hellhole. This is our place in this country, the country of our ancestors. Take a good look, Jonas. God has never passed through here.”<sup>148</sup> Horrified, Younes mounts his bike and turns around to leave as Jelloul shouts after him, “That’s right *Younes*. Turn your back on the truth about your people and run back to your friends... *Younes*... I hope that you still remember your name... Hey! *Younes*... The world is changing, haven’t you noticed?”<sup>149</sup> By exposing Younes to the truth about the Arabs’ situation in Algeria and calling him by his Arab name, Jelloul hopes to get a reaction out of Younes and motivate him to take action to better their collective situation.

Jelloul successfully forces Younes to evaluate his identity as an Arab not solely based on how his European friends and other Europeans see him, but in the context of the harsh reality he witnessed firsthand in Jelloul’s village. This generates an inner turmoil that troubles Younes into his mid-twenties, when the outbreak of war is imminent. Torn between loyalty to his European friends and solidarity with his people, Younes often escapes to Oran by himself to get away from the drama of Río Salado. While alone, he questions himself and tries to sort out his grief:

Who was I, in Río? Jonas or Younes? Why, when my friends laughed heartily, my laugh lagged behind theirs? Why did I always feel like I had to carve out a space for myself among my friends, and feel like I was guilty of something whenever Jelloul’s eyes met mine? Was I tolerated, integrated, subdued? What was stopping me from fully being *me*, to personify the world in which I evolved, to identify myself with that world while I turned my back on *my people*? A shadow. I was a shadow, indecisive and sensitive.<sup>150</sup>

Younes’ questioning of himself is reminiscent of Feraoun’s plea in his journal, begging to be assigned a label and a course of action to follow that would alleviate how conflicted he feels.

André’s father, a wealthy vineyard owner, becomes an unlikely source of advice for the troubled young man as the next stage of his relationship with Jelloul unfolds. Just before the outbreak of the war in 1954, Jelloul is falsely accused of murdering Younes’ friend José, André’s brother, and is hauled off by the police to be executed. Unable to save her son, Jelloul’s mother comes to Younes to beg him to

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<sup>148</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 189.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid* ; emphasis in original.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 284 ; emphasis in original.

convince Andre and José's father to stop her son's execution. An embarrassed Younes attempts to reason with his friends' father in Jelloul's favor, but to no avail, and André's father recommends that Younes be more concerned about saving his own skin and turn a blind eye to the reality of how the Algerians are really treated:

-“Jelloul could be innocent.”

-“Are you kidding? I have employed Arabs for generations, and I know what they are. They are all snakes... That viper confessed. He was condemned. I will personally make sure that his head falls into the basket... This is very serious Jonas. This is not a punch to the face, but a real war. This country is shaking, this is no time to play both sides of fence. We have to come down just and hard. No leniency will be tolerated. These crazed murderers need to understand that we won't back down. Every bastard we catch must pay for the rest of them...”

-“His [Jelloul's] family came to see me...”

-“Jonas, my poor Jonas,” he interrupted me, “you have no idea what you're talking about. Young man, you were well-brought up, you are integrated, and intelligent. Stay out of this hooligan business. You won't be as confused.”<sup>151</sup>

Unlike the day at the beach, this time Younes does try to defend Jelloul, but André's father is more preoccupied with the bigger picture of what he saw as Arab insubordination. As a result, he recommends that Younes not “play both sides of the fence” and instead choose to disengage from the turmoil entirely to avoid discomfort.

This is not the end of Younes' engagement with Jelloul. Jelloul is able to escape execution when one of the prison transport vehicles' tires goes flat and the vehicle plunges head first into a pit. He quickly joins the Algerian resistance movement, and seeks Younes' help when one of his leaders is injured. The leader needs a safe place to rest, and, because Younes' adoptive parents run a pharmacy, the resistance fighters can gather the medical supplies they need to continue their fight against the French armies. Thus, Jelloul and a group of resistance fighters forcefully occupy Younes' home. Following André's father's advice, Younes had kept to himself and had not contributed to the war on one side or the other, but Jelloul again challenges Younes to face the reality of what the war means for his future and the Algerian people:

-“Everything is fine and dandy for you, huh? ...The war doesn't concern you. You're still taking it easy while we're hitting a brick wall in the *maquis* [resistance]... When will you pick a side? You'll have to decide eventually...”

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<sup>151</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 302.

-“I don’t like war.”

-“It’s not about liking or disliking war. Our people are rising up. We are tired of suffering in silence. Of course, you with your butt between two chairs, you can maneuver at will. You can pick the side that benefits you.”<sup>152</sup>

Jelloul mocks what he sees as his noncombatant peer’s concern only with saving his own skin, “the war claims hundreds of lives every day and doesn’t affect you. I would shoot you like a dog if I wasn’t indebted to you... Actually, can you explain why I have a hard time calling you Younes?”<sup>153</sup> Because Younes refuses to participate in the war at all Jelloul has a hard time respecting Younes’ “Arab-” or “Algerian-ness.”

In another attempt to encourage Younes to join the resistance, Jelloul places a fully loaded revolver in Younes’ hands; “the coolness of the metal sent chills down [Younes’] spine.”<sup>154</sup> When Younes protests Jelloul’s gesture, the latter disparages him; “Frankly Younes, my heart bleeds for you. Only the lowest of the low would pass over such a grand destiny,” he spits before taking the revolver back.<sup>155</sup> Frustrated and personally offended, Jelloul tries to get Younes to understand how his fate is linked to that of the rest of the Arabs, whether he acknowledges it or not, and that he should do something to help their cause:

You’re nothing but a coward. What’s happening in the villages bombarded with napalm, in the prisons where our heroes are guillotined, in the *maquis* where we scrape up our dead, in the camps where our militants are languishing, you don’t see any of it. What kind of maniac are you, Jonas? Don’t you understand that a whole population is fighting for your own redemption? ... You’re nothing but a coward, nothing but a coward. Whether you frown or gird your loins nothing changes. I wonder what’s stopping me from slitting your throat...<sup>156</sup>

At this point, Younes decides to take a stand and reveal to Jelloul how he truly feels about his decision not to participate in the resistance:

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<sup>152</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 337.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

-“What do you know about cowardice, Jelloul? Who do you think really embodies that character trait? The unarmed man who has a gun pointed at his head or the one who threatens to blow out his brains?”

He glared at me with disgust.

-“I am not a coward, Jelloul. I am not deaf or blind, and I am not made of concrete. If you must know, nothing on this earth matters to me. Not even the gun that allows you to treat others with contempt. Was it not humiliation that compelled you to carry a weapon in the first place? Why then are you also demeaning others?”<sup>157</sup>

Younes turns the tables on Jelloul when he argues that not carrying a gun is an act of bravery.

Khadra shows that personal choice is powerful in shaping an individual’s identity since Younes, uncertain about where he stands in the politically dangerous context of the Algerian War, reserves the right not to fight. This exchange between the two characters allows Khadra, through Younes, to criticize the resistance fighters as equally cowardly as those defending colonialism. Khadra again presents his disagreement with Fanon and Memmi, and suggests that violence and revolt are not the answer to ending the “native intellectual’s” identity conflict.

Shortly after Jelloul’s departure from his house, in an attempt to participate in the war effort in a nonviolent fashion, Younes decides to provide medical supplies from his pharmacy to help the resistance’s infirmary, who send him a weekly list of needs that Younes then delivers. He is eventually caught during one of these exchanges and arrested by the French military for collaboration with the resistance. Enduring physical and mental torture at the hands of his captors, who are intent on obtaining information about the resistance, Younes remains silent and does not betray the Algerian fighters or reveal anyone’s names. He is rescued from torture and further questioning by a notable European from Río Salado—Pépé Rucillio—who advocates for his release.

The reader comes to see how much Younes has changed from the day on the beach through the description of his encounter with his now-widowed, adoptive European mother, Germaine. Upon returning home from detention by the French military, Younes is more interested in knowing how Pépé Rucillio was able to save him than he is in comforting his worried mother. In response to Younes’ stoic

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<sup>157</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 343.

and jaded attitude, Germaine's initial happiness to see her son alive evaporates. Younes harshly questions her about how his release was arranged, and Germaine becomes angry and resentful of her adopted son's seeming ungratefulness. Younes describes their falling-out: "I understood that the cord that kept me attached to her had just been unraveled, that the woman who had been everything to me—my mother, my fairy godmother, my sister, my accomplice, my confidant and my friend—now only saw a stranger in me."<sup>158</sup> The distance between them saddened Younes—a sentiment that brings to mind Feraoun's sorrow over the loss of "mother" France.

Jelloul and Younes have one final encounter when the war ends in the spring of 1962 when Jelloul repays Younes for the money he lent him and for taking him home on his bike years ago. Jelloul, now a lieutenant in the Algerian army, sends a car to Río to bring Younes to Oran. One of Younes' European friends—Jean-Christophe—had been a militant in the *Organization de l'armée secrete*, a pro-colonialism French terrorist organization that operated during the war for Algerian independence. Jelloul made sure that Younes' friend stayed alive in captivity so that Younes could be the one to set him free at the end of the conflict; Jelloul confides in Younes as he leads him to the cell where Jean-Christophe was detained:

I have not forgotten the day when you gave me money and took me back to my village on your bike. For you, it was nothing. For me, it was a revelation: I had just discovered that the Arab, the fine Arab, the Arab dignified and generous was not an old myth, nor was the Arab what the *colon* made of him... I am not learned enough to explain exactly what happened in my head that day, but it changed my life.<sup>159</sup>

The day that Younes took Jelloul home was significant for both individuals. Younes' eyes were opened to the misery of most Algerians and the divide between the colonizer and the colonized and Jelloul saw that Younes was not one of "them"—the Europeans—but an Arab or an Algerian. After symbolically freeing Jean-Christophe, Younes stays in Río Salado—renamed El Malah after independence—and continues to live there in the present day when the novel ends.

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<sup>158</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 352.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.



At the end of the novel, Younes appears to be comfortable in his own skin. He chooses to remain in Algeria after the war and maintains close ties with his European friends. They accept Younes for who he is, which points to the possibility of fraternity between the Algerians and the Europeans. The novel concludes with Younes and his European friends gathered in Aix-en-Provence to pay their respects to Émilie—the wife of one of their deceased friends—who recently passed away. Younes and his friends talk about the Algeria that they knew, before independence, and Younes updates everyone on the current state of affairs in Ríó/El Malah and in Algeria. Called over the intercom in the airport to report to his gate to catch his plane back to Oran as “Monsieur Mahieddine Younes,” the protagonist is at peace with both his Algerian-ness—since he uses his Arab name—as well as his ties to the European community.

In conclusion, in *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, Khadra uses Younes’ character to explore different ways an individual can reconcile a cross-cultural identity and strong allegiances to both France and Algeria. Younes first became the European-assimilated “Jonas” who remained silent on the situation of his people because of his uncertainty and discomfort with his ambiguous position in the colonial dynamic of European dominance. Challenged by Jelloul and his own conscience, he later chose to participate to a limited extent in the Algerian resistance movement, before finally experiencing relief at the end of the war. The story picks up in 2008, when we see that Younes, now an old man, has found ways to unapologetically embrace and combine all facets of his identity—similar to Menrad Fouroulou, Mouloud Feraoun, and Khadra. This final reconciliation refutes Fanon and Memmi’s claims about the “native intellectual” being eventually forced to decisively and irredeemably choose one identity over the other; Khadra defends his own and his character’s right to enjoy a hybrid identity and see themselves as both French and Algerian.

### *Conclusion*

Two of Yasmina Khadra’s works analyzed in this paper—*L’Écrivain* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*—deal with the concept of the divided self; Khadra is personally familiar with the difficulty of

identity conflicts, having experienced censorship from the military milieu because of his vocation to be a writer and rejection from the literary community as a result of his military past. *L'Écrivain*, Khadra's autobiography, discusses the impossibility of combining his compelling desire to be a French writer in the tough environment of military academies. *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* is a romance novel whose protagonist, Younes, is unsure of his feelings about his place among his friends, among his own people, and in the war for Algerian independence. Through the character Jelloul, Khadra emphasizes the evolution of Younes' understanding of what it meant to be European or Arab in Algeria and Younes is eventually able to come to terms with the different facets of his identity and no longer question his place colonial and postcolonial Algeria.

Khadra's own struggles with identity as a writer and as a military officer contributed to the realism and the honesty of his autobiography and transpire in the character of Younes. Khadra's writings contain an overarching humanist message that cooperation between differing cultures—military and literary, and French and Arab or Algerian—was and is possible through the universal emotion of love. Love for family—military for Khadra a mix of Arab and European parents for Younes; love for country—Algeria; and love of friends—European for Younes and fellow cadets for Khadra, which provided relief for the discomfort of the divided self in Khadra's view. These strong emotional connections to different facets of his identity allow individuals to comfortably self-identify as whatever they choose, even in the face of opposition from others or when different identities seem to contradict each other. In this way, Khadra is free to identify as an Arab female writer, a high-ranking military man, and as a French writer. Younes is free to identify as an Algerian fighting or not fighting for Algeria's independence, and as an adopted, Europeanized boy of mixed parents who frequents an almost exclusively European group of friends. In this way, Khadra rejects Fanon and Memmi's theories about the native intellectual, who, according to them, cannot espouse two opposing identities and eventually gives up trying to identify with the colonizer in favor of his indigenous culture. Throughout his life, Khadra sought to prove that his

multiple identities could co-exist in harmony, and that each facet of his identity—French, Algerian, military, and literary—could achieve a level of peaceful, mutual understanding.

### Chapter III

#### Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate*

“I wanted ‘something else’ to live for. And that ‘something else’ had to come from my heart.” –Mariama Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 2000 <sup>160</sup>

The next two chapters focusing on the writings of Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul shed light on women's experiences of identity formation in another former French colony: Senegal. Similarities and differences between the self-understandings of Feraoun, Khadra and their characters and Bâ, Bugul and their female characters highlight the different ways the French were present in Algeria and Senegal and how the concerns of the female characters both resemble and differ from their male counterparts in other former colonies.

In Mariama Bâ's book, *Une si longue lettre*, the recently widowed protagonist Ramatoulaye, similar to Mouloud Feraoun, is a schoolteacher. She is able to support herself and her children and this allows her to resist pressure to remarry in postcolonial Senegal after the death of her husband. Ramatoulaye's identity is not simply rooted in her children nor in her deceased husband, but is forged from her education. Through this character and other educated female characters in her books, Bâ argues that women are liberated through their French education to determine their own futures and form their own identities. This chapter demonstrates this theme by looking at conflicts between matriarchal characters and educated female characters in Bâ's books, *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate* and the specific ways in which these educated women took advantage of the freedom that their education afforded them and defined themselves in relation to their postcolonial Senegalese societies.

As opposed to the experiences of Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra in colonial and postcolonial Algeria, the women in Bâ's novels are not positioning themselves within a highly politicized society where taking a stand on identity could endanger their lives. Bâ and Bugul's characters establish their identities in less acute contexts but still at some personal cost. Access to a French education is

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<sup>160</sup> Bâ, *Une Si Longue Lettre*, 102.

central to these women's identities just as it was for the Algerian authors and their characters. Though the promise of full-fledged French citizenship went unfulfilled in Senegal, as in Algeria, access to a French education was still powerful for Senegalese women as demonstrated in Bâ's novels.

### *Girls' education in AOF*

I will start with a review of the history of colonial education in Senegal since the subjects of this chapter and the following one—Mariama Bâ, Ken Bugul, and the female characters in their books—were educated either under the French colonial education system or the very similar postcolonial education system. Senegal was part of the larger French West African colony—*L'Afrique Française Occidentale (AOF)*—from 1895 to 1958. The French had been present as traders in Senegal since the fourteenth century and established Saint-Louis as a permanent settlement in 1659 at the mouth of the Senegal River.<sup>161</sup> Formally organized in 1895, AOF was a vast territory, nine times the size of France, composed of modern day Mauritania, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Benin.

During most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French in Senegal were preoccupied by military operations to bring the rest of the interior of the country under French control. Thus, as in the métropole, education in AOF was the charge of the clergy. Protestant and Catholic missionaries in West Africa could receive state funds for providing education to the local inhabitants.<sup>162</sup> Primary education was officially organized in 1847 in the Four Communes—the coastal towns of Saint-Louis, Rufisque, Gorée Island, and Dakar—and the families there insisted that their children be taught using the same curriculum as that used in metropolitan France. The newly founded, state-sponsored primary schools were run by Les Frères Ploërmel—French Catholic missionaries—and, as far as the ruling classes of the Communes were concerned, they did their job well.<sup>163</sup> Missionaries were also active educators in the interior of Senegal and throughout AOF and hoped to achieve a Christianization of the region through their pupils. These

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<sup>161</sup> Vanderbort, "Senegal in 1848."

<sup>162</sup> Marie-Laurence Bayet, "L'enseignement primaire au Sénégal de 1903 à 1920," *Revue française de pédagogie* 20, (1972): 35.

<sup>163</sup> Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 77.

primary schools saw great success among the Europeans and *assimilés*, a term referring to the “Senegalese from the Four Communes who had successfully assimilated French culture;” by 1903, “the entire male Christian population of the Four Communes had already been educated at the primary level.”<sup>164</sup>

A decree from November 24, 1903, established a federal school system in Senegal of free and secular—but not compulsory—schools for Africans in the interior of the country. This decree divided primary education into three types: village, urban, and regional. Though primary education initially targeted boys, the decree anticipated the creation of schools for girls whenever the demand for them arose.<sup>165</sup> From the beginning, the missionaries in French West Africa believed that the Christianized education of girls was crucial to converting the future wife’s husband and children to the Christian faith and ensuring the spread of Catholicism in Africa.<sup>166</sup> The colonial administration in turn recognized that female education was necessary to the civilizing mission. In the aftermath of World War I, Georges Hardy, the inspector of Education in AOF, outlined the colonial government’s hope to strengthen the relationship between the French colonizers and their colonial subjects through the spread of the French language:

When we bring a boy to the French school, we gain an individual; when we bring a girl there, we gain an individual multiplied by the number of children she will have... When mothers speak French, the children will learn it without difficulty and will come to us already roughly formed; for them, French will become, in the true sense of the word, a mother tongue.<sup>167</sup>

The recruitment of female students to the French primary schools proved difficult, however. African families eyed the French *écoles laïques* with suspicion and generally favored the missionary schools because the clergy assured the girls’ fathers that the domestic-centered curriculum of the

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<sup>164</sup> Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 77.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>166</sup> Pascale Barthélémy, *Africaines et Diplômées à L’époque Coloniale (1918-1957)*, Rennes, France: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010, 35 ; Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa 1895-1960*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 65.

<sup>167</sup> White, *Children of the French Empire*, 67.

missionary schools would keep their daughters “useful” at home.<sup>168</sup> A lack of female teachers in the French schools also dissuaded African families from sending their daughters to these schools.<sup>169</sup> African families feared that sending their girls to be educated would upset the hierarchy of men over women and disrupt the traditional reverence for elders.<sup>170</sup> To combat these concerns and increase the numbers of girls attending school, the colonial administration embarked on a public relations campaign of sorts and sent out male African instructors to talk to local families about the benefits of French schooling for their daughters while assuring them that the focus of the programs would be domestic. French women—usually the wives of European schoolteachers or colonial administrators—were also deployed across the colony to convince families to send their girls to French schools.<sup>171</sup> These efforts paid off and the number of girls receiving a primary education across AOF increased from 1,638 in 1910 to 8,795 in 1935.<sup>172</sup>

The void left by the numerous African men recruited to fight for France during World War I was felt particularly in the medical field and in education. The colonial government turned to African women to fill these roles and began to provide higher education. *L'École de médecine de l'AOF* in Dakar opened its doors in January 1918, and that fall, a section for midwives was inaugurated.<sup>173</sup> Mirroring concerns in the *métropole* about infant mortality and increasing and fortifying the population, the colonial officials sought to train Africans to adopt better sanitary measures to preserve the lives of their children from birth.<sup>174</sup> These measures included convincing pregnant women to consult a doctor (if possible), dispelling traditional remedies for ills, and ensuring safe deliveries of infants.<sup>175</sup> Initially, midwives were trained similarly to the contemporaneous “health visitors” in the United States.<sup>176</sup> These women were to be intermediaries between the doctors and the local people, watching over the hygiene practices of pregnant

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<sup>168</sup> Barthélémy, *Africaines et Diplômées*, 38.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

and nursing mothers and their infants, and teaching the local populations how to avoid illnesses.<sup>177</sup>

Opportunities for higher education for women were broadened when the Front Populaire government established plans for the creation of an *école normale* for girls similar to the *École normale William Ponty* that had been in place for boys in AOF since 1903.<sup>178</sup> L'École normale des jeunes filles opened its doors in 1938 in Rufisque, Senegal, under the direction of Germaine Le Goff; this school prepared girls to become schoolteachers.

As director of the *École normale*, Le Goff hoped to create women worthy of the male African *évolué*: “All these doctors, accountants, communications workers [*employés des postes*] and number of *évolué* men that we are creating in a constant stream according to the needs of the colony, whom will they marry?”<sup>179</sup> Le Goff expressed concern for the inequality between the education of boys and girls and wanted to prevent “intellectual divorce” between future spouses and sought to contribute to the formation of husbands and wives who would “share the same values and have the same material and intellectual expectations.”<sup>180</sup>

The next milestone for education in AOF occurred following World War II when the colonial education system changed drastically to conform to the metropolitan model. Prior to 1947, any diploma conferred in AOF was only valid in the territory in which it was issued.<sup>181</sup> The newly inaugurated Fourth Republic in France created the French Union, thus changing the status of AOF from colony to overseas territory (*territoire d'outre-mer*).<sup>182</sup> While the alignment of programs between West Africa and France widened educational opportunities for women, these reforms often had the negative effect of prolonging a girls' educational *cursus*, leading to fewer recruits and an increase in drop outs.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Barthélémy, *Africaines et Diplômées*, 30.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.



By the 1950s, the *École de médecine* established in 1918, and the other schools of higher education in Dakar were combined to form the *Institut des Hautes Études de Dakar*.<sup>184</sup> In 1957, the *Institut des Hautes Études* became the University of Dakar and the eighteenth university of France and was linked to the Universities of Bordeaux and Paris to ensure the equivalency of the degrees conferred.<sup>185</sup> Following Senegalese independence in 1960, the *Institut Français d'Afrique Noire*—a research center for African studies created by the French government in 1936 also in Dakar—was incorporated into the University of Dakar.<sup>186</sup> Along with other newly independent countries, Senegal made education a priority and it was often the largest item in these new states' budgets.<sup>187</sup> The education of girls, however, continues to lag behind that of boys at every educational level.<sup>188</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century, the French colonial education system in Senegal encouraged the enrollment of girls—to spread the French language and culture across the colony—and by the mid-century, girls not only had access to primary education, but also to higher education. Despite the small number of girls who were able to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them, those who did attend school and succeed were often deeply affected by the education that they received. I argue in this paper that the educated women in Bâ's novels establish their own identities and are aware of the freedoms that their education affords them. In the previous chapters, I examined Feraoun and Khadra's defense of hybrid identities against Fanon and Memmi's claims about the “native intellectual” and the necessity of violence and revolt. The bitter tension Fanon and Memmi ascribe to the efforts of the colonized to assimilate speaks to the experience of Senegalese women educated in the French system differently. I will use Bâ's educated female characters' interactions with matriarchal characters in the novels—who challenge the young women's identities and freedoms—to draw out how these educated

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<sup>184</sup> Maelenn-Kégni Touré, “Cheikh Anta Diop University (1957--),” *The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed*, Accessed July 16, 2014, <http://www.blackpast.org/gah/cheikh-anta-diop-university-1957>.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 111.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

women see themselves and how they assess the (im)possibility of assimilation. Through these inter-female interactions, Bâ educated characters demonstrate an interest in breaking with traditional female roles and assert their freedoms gained through their education. The educated women's conflicts with their patriarchs point to these female characters' desires to live a modern lifestyle while still conserving their morality. This desire to maintain a modernized or westernized identity while living according to ethical standards mirrors Feraoun and Khadra's insistence on their hybrid identities of French and Algerian, and writer and soldier.

Mariama Bâ was herself both a young educated woman and later a matriarch. She was born in Dakar, Senegal in 1929.<sup>189</sup> Her mother died young and her World War I veteran father was active in the colonial administration, later becoming the minister of public health in the Senegalese transitional government.<sup>190</sup> Bâ's maternal grandmother raised her in an Islamic environment, and Bâ's father had to convince his mother-in-law to send his daughter to French school. Her primary education complete, Bâ was prepared for a career as a secretary when her school director insisted that she sit for the newly inaugurated *École normale* exam "for her own good and the honor of the school."<sup>191</sup> After Bâ obtained that year's best score on the exam, the same school director persuaded both her grandmother and her father to allow Bâ to continue her studies further and she entered the *École normale* in 1943 at the age of fourteen.<sup>192</sup> Four years later, Bâ graduated and became a schoolteacher and later an inspector of schools. Bâ married and divorced three times and had thirteen children before establishing herself independently in Dakar. She died suddenly at 52 in 1981.<sup>193</sup>

The two books by Mariama Bâ that I have chosen to read for this portion of the study are *Une si longue lettre* and *Un chant écarlate*. These books both feature complex interactions between mothers,

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<sup>189</sup> Barbara Celarent, "Une Si Longue Lettre by Mariama Bâ; So Long a Letter by Mariama Bâ," *American Journal of Sociology* 116, no. 4 (January 2011): 1391.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.; Barthélémy, Pascale. "La formation des institutrices africaines en A.O.F. : pour une lecture historique du roman de Mariama Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*." *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, no. 6 (November, 1997) : 2.

<sup>193</sup> Celarent, "Une Si Longue Lettre," 1392.

mothers-in-law, and the younger educated women in their lives, which highlight the ways in which the younger women viewed themselves and the freedoms that they had access to. The self-definitions of these educated women are important for understanding how access to a French education impacted their lives, for how they sought to combine traditional morals with a modern lifestyle, and for a glimpse into how they lived and aspired to live in postcolonial Senegal and beyond.

### *Une si longue lettre*

Bâ's first novel, *Une si longue lettre*, was published in 1979. The story takes place in Dakar in the post-independence period. The first-person narrative is organized as a series of letters that the protagonist, Ramatoulaye, writes to her best friend, Aïssatou. Recently widowed, Ramatoulaye, a schoolteacher and mother of twelve, writes to Aïssatou during her mandated forty days of mourning according to Islamic practice, at the end of which Aïssatou will be able to come visit her. The epistolary format allows Ramatoulaye to recount flashbacks and memories of her own life and Aïssatou's life.

*Une si longue lettre* features five matriarch-child relationships in which the mother figures exercise considerable power over their female children or relatives' lives. The first involves the protagonist Ramatoulaye and her own mother. The second opposes Ramatoulaye's friend, Aïssatou—to whom the letters in the book are addressed—and her mother-in-law, Seynabou. Dame Belle-mère and Binetou, Ramatoulaye's young co-wife, comprise the third pair. Fourth is Ramatoulaye and her own daughters, and finally, Ramatoulaye's relationship with her future son-in-law. Each matriarch-child relationship involves conflict surrounding the education of women and, commonly, its impact on romantic relationships, especially the choice of a spouse. Couples in this novel are married in peace when the mothers and mothers-in-law are on board with their children's relationship choices, but conflict ensues when mothers and mothers-in-law put pressure on their children to choose spouses they prefer instead.

Bâ's protagonist, Ramatoulaye, is the first example: she marries a man that her mother and father do not approve of. A man named Daouda Dieng, a Senegalese doctor, gave Ramatoulaye's mother gifts of rice and other much-appreciated necessities during the shortages of World War II.<sup>194</sup> Despite her mother's preference for Daouda Dieng, Ramatoulaye, "freed from frustrating taboos" and "capable of making decisions" after receiving her French education, chooses to marry Modou Fall, a lawyer she loved from her school days while she studied to become a schoolteacher.<sup>195</sup> Students within the *École normale de jeunes filles de l'AOF*—which Bâ attended—were taught to believe in an ideal of monogamous romantic love based on partnership and Germaine Le Goff hoped that her students would go on to marry men of their choosing.<sup>196</sup> Ramatoulaye views herself as free to make her own decision regarding whom she would marry, despite the disapproval of her parents, especially her mother. Bâ's protagonist also negotiates a position between traditional ethics and modernity: Ramatoulaye adheres to Islamic tradition by mourning for forty days after her husband's death, but as a young girl she went against her mother's wishes—"freed from frustrating taboos"—and married the man of her choice.

The next matriarchal conflict occurs between Ramatoulaye's friend, Aïssatou, and her mother-in-law, Seynabou. Aïssatou's marriage to Mawdo Bâ, Seynabou's son, is controversial because he is from an old aristocratic family. Seynabou, is a Toucouleur "Dioufène, Guélewar du Sine" while Aïssatou is the daughter of a jeweler.<sup>197</sup> Senegal's rigid caste-like social structure, so far unbreakable despite religion and colonial assimilationist policies, is one of the main social problems plaguing the country in the post-independence period.<sup>198</sup> Marriages outside of caste groups are extremely rare across all ethnic groups in Senegal and the terms *bijoutier* (jeweler) and *tisserand* (weaver), indicating the artisan classes, have slight contempt attached to them, and such groups have to live on the outskirts of traditional Wolof villages.<sup>199</sup> For Seynabou, her only son's marriage to a woman of a lesser caste is embarrassing and makes her angry

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<sup>194</sup> Bâ, *Une Si Longue Lettre*, 28.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> Barthélémy, *Africaines et Diplômées*, 144.

<sup>197</sup> Bâ, *Une Si Longue Lettre*, 30.

<sup>198</sup> Michael Crowder, *Senegal: A Study in French Assimilation Policy*, (London: Methuen & Co, 1967), 110.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-111.

enough to seek revenge against Aïssatou, at least according to Ramatoulaye.<sup>200</sup> Seynabou returns to the region of her ancestors to recuperate her niece, also named Nabou, whom she decides to raise and train as a worthy future wife for her son.<sup>201</sup> Initially unaware of Seynabou's plan, Ramatoulaye aids in the young Nabou's enrollment in the local French school and she grows up to become a midwife.<sup>202</sup>

One day, Ramatoulaye recounts, Seynabou announced to her son that his uncle had given him the young Nabou as his wife, and if Mawdo refused to marry her, Seynabou would never get over his refusal and die of shame and sadness.<sup>203</sup> Aïssatou is ignorant of her mother-in-law's plans for revenge and did not take the news well that she was going to have a co-wife.<sup>204</sup> Ramatoulaye describes how her friend felt pushed aside by her husband and her mother-in-law:

And so, you did not matter anymore, Aïssatou. The time and love you invested into your household? Quickly forgotten. Your sons? They were nothing compared to this reconciliation between a mother and her only son; you did not matter anymore than your four sons who would never be the equals of young Nabou's sons.<sup>205</sup>

Mawdo wanted Aïssatou to stay, but she could not bear to watch her husband go off to be with his other wife every other day.<sup>206</sup> She decided to divorce her husband, and took her four sons with her.<sup>207</sup> Aïssatou, who was working as a schoolteacher and was educated alongside Ramatoulaye, was taught through her French education that monogamy was the key to a happy, romantic marriage and that polygamy was considered primitive and an obstacle to the assimilation of Africans to French culture and civilization. Finding polygamous marriage repulsive, Aïssatou wrote her husband a farewell letter—which Ramatoulaye reproduces—where she detailed her feelings of betrayal, reminded her husband that real love is separate from procreation and her mother-in-law's approval, and expressed her

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<sup>200</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 42-43.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-47.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

disappointment that her husband was choosing to do away with their happiness as a couple simply to please his mother.<sup>208</sup>

Ramatoulaye describes how Aïssatou's education enabled her to leave a marriage that she did not wish to participate in any longer. She was able to rent a house and support herself and her children while preparing to pass exams to study in France.<sup>209</sup> Full of admiration for her friend, Ramatoulaye writes about Aïssatou's resilience and focus on the future which helped her achieve her goals, and the power of words and books:

[Books] had become your [Aïssatou's] refuge and they supported you. The power of books, wonderful inventions of clever human intelligence... Unique device of connection and culture, they are unmatched as a way to give and to receive. Books continuously bring generations together to work toward a common goal. Books allow you to reach new heights. What society refused you, books gave you: exams passed with flying colors took you to France also. Your graduation from *L'École d'Interprétariat* (the Interpretation School) brought about your placement at the Senegalese Embassy in the United States.<sup>210</sup>

This type of career change would have been extremely difficult without Aïssatou's French education. I understand Aïssatou's character as free to take care of herself and her children without being pressured to remarry or having to lean on anyone else for financial support. Bâ and Ramatoulaye portray Aïssatou's divorce and her new life in the United States in a positive light. Aïssatou's decision to marry outside of her caste, to marry for love, to change her career and to raise her children on her own because she does not agree with her husband's choice to take another wife, while stepping outside of the bounds of tradition, are portrayed to the reader as modern, acceptable, and justified actions for an educated woman.

The third matriarchal conflict takes place between Binetou—Ramatoulaye's young co-wife—and her mother, whom Ramatoulaye calls Dame Belle-mère. Ramatoulaye's husband Modou abandons her to marry one of their daughter's high school friends, Binetou, and Dame Belle-mère played a significant role in Modou's second marriage. In her letters to Aïssatou, Ramatoulaye recounts how Binetou often came over to her house to study for her baccalaureate exam with Ramatoulaye's oldest daughter, Daba.

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<sup>208</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 50.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*

Unbeknownst to Ramatoulaye and Daba, Modou began to treat Binetou to new dresses and wanted to marry her, only a few months away from the baccalaureate exams.<sup>211</sup> Modou promised Binetou a new house, pilgrimages to Mecca for her parents, a car, a monthly allowance, and jewelry.<sup>212</sup> Binetou's parents were less well off than Ramatoulaye and her husband, and Ramatoulaye describes Dame Belle-mère as “a woman very desperate to get out of her mediocre condition and who longed for the beauty of her youth, withered away by smoky wood fires... she complained all day long.”<sup>213</sup> Faced with her mother's incessant crying and begging for a “happy ending, in a real house,” Binetou agreed to be pulled out of school to marry Modou.<sup>214</sup> Binetou initially wanted to pass her baccalaureate exams and continue her studies, but Modou offered her a monthly allowance of fifty thousand francs, effectively dissuading her from finishing school.<sup>215</sup> Despite her pain at her abandonment, Ramatoulaye understood Binetou's dilemma: “What can a child do faced with a mother in a fury, who cries about her hunger and thirst for life? Binetou is a sacrificial lamb that was slain, like so many others, on the altar of ‘materialism.’”<sup>216</sup>

Ramatoulaye acknowledges that Binetou did not grow up privileged, that she was raised in an environment where survival was her family's preeminent concern and where her mother was more concerned with putting food on the table than with her daughter's education.<sup>217</sup> Binetou—and Dame Belle-mère—knew that her marriage to Modou was going to improve her quality of life, and “exiled into the world of adults that was unfamiliar to her, she [Binetou] accepted her golden prison.”<sup>218</sup> Meanwhile, Ramatoulaye writes about Dame Belle-mère living out her dreams of an easy life, far away from financial strife and scarcity in the new house Modou had built for her, her husband, himself and Binetou: “One turn of the knob in her bathroom and warm water in soothing jets massaged her back! One flick of the wrist in the kitchen and ice cubes cooled the water in her glass. Turning another knob lit a small flame on her gas

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<sup>211</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 54.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

stove while she made herself a delicious omelet.<sup>219</sup> Dame Belle-mère regained her husband's faithfulness and thoroughly took advantage of no longer having to be careful with money. Left to fend for herself in Modou's absence, Ramatoulaye recounts how her husband faithfully lavished his new mother-in-law with jewelry, rich *boubous*, and money to spend as she pleased.<sup>220</sup> Binetou, on the other hand, would drag Modou to the nightclubs where she would hold her head high in her expensive clothes, in a vain attempt to impress the other young people in the club with her marriage to an older, richer man.<sup>221</sup> Sitting alongside the aging Modou, however, she could not completely hide her embarrassment, and her heart ached as she watched her peers excitedly interact with each other; Ramatoulaye describes her co-wife as heartbroken over the dreams she had abandoned.<sup>222</sup>

Dame Belle-mère's bliss was short lived, and the reader sees the perils facing women who cannot support themselves financially when Binetou's marriage to Modou can no longer assure her and her mother's ease. Following Modou's death and his wives' forty days of mourning, Modou's assets were divided up among family members. Ramatoulaye proved that she had been keeping up with paying the bills on her own and was permitted to keep her current house.<sup>223</sup> Her daughter, Daba, and her husband paid off and bought the new house Modou had purchased for Binetou and her parents to the dismay of Dame Belle-mère who did not want to move out.<sup>224</sup> Binetou's mother cried out for pity and hiccupped as she lamented her fate, but Ramatoulaye recounts Daba's lack of patience and mercy for the woman who was responsible, in her eyes, for Ramatoulaye's unhappiness and struggles in Modou's absence: "You don't deserve any pity. Move out. I do feel sorry for Binetou, though. She is the victim, your victim."<sup>225</sup> Despite Dame Belle-mère's distress, Ramatoulaye depicts Binetou as indifferent and emotionally

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<sup>219</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 73.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.



removed from the division of Modou's property because she "had already died on the inside... since her marriage to Modou."<sup>226</sup>

The story of Binetou and her mother is similar to the story of Seynabou and young Nabou in that the mothers orchestrate their children's marriages to suit their own desires, and use guilt to get their children to respond to their needs. In Seynabou's case, she exerted her influence over her son for revenge on his marriage to Aïssatou, but in Binetou's case, Dame Belle-mère forced her to marry Modou and forgo her education so that her mother could live an easier life. Trapped and unhappy, Binetou's chance at freedom through education was thwarted by her mother; her hope for a better life on her own terms was snuffed out, and she died on the inside, remaining dependent upon Modou for financial stability and her mother's material happiness. Binetou's story starts out modern, like Aïssatou's, in that she was from a lower class family and through her education she could have done well for herself and her family; yet, Dame Belle-mère convinces Binetou to marry Modou to secure their family's financial future the traditional way, through marriage. Bâ is critical of Dame Belle-mère and through this mother-daughter conflict, she offers an example of how important education can be if a woman wishes to attain some measure of independence, such as the freedom to choose her own spouse or continue her education.

The conflict between Dame Belle-mère and Binetou also affects Ramatoulaye who is left alone after her husband marries the younger girl. A salaried schoolteacher, Ramatoulaye takes care of her family's water and electricity bills without significant outside financial help; she writes to Aïssatou that she was often the only woman waiting in line to pay her bills.<sup>227</sup> Ramatoulaye also embraces her freedom by going out to the movies alone:

I took my seat with less and less embarrassment as the months went by. People stared at the older woman sitting alone. I feigned indifference, holding back my anger and the tears that blurred my vision. Through the surprised glances, I saw for myself how narrow the freedom delegated to women was.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 103.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*

Though her children want her to divorce their absent father, Ramatoulaye cannot bring herself to officially separate from the man she loved so dearly; “I loved my home... You know how sensitive I am, you know the immense love that I devoted to Modou,” she wrote to Aïssatou, later adding, “Despite everything, I remain faithful to the love of my youth.”<sup>229</sup> She chose not to get divorced or remarry. After Modou died and her forty days of mourning ended, Modou’s brother proposed to marry her, and she scathingly refused: “You are forgetting that I have a heart, I have a conscience, and I am not an object to be passed around. You do not know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and love, a total sacrifice of oneself to the other person that you chose and who chose you.”<sup>230</sup>

Daouda Dieng, the man that Ramatoulaye’s mother originally preferred for her to marry, also came by her house to ask her to marry him for the second time.<sup>231</sup> Ramatoulaye took a day to ponder her response before deciding that she could not accept because she did not love Daouda and would not be able to give him her all, which she felt he deserved.<sup>232</sup> Daouda was already married and had children and Ramatoulaye was sensitive to the fact that she had lost her husband to another woman. She explains to Daouda in a letter that she would be ill at ease inserting herself between him and his first wife and their children.<sup>233</sup> After Modou’s brother and Daouda Dieng, many other men, young and old, tried to marry Ramatoulaye, but she refused every one of them, preferring to stay alone with her children; “I wanted ‘something else’ to live for. And that ‘something else’ had to come from my heart.”<sup>234</sup> In the face of Dame Belle-mère’s endless demands on Modou that kept him from his first wife until he died, Ramatoulaye’s education enabled her to take care of her family without feeling pressured to remarry in order to survive. Bâ frames Ramatoulaye’s insistence on the modern notion of marrying only for love, not survival in a positive light, especially since Ramatoulaye is financially stable enough to do so. Like her friend Aïssatou, she provides for and raises her children on her own and her break from tradition does not

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<sup>229</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 77 ; 82-83.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 97 ; 100.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

have an adverse effect on her morality. Despite the crowds of movie-goers' disapproval of her as a woman going to the cinema alone, Ramatoulaye asserted her freedom to do whatever it was she wanted to do without letting the absence of a male partner hold her back.

The fourth matriarchal figure in *Une si longue lettre* is Ramatoulaye herself, and her interactions with her oldest daughters and their romantic partners reveal hers and the next generation's perceptions of their freedom. Ramatoulaye is a mother-in-law herself as her oldest daughter, Daba, is married to a man named Abou. Ramatoulaye admires the young couple who exemplify the type of loving marriage that Ramatoulaye had always hoped for: "They identify with each other and talk about everything to find a compromise."<sup>235</sup> Daba is not alone in taking care of her household's chores and her husband can cook rice just as well as she can, and when Ramatoulaye gently scolded Abou about spoiling Daba, he replied, "Daba is my wife. She is neither my slave, nor my servant."<sup>236</sup> Ramatoulaye still fears for her daughter and reminds her that life is full of unexpected hardships that could potentially ruin her marriage, but Daba surprises her mother and reveals that she feels she is free to leave any marital situation that she is no longer happy with: "Marriage is not a ball and chain. It's a mutual agreement to share life with each other. And, if one adherent no longer sees a point to the union, why should he or she stay? It could be Abou (her husband), it could be me. Why not? A woman can initiate a breakup."<sup>237</sup>

Ramatoulaye's letters reveal that Daba is educated and that she is interested in the fate of Senegal and advocating for women. She decided to stay away from the strictly political arena—dissuaded by interparty discord and power-hungry men—and prefers to participate in a feminist organization.<sup>238</sup> Between Ramatoulaye and Daba there is less conflict and more contrast, since they are from different generations of educated women. Through her interactions with her mother, Daba expresses her belief in her freedom to marry a man she chooses, and she asserts a woman's right to divorce if she is unhappy with the marriage. As a member of a feminist organization, Daba maintains her freedom to express her

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<sup>235</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 107.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

grievances and reason her way through problems facing women, specifically the women in her country. Bâ's depiction of Daba's modern notions of marriage and political participation is positive and does not insinuate a lack of morality in her departure from traditional views on marriage and women's exclusion from the political sphere.

With her other children at various ages and stages of their education, Ramatoulaye attempts to shape her three teenage girls' direction in life and worries about what she sees as her daughters' overindulgence in the freedoms available to them. When she discovered, for instance, that “the trio”—Armane, Yacine, and Dieynaba—secretly smoked cigarettes, she decided to put her foot down and banned them from smoking, though occasionally her bathroom still smelled like tobacco smoke.<sup>239</sup> Ramatoulaye writes about allowing the teen trio to wear pants, even though she thought they were ill-suited for curvy black women and preferred that her daughters wore dresses.<sup>240</sup> The trio was permitted to go to the cinema without their mother, and they could have friends of both genders over to the house.<sup>241</sup>

Nevertheless, Ramatoulaye wonders in her letters if she gives her daughters too much freedom and if their cigarette smoking signals that they already have experimented or will experiment with alcohol or other vices. She wrote to her friend Aïssatou, “Can modernity exist without the degradation of morality?”<sup>242</sup> Ramatoulaye was especially anxious about how to talk to her teenage trio about balancing freedom, morals and modernity in how they conduct themselves sexually: “Mothers in times past only taught their girls abstinence... Modern mothers don't mind discussing the ‘forbidden fruit.’ They try to limit consequences, and focus on prevention. They remove all obstacles blocking their children from complete freedom!”<sup>243</sup> “Every woman can do whatever she wants with her life,” Ramatoulaye tells the trio, but she insists that “morals are incompatible with a woman who lives licentiously.”<sup>244</sup> Wanting to educate her girls without endorsing what she sees as unorthodox behavior, Ramatoulaye insists that the

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<sup>239</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 111-113.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 112 ; 117.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

trio know that their bodies are valuable and that sexual relations are above all expressions of love.<sup>245</sup> She lets her girls know that the existence of contraceptives does not mean that they should act on their every desire nor should they conduct themselves immorally.<sup>246</sup> Thus, through Ramatoulaye's interactions with her teenage trio, another glimpse of the freedoms attained by the next generation of educated women is revealed. The teens are free to attend school, dress as they please, attend movie showings unaccompanied, and interact with classmates of both genders at home. They are free to have control over their bodies in terms of their health—though Ramatoulaye tries to stop them from smoking cigarettes—and their sexual choices as their mother discusses contraceptive methods with them. Ramatoulaye's conversations with and concerns for her daughters reveal that she ultimately hopes that Armane, Yacine, and Dieynaba will be able to enjoy the freedoms that come with education and modernity within the parameters of unwavering morality.

In her final matriarchal role, Ramatoulaye unexpectedly becomes a future mother-in-law and grandmother when she discovers that her second oldest daughter, also named Aïssatou, is pregnant. Farmata, Ramatoulaye's *griote*<sup>247</sup> neighbor, got the young girl to confess, and quickly alerted Ramatoulaye of her fate.<sup>248</sup> Young Aïssatou tells her mother of her boyfriend, Ibrahima Sall, a local university student with whom she fell in love after meeting him at a friend's birthday party.<sup>249</sup> Ibrahima, or Iba, knowing that Aïssatou is pregnant, wants to keep the baby and is prepared to forfeit his scholarship money to take care of Aïssatou and their baby.<sup>250</sup> After listening to her daughter sob through her story, Ramatoulaye's first reactions are anger and disappointment. She writes to her friend, "After Daba, [Aïssatou] was the oldest girl. The oldest is supposed to be an example... My teeth chattered in anger."<sup>251</sup> Then, remembering how much young Aïssatou helped her out during her abandonment and following

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<sup>245</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 127.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> A *griot(e)* is a leading figure in Wolof society and traditionally knows the local oral history.

<sup>248</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 119.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

Modou's death, Ramatoulaye softened up. In her letters, she confides to her friend, "I could not abandon her like my pride wanted me to. The sheer importance of her [Aïssatou's] life and her future were powerful enough to annihilate all taboos, and forced my heart and my conscience to acknowledge their preeminence over everything else."<sup>252</sup> Neighboring Farmata warns Ramatoulaye that she is making a mistake and setting a bad precedent for her younger daughters: "[Farmata] expected lamentations: I smiled. She wanted vehement arguments: I offered consolation. She wanted threats: I forgave."<sup>253</sup> Farmata does not understand why Ramatoulaye would shower a "sinner" with so much careful attention, but Ramatoulaye sticks to her decision and decides to meet Iba.<sup>254</sup>

Ramatoulaye's letters describe her first meeting with Iba, in which he tells her that he intends to marry young Aïssatou if both mother and daughter agree. He mentions that Aïssatou is his first love—and his only love he hopes—and that both of them will be able to continue their schooling since his mother has agreed to watch the child during the day.<sup>255</sup> This is precisely what Ramatoulaye wants to hear, though she is concerned about her daughter being expelled from school because of her pregnancy.<sup>256</sup> Iba has already considered this risk. He assures Ramatoulaye that that baby's due date falls during a school break and that there should not be any problems as long as everyone stays calm and Aïssatou continues to wear her loose fitting dresses. The baby would be two months old at the start of the new school year and Aïssatou would be able to complete her last year of high school after which she and Iba would get married.<sup>257</sup> Ramatoulaye writes to her friend enthusiastically acclaiming Iba's commitment to ensure that Aïssatou obtains good grades. She also describes Iba's playful interactions with her younger sons, and notes that he regularly makes a point to talk to Ramatoulaye about current events during his visits. His

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<sup>252</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 121.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-124.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

parents also stop by Ramatoulaye's house to talk and inquire about Aïssatou's health and that of the baby.<sup>258</sup>

Ramatoulaye's interactions with Aïssatou and her boyfriend Iba show that Ramatoulaye believes in the freedom to follow alternate paths to starting a family as long as it does not interfere with education. Ramatoulaye still wants her daughter to get married and eventually form a traditional family, but she does not condemn her daughter for her unexpected pregnancy. In contrast to Farmata's hope for punishment, Ramatoulaye is impressed by the young couple and Iba's planning for the baby. Iba's parents demonstrate equal flexibility in their willingness to support the young couple. Through Ramatoulaye's interactions with the young couple, Bâ suggests that what is considered moral or a "sin" is irrelevant as long as education is not disrupted. Young Aïssatou's story, like Binetou's, also shows that a woman's education can be quickly jeopardized by marriage or pregnancy, since Aïssatou could be kicked out of school if her pregnancy is discovered. Similar to her own mother, Ramatoulaye was not involved with her daughter's choice of a husband, and though Ramatoulaye's opinion of her situation was important to young Aïssatou, the young girl ultimately decided for herself the direction that her life was going to take.

Interactions between matriarchs and educated female characters in Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* reveal that these women were free to choose their own spouses, adopt modern fashion trends, get divorced and support themselves, go out unaccompanied, have control over their own bodies and futures, and join associations and express themselves. These freedoms indicate that these women saw themselves as self-reliant, as individuals within couples, as modern women, as capable of making their own decisions, as breadwinners, and as individuals with opinions of their own. These educated female characters turn away from traditional female roles and values and embrace modern notions of love and marriage, yet Bâ portrays them as conserving their morality. Bâ also insists on the importance of education in providing these women the freedom to make their own life decisions. Ramatoulaye's friend Aïssatou and Binetou, while both overpowered by selfish matriarchs, found themselves in different situations because of the

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<sup>258</sup> Bâ, *Une si longue lettre*, 126-127.

disparity in their educational levels: Aïssatou was able to leave her husband and support herself and her children, while Binetou was unable to pass her baccalaureate exams and finish school. With the tragic fate of Binetou, Bâ suggests that suppressing the freedoms that education brings to women severely damages their self-worth and prevents them from accessing many of these privileges and the self-awareness that they still have value beyond marriage and children. This insight into how these fictional women saw themselves indicates the prominence of education in identity formation and helps readers grasp Bâ's vision of modern African women's place in postcolonial Senegalese society.

### *Un chant écarlate*

*Un chant écarlate* was Bâ's second novel and was published shortly after her death in 1981. This novel also takes place in post-independence Dakar and tells the story of Ousmane Guèye, an educated Senegalese man from Dakar. The primary traditional matriarch vs. educated young woman conflict in the novel occurs between Ousmane's mother, Yaye Kady, and Soukeyna, Ousmane's younger, educated sister. Yaye Kady's interactions with her daughter emphasize the freedoms Soukeyna accessed through her education and the young girl's balance of strong ethics and modernity.

During his university studies, Ousmane falls in love with the daughter of a white, French diplomat, named Mireille de la Vallée. When their romance is discovered, Mireille is sent back to France by her parents who do not approve of their daughter dating an African man. The two kept in touch and later decide to get married in France. Returning to Senegal, where Ousmane and Mireille teach philosophy at the local high school, Mireille struggles to adapt to her husband's family and lifestyle.

The primary source of tension between Yaye Kady and Soukeyna is the young girl's relationship with her sister-in-law, Mireille who teaches at Soukeyna's high school. Yaye Kady was never happy with her son's choice to marry Mireille. It saddens her and she feels betrayed and worried about what her



neighbors say about her, her son, and his white wife.<sup>259</sup> She, like other women her age, had planned to pass on her household duties to her future daughter-in-law and live the rest of her life in peace; when she learns that her son's wife is white, Yaye Kady assumes that Mireille will not take over her work as she had hoped.<sup>260</sup> Tormented by what she sees as a poor life decision on the part of her son, Yaye Kady—similar to Seynabou's plan to get rid of Ramatoulaye's friend Aïssatou in *Une si longue lettre*—plots to get rid of Mireille: “No woman, even as white as she is, will ruin my hard work... The foreigner will not so easily devour the fruits of my labor.”<sup>261</sup> Soukeyna, on the other hand, helps her sister-in-law with her laundry and tries to teach her Wolof.<sup>262</sup>

Married life, however, turns sour for Mireille and Ousmane as each is frustrated by the other's cultural habits, and the unfolding drama increases the tension between Yaye Kady and Soukeyna. Ousmane's childhood crush, a Senegalese woman named Ouleymatou, seizes what she sees as an opportunity to win back Ousmane, and approaches Yaye Kady about helping her out around the house. Ecstatic, Yaye Kady begins to push Ousmane to give Ouleymatou another chance. As his disagreements with Mireille turn into resentment, Ousmane starts to leave Mireille and their young son in the apartment alone and seek comfort in Ouleymatou's arms. A delighted Yaye Kady encourages her son's extramarital affair. Isolated, Mireille is unaware of Ousmane's infidelity, though she suspects it. She is not notified when Ousmane marries Ouleymatou, who had become pregnant with his child. Soukeyna, on the other hand, finds fault in her brother's actions and becomes Mireille's friend and trusted ally.<sup>263</sup> Soukeyna teaches Mireille to make traditional Senegalese dishes like rice and fish and the two spend time in Mireille's small home library.<sup>264</sup> One day, Mireille finds a letter in her mailbox at the high school

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<sup>259</sup> Mariama Bâ, *Un chant écarlate*, (Dakar, Sénégal: Nouvelles Editions Africaines du Sénégal, 1981), 104-105.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-112.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

informing her of her Senegalese co-wife and telling her that if she wants to know more she only needs to follow her husband, and she instantly recognized Soukeyna's handwriting.<sup>265</sup>

Yaye Kady and Soukeyna's disagreement regarding Ousmane's marital decisions point to their different worldviews. Soukeyna is inculcated with a culture closer to Mireille's because of her education and friendship with Mireille. The two write and speak to each other in French since Mireille did not speak much Wolof. Soukeyna speaks her mind and reprimands her mother for pushing Ousmane to marry Ouleymatou for her own benefit:

I am against my brother's remarriage; it is justified by nothing but your own interests. I will not associate myself with that second household. Mireille attempted the impossible to make you happy! You openly mocked her when she offered to help you cook with the *fourneau malgache* [outdoor stove]. You discouraged all of her attempts at cooperation with you. You reject her without even getting to know her. Why? Because she is white... Only the color of her skin fuels your hatred.<sup>266</sup>

Soukeyna also defends her mixed race nephew and tells her mother that she is not ashamed to take him out in his stroller with Mireille.<sup>267</sup> I argue that Soukeyna's choice to stand by Mireille against her brother and her mother is due to an education that promotes the expression of her own thoughts and her critical stance toward individuals like her mother and brother who might expect her deference, and perhaps her acceptance of polygyny. Soukeyna embraces modern notions of monogamous and interracial love and Bâ portrays this educated character as reasonable and moral opposite her stubborn, tradition-obsessed mother who cannot escape her desire for a family structure in which her daughter-in-law is exactly what she wants: submissive and African.

In *Un chant écarlate*, educated Soukeyna's conflict with Yaye Kady shows that she is free to become friends with her sister-in-law from another culture, and to form her own opinions in the face of opposition. Her embrace of these freedoms show that Soukeyna views herself as an individual independent from her family, as someone entitled to her own opinion, and capable of making a difference

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<sup>265</sup> Bâ, *Un chant écarlate*, 232.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-230.

in her sister-in-law's life. Soukeyna's break with traditional values does not threaten her morality. She is able to see beyond Mireille's skin color and accept her as a friend and relative along with her mixed race nephew as a result of her education and the associated freedoms.

### *Conclusion*

All of the educated female characters in Bâ's books claim certain freedoms and Bâ portrays her characters' modern decisions as rational and moral. Ramatoulaye, Aïssatou, Daba see themselves as individuals within their intimate relationships in Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*. Each of these educated women has the freedom to decide who they want to be and how they want to live their lives: they choose their own spouses, choose divorce, choose to stay married, or choose to work and join organizations. Ramatoulaye teaches her three teenage daughters that though women are free to do what they wish with their bodies, they must balance modernity with morality. Upon discovering that Young Aïssatou is pregnant out of wedlock, Ramatoulaye supports her daughter's decision to start a family as long as it does not interfere with her finishing school.

Soukeyna in Mariama Bâ's *Un chant écarlate* decides to become a friend and confidante to her sister-in-law, Mireille, in opposition to her mother. Standing up for her belief that her brother, Ousmane, is wrong for taking a second, Senegalese, wife without Mireille's knowledge, Soukeyna is forthright in pointing out her mother's stubborn prejudices against Mireille and defends her friend and her mixed race nephew. Soukeyna's French education facilitates her close relationship with Mireille, and her outspoken defense of her sister-in-law reveals that she saw herself as an individual within her family, free to voice her own opinions about family matters such as her brother's second marriage. Similar to Algerian authors Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra's defense of their hybrid identities, Bâ maintains that her educated female characters are able to break away from traditional women's roles while remaining steadfast in their morality. Both modern and ethical, Bâ's characters emphasize their ability and intention

to define their own place in postcolonial Senegalese society even in the face of matriarchal opposition.

For Bâ, modern African women can assimilate to western cultural values—contrary to Fanon and

Memmi's claims—as long as it does not erode their morality.

## Chapter IV

### Ken Bugul's *Le baobab fou*

“I do not want to be loved. Why? Because one day, a long time ago... I was abandoned. I never forgave my mother.” – Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 1952<sup>268</sup>

Having explored the role of education and matriarchal figures in two of Mariama Bâ's novels, I now turn to the work of Mariétou Mbaye Biléoma who writes under the penname Ken Bugul. In Wolof, her name means “one who is unwanted.”<sup>269</sup> She was born in 1947 in the Ndoucoumane—Malem Hodar—region of inland Senegal. Upon completing her secondary studies at the lycée Malick Sy de Thiès, she enrolled at the University of Dakar (now Cheikh Anta Diop University) where she received a grant to continue her studies in Belgium.<sup>270</sup> Between 1986 and 1993, Bugul worked with the International Planned Parenthood Federation as the Head of Programs within the African region.<sup>271</sup> Bugul currently hosts writing workshops in underprivileged areas, continues to write novels, and runs an art gallery. She is the widow of a Beninese doctor and has one daughter.<sup>272</sup>

Bugul's first novel, *Le baobab fou*, is a first-person narrative loosely based on Bugul's life. The novel begins with the protagonist Ken leaving for Brussels, Belgium around the time of Senegal's independence where she hopes to finish her studies. The matriarchs in Ken Bugul's *Le baobab fou* exert a more indirect influence on Ken's life than the push-and-pull between mothers and daughters and daughters-in-law evident in Bâ's novels.<sup>273</sup> In the epigram at the beginning of this chapter, Frantz Fanon quotes a black man from the Antilles who has trouble grappling with his lonely childhood as an orphan in

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<sup>268</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 60.

<sup>269</sup> Jean-Marie Volet, "Ken Bugul," <http://aflit.arts.uwa.edu.au/KenBugulEng.html> (accessed June 24, 2014).

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> In this section, I will refer to the author of *Le baobab fou* as “Bugul” and the protagonist of the novel as “Ken.”

Bordeaux, France where he had no home to go to during the school breaks. Along the same lines, the central matriarch-child conflict in Ken Bugul's *Le baobab fou* involves the protagonist wrestling with her mother and grandmother's abandonment of her as a child. In the novel, Ken's self-understanding stems from this feeling of abandonment, her French education, and the opinions of others around her. However, unlike the educated female characters in Bâ's novels, Ken finds it more difficult to orient herself morally when she is away from Senegal and neglected by matriarchs embodying traditional customs. Through Ken's experiences in Belgium, Bugul also debates Fanon and Memmi's claims about the impossibility of assimilation as Ken attempts to find her place among the westerners she encounters.

The first matriarchal conflict in *Le baobab fou* occurs between Ken and her grandmother when she is a little girl. The older woman resents her granddaughter for attending school. Ken's grandmother does not believe girls should go to school, but she had no problem with Ken's older brothers attending French school, because "Men could have adventures, but not women."<sup>274</sup> Enrolled in French school against her grandmother's wishes, Ken is subject to her grandmother shunning her until the day she died: "She hated me and looked at me like I was contaminated, I disgusted her. That is why I was not present the day of her death, but I had already seen her dead, the day before, in a dream."<sup>275</sup> Ken's mother then abandons the young girl when she is only five years old. Ken's mother was not her father's only wife and Ken was her father's youngest child. When Ken realizes that her mother had been packing up her things for a couple of weeks, she becomes very anxious about her fate should her mother leave the family home.<sup>276</sup> Her mother is all she had:

In this house, she was the only one I could pick out. There was father, but he was everyone's father; he had as much affection for his own children as he had for those of others... My mother, I could feel her next to me every night in the bed that we shared... "Ah! Mother why were you leaving? Why did you have to go? Why were you leaving me?"<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 170.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

Her mother's departure has a profound effect on the young girl: "For the rest of my life, I will curse the day that took my mother away, the day that shattered my childhood, the day that reduced me to that young five year old child standing alone on the platform of a train station long after the train left."<sup>278</sup> The familial house no longer feels like home to Ken after her mother leaves and she feels like no one notices how much she hurt: "Do adults realize that only children know how to truly suffer? Do adults know that only children truly feel intense emotion? Ah! Mother's departure brought about so much turmoil in my life. I was overwhelmed by emotions that I carefully repressed."<sup>279</sup>

As the youngest child, pushed away by her grandmother and left behind by her mother, Ken often feels very alone. When Ken goes to live with her father's first wife, her sister's new baby quickly replaces her as the youngest child and she feels ignored and lonely: "No one to console me... The emptiness my mother left behind was no comfort. Father, old and dedicated to his prayers, could not care for me. Father's first wife could never replace my mother."<sup>280</sup> Her older siblings do not talk to her and she often longs for a close family: "I had a thousand things to say, words to exchange. Love, friendship, tenderness... I was alone.... How had all of these ties severed?"<sup>281</sup> Adding to the young girl's solitude, she is sent away from her village to live with an aunt in the city where she can continue on to the sixth grade.<sup>282</sup> Her second year of high school, she again moves to live with the superintendent of the school and his family. However, after three months she is sent back to her aunt's house because the superintendent's wife finds out that her husband wants to marry twelve-year-old Ken.<sup>283</sup> Her aunt rents all but one room of her house to several other families. The house only has one toilet and gets very noisy while Ken tries to study in the evening.<sup>284</sup> Lonely but incredibly studious, Ken wills herself deaf to the commotion in her aunt's house and "studies furiously;" and when she has to go sleep, she continues to

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<sup>278</sup> Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 98.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 161; 165.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-164.

“analyze in [her] head the *Discourse on the Method*, the tragedy *Cinna*, and imagine the enthronements of Visigoth, Occitan—French kings anyway—in the Reims cathedral.”<sup>285</sup> Winning the grand prize for superior academic performance at her school that year, Ken does not invite anyone to attend the awards ceremony. Jaded by her academic success because it does nothing to remedy her loneliness, Ken also feels that her achievements only discourage and frustrate her fellow students whose efforts remain unrewarded.<sup>286</sup> The reader sees, however, that despite her grandmother’s disdain, alienation from her mother and her family, and living in less-than-desirable conditions with her aunt in the city, Ken was free to go to school and stay in school. School is important to her even though it could not fill the void in her life.

Unable to find fulfillment in her grandmother who rejects her, in her own mother who abandoned her, in her father’s first wife who cannot replace her biological mother, or in devoting herself to her academics, Ken tries to find solace in becoming “toubab” or “white:”

In mother’s village, I only spoke in French with the other young people who attended French schools... I thought I may have found a way to be at peace by making myself “toubab.” Always buying the second hand Parisian fashion magazines from the market, always saying “bonsoir” left and right, always walking around the village to show off, wearing my high heels that made me sweat and walk ungracefully, letting my half-slip show on purpose. Straightening perms, imitating western hairstyles that made your face seem grotesque, the red nail polish that flowed like blood over my fingertips. Oh, God! I was worn out wanting to do more than just “imitate,” I really wanted to distort my appearance completely.<sup>287</sup>

Consistent with her desire for metamorphosis, Ken is sent to spend the larger part of her summer with an older brother in Senegal’s capital, Dakar. He and his family live on the third floor of an apartment building. They have a small library in their house, eat dinner together sitting at the table, and they own a telephone and a camera.<sup>288</sup> This level of westernization astounds Ken: “Being westernized did not seem so simple anymore. It was more than just attending a French school. It was a whole lifestyle.”<sup>289</sup> Though

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<sup>285</sup> Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 158; 164.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-168.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 170-172.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.



she feels it takes a lot of effort to be truly westernized, Ken decides to put all her energy into it; “[My] brother brought home books for me from the French cultural center. I only read *The Three Musketeers*, thinking that I could draw out a sense of patriotism and heroism to stimulate [my Westernization]. I increasingly devoured western magazines which reported on the captivating lives of the Westerners of my generation.”<sup>290</sup> After spending the summer with her brother and his family, Ken decides to become even more westernized and leave her village to go “over there, to the country of snow and fir trees.”<sup>291</sup> Ken’s desire to be westernized grew out of her French education and her experience of life in the more cosmopolitan capital, and she felt that her ambition could become reality.

In the absence of conventional matriarchal support, Ken’s identification with a western lifestyle gives her freedom and direction, and she seeks to go to Europe. She applies for funds twice after passing her baccalaureate exams and the second time she is able to secure the funds.<sup>292</sup> In Brussels, Belgium, she hopes to continue her studies and find herself: “It was more about leaving and less about continuing my studies abroad. I wanted to discover somewhere or in someone my missing link. Why not go find my ‘Gallic ancestors’?”<sup>293</sup> However, Ken’s freedom to establish her own identity is challenged by several individuals she encounters in Europe who insist that her value and identity stem from her status as a foreigner and a black woman.

Despite her high level of education and self-identification as a Westerner, almost immediately upon arriving in Belgium, Ken realizes that she is a foreigner, no matter how much she feels like she blends in. First, she notices that the staff at the home for young catholic girls—where she spent her first nights in Europe—treat all of the girls there as a homogeneous block; Ken notes that hundreds of “them”—young girls from other countries around the world—must come through the home every year.<sup>294</sup> After receiving her scholarship money from the school office, Ken goes shopping. Buying things

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<sup>290</sup> Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 173.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 208; 42.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 53.

haphazardly—like paper, soap, candy, scarves, sweaters, dresses, jewelry, pajamas—she feels very natural and comfortable, “I did not feel like a foreigner or a newcomer, I was a consumer like any other. I paid, the cashiers handed me my change with indifference.”<sup>295</sup> Suddenly, Ken catches her reflection in a store window and stops short, in disbelief that she is staring at her own face:

“I could not believe my eyes. I quickly told myself that it was not my face: my eyes were wide, my skin was shiny and dark, my face was terrifying. I could not breathe, because that was my face. How could that face be mine? [...] Yes, it was the first time that I realized I was a foreigner.”<sup>296</sup>

The feeling of foreignness is reinforced a few months later when she visits a clinic to inquire about getting an abortion. The waiting room was full of exclusively Arab, African, and Antillean women. Ken gets the same feelings about the clinic as she had in the home for foreign catholic girls. All of the women in the waiting room were lumped together without distinction: “We were together without actually being united. We looked at each other without seeing each other.”<sup>297</sup> Ken feels like what makes her unique is overlooked when she is labeled as a foreigner and nothing more. This feeling leads Ken to seek the companionship of other marginal members of society—namely those who abuse drugs and alcohol. During one of these nights spent with other foreigners, Ken becomes annoyed with everyone’s stories about “their race,” “their countries,” “in your country,” “your people,” because it makes her realize that her ancestors are not Gallic at all.<sup>298</sup>

Although being categorized as a foreigner is limiting, it is also “advantageous” for Ken at times. The West was interested in Africa, and by extension, interested in her.<sup>299</sup> It was common within her bourgeois circle of white friends and acquaintances to host themed dinner parties and Ken decides to invite her friends over for an African themed dinner. She prepares a traditional Senegalese dish for her guests, “Oh, how the Westerners chatted, giggled, and sighed while eating an exotic dish served on the

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<sup>295</sup> Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 57-58.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

spot by the foreigner herself.”<sup>300</sup> She models various traditional outfits that she had brought from home, but she only plays along with her guests’ fantasies about Africa to flee her loneliness.<sup>301</sup> Haunted by solitude, Ken uses drugs to cope with the reality that she had lost her “Gallic ancestors.”<sup>302</sup>

Ken struggles because she sees herself differently than she had before. Her identity is reflected back to her in the gaze of others, and everyone around her sees her as generically “foreign,” “African,” or “black,” which is not how she feels about herself. It becomes especially difficult for Ken to digest the way others hypersexualize her as a black woman. One of the first characters to comment on Ken’s body is the doctor she consults for her abortion. After disrobing, Ken stands before the doctor who tells her, “You have a magnificent body, hmm, and that skin, I understand.”<sup>303</sup> Next, when moving into a studio apartment, the property owner tells her, “You are so beautiful, if you wanted, you could have everything.”<sup>304</sup> He later proposes that she work in the sauna on the ground floor of the building that serves as a front for a brothel.<sup>305</sup> Ken eventually takes the owner up on his offer and arranges to meet with Gaëlle, the woman who runs the brothel. On her first day of work at the sauna, an older white client requests Ken and tells her, “Ah! You black women are simply divine.”<sup>306</sup> This first encounter with a client saddens Ken and makes her homesick: “I wanted to cry. I wanted to run back to the village, curl up underneath the baobab tree and cry there until any lingering memory of this flabby man who had trouble lifting himself off of the massage table where he hoped to be reborn would be gone.”<sup>307</sup> Despite this experience, Ken returns to work in the sauna on occasion, subconsciously attracted to everything about the West that she did not learn in her school textbooks.<sup>308</sup>

Ken’s friendships and romantic relationships consistently make her feel like all she has to offer is the color of her skin and her supposed sensual nature. Befriending a minor Belgian girl, Ken is devastated

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<sup>300</sup> Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 132.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-133.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-106.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*

when the girl's racist parents do not allow their daughter to invite Ken over their house: "I was black and that one thing hindered a deep friendship."<sup>309</sup> Two Arab club owners, however, see Ken's skin color paired with her femininity as an asset. They approach her as she is dining in the restaurant they own and ask her if she would like to work in their night club as a dancer to help increase alcohol sales—of which she would earn a commission—and Ken accepts.<sup>310</sup> In reality, Ken is uninterested in alcohol and making money, and prefers to talk to the men who come to the club about nature, art, architecture, and the men's lives and their families.<sup>311</sup> The club owners reprimand their employee, telling her that she should be more aggressive about selling alcohol:

Men like you. Do you understand? You enchant them without even trying; *you are a black woman* and you are beautiful. You need to exploit that... A woman cannot help but to sell things. People will not stop asking us where we found you; you are a combination of femininity and intelligence and *you are a black woman*. So if you want to earn some money, stop talking to the clients about metaphysics, Sumer and poetry.<sup>312</sup>

Even another woman encourages Ken to use her black womanhood to make money. She meets a Swiss woman one night in the club while working and goes out to dinner with her shortly after losing her job at the club. It soon becomes clear to Ken that her acquaintance is a prostitute. As the two women sit at a hotel bar, Ken tells her friend about her plans to go back to school, but the Swiss woman ignores her and insists, "Ken, money is important, but intelligence, culture, knowledge, those are not important, they only create problems. Everything in this world requires money, people are not interested in what you have to say. Men like you. Ken, *you are a black woman*, you could make a fortune."<sup>313</sup> Following her friend's advice, Ken decides to prostitute herself to a man staying at the hotel that night; she feels desired and gets some of the attention she craved in all of her years of loneliness and longing for acceptance, "I savored the superficial power I had over the Whites who only accepted me for consumption."<sup>314</sup> Harkening back

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<sup>309</sup> Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 120.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-145, emphasis in original.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 148, emphasis in original.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

to Fanon and Memmi's claims that the "native intellectual" can never completely assimilate to the culture of the colonizer, Ken realizes that her acceptance by white (men) in Belgium is conditional upon her delivery of sex and the exchange of money. In the end, she only feels empty and angry: "Yes, it was always the same thing. He wanted to touch this body, touch this skin, this color. I wanted to scream."<sup>315</sup> She was tired of being treated only as the sub-par character that she was playing, similar to the frustration Fanon and Memmi predict the "native intellectual" experiences as he or she tries unsuccessfully to gain acceptance from the colonizer.<sup>316</sup>

The more the people around her suggest something "that she should be doing" because she is a black woman, the more miserable Ken feels.<sup>317</sup> She realizes that she will not be able to depend upon Belgium or the people she met there to define her: "I had nothing and I was looking for my childhood in everything that I went through in this substitute country where I let myself wander into tragedy since my mother's departure."<sup>318</sup> Ken wishes for death or an opportunity for re-birth: "I cried hard, because I was not dead... Acutely aware of everything that had happened to me so far away from the village where I was born, I prayed to God that I would be reborn, as if almost a quarter century of torment had never existed."<sup>319</sup> Returning to Senegal angry and desperate, Ken acknowledges that she cannot recover her childhood through trying to assimilate to European culture in rejection of her Senegalese culture.<sup>320</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In *Le baobab fou*, Ken embarks on a journey to discover herself and her freedom in spite of early conflicts with her grandmother and mother. In the face of her grandmother's disapproval, Ken is free to attend French school. Following the departure of her mother, Ken is able to find temporary solace in her

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<sup>315</sup> Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 153.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 220-221.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

studies. As a result of her education, she is free to adopt a Westernized lifestyle and take on university studies, first in Senegal and then in Belgium. Living in the country of her “Gallic ancestors,” Ken continues to search for something to fill the void in her life caused by her disruptive childhood and her mother’s sudden departure. While she is free to establish her own identity and self-worth, Ken is confronted by people she meets in Belgium who try to limit her value to her status as an exotic foreigner or her supposed hyper-sexuality as a black woman. Upon internalizing that her acceptance by westerners remains conditional, Ken realizes that she has to leave Belgium and accept that perhaps finding peace means accepting that the void in her life will never be completely filled. This way, she still rejects Fanon and Memmi’s claims in that even though westerners never fully accepted her as one of their own, she is still free to identify with them as well as with her Senegalese culture to which she returns at the end of the book. As a result of her education, Ken was able to persevere in her quest to establish her own identity according to how she saw herself.

However, in contrast to the educated female characters in Bâ’s novels, Bugul seems less focused on Ken maintaining her morals as she lives her modern lifestyle. Instead, lacking the matriarchal conflicts present in Bâ’s novels to define herself against, Ken struggles with the painful reality that even though assimilation to western culture did not provide her the “Gallic ancestors” she desperately sought to identify with, she can still find some solace in combining her learned European culture with her Senegalese culture. In *Le baobab fou*, Bugul also demonstrates that westerners in Europe may disrespect or downplay an African woman’s liberation through education. Following her abortion, Ken abandons her schooling, which was one of the reasons she came to Belgium in the first place. The rest of her story revolves around how others categorize and place her in their western society: Foreigner, club dancer, prostitute. Through Ken’s story, Bugul argues that educated women’s freedoms are a positive thing, but cautions that these freedoms can be perverted in the European context. Just as Fanon and Memmi theorize, this is especially damaging and disheartening for women like Ken, who desire to identify with the western culture they learned about in school.

## Conclusion

In the final pages of *Le baobab fou*, Ken, who has recently returned from Europe, approaches the baobab tree that she played under as a child. Someone informs her that the tree has been dead for some time. “But how is this possible?” she asks, “It’s right here, standing upright, it has all of its branches,” to which the unnamed character replies, “Yes, but it is dead.”<sup>321</sup> Ken then proceeds to cry and mourn the death of this tree who, for her, witnessed the departure of her mother.<sup>322</sup> This image of this young woman crying under this tree strikes me because Bugul began the novel with Ken’s departure for Belgium, full of hope and expectations about life in Europe and chooses to end the story with a despondent Ken who has returned to her Senegalese village. Ken’s sense of self emerges in opposition to the incredible amount of conflict in her life from her grandmother’s shunning, to her mother leaving, to throwing herself into school and being westernized, to having her worth determined by others based on her foreign citizenship, and her black womanhood. The baobab tree from Ken’s youth is both dead and alive—physically dead, but very alive in her vivid memory of her mother’s departure. Similarly, Ken herself is physically alive, but emotionally “dead” since she has acknowledged that she has been rejected by westerners and cannot recover her shattered childhood. It is up to her to decide who she will be and what defines her.

Soukeyna in Mariama Bâ’s *Un chant écarlate* decided to become a faithful friend and confidante to her sister-in-law, Mireille, in opposition to her own mother. In a bold defense of her friend and her mixed race nephew, Soukeyna calls out her mother for judging Mireille solely on the color of her skin. Bâ portrays Soukeyna’s character as an individual within her family, free to voice her own opinions about family matters such as her brother’s second marriage, and free to form cross-cultural friendships.

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<sup>321</sup> Bugul, *Le baobab fou*, 222.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

In Bâ's *Une si longue lettre*, conflicts between matriarchs and younger educated female characters reveal that these women were free to decide who they wanted to be and how they wanted to live their lives. Ramatoulaye, Aïssatou, and Daba chose their own spouses, chose divorce, chose to stay married, or chose to work and join organizations. Ramatoulaye teaches her three teenage daughters that though women are free to do what they wish with their bodies, they must balance modernity with morality. Young Aïssatou's pregnancy out of wedlock is not portrayed as an unforgivable transgression, but, because it will not disrupt Aïssatou's schooling and she and her boyfriend will eventually get married, Ramatoulaye decides to support her daughter unexpectedly starting a family. In *Une si longue lettre*, Bâ highlights the importance of education in achieving financial stability and personal peace, as evidenced with the fate of Binetou who forfeited her education to marry Modou and ended up with nothing when he died. Bâ emphasizes that even though her educated female characters protest traditional customs, they are still living morally in their adoption of their more modern lifestyles.

Education and conflicts between matriarchs and educated female characters contributed to each educated female characters' self-definition. For the girls who were fortunate enough to have access to education, it proves to be a very powerful tool, as evidenced by Bâ and Bugul's decision to write novels in French to share these women's stories and experiences with a wide audience. Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra also expressed their identity struggles and those of their characters in their French language novels and autobiographies.

Bâ and Bugul reject Fanon and Memmi's claims that the "native intellectual" cannot subscribe to the western culture of the colonizer. Bâ defends her characters' identification with western culture by portraying them as women with unwavering morality and their adoption of modern western lifestyles in a positive light. Bugul's protagonist Ken discovers that even though westerners reject her, she can still identify with them and her Senegalese culture. Perhaps the combination of both cultures will finally bring her the relief she seeks. The Algerian authors also rejected the notion put forth by Fanon and Memmi that



one cannot be both French and Algerian. Instead, these authors suggest that they can adhere to both identities simultaneously.

Khadra grew up in post-independence Algeria, and his desire for acceptance from his new Algerian military “family” clashed with his self-proclaimed destiny to become a French writer. His military career now over, instead of allowing people to pigeonhole him as a violent military officer or as an imposter—Khadra seeks to prove that two seemingly irreconcilable identities can exist in harmony. In *L'Écrivain*, through his autobiographical story of how he discovered his love of writing in French, Khadra explores the ways in which he has come to terms with both his Algerian military and French literary identities. Khadra’s novel, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, takes place prior to and during the Algerian war. Khadra’s character Younes—who is westernized and uneasy about which “side” he should choose to support during the Algerian war—is able to make peace with the different facets of his identity, and reconcile French and Algerian identities harmoniously.

Living during colonization and dying days before its end, Feraoun wanted freedom for Algeria, but did not hide his disappointment in France for failing to uphold the admirable values he learned in school; Feraoun desired an independent Algerian state, but he also wanted fraternity between France and her former colony. His defense of his hybrid identity is evident in the ambiguous genre of *The Poor Man’s Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher* and through the character of Fouroulou, who has strong ties to both France, Algeria, and Kabylia. In *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, Feraoun’s introspective soliloquies revealed the extent to which he refused “to pick sides” and simply wished to remain seated in his own “chair.”

Feraoun, Khadra, and their French educated characters reject the impossibility of being both French and Algerian and envelope their opposition in an overarching positive message of intercultural fraternity and cooperation. Bâ’s French educated female characters are successful in assimilating to aspects of western culture—framed by strong morals—as these women define themselves and their place in the world on their own terms. Bugul’s character, Ken, struggles with others’ definitions of her before

finally seeking reconciliation with her Senegalese culture in order to face the reality that she will never fully recover her childhood or be accepted by westerners—though that does not stop her from identifying with them. Through these women’s interactions—or lack thereof—with matriarchal characters, their assertion of the freedoms that their education affords them allows them to discover and expand on what they see as their place in postcolonial societies. Across all four authors, the characters and the messages of self-understanding communicated through these novels and autobiographies are non-violent, further opposing Fanon’s call for fierce revolution in order for the colonized to achieve peace. All of the authors’ characters certainly want peace with themselves and their self-identifications, but the absence of the type of brutality Fanon expected does not mean that these characters’ assertion of their sense of self was not without passion or struggle. Just as the deranged aspiring multicopyist from Fanon’s case study screamed, “Je suis Algérien!”, so these authors and their characters shout and defend their identities and freedoms loud and clear.

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## ACADEMIC VITAE

**Brooke Durham**

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### EDUCATION

**The Pennsylvania State University**, Schreyer Honors College, University Park, PA

**B.A** in International Politics, History; Arabic Language, Middle Eastern Studies Minors

Graduation Date: May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Honors thesis: "What society refused you, books gave you": Self-Identification and French Education in the Written Works of Mouloud Feraoun, Yasmina Khadra, Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul

### FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

**Bunton-Waller Fellowship**, the Pennsylvania State University, 2011-Present

Four year full tuition and room and board scholarship awarded to underrepresented students attending Penn State University Park. Fellows are housed together during the first-year and benefit from professional development workshops during the following years.

**Paterno Fellowship**, the Pennsylvania State University, 2011-Present

Provides students in the College of Liberal Arts admission to the Schreyer Honors College upon completion of honors course requirements specific to different majors.

**Dean's List** Fall 2011, Spring 2012, Fall 2012, Spring 2013, Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Fall 2014

**McNair Scholars Program**, the Pennsylvania State University, 2012-Present

McNair Scholars are prepared for entrance into a doctoral program after graduation through research experience, Graduate Records Examination Preparation, professional and academic development workshops and mentorship.

**Adma Hammam Shibley Memorial Scholarship**, the Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2014, Penn State History Department Award for Middle Eastern Studies.

**Phi Alpha Theta**, the Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2014

Penn State sponsors the Epsilon-Upsilon chapter of this national history honors society.

**Phi Beta Kappa**, the Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2014

Penn State sponsors the Lambda of Pennsylvania chapter of this national honors society.

**The Pennsylvania State University Class of 1922 Memorial Scholarship**, The Pennsylvania State University, Fall 2014-Spring 2015

**Margaret Bixler Kolpak Memorial Award**, the Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2015

The History Department's Kolpak Award annually goes to the female history major who has achieved outstanding academic success and practiced civic responsibility during her Penn State undergraduate career.

**Multicultural Resource Center Senior Award for Academic Achievement**, the Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2015

**Best Schreyer Honors Thesis in History Award**, the Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2015

### **ACADEMIC INTERESTS**

French Empire Studies, North and West African Colonialism and Postcolonialism, Colonial and Postcolonial Identity, Colonial Education, Francophone literature.

### **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

**The Pennsylvania State University**, University Park, PA

**McNair Summer Research Program**, May 2013-July 2013

Conducted faculty-guided research with Dr. J. Safran on the self-identification of Algerian novelists Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra and their French education. Produced a research paper entitled, "An Analysis of the Self-Identification of Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra and their French Education."

**The Pennsylvania State University**, University Park, PA

**Office of Undergraduate Education Summer Discovery Grant**, May 2014-July 2014

Conducted faculty-guided research with Dr. J. Boittin on the self-actualization of Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul's female characters and their understandings of the freedoms that their French education afforded them. Produced a research paper entitled, "Education, Freedom and Self-Awareness in the Novels of Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul."

### **PRESENTATIONS**

"An Analysis of the Self-Identification of Algerian Novelists Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra and their French Education." Paper presented at the SROP/McNair Summer Symposium. University Park, PA, July 2013.

"Hybrid Identity in Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*." Poster presented at the Africana Research Center's Undergraduate Research Exhibition. University Park, PA, October 2014.

"Hybrid Identity in Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*." Poster presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Black Doctoral Network Conference Undergraduate Poster Competition. Philadelphia, PA, October 2014.

"'What society refused you, books gave you': Education, Freedom and Self-Awareness in the Novels of Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul." Paper presented at the Undergraduate History Conference. University Park, PA, December 2014.

“Hybrid Identity in Mouloud Feraoun’s *Le Fils du pauvre*.” Paper presented at the 23rd Annual National Association of African American Studies and Affiliates National Conference. Baton Rouge, LA. February 2015.

“What society refused you, books gave you’: Education, Freedom and Self-Awareness in the Novels of Mariama Bâ and Ken Bugul.” Poster Presented at the Undergraduate Research Exhibition. University, Park, PA. April 2015.

### **LANGUAGES**

**French:** Fluent speaking, reading, writing, translating

**Modern Standard Arabic:** Intermediate reading, writing, speaking, and translating.

### **STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS**

Tour Guide, Student Minority Advisory and Recruitment Team, 2011-2013

Tour Chair, Student Minority Advisory and Recruitment Team, 2012-2013

Treasurer, Multicultural Undergraduate Law Association, 2012-2013

Alto Co-Section Leader and Co-founder, No Strings Attached Acapella, 2011-Present

Member, Le Cercle Français, Penn State French Club, 2014-Present