

Reading and Remembering the Algerian War: The Functions and Effects of Literary Texts in Readers' Interactions with Cultural Memory

Marjolein Wennekers, 3351718

Research MA Comparative Literary Studies, Utrecht University

Thesis written under the supervision of Dr. S.C. Knittel (first reader) and Dr. B.M. Kaiser (second reader)

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Introduction

La guerre d'Algérie reste une question de mémoire particulièrement sensible entre les deux pays. Près de cinquante ans après l'indépendance de l'Algérie, les controverses sont nombreuses et les passions vives entre les différents groupes mémoriaux. Est-ce un "passé qui ne passe pas" ? (...) Que peut la littérature, dans ce cadre ? (...) La diversité et la complexité des histoires personnelles, dont la littérature est volontiers l'expression, favorisent-elles une meilleure compréhension de l'Autre ? Où en est-on aujourd'hui dans les relations entre l'Algérie et la France sur le plan littéraire ? (France Culture, "Ecrire la guerre d'Algérie, entre littérature et Histoire")

The Algerian war (1954-1962) : a war that, in France, has been described as "les événements" or "la guerre sans nom", and that – in Algeria – is also commonly referred to as "révolution", "guerre d'indépendance", or "guerre de libération nationale". These different denominations are but a first indication of the variety of perspectives from which this period, that made an end to France's colonial presence in Algeria, can be considered. Even today, more than 50 years after the conflict's official end, the history and memory of the war continue to be contested and negotiated. The legacy of the war seems to have a continuing influence on the way in which different social groups in both countries interact with and relate to each other, and, in recent years, the conflicting efforts of these groups that all seek to integrate their own interpretations of the past into collective memory have come to be seen as 'guerres de mémoires'. In this respect, then, the Algerian war seems indeed – as France Culture suggests in the passage quoted above – to be a "passé qui ne passe pas". This passage, which evokes many interesting questions, stems from the description of a radio broadcast centering on the potential functions and effects of literature with regard to the history and memory of the Algerian war – the subject that will also be central to this thesis.

Over the years, the Algerian war has been the subject of – or functioned as a background for – a great number of literary works, "reflecting every angle of opinion" (Prost, 118), and written on both sides of the Mediterranean. Many of these texts have been studied extensively from a wide range of angles, and perhaps especially with a focus on topics related to collective (or cultural) memory – considering the ways in which they represent the past, or in which literature differs from other media of remembrance¹. However, until now, little critical attention appears to have been paid to the ways in which (non-professional) readers respond to texts about this war, and to the impact that these texts – and literature in general – might have on the way in which these readers perceive the past and the present. What are the functions and effects of literary texts in expressing, shaping, and negotiating the collective memory of the Algerian war?

¹ In this respect, novels like Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), Didier Daeninckx's *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984) and Leïla Sebbar's somewhat more recent *La Seine était rouge* (1999) seem to have obtained a quasi-canonical status. The last two have, for instance, been discussed in Michael Rothberg's influential book *Multidirectional Memory* (2009).

This study proposes to address this question by combining the frameworks of memory studies, postcolonial theory, and reader response analysis (chapter 1). Although, within memory studies, the functions of literature with regard to the storage and circulation of memory have been widely discussed, many studies – much like the publications focusing on novels about the Algerian war – put more emphasis on the medium than on questions of reception. Still, some theoretical approaches seem to be more attentive to the impact that specific literary texts could have on actual readers. In this respect, some have underlined the potential roles of literature in the transmission of memory to younger generations within the sphere of the family or community (see, for example, Marianne Hirsch's (2012) discussions on postmemory), whereas others precisely stress that a literary experience can enable readers to feel connected to the memories of others they do not feel "naturally" related to (as in Alison Landsberg's (2004) notion of prosthetic memory).

Literature's place in relation to these narrower or wider realms of reception is indeed interesting, as stories often center on a limited number of characters that are connected to a limited number of communities, whereas the texts – and especially those that acquire a bestseller status – circulate beyond the lines of communities, in society at large. Which aspects contribute to the broader appeal of these texts? And is a prior interest in and understanding for the particular perspective brought forward in the novel still required, or are texts able to challenge pre-existing understandings and images of the past, and its place in the present and future? These questions appear to be of particular relevance in the context of the *guerres de mémoires*, which not only continue to influence social relations in France, but also affect political relations between France and Algeria. Because the mnemonic context will likely have an important influence on the way in which novels about the war are received in both countries, this context will be sketched out in chapter 2.

The assumption that reading literature could lead to an increased empathy and understanding for others has (at least partly) been confirmed by research carried out in the field of empirical literary studies (see, for example, Hakemulder 2001). However, this kind of reader research often requires the manipulation of texts and the use of very specific (psychological) measurements, and, although informative about possible cognitive and emotional responses to specific textual elements, does not seem to be the most suitable method to capture the complexity of readers' responses to literature that deals with experiences of a (traumatic) collective past. Arguably, then, while scholars in the fields of memory studies and postcolonial theory would do well to take actual reading practices in consideration, those who study real readers could sometimes benefit from the nuanced discussions and historically specific contextualizations in these more text-oriented fields. This thesis will attempt to merge these methods and perspectives by analyzing professional and non-professional (online) reader responses – written in both France and Algeria – to two particular novels: Laurent Mauvignier's *Des Hommes* (2009) and Yasmina Khadra's *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (2008). In this respect, this study hopes to acquire some general insights on the interaction between literary texts and readers and on the potential

functions and effects of fiction in shaping readers' interactions with collective memory, while remaining aware and paying due attention to the specificity of the historical context and the literary texts.

The novels by Mauvignier and Khadra are both written in French, which, in Algeria, is a second language that cannot be read by everyone – a fact that sets a limit to the circulation of the texts. Nevertheless, it was a deliberate choice to select works written in French; on the one hand for the practical reason that I would not be able to read novels or reader comments in Arabic, but also to avoid the possibility that differences in responses could be ascribed to issues of translation, and because of the ways in which, in Algeria, the French language appears to have come to be connected to notions of revolt and memory (as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2). The specific novels have been chosen on the basis of their 'popularity' among readers – which is in part revealed by the number of (online) responses they have elicited – but also on the basis of the particular perspectives from which they represent the Algerian war and the ways in which these texts position themselves in relation to the reader. From this point of view, it is important to note that both novels are fairly recent and, therefore, share the mnemonic context in which they are received by contemporary readers. This allows them to point the reader simultaneously to issues connected to the past, the present, and the past's place in the present. As will be discussed in chapter 3, both texts seem to ascribe a certain responsibility to the reader, but in different ways: whereas *Des Hommes* underlines the importance of understanding the difficulties of coming to a sense of closure with regard to the past, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* seems to encourage closure by means of a reconciliation with people from – and beyond – other communities.

The ways in which readers are positioned by the texts create a certain mnemonic potential that, as Ricoeur (1984) and others have argued, remains to be actualized in the reception of the works. In order to get a sense of this actualization, the fourth chapter will add a study of professional reviews and 'lay' reader responses (drawn from a variety of newspapers, magazines, discussion forums, and (literary) websites) to the critical analysis of the novels themselves. In this way, this thesis will present three different modes of reading (and writing), which all allow different aspects to come to the fore. In order to get a sense of the impact of literature on the way in which the collective memory of the Algerian war is shaped and negotiated, however, the lay readers are perhaps most interesting – not only because they outnumber the other kind of readers, but also because their responses appear to be more suited to report one's affective and personal relations to the texts and the past.

The aspects that will have come up in the discussion of the theoretical framework, the historical and (contemporary) mnemonic context, and the analysis of the novels will be combined to observe whether readers indeed feel called upon by the text in a certain way, how they respond to such a call, and which factors (for example with regard to the form and content of the text, or to their own background) appear to be most influential in this respect. Besides this focus on what the text seems to ask of the readers, equal attention will be paid to the aspects that are brought forward by the readers themselves, as I believe that not only responses, but precisely the ways in which readers *interact* with a literary text, determine its impact on memory culture. In this last part of the analysis – but also throughout the entire

thesis – questions of the following kind will play a guiding role: (how) do readers situate themselves in relation to the text and to the events of the war? Who are they, what is their prior knowledge? Do they refer to a need to learn about the past, and to their (personal, community or nation's) responsibilities in the present and future? Do they focus primarily on the content of the works, or also on its form? What kind of value do they attribute to the text (is it, for example, a source of information, understanding, or nostalgia)? Do they feel the need to pronounce a judgment about the represented events, or about the behavior of the protagonists? Has the text affected them, and how? Does it change the way in which they think about themselves and about others?

Or, as the passage by France Culture so simply but strikingly puts it: "Que peut la littérature, dans ce cadre?"

1. Theoretical Framework

An adequate analysis of the (individual and collective) impact of literature about the Algerian war should be embedded in the scholarly discussions on which it draws and that it seeks to expand, stemming from a combined framework of memory studies, postcolonial theory and reader oriented approaches. In this chapter, the central focus will be on the place of literature and the reader within the work of scholars who have pondered over the relations between the past and the present; the Self and the Other. How have the functions of literature been conceived, within these frameworks? What has been said about the interactions between texts and their readers? The Algerian war concerns the past struggles between two countries, but – as will be discussed more profoundly in the next chapter – its legacy still seems to influence relations within and between different social and ethnic groups today. Therefore, special attention will be paid to discussions about the transformative potential of literary texts, without overlooking the variety of other functions and effects that have been ascribed to them.

Literature and the Reader in Memory Studies

Literature already had its place in the work of some of the “founding fathers” of memory studies, such as Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora. By means of his well-known anecdote describing a “walk with Dickens”, Halbwachs (1980, 23) argues that the (literary) texts we have read, much like our social interactions, influence the way in which we perceive and experience things, and, therefore, that our individual memories are always already collective. However, as Astrid Erll (2011) points out, Halbwachs does not make the importance of literature and other media explicit, but – from his viewpoint as a sociologist – rather treats them as mere vehicles “facilitating the unimpeded access to a more comprehensive social dimension of memory” (130). Nora, in his *lieux de mémoire* project (1984-1992), pays more attention to the place of media – in the broadest sense – in collective memory. In contrast to Halbwachs, he claims that a natural, social collective memory does no longer exist in today’s society. Therefore, various ‘sites’ that have been ascribed a symbolic meaning and fulfill a function in society – ranging from buildings and monuments to historical persons and memorial days, and including literary texts – become a sort of artificial placeholder for memory (see Erll, 23-24).

Despite the presence of literature in the work of these founding scholars, Erll asserts that its position within memory studies has become more prominent in recent years, and particularly in the last decade, as literature is an important object of study in the subfield that – following Aleida Assmann’s term (Erll, 36) – has come to be known as *cultural* memory studies. With regard to this position, Erll mentions that an overview of possible topics and methods was first presented in the series *Literature as Cultural Memory* (2000) and that it has led up to “the abundance of individual contributions to the relation of literature and memory” that faces us today (Erll, 67).

In a special issue of the *European Journal of English Studies* devoted to literature and the production of cultural memory, Erll and Rigney (2006) distinguish three potential roles that literature could play in this

respect: it could serve as a medium of remembrance (a spur for studies focusing on the various ways in which literature recollects the past in the form of narratives, for example by emphasizing unofficial or marginal memories), as an object of remembrance (inciting a special attention to intertextual relations and processes of canonization), or it could be a medium for observing the production of cultural memory (in which literature is viewed as a 'mimesis of memory' and could provide knowledge about how memory works for individuals and groups). Although Erll and Rigney point out that literature's role as a medium of remembrance "raises the question as to how the writing (genre conventions, points of view, metaphors and so on) shapes our views of the past"(112) and even though the descriptions of the other roles also imply an interest in questions of reception, no explicit attention is being given to the place of the reader in the construction of cultural memory.

The notion of reception is more clearly visible in Erll's more recent book *Memory in Culture*, which was already referred to above. Here, the functions of literature (and of media in general) are regrouped as those of storage, circulation, and 'cues'. Erll underlines that, in any study of these functions, the reader should have a central position:

Literature as a medium of cultural memory is (...) first and foremost a phenomenon of reception. When we study literary works and ask what functions they fulfill in memory culture, we must start from the premise of their appropriation through readers, from the aspect of refiguration. (160)

The term 'refiguration' refers to *Temps et Récit* (1983-1985), Paul Ricoeur's philosophical treatise on time and narrative, which Erll discusses as an aid to illustrate the complex interactions between literature and cultural memory (152). Ricoeur distinguishes three levels of representation, which he refers to as mimesis₁ (in Erll's slightly reformulated definition, "the prefiguration of a literary text by memory culture", 152), mimesis₂ ("the literary configuration of new memory narratives", 152), and mimesis₃ ("their refiguration in the frameworks of different mnemonic communities", 153). The elements that will be central in the textual analysis of Laurent Mauvignier's *Des Hommes* (2009) and Yasmina Khadra's *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (2008) are those that Erll connects to mimesis₂: emplotment, voice, perspective, metaphors and other literary forms that are used to create – rather than merely represent – reality and cultural memory in literature (154). Although, from this point of view, the literary text is primarily linked to the historical events that it portrays and reshapes – and has predominantly been studied as such by literary scholars – Ricoeur emphasizes the place of mimesis₂ as a *mediator*, defining it as "the concrete process by which the textual configuration mediates between the prefiguration of the practical field and its refiguration through the reception of the work" (Ricoeur 1984, 53). From this point of view, one could argue that mimesis₂ is also revealing about the kind of audience the author had in mind, and that the choices made in the configuration of the text can shape its reception.

Erll emphasizes that, in order for a literary work to affect cultural memory, its refiguration needs to be collective; it must be read “in a broad swathe across society” and be received as a medium of memory (155). If these conditions are met, literary representations of characters and historical events

can have an impact on readers and *can* re-enter, via mimesis₃, the world of action, shaping, for example, perception, knowledge, and everyday communication, leading to political action – or prefiguring further representation (and this is how the circle of mnemonic mimesis continues to revolve). (155, emphasis in the original)

Despite Erll’s attentiveness to the central position of reception and of (communities of) readers, her distinction between the “mnemonic potential” of literary works and of their actual functions and effects seems to favor a somewhat limited narratological approach:

It is (...) never one formal characteristic alone which is responsible for the emergence of a certain mode; instead we have to look at whole clusters of narrative features, whose interplay may contribute to a certain memory effect. It is, of course, impossible to predict how stories will be interpreted by actual readers; but certain kinds of narrative representations seem to bear an affinity to different modes of remembering, and thus one may risk some hypotheses on the *potential* memorial power, or effects, of literary forms. (158, emphasis in the original)

Nevertheless, on one of the last pages of her book, Erll points out that actual reading practices are in dire need of rigorous study (171). A similar point is made by Wulf Kansteiner (2002), who argues that collective memory studies should combine its more common interpretive tools – ranging from “traditional historiography to post structural approaches” (179) – with the methods used in the study of media reception. He claims that scholars – and in particular historians – should leave behind the “simplistic, tacit assumption (...) that facts of representation coincide with facts of reception” (195), as readers and other media consumers can use the “same media texts for very different ends” (193), will often ignore certain media representations, or even read them “against the grain of their intended and intrinsic messages” (192). Irwin-Zarecka (1994), quoted by Kansteiner, underlines that “Individuals are perfectly capable of ignoring even the best told stories, of injecting their own, subversive meanings into even the most rhetorically accomplished ‘texts’ – and of attending to only those ways of making sense of the past that fit their own” (Irwin-Zarecka in Kansteiner, 192). Kansteiner, then, not only stresses the need for reception research to complement studies discussing a (media) text’s mnemonic potential, but also expresses the hypothesis that this potential is limited in several ways. The suggestion that media consumers will only attend to media representations that fit in with their own attitudes towards the past has also been made by Erll – in reference to Aleida Assmann’s notion of ‘collective texts’: “collective texts have to ‘fit’, have to be able to resonate with a memory culture’s horizons of meaning, its (narrative) schemata, and its existing images of the past” (Erll, 165).

Empathy, Awareness, Responsibility? – The Transformative Potential of Literature

Other scholars, however, seem to be more hopeful about the transformative mnemonic potential of cultural memory – and of literary texts in specific. In her article about the role of “Fiction as a Mediator in National Remembrance” (2008), Ann Rigney contrasts the ‘authority’ of modern historiography with the ‘allure’ of historical (literary) fiction, arguing that the greater popularity of the latter might lead to a bigger influence. Even though Erll asserts that the reader ascribes a certain kind of referentiality to both types of media (165), Rigney argues that the “poetic license” of fictional works allows them to “do distinctive things” (81) in the production of cultural memory. Rather than merely confirming the ideas that we already have, hybrid genres such as the historical novel “address through storytelling our understanding of particular historical events or particular periods” (84). Moreover, these works could encourage us to think about the ways in which this understanding – on both a personal and collective level – has come into being: “literature, in providing a space for experimenting with ways of representing the world, also gravitates towards engaging us in critical reflection of the nature of remembrance itself” (87). Besides offering new forms of representation, literature is also a platform for counter-memories, as it shows “a desire to get to the other side of official accounts, to experiences that had been written out of the picture” (88). By focusing on other events and different social groups, “fictional narratives help in shifting the social horizons in which people think about the past” (91) and can be “a stepping-stone medium for encouraging people to look beyond their present social frame of reference” (92).

Rigney sees the key to the effectiveness of these fictional narratives in their “experiential and reflective dimensions”, which “ensure that they have a value in themselves for the reader that is independent of their initial relevance” (92). The promise of a valuable, aesthetic literary experience can draw readers who have no prior stake in particular historical contexts. However, once readers become engaged in the story, their interest for these contexts can be aroused. In this way, literary narratives can travel across generational divides as well as national and social borders as they “help promote an imaginative link to other groups, creating prosthetic memory in Landsberg’s sense” (92).

Landsberg (2004) uses the notion of prosthetic memory to refer to “the possibility of taking on memories that are not naturally – ethnically, racially, or biologically – one’s intended inheritance” (Landsberg, 26). She describes how our interactions with diverse (mass) media that confront us with historical events we have not lived through ourselves – such as watching clips of testimony in a museum or reading literary texts – can be experiential ways of engaging with the past, that, in the best case, foster empathy and new (political) relations with individuals and groups from “a different class, race, or ethnic position” (48). In a chapter that deals with the remembrance of slavery, Landsberg discusses Toni Morrison’s novels *Beloved* and *Songs of Solomon* and remarks that Morrison hopes to “produce scars that might ultimately become part of her reader’s archive of experience. So while the black characters in Morrison’s novels acquire memories that might be considered their cultural inheritance, she intends

white readers to take on those memories, too” (100). To enable “identification across lines of difference” (101) and empathy, then, these memories must leave marks and be painful.

As promising as the notion of empathy may sound, to some scholars it has become a source of suspicion. Within the framework of current discussions about the residential school history in Canada², Roger I. Simon (2013) anticipates the potential possibilities and problems related to the place of personal stories within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. By quoting Rachel Baum, he points at the possible limitations of the transformative effects of these stories: they could create the impression that “listening to the story is itself enough, as if it does not take hard work – political work as well as emotional – to create a world in which we can truly say that ‘never again’ will such violence and violation be tolerated” (Baum in Simon, 130-131). He expresses the concern that stories of pain and loss could turn into spectacles, and that the people listening to or reading these stories might end up “feeling good about feeling bad” (132-133). What he typifies as the “too bad, so sad” attitude (133) does not require people to reflect upon their own responsibility and complicity, and, rather than constituting a decolonizing experience, it risks leading to a “replay or reinstating of colonial power relations” (131).

As will be discussed further on, the absence of self-reflection and action beyond the moment of reading might in part be caused by a notion of closure and redemption that seems to be present in certain texts. Another factor that has been brought up by various scholars - such as Dominick LaCapra (2001) – is a sense of “self-sufficient, projective or incorporative identification” from the part of the reader. He contrasts this with a more ethical attitude he calls “empathic unsettlement”, which involves “a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other’s position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other’s place” (78). Further on, he relates the unwished-for tendency to turn the other into an “object of pity, charity, or condescension” to sympathy, whereas empathy “should rather be understood in terms of an affective relation, rapport, or bond with the other recognized and respected as other” (212-213).

A strikingly similar point is put forward by Landsberg, who argues that empathy, rather than sympathy, is created in our mediated experiences of painful stories. She explains the difference as follows:

Prosthetic memory teaches ethical thinking by fostering empathy. As I described previously, the experience of empathy has more potential and is more politically useful and progressive than its cousin sympathy. Sympathy, a feeling that arises out of simple identification, often takes the form of wallowing in someone else’s pain. Although it presumes sameness between the

² The residential school system (1880-1996) was part of Canada’s politics of assimilation and forced over 150.000 indigenous children to leave their communities. In 2008, the government’s official apology for this system led to the inauguration of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). For more information about this subject and its context, see Peter Kulchyski’s *The Red Indian* (2007) or Henderson and Wakeham’s *Reconciling Canada* (2013).

sympathizer and her object, whether or not there is actually a “sameness” between them, an actual shared experience, matters little, for in the act of sympathizing, one projects one’s own feelings onto another. This act can be imperializing and colonizing, taking over, rather than making space for, the other person’s feelings. (129)

Empathy, by contrast, would have the potential to go hand in hand with “social responsibility as well as political alliances that transcend race, class, and gender” (21). Both Landsberg and Simon use the term “colonizing”, but in slightly different ways. Whereas Landsberg seems to refer to a focus on one’s own feelings rather than on those of the people that lived through the painful experiences, Simon refers more specifically to the tendency of readers or listeners to perceive these people as “victims” deserving “pity”, denying them “a subjectivity that is self-constituting” (131), while remaining unaware of their own implicatedness and responsibility.

Both of these concerns have also been put forward by Angemeer (2012), who combines a theoretical interest in postcolonial issues (focusing on Said’s notion of orientalism and, more generally, the relations between the Self and the Other) with an analysis of *Amazon.com* reviews posted by Western readers on bestselling books about Muslims. She uses the term ‘empathetic identification’ to refer to readers’ tendency to focus on their own emotions and to “articulate shared values and experiences with the Muslim Other as a way to create a superficial connection” (23) and argues that this tendency stems from the fact that readers are often unaware of the ways in which they are themselves “implicated in the past and present injustices of Westerners toward the Muslim Other” (6). In order to challenge this perceived empathetic identification, readers would have to acknowledge the “historical, political and cultural differences, and the differences that have arisen between them and the Muslim Other because of colonialism and imperialism” (24).

According to Angemeer, this awareness would require a different way of reading and, ideally, education could play a role in changing the way in which people approach texts about other cultures and social groups. Following Todd (2003), she suggests that a notion of guilt rather than empathy should serve “as a motivator for the Westerner creating a more responsible relationship with the Other” (53). Todd challenges the “belief that through empathy, one can feel with, understand and engage with the Other better” in a way that recalls LaCapra’s and Landsberg’s criticism of ‘sympathy’: “projection by the Self onto the Other becomes interpreted as empathy with the Other. It becomes a process of the Self ‘[casting] its own inner life onto that of the other; it is as though it sets the other up to be a reflection of part of the self’” (Todd in Angemeer, 53). By being attentive to the alterity and ‘uniqueness’ of the Other, the Self could become aware of its implicatedness in the Other’s condition and develop a sense of guilt that would lead to being “susceptible to the call of the Other” (Todd in Angemeer, 53-54).

Whereas Landsberg underlines the importance of the experiential dimension of literary texts and other media in creating the potential for new and more responsible relations with people belonging to other social groups, Todd and Angemeer focus primarily on the attitudes that (Western) readers bring to bear

while situating themselves in relation to literary texts. A third factor worth considering might be the way in which *the text* situates itself in relation to its (implied) readers, and the way in which these readers are situated by the text. As Angemeer points out in relation to the texts that are central to her study – Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003), Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003), and Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin’s *Three Cups of Tea* (2006) – all three of them “were originally published in English and targeted to a Western, English-speaking audience” (57). Although she does not really elaborate on the possible implications of these facts herself, others have pointed at troublesome aspects of this writing with an eye to the Western audience. Besides the fact that it could be seen as “a further stage in the leveling process of a spreading global consumerism” (Damrosch, 18), the content of literary works also risks being adapted to our “consumerist demands” (Slaughter, 326). Damrosch points out that “[e]ven today, foreign works will rarely be translated at all in the United States, much less widely distributed, unless they reflect American concerns and fit comfortably with American images of the foreign culture in question” (18). Even though I would agree with Angemeer that readers still have their own responsibility in bringing a sense of historical and situated awareness to the text, these literary works – that, to a certain degree, seem to focus on meeting the ‘expectations’ of Western readers – are unlikely to contribute to that awareness.

Similar concerns might be expressed with regard to novels by Algerian authors that are directly written in French, of which Khadra’s *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* constitutes an example. Although, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the notion of writing in ‘the language of the Other’ has some extra complicating dimensions in the Franco-Algerian context, the fact that the novel – like that by the French author Mauvignier – appeared in France before it was published in Algeria could suggest that these texts primarily address (and perhaps search to please) a French reading public. Even if this is the case, however, the (reflective) focus on the Algerian war will make it hard for French readers to remain unaware of the text’s and their own historical situatedness.

Still, the awareness of their (nation’s) implicatedness in the (hi)story described in the novels might not always suffice to create the sense of guilt mentioned by Angemeer and Todd. In his article on the potential effects of personal stories in the context of the TRC in Canada, Simon suggests that

When civic responsibility is understood as dependent on feelings of guilt, responsibility is circumscribed if guilt is split off from the present and attributed to past institutional policies and the people responsible for them. In such circumstances, those in the present view the colonial practices of the past as not their fault or deed, and hence they bear no responsibility for its consequences. (136)

Some of the present-day readers of literary texts about the Algerian war may have lived through the events themselves, but others might not feel directly concerned and defer responsibility to the politicians in power at that time or to social groups which they do not feel connected with in any way. Even though Canada’s responsibility towards Aboriginal people is of a different nature than that of the

French towards Algerians – after all, Algeria is not a French colony anymore – the legacy of the war still seems to be a direct and indirect cause of conflicts in contemporary France. According to Simon, “if our interest is in a form of public history that might enhance civic responsibility” (136), “worth discussing at the very least would be cultural practices that might encourage a de-coupling of guilt and responsibility so that the rejection of guilt does not produce the rejection of responsibility” (138).

Although the “rejection of guilt” appears to be primarily a problem related to the reception and attitudes of readers, it would seem that “cultural practices” such as literature might have a role to play in shaping these attitudes. The notion of closure, which was already briefly touched upon above, is of importance here. Within trauma theory, the concept of “narrative fetishism” (Santner, 144) has been brought forward to refer to narratives that simulate “a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere” (144). In this way, these narratives could create the impression that the trauma “that called that narrative into being in the first place” has been resolved and that “the work of mourning”, or memory work in general, is no longer necessary. Hayden White, in an article about the representation of so-called ‘modernist events’ – of which colonial conflicts like the Algerian war could be considered an example –, quotes the modernist writer Gertrude Stein to make a similar point: “the thing in its essence being completed cannot be remembered because there is no emotion in remembering it”. White argues that modernist events can only be adequately represented (that is, without being fetishized) with the aid of modernist literary forms, such as the “psychopathological techniques, which explode the conventions of the traditional tale” that have been listed by Jameson as “artificial closures, the blockage of narrative, [their] deformation and formal compensations, the dissociation or splitting of narrative functions, including the repression of certain of them, and so forth,” (Jameson in White, 82).

Whereas White seems to be primarily concerned with doing justice to the nature and scope of the events that are represented (with the transition between *mimesis*₁ and *mimesis*₂, in Ricoeur’s terms), the concerns expressed by Santner and the quote by Stein suggest that narrative closure might also have negative consequences for the potential impact (*mimesis*₃) of a text: if the text sends out the message that the past has been ‘completed’ and that memory work is no longer necessary, readers might not feel (emotionally) involved and implicated enough to remember and take responsibility. Besides the form, choices made with regard to the content of literary works might also have a role to play in either encouraging or preventing illusions of closure and ‘intactness’. Dominick LaCapra, for example, warns against “fetishized and totalizing narratives that deny the trauma that called them into existence by (...) harmonizing events, and often recuperating the past in terms of uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios” (78). As Keavy Martin discusses in relation to Robert A. Alexie’s *Porcupines and China Dolls* (2009) – a novel that deals with the ongoing legacy of the residential school system in Canada – closure can be refused by pointing at the continuing impact of the past in the present. By showing that telling one’s story does not straightforwardly lead to a (cathartic) process of healing, “the author does not allow his readers the comfort of watching his characters recover” (60), but instead requires them to bear witness (49). The novel ends “with the withholding of an ending” (61) and

goes against a desire for resolution and closure that, according to Martin, “is in many ways a longing for oblivion – for the luxury of forgetting and for the absolution of amnesia” (61).

A Plurality of Identities and Functions

The relation between closure and responsibility is also of interest in the context of the Algerian war, and will certainly be dealt with in the analysis of the literary texts and the reader comments. However, Angemeer primarily focuses on the responsibility of the Western reader towards non-Western Muslims, and creates a seemingly clear-cut binary opposition between the Self and the Other that becomes problematic in the context of the memory of the Algerian war. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, there are many different mnemonic communities on both sides of the Mediterranean (French and Algerian citizens and veterans, *pieds-noirs*, *harkis*, immigrants) that all have their own interpretations of the war and are related to each other in complicated ways. These multiple and fragmented perspectives on the Algerian war are visible in the novels, and have the potential to complicate notions of guilt and responsibility. Alternative notions that have been posited in discussions on identity formation – such as Said’s ‘counterpoint’ (discussed in Lachman, 2010) and Jean-Luc Nancy’s ‘singular-plurality’, which both allow for more fluid and relational conceptions of being and being-with – could help nuance and surpass the binary between Self and Other and enable a more adequate discussion of the representation and reception of the Algerian war in literature.

Moreover, the notions of empathy, guilt, and responsibility that have been discussed until now – and were drawn, in part, from Angemeer’s normative discussion about the way in which readers *should* respond to literary texts – have a strong ideological dimension and might not necessarily account for the full variety of functions and effects that literature about the Algerian war may have for different readers and mnemonic communities. Erll points out that literary works can use various modes of remembering to represent the past, and instead of using the reflexive mode – which, in some cases, could promote reconciliation and new (political) relations between social groups – some texts might, on the contrary, primarily rely on an antagonistic mode that helps “to promote one version of the past and reject another” (159). The antagonistic mode “tends to infuse literary works which represent identity-groups and their versions of the past”, often using negative stereotypes, biased perspectives, and ‘we’-narration to present the memories of one group as true, while conflicting memories of other groups are portrayed as false (159). As was mentioned earlier, however, people will often read “against the grain” (Kansteiner, 192), and following Rigney’s *faute-de-mieux* principle – asserting that social groups will often value any literary text that represents their story over historical works that are ‘irrelevant’ to them (88) – they might claim stories with both antagonistic and reflexive modes as their own.

Inversely, however, the appropriation of a literary text by a specific social group does not necessarily mean that an antagonistic function is ascribed to it. While some readers might value a literary work because it validates their own perspective of the past, others might be (negatively or positively) affected

by a text because it opens up wounds, gives comfort, or is a source of nostalgia.³ In this respect, literary works can also answer the desire of older generations to share their memories with their children, or – inversely – provide an occasion for younger generations to learn more about the past of their parents and grandparents. It would be interesting to observe the functions and effects of these texts within and outside of the mnemonic communities they most closely relate to – with an eye on postmemory⁴ and prosthetic memory – and to see to which extent various aspects of the texts appear to contribute to this. In order to get a better sense of these functions and effects, and of the ways in which readers ascribe value to and are affected by literary texts, a study of their responses seems necessary.

From Reader Response to Readers' Responses

The origins of reader oriented approaches within literary studies are often traced back to the 1970s, when scholars started to oppose the formalist assertion that critical analysis should focus on the 'essential core' of the text itself, and not on "the readers' generative process of reading, understanding, and appreciating it" (Harding, 68). In the late 1940s and the 1950s, William Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe Beardsley had warned in particular against the fallacious emphasis on the psychological effects and emotional impact of a text on the reader, which they referred to as the Affective Fallacy and defined as "a confusion between the poem and its results (what it *is* and what it *does*)", an approach that would produce impressionism and be irrelevant to critical interpretation (Wimsatt and Beardsley in Harding, 68, emphasis in the original). A growing number of scholars within the critical movement of 'reader response' reacted to these assumptions, placing the meaning making processes of the reader at the center of attention. 'Reader response' consisted of – and has given rise to – a wide range of approaches, methodologies, and perspectives, and as Harding argues, "it is more accurate to think of reader response as a critical orientation rather than a coherent category of techniques and beliefs" (69).

She goes on to describe that, in the twenty-first century, few scholars will identify as reader-response critics, because the emphasis on the reader "is no longer a defining feature of a unified theoretical school", but has rather become a common subject of attention "among many schools of criticism" (74). Within the field of memory studies, this influence becomes apparent from all the hypotheses about readers that were discussed above and from explicit references to concepts of key figures within reader response theory, such as Stanley Fish's "interpretive communities". Fish argues that the validity of an interpretation of a text is not determined by the identity of the individual reader, but by the common strategies, ideals, and methods of the reader's (social or scholarly) group (Goldstein and Machor, xii-xiii). Erll connects this concept to Ricoeur's *mimesis*₃, and explains that

³ Nostalgia about colonial times is often regarded as inappropriate, but - as Welch and McGonagle (2013) suggest – it could be seen as "a form of resistance to official history" that challenges the "silences and opacities of national memory" (23). This subject will be discussed in more detail in chapters 3 and 4.

⁴ Although Marianne Hirsch – who has coined the term postmemory – primarily seems to refer to the way in which the second and third generation are *marked* by the traumatic experiences of their parents, the notion will here be taken up in the slightly more general sense that has been attributed to it by Rothberg (2009) – and others - : "later generations' *engagement* with their parents' traumatic pasts" (273, my emphasis).

As far as the appropriation and interpretation of literary works is concerned, we must start from the premise of the existence of mnemonic 'interpretive communities' (...). Social groups agree or disagree on possible refigurations and on the value of a literary text for cultural memory. In all of these social processes, power is a factor that cannot be underestimated: Literary texts offer possible interpretations of the past and develop a number of – partly affirmative, partly subversive – narrative potentials. How these potentials are actualized in the social arena is a matter of negotiation and contestation". (155-156)

Fish, along with other key theorists associated with reader-response theory, such as Iser and Jauss, has also had an important influence in the field of reception study. According to Griswold, Lenaghan, and Naffziger, the transition from the notion of an individual, universal reader to a focus on situated communities of readers precisely marks the difference between the fields of reader response criticism and reception studies:

Reader response criticism emphasizes the individual reader's role in constructing the meaning of texts. Reception studies, while also emphasizing the individual's role in meaning making, go to greater lengths to situate individual responses within a larger cultural context. (...) Feminist and ethnic studies scholars, rejecting the concept of the "universal reader," have explored discrete, marginalized text communities. (20)

If these authors stress the importance of readers' positions within social, cultural, or ethnic groups, Goldstein and Machor underline the significance of their historical situatedness within reception studies. Referring to Jauss's ideas about the reader's 'horizon of expectation', they point out that "time and change divide the perspective or horizon of the modern reader from that of the 'ancient' author" (xvi) and that "by examining the readers' changing horizons and sociohistorical contexts, criticism reveals literature's historical influence or reception" (xii). Although a temporal divide between the author and readers does hardly exist in the case of the novels that will be discussed in the following chapters, the topic of the Algerian war and the different ways in which mnemonic communities relate to it make a focus on readers' historical and social position self-evident.

Goldstein and Machor also indicate that a distinction can be made between reception *theorists*, who "dispute the importance of ethics, politics, ontology, and institutions for readers and audiences" in a very general way, and reception *studies*, which "dispute the relationship of text, reader, and their historical contexts" in more specific cases (xvi). Most of the papers presented in their book fall within the latter category, and it is also this sense of reception study that governs Harding's description of the field, explaining that these studies focus on "the way that a particular text has been *received* by readers – how it was reviewed when first published, whether it won awards or other accolades, how many editions were printed, whether it sold widely in its time or since then, whether it has been studied or neglected over time, and so on" (76, italics in the original). All of these factors certainly seem important to determine a text's impact – for example on the construction of cultural memory – and will be taken

into account, but they might not suffice in giving an accurate portrayal of the variety of specific functions and potential transformative effects that texts may have for different readers. Harding adds that some theorists “have used evidence about various kinds of reception to consider how texts affected actual readers” (76), and a closer look at the responses of actual readers seems indeed necessary to obtain a clearer view of the mnemonic potential and other functions and effects of literary texts.

One field of study that is concerned with the responses of actual readers – which Harding lists as a separate school of criticism but that others, like Holub (1984), have included within reception theory – is that of empirical literary studies. Often, empirical research takes the shape of experiments that put psychological and literary theories to the test in order to generate insights about the ways in which readers respond to specific aspects of literary texts. These studies are, of course, embedded in wider social and theoretical discussions. Within her PhD project *Reading Suffering. An Empirical Enquiry into Emotional, Intellectual and Ethical Responses to Narratives of Mental Pain*, Emy Koopman investigates the way in which readers respond to literary renderings of grief, depression, rape, and other forms of suffering, focusing – among other things – on the role of implicitness/explicitness and aesthetic aspects⁵. In an earlier study (Koopman 2011), she explored the “mechanisms of ‘therapeutic’ functions of literature” for people who turn to fiction to help them cope with a difficult time in their lives. She found that ‘narrative feelings’ (identification with the character and feeling absorbed in the narrative world”) had a positive impact on catharsis and insight, whereas ‘aesthetic feelings’ (“attention to and appreciation of stylistic features”) did not. Readers’ responses to the suffering of others and the functions of literature in relation to their own suffering (or that of people they feel closely connected to) will both also be of interest in the context of the Algerian war, although the historical specificity and the collective nature of suffering in this context form a complicating dimension.

Another example of empirical research worth mentioning here is the Dutch national research project “The Multicultural and Multiform Society”. Within this project, Frank Hakemulder has carried out a number of studies concerning the effects of reading (literary) stories on the perception of others belonging to different (social) groups. A general outcome was that “the degree to which we are immersed in a fictional world determines the degree of the effect on our out-group perception” (quote on Hakemulder’s website), a finding that seems to be in line with Landsberg’s claims about the importance of the experiential dimension of literature – and other media – and its potential to contribute to empathy and new connections between different groups. Hakemulder (2001) discusses an experiment in which participants either read a story or an expository essay about the position of women in Algeria. The results suggested that reading literature might widen the range of people readers are willing to consider as part of their in-group (240). The presence of characters in the story seemed to be an important factor, as it allowed readers to ‘take roles’.

⁵ See, for example, Koopman, Hilscher, and Cupchick (2012) and Koopman (2013).

Although these results are very interesting and provide some insights about the potential roles of fiction in crossing boundaries between the Self and the Other, their application to specific contexts such as that of literature about the Algerian war is limited. As was discussed above, hopeful-sounding notions like empathy and identification can be considered problematic, and the complex and nuanced discussions surrounding these notions do not always lend themselves to straightforward empirical operationalization. Moreover, as critics like Geoff Hall have suggested, it is difficult to determine the ‘ecological validity’ of the results of empirical experiments – a notion which he defines as “the very basic demand that a study actually tells us about the phenomenon it purports to tell the researcher and the readers of that research about, and not about a suggestive but frustratingly parallel research universe” (Hall in Allington and Swann, 224). He fears that these experiments – which often involve manipulated texts, rating tasks and exam-like environments – might say more about what readers *can* do if they are asked to, rather than what they actually do in their day-to-day encounters with literary texts. Therefore, he underlines that “what we think of as empirical research should not be limited to experimentalist paradigms” and encourages “more nuanced qualitative or ethnographical approaches” to reader research (Hall in Benwell, 303), which some scholars have undertaken by studying (local, televised, or online) book clubs. Others have started looking at historical anecdotes of reading in order to obtain information about the way in which literary texts were interpreted and received by earlier generations, which has led to the development of the online accessible Reading Experience Database 1450-1945 (Allington and Swann, 226). A common characteristic of these diverse studies is a focus on the “*ways of talking*” used by readers, which “have increasingly come to be foregrounded with the development of a discourse analytic approach to media reception study” (Allington and Swann, 225, italics in the original).

If “digitized databases have made (...) historical resources accessible and searchable, fuelling renewed interest in examining historical readers who have read, and sometimes reviewed or responded to, literary texts” (Harding, 76), the worldwide web seems to play a similar role in providing access to reviews and responses by contemporary readers. In a position paper in which he argues the need for a corpus of online book responses, Peter Boot points out that “Today’s online book responses (...) are unique in that they are produced spontaneously by ordinary readers and have an ecological validity that other research data lack” (33). He shows that these responses can be – and have been – studied from many different angles, ranging from studies on processes of canonization that have established “that online reviews do have an influence on book sales” (33) to studies using linguistic technology “to characterize responses from different site types based on word usage” (34). Whereas the latter type of research has especially been used with an eye on marketing purposes, the former type seems more interesting here, as this suggests that online reader responses not only reveal, but also contribute to processes of reception – and potentially, the construction of cultural memory. In this respect, a situated close reading of reader commentary – a method that, as Boot mentions, has been used by scholars like Steiner (2008), Domsch (2009), and Gutjahr (2002) with regard to *Amazon.com* customer reviews – seems to be most useful in relation to this study, as it could provide insights about the reasons why readers decide to pick up certain books, the functions they ascribe to literature about the Algerian war,

and how particular texts have affected them. In certain respects, online reader commentary appears to be even more informative than the study of 'real life' reading groups, as it requires little to no scholarly intervention and readers can exchange their views in a relatively neutral, anonymous, and easily accessible environment.

However, this anonymity is also one of the potential pitfalls of online reader research. Immediately after having praised the ecological validity of online book responses, Boot stresses that "[this] does, of course, not imply we should take everything that people write online at face value" (33). As Paul C. Gutjahr (2002) remarks in his article about *Amazon.com* responses to Christian novels,

[It] is impossible to tell much about the readers themselves. Aside from offering the content of their reviews and an occasional note on geographical location, the reviewers remain largely anonymous. There is no way to confirm either the content or the identity of those who write these reviews. (219)

Because the amount of demographic information available will likely vary from reader to reader – and because, as Gutjahr points out, this information cannot be verified – it might sometimes be hard to determine how readers are connected to the events of the Algerian war and their legacy. Angemeer, whose study of Western readers' *Amazon.com* responses to books about Muslims was discussed above, adds that this inability to contextualize readers also hinders attempts to "interpret their motivations for writing these reviews" (65). She asserts that these reviews are not always written spontaneously, but rather might sometimes be 'planted' on behalf of (rival) publishers, or form part of a reading assignment for a high school or university class. Sometimes, follow up research – like that carried out by Gutjahr, who sent out a questionnaire to 300 of the Amazon reviewers – can clarify these motivations, as well as the background of readers and the long term effects of their reading experience.

Another aspect worth taking into consideration is the fact that, even if the identity and motivations of the reviewers appear to be clear, it is not always possible "to say how representative these readers are" (Gutjahr, 119): the readers who choose to write a review about a particular literary text might precisely be the ones who felt most positive or negative about it. Moreover, as degrees of (digital) literacy may vary, these readers might not necessarily be representative of society as a whole or even of the social group they feel connected to. As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, this issue of representativeness could also play a role in the Algerian context, as approximately 20 percent of the population is illiterate, French is a second language for most readers, and as the literary infrastructure in general still copes with some problems (see Miliani 2011).

Although it is important to be aware of these potential limitations, I still strongly believe that a comparative analysis of reader responses is worthwhile, as it can provide insight in the diverse mechanisms that are at work in the construction of a discourse and discussion around particular works and in the various kinds of functions and effects literary texts may have for readers with different

relations to the same (historical and mnemonic) context. As Allington (2010) has rightly pointed out, it is important to acknowledge and realize that these responses also have a value “as cultural products in their own right – in other words, as texts” (13), and I think that it is more interesting and relevant to perceive them as such than to ponder strictly on their validity as unmediated ‘realities’.

Often, scholars categorize reader reviews by common characteristics and carry out a discourse analysis to interpret them. Although their methods are similar, these studies all draw on very different theoretical discussions that are related to the specific questions they explore. While Gutjahr focuses on the place of the Christian novel within American Protestantism, the studies by Aubry (2009) and Angemeer are embedded in postcolonial discussions about the relation between the Self and the Other, processes of identification and (the problematic sides of) empathy. Reader response theory, the framework that was at the basis of reception study, does not necessarily play an important role within these studies. However, Angemeer draws on a number of concepts by key figures within reader response: Jauss’s horizon of expectation, Fish’s interpretive communities and Rosenblatt’s distinction between efferent and aesthetic stances of reading (44). This distinction holds that readers tend to look for facts and answers while reading non-fictional texts (the efferent stance) and “focus primarily on experiencing what is being evoked, lived through, during the reading” while they are reading literary texts (the aesthetic stance, Rosenblatt in Angemeer, 44). As Angemeer shows, this assertion is complicated when readers turn to literature about the Other in a search for knowledge rather than an aesthetic experience, something that might also hold true for (part of) the readers of literary texts about the Algerian war.

Despite the presence of these reader response concepts in Angemeer’s theoretical framework, notions drawn from postcolonial theory and even memory studies – for example discussions about witnessing and testimony, which will also have its place in this study, particularly in relation to *Des Hommes* – appear to be even more important instruments in her analysis of reader reviews. The variety of theoretical backgrounds in which reader research is situated confirms Harding’s claim that, nowadays, the focus on readers constitutes an approach rather than a coherent theoretical school. If the first part of this chapter was concerned with explaining how memory studies could be enriched by paying closer attention to the experiences and responses of real readers, this last part aimed to show that reception research can profitably incorporate the theories and hypotheses that have been posited within the fields of postcolonialism and memory studies. The analysis of reader reviews in this study, then, will proceed in the light of the manifold discussions that were addressed above. (How) do readers situate themselves in relation to the text and the Algerian war? Do they refer to a need to learn about the past, and to their responsibilities in the present and future? Do they focus primarily on the content of the work, or also on its form and experiential dimensions? Does the text affect them? Does it change the way in which they think about themselves and about others, fostering empathy, guilt, or understanding? Which kinds of mnemonic functions do they ascribe to the text? In combination with the context and text specific questions that will come to the fore in the following chapters, these questions are set out to provide

insight in the impact of literary works about the Algerian war on their readers, and on the variety of functions and effects these works might have in the construction of cultural memory.

Whereas the studies mentioned above based their analyses on customer reviews found on *Amazon.com*, this thesis will observe the reader responses left on its French counterpart *Amazon.fr*, the literary website *Babelio.com* (situated in France and mainly addressing a French readership), and on the various weblogs that are connected to some of the responses left on Babelio (which, in that case, will often be ‘responses to responses’ that can provide insight in the interactions between readers). Because it is harder to find Algerian weblogs dealing with the selected novels and because there does not yet appear to exist an Algerian equivalent to websites like Amazon and Babelio, the inclusion of Algerian responses requires a slightly different approach. Responses to *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* will be drawn from a number of general discussion forums that pay attention to the novel (for example *Dziriya.net*, *Algerie-dz.com*, and *Setif.dz*) and from the comment sections that accompany articles about Khadra on various news websites (most notably *Le Matin DZ Algérie*). Because, even in this way, it proved hard to find non-professional reader responses to *Des Hommes* – in fact, Khadra’s novel appears to be one of the few works about the Algerian war that has elicited substantive comments – professional reviews (about both novels and written in both countries) will also be taken into account.

Besides this practical reason to include professional reviews, they are also interesting in their own right: on the one hand, these reviewers are readers themselves, but they also play a distinctive role in framing the way in which the novels are received by other readers. In this way, this thesis will center on three different modes of reading (and writing): that of the scholar, who – with a certain sense of ‘objectivity’ and distance – attempts to situate the text in its mnemonic context (as I will do myself in chapter 3); that of the reviewer, who might be less objective, but will probably still approach the text with a certain distance, pointing primarily at the aspects that could be of interest to the larger readership; and that of the non-professional readers, who might provide most insight about the novel’s impact on a personal and emotional level, and – because of their greater number – might precisely have the biggest and most direct influence on a work’s refiguration in memory culture.

2. The Algerian War: A Variety of Historical, Mnemonic, and Literary Perspectives

If the preceding chapter aimed to position this study within the theoretical frameworks of memory studies, postcolonial theory and reader oriented approaches, this chapter zooms in on its place within scholarly discussions of the history, memory, and literary representations of the Algerian war (1954 – 1962). In order to come to a fuller understanding of readers' responses to fictional texts about this war, it is important to have a sense of its central events, the various groups that were involved in it, and the ways in which the war has been remembered, represented, and discussed over time within French and Algerian society.

In his book *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (1999), Hayden White points out that 'facts' about (historical) events are not objective, as they are always subjected to the historian's choices, for example with regard to context and detail (71). The well-known expression claiming that "history is written by the victors" – often attributed to Winston Churchill, but of uncertain origin – also underlines the importance of perspective and representation. Although notions of 'victor' and 'victim' are complicated in the context of the Algerian war – as will be discussed in what follows – its history and memory are certainly subject to ongoing debates.

A Contested and Negotiated Past

In this respect, even a seemingly simple definition like "the Algerian war (1954-1962)" requires some contextualization. On the one hand, within the French context, the 'Algerian war' was only recognized as such by French Parliament in 1999. Until then, the events had been described as "opérations de maintien de l'ordre" (Stora, 122), a name that demonstrates the fact that the French originally thought of the war as an internal conflict. Stora (2012) explains that, as the French had been present in Algeria since 1830, "avant même que la Savoie devienne française", and as many French citizens had been living in Algeria for multiple generations – making it "une colonie de peuplement" – citizens and politicians of all orientations agreed when François Mitterrand, minister of Interior Affairs in 1954, declared that "l'Algérie, c'est la France" (27). A famous slogan at that time held that "La méditerranée traverse la France comme la Seine traverse Paris" (28) and according to Stora, independence only became conceivable as a political solution in 1959, when De Gaulle pronounced himself in favor of self-determination in Algeria (82).

On the other hand, as Schyns (2012) demonstrates, the shift from "opérations de maintien de l'ordre" to "guerre d'Algérie" does not completely overcome questions of perspective, as others – especially in Algeria – might prefer the terms "guerre d'Indépendance" or "guerre de Libération nationale" (24). Schyns, however, points out that all of these different notions are known and used in both countries, and explains that she primarily uses "guerre d'Algérie" because of its presence in the work of leading scholars (like Stora) and its greater familiarity to 'the public' (47). Both of these reasons, and especially

the latter, also play an important role in the designation of the war in this study, as the responses of 'the public' will be a central concern.

As Stora explains, even the dates that are commonly retained to describe the war (November 1st, 1954 as its starting point and July 5th, 1962 as its end) can be considered as somewhat arbitrary. After independence the violence continued for weeks (114) and some historians have argued that a first Algerian war took place in the years following the conquest by the French in 1830, or that the Sétif massacres of May and June 1945 should be considered as the real starting point of the war (16, see also Schyns 26, footnote 40). Moreover, Stora's discussion of the total number of war casualties shows that even something as seemingly objective as the number of deaths can be debated:

le nombre de morts est, depuis la fin du conflit, un sujet de désaccord et de polémiques entre la France et l'Algérie. Les historiens sont confrontés à des discours de propagande qui exagèrent, ou au contraire minimisent, la réalité. Côté algérien, le chiffre de 1 000 000, voire 1 500 000 morts, a été retenu. Côté français, on a avancé le chiffre de 250 000 morts. D'après les estimations les plus sérieuses, la guerre aurait fait près de 500 000 morts, en grande majorité des Algériens musulmans (près de 400 000). (115-116)

Although different interpretations of historical events are ubiquitous within the field of history, the variety of names, dates, and numbers that are linked to the Algeria's decolonization are a first sign of the fact that the war is still very much a site of contestation and negotiation. As Stora points out in the following passage (in which he manages to capture a lot of aspects of the conflict), the war and contemporary debates not only oppose France and Algeria, but also divide groups within these countries:

Tous ces chiffres sont impressionnants. Mais, à eux seuls, ils ne rendent pas compte de ce qu'a été cette guerre. (...) Il faut aussi y ajouter, lorsque l'on fait le bilan de la guerre d'Algérie, les très lourdes pertes matérielles, les déplacements massif de population, les tortures, les disparitions, etc. Ce conflit a duré plus de sept ans. Il a été d'une cruauté terrible. Il a divisé non seulement les Algériens et les Français, mais aussi les Algériens entre eux et les Français entre eux. (116-117)

Alain-Gérard Slama, quoted by Schyns, speaks of "plusieurs guerres superposées" and distinguishes up to six wars within the Algerian war: "(...) gouvernement de Paris contre algériens insurgés, pieds-noirs contre métropole, musulmans intégrés contre nationalistes, révolutionnaires du FLN contre démocrates et Messalistes, partisans de 'l'Algérie française' et intellectuels de gauche contre de Gaulle, OAS contre armée loyaliste" (Slama in Schyns, 25, footnote 37).

Memory in France: From Amnesia to *Guerres de Mémoires*

According to Eldridge (2010), the “controversial and deeply divisive nature” of the Algerian war itself is reflected in the debates between “the multiple groups currently resident in France with a connection to the war, each of which possesses their own particular recollections and interpretation of those years” (n.p.). She mentions the “*veterans*”, mainly consisting of the 1 500 000 young men (the majority of a generation born between 1932 and 1943) who were sent to Algeria as conscript soldiers (“*appelés*”, Stora, 44), the “*porteurs de valise* (suitcase carriers) who had actively aided in the independence struggle”, the “*harkis* who fought with the French against their fellow countrymen” (more than 100 000 at the end of the war, of whom tens of thousands were killed after independence, while a smaller group got “parked” in camps in France (Stora, 112))⁶, and the “*pieds-noirs*”, the European Algerians, also called ‘rapatriés’ upon their massive (re)migration to France in 1962, “who generally viewed the colonial period as a blessing for all concerned and independence as the tragic sacrifice of a priceless piece of France” (Eldridge, n.p.). Although this list is not exhaustive, these groups – and especially the veterans, harkis and pieds-noirs – seem to be most visible within the “kaleidoscope of fragmented memories” in France, which, as Eldridge explains

have increasingly come into open conflict, particularly over the issue of when and how to commemorate the war, with each group seeking to see their version of the past enshrined in official rituals and monuments. So intense has this competition become that it has acquired the epithet *guerres de mémoires*. (Eldridge, n.p., italics in the original)

Earlier on, she characterizes these memory wars as an excrescence of what Henry Rousso has called a state of “‘*hypermnesia*’, characterized by ‘a continual and almost obsessive presence in contemporary public space’” (Rousso in Eldridge, n.p.) which has gradually developed in France within the last twenty years. In this respect, Pierre Nora (quoted by Rothberg) has claimed that

we have passed from a modest memory, which only demanded to make itself admitted and recognized, to a memory ready to impose itself by any means. I have elsewhere evoked a ‘tyranny of memory’; it would be necessary today to speak of its terrorism. So much so that we are less sensitive to the suffering that it expresses than to the violence by which it wants to make itself heard. (Nora in Rothberg, 269)

Before going into the various consequences that have been and can be related to this current state of memory in France, it is relevant to note – as many scholars do – that this hypermnesia and the memory wars that followed from it can be seen as a response to the preceding period of apparent national amnesia. Stora, quoted by Eldridge, explains this as follows: “After periods of great fever – uprisings,

⁶ Despite the French state’s official policy to discourage the reception of harkis, thousands of them arrived in France. Most of them were installed in camps, often in precarious conditions. For more information about this subject, see for example Besnaci-Lancou et al. (2010).

wars, revolutions, massacres, genocides – societies accumulate silences so that all citizens can pursue their life together. It is only after that painful memories return to the surface of societies. And then sometimes conflicts begin” (Stora in Eldridge, n.p.). In France, 1962 not only marked the end of the Algerian war, but of a period of over twenty years – starting from the Second World War and including the decolonization of Indochina (1946-1954) – in which the country had never really been at peace. As Stora points out, in this decade of economic growth and cultural change, the population wanted to “passer à autre chose” (...) La France vote des lois d’amnistie qui empêchent de poursuivre en justice les auteurs de crimes commis pendant la guerre d’Algérie. Des grâces présidentielles sont accordées. (Stora, 117-118)

Other ways in which the French state limited the public awareness of the colonial past involved renaming “public institutions and buildings which had previously trumpeted the nation’s overseas possessions” (Hargreaves, 1) and limiting the accessibility of the archive (a situation that, as Eldridge points out, has gradually improved since 1992). However, the desire to recover and move on from a long period of wars is not the only reason that has been put forward to explain French amnesia, and the state does not seem to have been the only driving power behind it. Different mnemonic communities might also have played an important role in this respect. Stora mentions that the movie *La Bataille d’Alger* can be seen as an example of the French refusal to reflect on the Algerian war. The movie, which was produced shortly after the war and which portrayed the torture and violence surrounding the Battle of Algiers (which took place in 1957), was not shown in French cinemas for several years – not because it was censored by the state, but because veteran and pied-noir associations threatened the cinema owners (Stora, 120).

According to Antoine Prost (2002), the fact that these veterans and pieds-noirs (two of the communities that will be of particular interest in the analysis of the novels and the reader response, in the following chapters) did not find a way to commemorate their experiences and losses collectively also contributed to the absence of the war in France’s collective consciousness (112). On the one hand, these groups were divided because “the relationship between the ex-soldiers and the pieds-noirs had been ambiguous during the war” (112) – although they were (at least initially) both on the same side, their stakes and experiences had been different. This also held true for their experiences after the war: the veterans returned in a society that perceived them as “soldiers without victory, without good causes and without enthusiasm” (Stora in Prost, 118), which meant that they could not be positive figures to themselves or to their surroundings. Consequently, their memories remained merely private, leading to a silence that will be discussed extensively in the next chapter. For the pieds-noirs – who had to reconstruct their lives in a country that was ‘theirs’ but in which many of them had never been – memory was marked by a sense of displacement and exclusion from a lost paradise. This nostalgia (or

*nostalgérie*⁷) appeared to be contradictory to the pieds-noirs' efforts to become integrated in French society, and therefore it remained mostly restricted to their own community (114-115). On the other hand, there were also divisions within these individual groups, as the pied-noir movement was weakened by political rivalries (113) and veterans with different political orientations could not decide on, for example, a date to commemorate the end of the war. As Prost points out: "commemoration enforces unity; but it first needs some unity to begin with" (116).

Even though – as was mentioned above – it does not (yet) seem to have enforced a sense of unity, the commemoration of the Algerian war has increased enormously in the last two decades. This is in line with Stora's claim that "It is only after [a period of silence] that painful memories return to the surface of societies" (Stora in Eldridge, n.p.). But how did these "retours de mémoire" (Stora, 121) come about? According to Hargreaves, "at least three sets of factors appear to have contributed to this" (2).⁸ He first mentions France's continuing relations with former colonies – such as Algeria – which many considered as neocolonial in nature and which "inevitably kept memories of empire alive, even if these were not explicitly verbalized" (2). In the second place, it seems that the passage of time spurs a growing number of people who are nearing old age to finally share their memories of violence and torture (3). A third factor brought forward by Hargreaves is immigration. On the one hand, Algerians who immigrated to France for economic reasons had been an important source of funding for the Algerian nationalist movement and they and their children (generally referred to as "Beurs") play an important role in "keeping alive memories of [for example] the police killings of Algerian demonstrators in 1961", by representing them in novels, films, and other forms (4). On the other hand, Hargreaves claims that their mere presence has turned these immigrants into "ever more visible reminders of France's colonial past" (4).

Désirée Schyns, referring to a study by the historian Henry Rousso, also points out that "l'importance sociale des nouvelles generations de Français d'origine maghrébine a (...) une influence certaine sur le poids de la guerre d'Algérie dans le présent" (45), alongside contemporary issues such as the war in Iraq and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although Schyns seems to agree that current events and situations can provoke memories of the Algerian war and add to their import, she casts doubt on the idea of a

⁷ As both Dine and Hubbell (quoted in Welch and McGonagle) have remarked, this term was coined in the 1930s and thus predated the Algerian war. However, the sentiment that it describes has particularly been related to the pied-noir community. According to Welch and McGonagle, *nostalgérie* "was fueled by a double trauma, the longing for the homeland made all the more acute by the impossibility of return" (17).

⁸ Cohen (2003) mentions two more factors. First of all, the trial against Maurice Papon in 1997-1998 revealed that he had not only been responsible for the deportation of 1560 Jews during the Second World War, but had also overseen the use of torture in Algeria and the violence against Algerian demonstrators in Paris in October 1961 – a subject that is also amply discussed by Rothberg. Second of all, an interview (published by *Le Monde*) with the Algerian woman Louissette Ighilahriz provoked a lot of attention for and uproar about the use of torture during the war. According to Cohen, there was an exceptional receptivity to her story because the tone of the article was not accusing – rather, Ighilahriz wanted to thank a French military doctor who had saved her life (231).

'return' of these memories after a long period of amnesia. She quotes Raphaëlle Branche, who argues that

La fin des années 1960 fut marquée par un immense appétit de savoir sur la guerre d'Algérie. (...) Les nouvelles générations, celles qui avaient été juste un peu trop jeunes pour partir en Algérie, celles qui avaient eu 10 ans en mai 1958 et 20 en mai 1968, se précipitèrent sur les livres d'Yves Courrière, *La guerre d'Algérie*. Quatre volumes, un par an, pour satisfaire cette soif de savoir, ce besoin de comprendre ce qui s'était passé là-bas et ce qu'avaient vécu les proches. (Branche in Schyns, 32-33)

Branche also mentions other books and movies about the Algerian war that were popular in the decade after its end and Schyns suggests that, although – as Stora and others have argued – there certainly were some factors that restrained public commemoration of the war, the widespread *impression of amnesia*, “la sensation de l'oubli”, is perhaps a more interesting phenomenon to consider. Somehow, the expression “for the first time” continues to be linked to every new movie or documentary about the Algerian war, and all of them seem to be breaking the silence (Stora in Schyns, 36). The French seem to feel the need to perpetually rediscover the occulted situations, “comme si les découvertes étaient trop douloureuses pour pouvoir être assimilées” (36). Although she acknowledges that the comparison between French collective consciousness and the individual psyche might elicit a lot of critical comments, she describes how “(...) comme dans la cure psychanalytique, le patient français feint de “découvrir ce qu'il savait déjà, mais qu'il n'osait pas se dire” (43).

It seems, then, that rather than being completely absent from 'collective consciousness', the French struggled to find adequate ways of responding to the memories of the Algerian war. William B. Cohen (2003), discussing the use of torture during the war, points out that

while it had led to a firestorm of moral outrage during the war, thereafter the subject, while certainly not hidden, did not raise public ire until the late 1990s. Nor, until recently, did this record blacken the French view of their general colonial record, even in Algeria. A 1990 Louis Harris poll asking whether France's presence in Algeria was a good thing for the latter found 59 percent thinking so. (230)

Arguably, the combination of this “sensation de l'oubli” and the absence of “public ire” has sparked a sense of indignation within different mnemonic communities that has contributed to the “batailles de mémoire” (Schyns, 12) that still mark France today. According to Stora, this time quoted by Derderian, these communities are pitted against each other as a consequence of the “cloistered” way in which they remember the past: “It is precisely because so many of the groups implicated in the war cling to narrow, unchanging, and mythologized constructions of the past, argues Stora, that a ‘reconciliation of images’ becomes so difficult” (Derderian, 31). In this respect, even books and documentaries that seek to give a as broad as possible perspective of the war end up including voices or stories that each represent a

particular community. However, conflicts also exist between the walls of these cloistered memories: in 1993, Jacques Roseau – the ‘voice’ of the *pieds-noirs* – was killed by members of his own community, presumably because they disagreed with his reconciliatory gestures towards former FLN chef Yacef Saadi (Derderian, 32). As Eldridge points out in reference to this murder case, the *guerres de mémoires* “are not merely an abstract problem, but a phenomenon with tangible and very real consequences for those directly involved in them, but also for wider French society” (n.p.). She also discusses a book by Eric Savarese, who underlines the importance of the question of suffering and the status of the victim within the memory wars and commemorative culture at large, leading “each group to stake a claim as the ‘best’ or most deserving victim”, and creating “a veritable dialogue of the deaf when it comes to recognizing the experiences, particularly painful ones, of other parties” (Eldridge, n.p.). Although others, like McCormack (2007) (also discussed in Eldridge) pronounce the hope that a focus on points of commonality might allow society to move forward, Savarese perceives the memory wars as a continuation of the “armed struggles on the political terrain” (Savarese in Eldridge, n.p.). As was already mentioned above, Pierre Nora has used the notion of terrorism to describe the mnemonic situation in France, and he also perceives the emphasis on the victim as a menace for society. He argues that this emphasis moralizes history, which is “not Manichean”, and that historians need to operate as “authorities of reconciliation” in order to overcome social divisions (Nora in Rothberg, 269).

The “*guerres de mémoires*”, however, are not the only way in which the memory of the Algerian war continues to impact present-day society. As was mentioned above, contemporary conflicts and immigrant groups play a role in provoking these memories, but, in turn, these memories also seem to influence the way in which people interpret these situations and respond to other social groups. Savarese’s “dialogue of the deaf” is perhaps one example of this, but many scholars also connect the legacies of the war to contemporary racism. McCormack, discussed by Eldridge, points out that what he sees as a “defect of transmission” of the Algerian war not only perpetuates “wartime divisions within society” but also “feeds into contemporary racism and exclusion directed at Algerians and their descendants in France”, thus creating “a ‘social fracture’ that operates largely along ethnic and generational lines” (McCormack in Eldridge, n.p.). Hargreaves makes a similar point when he discusses the distrust against immigrant minorities, which sometimes becomes visible in the form of controversies, for example surrounding headscarves. He argues that “sometimes subliminally and at other times quite consciously, animosities directed against these minorities have been informed by still-unhealed wounds arising from the trauma of decolonization” (4-5). McCormack (2011) extends this line of reasoning to the riots of 2005, in which young people from underprivileged suburbs of various French cities – many of whom descending from Algerian migrants – were pitted against the police (1130). Moreover, Stora has shown that actors in the Algerian war – like former settlers, OAS members, and harkis – have played an important role in supporting the extreme right political party Front National (referred to in McCormack, 1130 and 1133).

When it comes to readers, then, it seems clear that not only the events of the war itself, but also notions related to processes of forgetting, memory wars, and contemporary social and political contexts constitute the framework in which the encounter between them and a text takes place. However, although the focus thus far has been on the impact of the memories of the Algerian war on French soil, it is also important to consider its impact on the relations between France and Algeria and the mnemonic context within Algeria itself.

First of all, it can be argued that the conflicting memories surrounding the Algerian war, which create a “social fracture” that operates largely along ethnic and generational lines” (McCormack in Eldridge, n.p.) also influence relations across borders. As Raphaëlle Branche points out in an interview in honor of the 50th anniversary of Algerian independence, the war – which, as was mentioned earlier, was only officially recognized as such by the French state in 1999 – was never ended in the form of a peace treaty between the two countries. However, at the start of the last decade, Algerian and French politicians envisioned signing a treaty of friendship – which, around that time, was also signed with regard to other countries, like Tunisia – and as a prelude to this treaty, 2003 became “l’année de l’Algérie”. According to Branche, the failure of this treaty project can possibly be ascribed to the proposition, in February 2005, of a law that encouraged teachers to acknowledge the “positive role” of France’s colonial presence, especially in North Africa. Many scholars – like Stora – list this law as an example of the polemics that fuel memory wars between communities living in France, but Branche asserts that “l’Algérie a été le fer de lance de l’opposition à cette loi” (Branche and Djerbal, 17)⁹. She thinks that the election of president Hollande might give the treaty project a second chance, as his reputation in the Algerian press is better than that of his precursor Sarkozy (18).¹⁰

Branche also points out that the way in which the war is remembered in both countries is very different. This is exemplified by the fact that “en France, on commémore la fin de la guerre d’Algérie, alors qu’en Algérie on commémore l’indépendance, la fin de la colonisation. Et cela, apparemment, les Français ne peuvent pas le célébrer” (21). Because of these different perspectives it is hard to imagine a common commemoration, and Daho Djerbal – interviewed within the same article – stresses that this also

⁹ The numbers referred to are paragraph numbers, as page numbers are absent in the electronic version of this article. The page range of the print version is noted in the bibliography.

¹⁰ However, an incident in December 2013 – which was, perhaps, after the interview with Branche and Djerbal took place – once again showed that the relations between France and Algeria are still precarious. During the official celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Crif – a Jewish organization in France – President Hollande pronounced his gladness about the fact that Manuel Valls had returned safely from Algeria and added that “c’est déjà beaucoup”. Although this remark was meant as a joke, it provoked a lot of reactions on social media and in the Algerian press. An article in the newspaper *El Watan* made an explicit connection with the colonial past: “Le peuple est renvoyé, sans autre forme de procès, à sa condition de colonisé, de sauvage à civiliser, d’indigène de la République” (quoted in *Lexpress.fr*). In response, Hollande has apologized for the way in which his remark had been understood and his apologies were received with satisfaction (see also “Les ‘regrets’ de Hollande après sa blague satisfait l’Algérie”, published on *Leparisien.fr*).

problematizes collaboration between historians of both countries, despite the friendly contact that may otherwise exist between them (43-46).

Memory in Algeria: The (Glorious) Past as a Social and Political Resource

In order to come to a fuller understanding of the extent of these differences, it is important to realize that within Algeria, the memory of the war has a history of its own. As the existence of the aforementioned harkis already indicates, the indigenous population of Algeria – also referred to as “Algériens musulmans” (Stora, 18) – was not a homogenous group. At the start of the war, there were approximately 9 million Algerian Muslims, about 3000 to 6000 of whom, in July 1962, belonged to the so-called “fellagas” or “mujahideen”: the independence fighters of the National Liberation Army (ALN), the armed division of the FLN, the National Liberation Front. Although only these mujahideen would seem to be war veterans in the common definition of the word, within the Algerian context this definition quickly expanded to include a wide range of members of the civil organization of the FLN (Branche, 431-432). Over the years, the number of veterans card holders seems to have increased considerably, from 332.000 in 1995 to possibly half a million by the end of the 1990s (Ameyar in Branche, 432). This increase can be related to the social benefits that the State has connected to the veteran status, which – as the government has partly acknowledged – has led to trafficking in veteran’s certificates. As Branche points out, these cases of fraud and the very existence of these benefits exemplify the fact that within Algeria, the memory of the war “is a primordial social and political resource” for both citizens and the State, for whom “the fight for independence remains a cornerstone of (...) required political values” (431).

However, as both Stora and Branche explain, even the Algerians who fought for independence never constituted a real unity. There were cruel conflicts between the FLN and the MNA – connected to the old independence leader Messali Hadj – in which, throughout the war, thousands of people were killed (Stora, 56). Struggles between different groups intensified when independence approached (113) and a “coup d’état” took place in June 1965 (Branche, 432). Nevertheless, the FLN, the “parti unique et autoritaire” (Stora, 118) that came to power after independence, “fait comme s’il n’y avait eu aucune division, aucun déchirement, aucun règlement de comptes entre Algériens” (119) and created the image of “une population musulmane tout entière engagée dans la lutte contre la puissance coloniale française” (112). The FLN imposed a glorious vision of the war and constructed a national narrative shaping “une mémoire unanimiste, pleine d’histoires héroïques, de légendes et de stéréotypes” (Schyns, 15), an official version of which “was carved into stone in the Constitution” in 1963 (Branche, 433).

Evans and Philips (2007) and Le Sueur (2010), discussed by Eldridge, perceive these political decisions as an “officially imposed policy of forgetting” (n.p.) and Djerbal uses the notion of amnesia to make a similar point (Branche and Djerbal, 30). However, if the notion of amnesia in the French context implied (the sensation of) a total absence of the war in collective consciousness, this is not the case in Algeria. As Branche points out, “Although Algeria is a young country, with nearly 30% of the population under age

15 and just 4.5% over the age of 65, the war still casts a long shadow over the country”(432). The war is omnipresent, to the extent that it “goes virtually unnoticed given its frequent use on postage stamps, the names of shops or even in pop music” (435). Rather, amnesia exists in the sense that there continues to be little space for nuanced or deviating personal narratives, as the representations of the war that circulate in some of these vectors of memory are still very much shaped by the official state narrative.

Branche exemplifies this by referring to museums that represent the war “with no great concern for historical authenticity. French oppression is depicted in a vocabulary sometimes drawn directly from propaganda of the era. Thus, at times no distinction is made and France or the French are referred to collectively”(437). This appears to be a consequence of the fact that, from 1963 onwards, the Algerian State presented itself as the best agent to judge what is written about the past, in which no distinction was made between history and memory (433). In the 1970s, a National Centre for Historical Studies was founded and attached to the Interior Ministry, and in 1984 The National Organization of Mujahideen was given the “monopoly on the gathering of archives and documents” and the task of “transmitting the Revolution’s message to the rising generations in order to link them to our glorious past” (May in Branche, 433). Branche points out that “This was an issue of controlling what was written; scientific history and contradictory recollections were viewed as threats” (433).

In this respect, the violent civil war that shook the country in the 1990s – and that has sometimes been referred to as the second Algerian war – was interesting for a number of reasons. First of all, it showed to which extent specific notions related to the war of independence had become part of a discourse that could be appropriated by different groups, in different contexts, and for different purposes – a process that, as Hill (2012) asserts, is precisely the danger of the State narrative, as it glorifies revolt and seems to incite ever new groups to present themselves as the natural heirs of the early FLN (4). Branche describes how, during the civil war, “Islamists assassinated intellectuals and artists (...) and accused them of being ‘hizb França’ – on the French side”, not only because of their education or ideas, but also as a way of “identifying themselves with the resistance during the struggle for liberation, by rejecting their adversaries (their victims) as being on the side of France, i.e., the enemy” (438). In a similar way, “both sides accused the other of being a descendant of the harkis: someone accused of seeking the loss of Algeria was thus called a ‘harki’ or ‘son of a harki’. From the highest echelons of the State, all the way down to children’s playgrounds, ‘harki’ is a serious insult” (438).

In the second place, the civil war incited the Algerian state to both loosen and tighten its grip on memory. Branche explains that, on the one hand

The country opened up to a multiparty system and numerous associations flourished, enabling different messages to be delivered and heard. Private foundations were created, with the mission of gathering the recollections of the last survivors, as well as any possible documents that had not been gathered by the State monopoly. (...) [Buried] memories of the violence of the war for independence came back to the fore in Algeria. Questions were raised about divisions in

the national movement, about purges, or about assassinations that had never been adequately explained. (433-434).

On the other hand, however, the civil war “revivified the need for a strong national narrative”, leading the State to “delve into the past to reassure its power over a society torn apart by the war” (431). The definition of ‘monuments of the war for independence’ was broadened and several commemoration dates were added to the two existing ones (1 November and 5 July, marking the beginning and end of the war). Moreover, the law of 5 April 1999 on Shohada and Mujahideen specified that harkis and others “whose positions during the revolution for national liberation were contrary to the interests of the homeland and who behaved in an unworthy fashion” were to be stripped of their civil and political rights (440).

A revision to the Constitution that was proposed in 2008 is illustrative of this double – loosening and tightening – political movement. The original proposition specified that “As history is the memory and shared heritage of all Algerians, no one has the right to appropriate it and to use it for political means. It is thus the State’s role to promote the writing, teaching and diffusion of history”. Although the first sentence suggests a break with the way in which the government dealt with history and memory in the past, the last sentence uses this democratic logic as a way to justify the State’s influence. However, the proposition was not accepted in this form. In the final version, it is merely noted that the State works “among other things, to promote the writing of history and its teaching to the younger generations”. Branche points out that “in the same article, patriotic duty, defending the memory of the war, and the writing of history are all linked. This link continues to weigh on the conditions for writing about history freely; it also gives the memory of the war a virtually sacred status” (434). Although some scholars, like Schyns, quite hopefully express that “en Algérie, la mémoire de la guerre est en émergence” (12), Djerbal seems to be less optimistic when he asks himself:

Le travail historique a-t-il été effectué hors de la sphère politique et de l’idéologie dominante ? L’université et la recherche académique ont-elles pu combler le vide de parole en s’appuyant sur les faits, rien que sur les faits, en luttant ainsi contre cette réduction de l’histoire au politique et à l’idéologique ? Il faut dire franchement que non. (34)

In spite of some exceptions, he thinks that “le temps n’est pas encore venu de sortir d’une histoire présentée à partir d’un point zéro de l’origine et d’une mémoire monumentale” (37).

Even though it is hard to pronounce a judgment about the way in which countries should deal with their past, it seems clear that in both France and Algeria, collective memory of the Algerian war has an impact on social relations. In Algeria, the strong binaries embedded in the glorifying narrative provide little space for nuance and arguably contribute to an “‘anger that will not go away’ because no attempt is being made to address its root causes, namely the political, economic, and now historical exclusion of the people by the state” (Evans and Philips in Eldridge, n.p.), whereas in France the multitude of perspectives seems to encourage memory wars and racism. In both countries, memory of the war is

sometimes placed in the service of political interests. How can literature be perceived in relation to these problematic aspects of official memory?

Literature, Memory, and the Algerian War

As several scholars point out, the Algerian war – despite the various forms of amnesia that were discussed above – has been and continues to be an important source of inspiration for writers on both sides of the Mediterranean. Jacomard (2008) speaks of “milliers de livres sur le sujet” (161, footnote 49) and Prost (2002) mentions that “many books were published about the war – more than one thousand, reflecting every angle of opinion” (118). Schyns indicates that “la guerre est le sujet principal de la littérature algérienne de ces trente dernières années” and that the theme has given rise to “œuvres de genre et de statut varié” (11). Even though this concerns works written in French as well as in Arabic¹¹, Schyns – like many other scholars – only focuses on the former¹². She justifies this decision by pointing out that French continues to be a very important language for Algerian writers, despite the fact that the new independent state wanted to manifest itself as Arab and that, after 1962, Arabic became the official language of education (12).

Croisy (2008) affirms this and remarks that this continuing importance can be explained by the different significations that have come to be attributed to the French language. Before and during the Algerian war, many Algerian writers – among whom Yacine, Feraoun, and Mammeri – used French to denounce colonial exploitation (86). In this way, the language became a “subversive political tool used to strip a colonial power of its legitimacy” (Harbi 551). In the context of the policies of Arabization that followed independence, French continued to have this subversive function, and therefore many authors kept using it to critique “successive oppressive nationalist governments” (88). Moreover, in various ways, French has also become a language of memory: “The French of Algeria is a site of trauma: it was born as a result of colonial violence. It is also a site of recovery as it remembers the trauma and strives to work through it by redefining itself” (89). Much like the memory of the war, then, the French used in Algeria has a history of its own, and has become “a new language specific to its site of expression” (Croisy, referring to Derrida (1996), 89).¹³

Although this explains the importance of the French language for Algerian writers – and for the scholars interested in francophone Algerian literature – the issue of language should also be considered with regard to reception. Despite the different meanings that the language has taken on, some readers might still conceive of French as “la langue du colon” and accuse writers of seeking to please an audience situated in France, rather than Algeria. From a more practical point of view, it is important to note that

¹¹ A third language that could be considered here is Tamazigh, used by the Berber population. However, as Miliani (2011) points out, this language is not (yet) widely employed in literature (107).

¹² For examples of studies focusing on Algerian texts written in both languages, one could look at Abu-Haidar (1992) or Granara (1999)

¹³ For other publications dealing with the notion of ‘francophonie’ (both in the Algerian context and from a more general theoretical point of view) see, for example, Apter (2005) and Bensmaïa and Waters (2003).

not everyone in Algeria is able to read literature written in French. Miliani (2011) refers to a national survey that was carried out in 2008 among 30 million people, which found that nearly 7 million people were illiterate, 12 million people could only read and write in Arabic and 10 million people could read and write in both Arabic and French (and, in some cases, a third language). Another survey, carried out among 1000 visitors of the Salon du Livre event in Alger, similarly found that – when asked about their preferred reading language – over 50 % chose Arabic, compared to 20 % for French and 23 % for both languages (114). However, this survey also revealed that persons who preferred reading in French read much more than those who preferred reading in Arabic, and were also much more interested in literature (for example, nearly 70 % of the people who chose Arabic indicated never to have read a book, as compared to 3 % of the people who chose French)¹⁴. Overall, newspapers and magazines were more closely related to reading in Arabic, whereas reading literature occurred more often in French. Still, Miliani remarks that the estimated Algerian reading public of books is only 1,5 million (on a population of 35 million), a point that seems to affirm his statement that “la diversification d’un réseau de librairies, la diffusion et la promotion du livre et de la lecture posent encore problème pour soutenir et développer la lecture en Algérie toutes langues confondues” (112).

Djeral, who – as was discussed above – is rather pessimistic about the current state of historiography within Algeria, also pronounces his worries about the book industry, though in a different sense than Miliani. According to him, the state’s “quasi-monopole de l’expression dans l’espace dit public”(32) extends itself far beyond the realm of historiography. At the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the war of independence, a lot of money was made available to encourage publishing houses – and other cultural and research institutions – to organize “des manifestations à la gloire des héros” and to glorify “la geste nationaliste” (32). Furthermore, he claims that the Ministry of Cultural Affairs boosts “l’ensemble du champ médiatique et éditorial en finançant à grands frais des productions à grande prétention mais à faible contenu” (28). This creates the impression that, within the Algerian context, the production of literature is heavily influenced by the State. In her discussion of (francophone) Algerian literature, Schyns indicates that this was indeed the case from the 1960s to the 1980s, when the majority of writers who published in Algeria reproduced the official state ideology, which meant, for example, that they had to glorify “une nation algérienne mythique d’avant la colonization” and “l’unanimité non moins mythique d’un peuple dans la Révolution qui a sacrifié 1 million de héros” (15). However, by referring to works by Mammeri and Myriam Ben, she shows that even within these official frameworks, doubts about Algeria’s present and future can appear through the filters of their texts. She points out that “celles-ci annoncent que les lendemains ne chantent plus et prouvent par leur existence même que les textes, même dans ce contexte officiel, ne sont pas aussi manichéens que ne l’aurait souhaité l’État” (16).

¹⁴ Miliani does not discuss differences in respondents’ levels of education, in this respect, but one could presume that this is also a factor to take into account.

This potential to present a different, nuanced narrative despite – or even within – the official frameworks of memory can be linked to the notion of ‘counter memory’ that was brought forward in the preceding chapter. Schyns describes how literary texts

incorporent souvent des sources négligées par l’histoire officielle, des mémoires silencieuses, marginales ou tout simplement réprimées au nom de la raison d’État. Ils n’intègrent pas seulement de la mémoire, ils créent en même temps des imaginaires collectifs du passé. De cette façon, la fiction littéraire peut constituer une contribution importante à la construction historique. Or celle-ci ne fait que commencer en Algérie. (46-47)

Schyns’s description of literature’s ability to both integrate and create memory recalls its functions as a medium of storage and of circulation, discussed in Erll (2011). The suggestion that literary fiction can contribute to the construction of history is echoed by Raphaëlle Branche in an interview with Julie Champrenault and Augustin Jomier (2012), which focuses on the mnemonic context in France rather than Algeria:

On transmet en racontant des histoires. C’est pour cela que la fiction a une puissance extraordinaire, plus forte que ce que nous historiens écrivons, car elle raconte des histoires, parce que les gens s’identifient, parce qu’elle offre la possibilité d’un condensé de réalité que le réel offre rarement. Si la tentation de la fiction est présente, elle ne remet pas en question le rôle de l’historien, mais élargit au contraire son horizon. (Branche in Champrenault and Jomier, n.p.)

It is interesting that Branche ascribes an extraordinary power to fictional stories when it comes to the transmission of the past, especially as she relates this to processes of identification – a point that, as was discussed in the first chapter, has also been put forward by Landsberg (2004), Rigney (2008), and various scholars within the field of empirical literary studies. Although Branche does not comment on the possibility for identification to influence social relations, both she and Schyns still seem to ascribe a transformative potential to literature in the sense that it changes the collective image of the past, thus challenging and/or complementing historical and official accounts of the war. This can be contrasted to a comment by Prost, who, after pointing out that “many books were published about the war – more than one thousand, reflecting every angle of opinion”, adds that most of them, however, “were only narratives of individual experience, given and read as such” (118). As Erll (2011) has suggested, in order for a literary work to affect collective memory, it first has to be perceived as a (collective) medium of remembrance. Although Branche and Schyns – like many of the scholars that were discussed in the first chapter – appear to take this aspect for granted, comments like that of Prost remind us that readers might not always extend the experiences of protagonists to issues at stake in society at large, or even to the community that protagonist belongs to. In this way, Branche, Schyns, and Prost all touch upon matters of reception, but refrain from developing their claims. The question remains, then, which vision comes closest to the actual ways in which (contemporary) literary texts are received and responded to –

and what this means for, and reveals about, the interactions between history, memory, literature, and readers.

This lack of attention to actual readers can also be noticed in relation to the many scholarly publications that deal with specific literary texts about the Algerian war, which nonetheless cover a wide range of interesting perspectives. While some scholars have focused primarily on thematic aspects (such as (female) identity¹⁵) or on the narratives of specific mnemonic communities¹⁶, others have paid special attention to the genre of the works they were studying (graphic novels, crime stories, or youth literature, for instance¹⁷). A focus on memory appears to be a characteristic shared by nearly all of them, in which notions like representation, perspective, silence, and post-memory play important roles. Whereas most publications focus especially on the place of these issues within specific texts, some of them also contain an 'outward' focused dimension, allowing for reflections on the particularities of these texts as media of remembrance, for example as compared to official state narratives and historiography. However, once again, none of these studies goes on to observe the significance of these texts for actual readers, or their impact on the ways in which the Algerian war is understood and remembered.

Natalya Vince (2013) argues for the need to carry out field research into the reception of narratives of the past. She asserts that it is necessary to "take a 'bottom-up' approach to the question of transmission, by examining not what the state, veterans, opposition groups or historians would like to transmit, but instead focusing on what has been transmitted" (34). In 2007, she carried out a case study with 95 trainee teachers and students in "History, Arabic Literature, Philosophy, French and English at the Ecole normale supérieure in Bouzaréah, Algiers", in order to explore "what image students have of the mujahidat and how this image is formed through the filters of school textbooks, family stories, films, books and current affairs"(32). Although Vince does not mention literary texts specifically, some of her findings are still very interesting. She mentions, for example, that "for students at the ENS, eyewitness accounts of the war, particularly from within the family, are considered far more valuable sources than written documents". One history student pointed out that "In books there is a kind of subjectivity, sometimes even a falsification. There are things missing, there are things added. So living eyewitnesses are very important", and a Masters French student remarked that "You need to be suspicious of what's in black and white!"(47). Vince explains that

These students' lack of confidence in written sources is symptomatic of the nature of the regime under which they live. Students do not trust the written, largely because it is the state which

¹⁵ See, for instance, Hiddleston (2003) and Jouane (2013) on the relation between language and identity, and Rosello (2002), Barbé (2006) and Achille (2013) on the (war) experiences of female characters and authors.

¹⁶ In this respect, Jouane (2013) and Moser (2013) discuss works related to the experience of harkis; Hiddleston (2003) and Jaccomard (2008) focus on texts written by second-generation immigrants, and Jaccard (2001) and Hubbell (2012) underline the literary production of the pied-noir community.

¹⁷ Examples are Howell (2011) and McKinney (2013) for graphic novels, Kimyongür (2014) for crime fiction, and Ibrahim-Lamrous (2006) and Bacholle-Boškovic (2006) for youth literature.

controls most of the published material which they are likely to have access to (notably textbooks, which have been under state control since the 1970s), at the same time because the state cannot control everything, the wider population has a degree of manoeuvre to verbally critique this version. (47)

This suggests that students distrust both the official state narrative and potential counter narratives that are produced outside of the control of the state. Further on, Vince points out that “students’ written sources of information on the war appear to be scant, only a small minority of students talks about books that they have read” (47). The most popular books among the few that are cited appear to be those of Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, who was already the most-read historian in the 1980s and whose work has been described by Stora as “a reconstructed mythical history”. The majority of students who participated in the study did not read French fluently, and this partly explains why they do not refer to more recent sources, as there appears to be a lack of sources available in Arabic. However, students who did read French also hardly mentioned any books, which would seem to indicate “not just (...) a lack of access to sources, but a lack of interest in published, academic history” (47). Fictional movies seemed to play a far more important role in shaping students’ image of the past, but again the titles that were mentioned were relatively old and concerned the movies that are often broadcasted on state television.

Another example of empirical research worth considering is McCormack’s (2007) study among French high school pupils, in which he interviewed them about the place of the Algerian war in their history curriculum and about the ways in which they had learnt about the war. It was shown that books (“novels rather than scholarly books”) can play a role in the transmission of memory, but that – from a quantitative point of view – their influence might be limited: “two or three pupils out of twelve had read novels, each of whom had read one or two books on the Algerian war, that is, there is relatively little impact from this source” (140). There were slightly more pupils who had seen films about the war, but in both cases they had difficulty remembering the titles of the works they had read or seen and were unable to name a book or a film they knew existed but had not read or seen themselves (141). However, rather than a lack of interest – as was suggested by Vince in the Algerian context – the pupils generally reported a lack of time, as even the few among them who had read books indicated that this had been earlier in their lives or during the holidays (140). It turned out that 80% of the pupils thought too little is said about the Algerian war (McCormack in Eldridge, n.p.).

McCormack’s and Vince’s case studies both shine an interesting light on some aspects of the reception of (literary) texts about the Algerian war and their impact on the construction of cultural memory. Their findings seem to be in line with a remark by Chaulet Achour (2011), who, referring specifically to francophone Algerian literature about the war, claims that these works are “peu connu pour des raisons différentes en France et en Algérie”. However, other sources, like an article by Lutaud and Aissaoui in *le Figaro* (2010), claim that – as compared to films – novels find their way to the audience remarkably more easily. Of course, the pupils and students interviewed by Vince and McCormack are not representative for the entire Algerian or French population, even though the outcomes seem to suggest

that, for younger generations – and thus, potentially for the generations of the future – literature might not be the most important vector of memory of the Algerian war. Still, this makes it only more interesting to observe the works that *do* manage to find their way to a (relatively) big audience, and to analyze the reader response that is elicited by these texts. Which books are these? And which impact might they have with regard to the construction of cultural memory?

Whereas many literary studies might start with one or more particular texts in mind, the fact that the question of impact plays such an important role in this thesis turned the selection of texts itself into part of the research process. In order to get a sense of the variety of functions and effects readers ascribe to literary texts about the Algerian war, of the types of texts they prefer, and of the works that spring to their minds when they think about the war, I started this process by posting a series of questions on a number of French and Algerian internet forums (see appendix A)¹⁸. Although very few forum users responded to these questions – approximately ten in total, some of whom only discussed non-fictional works – their comments were illuminating nonetheless. Some of these readers brought up older novels, such as *Nedjma* (1956) by Kateb Yacine and *L'Étranger* (1946) by Albert Camus¹⁹, but their comments – which sometimes hinted at the public and critical discourse that had come to connect these novels to the war – gave the impression that, to them, these works functioned mostly as ‘memory cues’ instead of provoking reflections about the way in which the Algerian war is (or should be) remembered.

This impression was confirmed when I looked at other readers’ responses to these two novels on (literary) websites such as *Amazon.fr* and *Babelio.com*. Whereas they both appeared to have a canonical status, and especially *L'Étranger* is still widely commented to today, only very few readers discussed the historical contexts in which the stories are set. If contemporary readers would be aware of this context, the novels could arguably play a role in shaping the collective memory of the Algerian war, but for many of them it seems to have lost part of the meaning that it might have had in the past. Responses to Didier Daeninckx’s *Meurtres pour mémoire* (1984) show that this is not necessarily the case for all the (somewhat) older novels. Both within and outside academia, this crime story has become strongly associated to the memory work that it has done in the past²⁰, but readers’ comments reveal that it still provokes reflections about the war and its aftermath today. This seems, to a large extent, to be due to the fact that the novel itself has a strong memory reflexive dimension, in the sense that it thematizes the process of ‘uncovering the past’.

Meurtres pour mémoire is not studied in this thesis, because, compared to other novels, the number of responses it elicits today – in the mnemonic context that was sketched out in this chapter – is relatively

¹⁸ These forums include *le Forum littéraire de Booknode*, *Grain de Sel – forum littéraire et culturel*, *Études littéraires*, *Forum Algérie* (algerie-dz.com), *Forum Algérie* (forum-algerie.com), and *Forum Algérie Monde*.

¹⁹ Although both of these novels were written before the actual start of the war, they give a sense of the difficult relations between the colonizers and the indigenous population.

²⁰ The novel is often ascribed an important role in breaking the silence around the violently repressed demonstration of Algerians in Paris that took place on 17 October 1961

small. I decided to focus on more recent texts, not only because the greater publicity will likely contribute to the popularity of these works (which, consequently, could lead to a greater number of responses), but also because these texts share the mnemonic contexts in which they are received. In this respect, Yasmina Khadra's *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (published by Julliard in France in 2008, and by Sedia Editions in Algeria in 2008 (original version) and 2014 (Arabic version)) and Laurent Mauvignier's *Des Hommes* (published by Les Editions de Minuit in 2009 and, in the original version, by Editions Barzakh Algérie in 2010) appeared to be particularly interesting. Both of these novels have been widely sold (Julliard's website speaks of more than 250.000 copies, whereas Les Editions de Minuit mention a number nearing 110.000 copies) and they were awarded various literary prizes. More importantly, however, both stories explicitly connect the past to the present, which allows them to reflect on memory processes (much like in *Meurtres pour mémoire*) but also to point contemporary readers at the ways in which the aftermath of the Algerian war is still relevant to them, in today's society. As will be argued in the next chapter – which will analyze the novels by Mauvignier and Khadra from the point of view of the theoretical, contextual, and mnemonic issues and discussions that have been central to this point – this allows both texts to position readers in distinctive ways, thus creating a mnemonic potential that remains to be actualized in the reading process.

3. Between Representation and Responsibility: The Algerian War and the Position of the Reader in *Des Hommes* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*

As was discussed at the end of the previous chapter, the decision to select and analyze Laurent Mauvignier's *Des Hommes* (2009) and Yasmina Khadra's *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (2008) alongside each other primarily lies in the fact that both have been equally well received, widely sold, and have generated a lot of (online) reader responses. In order to be able to place and interpret these responses, however, it is important first to observe the novels' similarities and differences when it comes to what Ricœur would label as mimesis₂: the way in which they relate, on the one hand, to the past and its place in memory culture (mimesis₁), and, on the other hand, to their implied and actual readers, who play an important role in shaping the texts' refigurations in that memory culture (mimesis₃). In this respect, the novels can respond to certain challenges in memory culture and create a mnemonic potential that remains to be actualized in their short and long term reception.

The novels are similar in the sense that they are both fairly recent, which means that they appeared at an equal temporal distance from the historical events they portray (approximately 50 years), and were written from within the same, contemporary, mnemonic context – even though, as will be argued in this chapter, they both have their own take on these events and this context. This mnemonic context or horizon, which is shared by the readers, provides the represented events with a part of their meaning and significance. While some authors might choose to set their stories entirely within the time frame of the Algerian war itself, the novels by Mauvignier and Khadra both make the connection between the past and the present explicit, which allows them to reflect on memory related issues and to discuss past and present events simultaneously. In each novel, narrative perspective and a (critical attitude towards a) sense of closure play important roles in bringing about these connections and reflections, and influence the different ways in which readers are positioned by the texts.

In *Des Hommes*, the narrative perspective(s) and the central events and themes point to the absence of closure, in which the notion of *silence* occupies a central position. The way in which this silence is presented underlines the difficulty of speaking about the war experiences for the French *appelés* (conscript soldiers) who have lived through it, and stresses the importance of an active, understanding way of responding to this silence. The reader, then, is positioned as a listener (and, arguably, even as a kind of witness), who is simultaneously invited to identify with the *appelés* and shown the limitations of such an identification. Instead of silence, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* can be said to center on the notion of *love*, which – on the level of the protagonist as well as on the level of communities – destabilizes a sense of a homogenous identity, frames the course of history in a different way, and steers towards a sense of reconciliation that seems to provide a kind of closure. This novel does not necessarily point the readers to a need to listen, but rather to *look* – and more specifically, to look differently – at the situations of the past, relations in the present, and possibilities for the future. With regard to these differences, the analysis of *Des Hommes* will incorporate a (short) discussion on testimony and

witnessing, while *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* demands some more attention to theoretical conceptions of identity. However, many other theoretical issues that were brought forward in the first chapter – such as Rigney’s and Landsberg’s remarks about literature’s transformative potential, and LaCapra’s and Martin’s comments on the risks of narrative closure – will prove helpful in the analysis of both works.

Understanding Silence in *Des Hommes*

Laurent Mauvignier (1967) was born in Tours, France. *Des Hommes*, his seventh novel, was published by Les Editions de Minuit in Paris in 2009, and by Editions Barzakh pour l’Algérie in 2010. It has sold over 100.000 copies in France alone and was widely acclaimed – a point that will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter – and obtained the Prix Millepages in 2009, and the Prix Initiales and the Prix des Libraires in 2010. In an interview with the review *Décapage* (quoted in Capone 2011), Mauvignier mentions that the desire to write this book had been with him since his youth, when he was confronted with the silence of his father and other men in his surroundings, who had all been conscript soldiers – *appelés* – during the Algerian war. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the majority of men born between 1932 and 1943 – an entire generation – had done their military service in Algeria, adding up to 1 500 000 at the end of the war. *Des Hommes* deals with the experiences and silences of a few of these *appelés*, most notably the cousins Bernard and Rabut, and their mutual acquaintance Février.

The novel consists of four parts (entitled “après-midi”, “soir”, “nuit”, and “matin”), and, as Sylvie Ducas and other scholars have pointed out, takes the form of a “tragédie antique en quatre actes (...) ramassé[e] sur les 24 heures du temps prescrit par le registre tragique”(84). These 24 hours take place in the late 1990s, in a village in the south of France, where a woman called Solange celebrates her 60th birthday with her family and friends. The party is interrupted when her brother Bernard – a vagabond known as Feu-de-bois because of the penetrating wood smell that lingers around him – causes a commotion by offering his sister an expensive brooch that he clearly cannot afford. Bernard feels frustrated and excluded by the accusing questions of the other birthday guests, and takes his anger out on Said Chefraoui – a guest of Maghrebian origin, whom he addresses with the racist insult “bounoul”, and threatens with violence (44). Later that afternoon, it turns out that, after having been sent away from the party, Bernard entered Chefraoui’s house, scared his children, attacked his dog, and attempted to hurt or rape his wife. When Rabut – Bernard’s cousin and the primary narrator of the first two and the last part of the novel – hears Bernard’s insults and is told about his later behavior by the mayor and the local police officer, his long repressed memories of the Algerian war gradually come back to him. In “nuit” – the third and longest part of the novel, which takes the form of a flashback – an omniscient narrator takes over and we see how Bernard and the other *appelés* in his convoy leave for a war they hardly know anything about, where they experience emotions ranging from boredom to mortal fear, and end up being both perpetrators and victims of violence. In the last section, the next day has begun and Rabut – who has had a rough night because of his war nightmares – drives off in his car, reflecting on the past, the future, and the different ways in which he and his cousin have tried (and often failed) to deal with their memories.

The third part, by taking the readers 40 years back in time and to the other side of the Mediterranean, breaks with the tragedy's criteria of unity of time and space which are so well met in the rest of the novel. In this way, the novel shows the importance of the (memory of) the Algerian war in contemporary society, by framing it as a "passé qui ne passe pas, contamine le présent et ferme le futur" (Ducas, 88). On the back cover of the novel, a quote from Jérôme Garcin's review for *Le Nouvel Observateur* underlines that *Des Hommes* "n'est pas un roman sur la guerre d'Algérie, c'est un livre où parlent tous ceux qui ne trouveront jamais la paix. C'est un livre sur la guerre qui continue après la guerre" (Garcin in Mauvignier). This emphasis on the aftermath and consequences of the war establishes a link between the past and the present and seems to stress the interest and relevance for contemporary readers.

In the first part of the novel, the fragmented return of narrator Rabut's war memories draws attention to and mimics the process of recollection. When the mayor and the police officer inform Rabut about the violent behavior of his cousin Bernard, Rabut agrees that this is inexcusable, but also becomes aware of the effect the events of that day and the mayor's words have on him. A question, which he does not ask, comes up and keeps lingering in his mind, awakening something inside him:

Monsieur le maire, vous vous souvenez de la première fois où vous avez vu un Arabe? Monsieur le maire, vous vous souvenez? Est-ce que vous vous souvenez? Est-ce qu'on se souvient? Que quelqu'un ? Est-ce qu'on se souvient de ça? J'entendais encore cette phrase, et déjà, à ce moment-là, j'ai ressenti en moi s'affaisser, s'enliser, s'écraser toute une part de moi, seulement cachée ou calfeutrée, je ne sais pas, endormie, et cette fois comme dans un sursaut elle s'était réveillé. (77)

The repetitions of the verb 'se souvenir' – shifting from a specific "vous" to a general, collective "on" –, and the groping, cautious writing style (which, in the remainder of the passage, develops into a sort of stream of consciousness), represent – as Ducas points out – the process of "le retour du refoulé" (85), which is part of "la prise de conscience après coup, par le personnage comme par le lecteur" (86). The reader and the narrator discover Rabut's repressed past together, and this "prise de conscience après coup" arguably parallels the developments in the reader's environment (especially for readers in France), which might encourage identification with the narrator as well as with the memory process as such.

A similar parallel can be observed in the central part of the novel, where the omniscient narrator shows and describes the experiences and thoughts of Bernard and the other appelés in his convoy, who set off for war. The young soldiers are confronted with "un conflit auquel ils ne comprennent pas grand-chose et qui n'est pas le leur" (Eibl, 99), a situation that could also apply to many of the readers who might encounter the war for the first time while reading the novel, and who perhaps not automatically feel connected to these events from the past or to the experiences of the appelés. Identification may further be encouraged by the meticulous descriptions of the appelés' fears that are often accompanied by anticipations that make the tension almost tangible. An example of this is the following passage, in

which Bernard and his friend Février are escorted back to their barracks after having spent the night at an outpost, because of their late arrival. When they come near the barracks, they notice that things are different – wires have been cut, the French flag has not been put up:

Pourquoi soudain on a peur de ce silence et plus encore de ce que ça peut dire. On a peur et soudain ce n'est pas pour nous qu'on a peur, pas pour nous, mais pour eux, dedans, à l'intérieur du poste (...) Ce moment d'arriver au poste et déjà de découvrir cette drôle d'image : qui le dit le premier, qui ose le dire, nommer, dire (...). Puis quelqu'un le dit. Il n'y a pas le drapeau, ils n'ont pas levé les couleurs. On ne sait pas ce qu'on doit penser. Ou bien, est-ce qu'on sait déjà ? Peut-être que si. Si, déjà. On sait. Est-ce qu'on sait? C'est seulement plus tard qu'on se dit qu'on savait déjà, à ce moment-là, et que simplement on n'osait pas ce dire, Oui, c'est ça. (236-237)

In this fragment, the verb 'savoir' is treated with the same precaution and hesitations as 'souvenir' in the passage discussed earlier, warning the readers that something important is about to be revealed, which they know about without exactly knowing²¹, much like the characters themselves. The buildup of tension continues for a couple of pages, and then it turns out that the throats of all of their companions have been cut. Whereas the passages referred to above - which mimicked the memory process, or described the sense of ignorance and distance that the appelés initially experienced with regard to the war – might primarily provoke a sense of cognitive identification in the reader, scenes like these seem to encourage an emotional – and almost physical – kind of transportation. In this respect, *Des Hommes* appears to have the experiential dimension that, according to Alison Landsberg, plays an important role in creating “prosthetic memories” that – as they can be expected to have a scarring, lasting impact on the reader – could help foster empathy and understanding.

As both Landsberg and Dominic LaCapra point out, however, it is also important that readers are aware of the differences that separate them from the (suffering) characters they read about. The novel seems to encourage this awareness by emphasizing the differences between the appelés and the people in their surroundings, who, both upon the veterans' return to France and many years later, fail to comprehend their feelings and behavior. This is illustrated by the following passage, in which Rabut first wants to ask the mayor - who does not show any understanding toward Bernard's violent attitude - the question that was mentioned above:

Monsieur le maire, vous vous souvenez de la première fois où vous avez vu un Arabe? (...) À peine je me suis vu regarder le maire et vérifier ce que je savais déjà, son âge, oui, il avait quel âge, lui, dans ces années-là ? Est-ce qu'il y est allé, est-ce qu'il a vu, est-ce que c'était la première fois qu'il sortait de chez lui, de son vieux cocon familial et est-ce qu'il a laissé des mois et des mois une famille, une fiancée ? Est-ce qu'il a eu peur, qu'il s'est ennuyé, qu'il a tenu un

²¹ As Roann Barris (2008) points out, this sense of “knowing without knowing” has often been associated with trauma (6).

fusil et connu la moiteur des mains sur le fusil et la chaleur étouffante, et oui – je sais tout ça. Je sais qu’il est un peu trop jeune. (73)

This passage indicates that there is a generational and experiential gap between those who have a first-hand experience of the war, and those who do not. Although readers have an access to the narrator’s thoughts that the mayor lacks, these thoughts point to an experience that most of them are unlikely to share. Even though the novel seems to encourage the reader to feel what the characters feel, to sense the tension, to identify with the appelés who are confronted with a war that is not their own, and with the rediscovery of this war after a long period of repression, passages like these underline that there is nevertheless an essential difference that makes complete identification impossible.

Robert Eaglestone (2003), in an article discussing “The Experience of Reading Holocaust Testimony”, describes the refusal of (full) identification as an important distinctive feature of testimony as a genre. He claims that the “gaps, shifts, breaks and ruptures” (38) of testimonies, which can exist at the level of the form or of the content, erect a ‘dyke’ between the text and the reader, leading to a reading experience that is profoundly different from reading fictional texts, which – on the contrary – tend to stimulate identification. Although Mauvignier’s *Des Hommes* is a novel, then, it seems to employ certain characteristics of the testimonial genre, and appears to use these in the way in which it positions the reader. In this respect, the part that follows the dramatic scene discussed above (in which the soldiers learnt that their companions were killed), is particularly interesting.

This specific scene is narrated by Février, who was in the same compound as Bernard and who, a couple of years after the end of the war, visits Rabut in order to talk about his experiences and memories. He had had the desire to share his story for quite a long time already, but describes how, upon his return in France, almost no one asked about his experiences in Algeria. This frustrated him to the point that he often considered forcing his stories upon the other men in the local bar, his parents, or his ex-girlfriend. This girl, Éliane, worked at the market, and Février often thought of going there to confront her with his memories of torture and other terrible things he had done in the war, and to ask her :“tu sais ce que c’est, toi? T’as déjà vu ça sur ton marché, t’as déjà vu la terreur dans les yeux? T’as pas idée ma pauvre Éliane, t’as aucune idée de rien (...)” (250). He refrained from doing these things because he knew that Éliane, the people present at the market or in the bar, and even his parents, would think he was crazy and tell him to stop talking. The years of silence that followed eventually took their toll, and Février decided to visit his old friends in order to “dire tout ce qui à force de croupier en lui devenait insupportable, trop présent, et qu’il s’était raconté qu’en parlant avec des gens comme lui il pourrait, comme il avait dit, crever l’abcès” (253). However, even his fellow veterans would not let him speak – they all just tried to forget and go on with their lives –, and although he actually had not known Rabut that well during the war, he was one of the last persons Février felt he could turn to.

In this way, the novel creates a setting that can be related to processes of testimony and witnessing. Dori Laub (1992) has distinguished three different levels in this respect, namely “the level of witness to

oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (Laub in Kopf (2010), 52). Irene Kacandes, also discussed in Kopf, approaches these levels from a literary point of view, and concludes that the third level can be related to a work’s reception, and thus to the position of the reader. It follows, then, that by witnessing the process of witnessing, readers can become aware of the relevance of “active listening and witnessing” (Kopf, 43) and the need for an “addressable other” (51), which “are of as much importance as the act of narrating itself” (43). In this respect, readers of *Des Hommes* could be said to witness two processes of witnessing: indirectly in the case of Février’s failed attempt to share his experiences with Éliane and the other people in his surroundings, and more directly with regard to Février’s conversation with Rabut. Although the situation of most readers will correspond to that of Éliane, the mayor, and others who lack the experiences of the appelés, when Février tells his story, their position seems to coincide with that of Rabut: they become (vicarious) witnesses, who are supposed to listen and (try to) understand. From this point of view, the lack of understanding presented by those other characters could perhaps serve as a ‘bad example’ that motivates readers to engage with the stories of the appelés in a different, more responsible way.

Capone (2011) also underlines that the prominence of silence in the novel is related to the difficulty of finding someone to speak to, and that this difficulty is not only dealt with on the level of the story, but also on a more reflexive level, in which the novelist or narrator “convoque l’écoute du lecteur” (Capone, 41). In the passage where Février shares his memories with Rabut, but also in a passage that represents only one side of a phone call, a passage in which Rabut tells a story to the waitress of the local bar, and in general in the many fragmented descriptions that are part of the novel, the reader is positioned as a listener, “[qui] doit lui aussi s’impliquer dans le récit pour comprendre l’implicite. (...) Être à l’écoute, ne pas chercher à compléter les blancs” (Capone, 47-48). The reader’s role, then, is at once modest and active: rather than breaking the silence, he or she should listen (instead of just ‘hear’, a distinction that is also dealt with in the novel) and make an attempt to understand.

This emphasis on listening and understanding appears to differ from the ways in which others have described the position of the witness. Judith Herman (1992), for example, has argued that those who bear witness to traumatic events of human design “are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. (...) The bystander is forced to take sides” (Herman in Kopf, 42-43). As Capone (2012) rightly suggests, Mauvignier seeks to rethink this binary opposition (49), and portrays the appelés, much like the other groups, as both perpetrators and victims of violence. Above all, all the different parties involved are presented as humans (*des hommes*), which gives the novel a universal dimension.²² Even

²² This universal dimension is reinforced by the fact that there are almost no allusions to specific events or political figures. In an interview, Mauvignier points out that he also wants readers without much foreknowledge about the war to be able to read his novel: “Je ne cherche pas à travailler, à écrire sur la guerre d’Algérie, comme Benjamin Stora l’a fait, ou comme Rotman, ce n’est pas un travail de ce registre-là, c’est quelque chose qui est d’une certaine manière plus personnel et dont j’aimerais que ça puisse être lu de manière décontextualisée...” (Mauvignier in

though the focus on a shared humanity sometimes risks obscuring meaningful historically situated differences, this does not appear to be the case in *Des Hommes*. Many appelés are aware of their role as occupants – Bernard, for example, repeatedly wonders what it would be like to stand in the shoes of the Arab population, and realizes that he would probably have joined the revolution as well, although he could also imagine being a harki fighting on the side of France.

Moreover, the narrative construction allows different communities to come into view: the harkis who point out the flaws in the generalizing attitudes of the French (190), who, at the end of the war, betray them by leaving them to their faith or even killing them (281), the pieds-noirs who are likely to meet disdain and hatred upon their ‘return’ to France, and the Algerian civilians who are subject to the appelés’ violence. An example of this last case is a passage in which the soldiers torture a boy in his home, consisting of a detailed description of the boy’s features, his fear, and incomprehension. Nevertheless, in this passage the boy’s name remains unknown – in contrast to that of the soldiers – and in general, the focalization always lies with the appelés. If the inclusion of the experiences of other communities could, as Landsberg argues, encourage a sense of empathy and understanding that goes beyond the sphere of a single group, facilitating social responsibility and new (political) relations beyond generational, ethnic, or racial divides, this potential seems to be limited by this predominant focus on the appelés. Even though these other experiences are sometimes described in a similarly visceral way, they are nearly always filtered through the perspective of the soldiers, who, therefore, are still the ultimate ‘object’ of (imperfect) identification.

However, if readers accept the way in which they are positioned by the text, the emphasis on the importance of listening could potentially still influence their attitudes towards other communities: the difficulty of finding someone to speak to, which is so present in the novel, could be paralleled to the “dialogue of the deaf” that – according to Savarese (discussed in Eldridge, n.p.) – is at the basis of the memory wars in contemporary France – and arguably also influences relations between France and Algeria. In that broader context as well, listening to each other’s experiences could arguably be a first step in finding a more constructive way of dealing with the past.

Capone (2011) also refers to the novel’s place in the contemporary mnemonic context, but primarily relates the theme of silence and the need to find a listener to the collective amnesia that, in France, has surrounded the war. However, I think that the novel also problematizes the very notion of ‘breaking’ the silence. Just as merely ‘hearing’ stories about the war does not suffice to understand the appelés – or any other mnemonic community, for that matter – merely ‘speaking’ about these events does not seem to provide the catharsis that is often ascribed to it. On Saturdays, Rabut attends meetings with his friends of “les anciens d’Afrique du Nord”, during which “on pense aux copains, et puis aux Algériens aussi, à ce regret qu’on a de tout ça, de comment ça a pu arriver” (253). Nevertheless, his sleep

Lévy-Bartherat, 5). As was mentioned in the first chapter, Rigney (2008) perceives this broader appeal as one of the characteristics that can contribute greatly to a text’s effectiveness as medium of remembrance.

problems and stomach aches persist. Eibl remarks that the novel's doubting, searching sentences show that "rien n'est jamais dit une fois pour toutes" (101) and Ducas makes a similar point, perceiving these "jeux d'ajustement et de reprises" as an attempt to get a bit closer to the "mystère de l'innommable, sans jamais pour autant prétendre le percer" (86). The war is a "hors-champ insaisissable" that the words, much like Rabut's photographs which are taken out of their box towards the end of the novel – have difficulty to capture (Ducas, 89). As Ducas rightly points out, Mauvignier turns the 'unsayable' into the subject matter of the novel, a reflexive choice that seems to fit in with the 'psychopathological techniques' of literary modernism mentioned by Jameson and White, which avoid the risk of narrative fetishism by preventing closure. And indeed, in an interview with *Les Inrockuptibles*, Mauvignier has made clear that he addresses the theme of the 'non-dit' "pour le dire, pas pour le réparer. (...) Le roman peut montrer les manques mais il ne s'agit jamais pour lui de donner des réponses. Le roman, c'est l'art de reformuler les questions" (Mauvignier in Lévy-Bertherat, 16).

This lack of answers and of closure is present in the formal and thematic aspects of the novel, but also on the level of the events it portrays. According to Eibl, the Algerian experience turns the present into a symptom of something that will always be absent (98), and in this respect, Bernard's racist behavior at the start of the novel seems to be a case in point. As was discussed above, this behavior triggers the 'awakening' of Rabut's war memories, and in another passage the actual return of Rabut's memories is preceded by the mental image of the arrival of the first Maghrebian immigrants in his village, which, for the appelés, had been "comme de revoir surgir des morts ou des ombres comme elles savent parfois revenir, la nuit, même si on le raconte pas, on le sait bien, tous, à voir les autres des anciens d'Algérie et leur façon de ne pas en parler, de ça comme du reste" (88). The 'double movement' that was discussed in the previous chapter, in which Arab immigrants can trigger war memories and in which these war memories can influence the way in which these immigrants are perceived, is exemplified here. This passage seems to play a connecting role between Bernard's violent racist actions and the war events figuring in the central part of the novel, and although the causal relation is never made explicit, the novel seems to advance the war – and especially the complicated silence that continues to surround it – as a possible origin of this violence. In his interview with *Les Inrockuptibles*, Mauvignier straightforwardly underlines that what remains implicit in his novel:

La guerre d'Algérie n'est pas finie. Le Front national, c'est la guerre d'Algérie. Les propos qu'on entend aujourd'hui, cette espèce de racisme progressiste, l'idée qu'un Français ne peut pas être algérien – et donc qu'un Algérien ne peut pas être français –, c'est vraiment la question de départ de la guerre d'Algérie. Et on voit bien comment en France aujourd'hui cette question n'est pas réglée. Dans l'inconscient collectif, il y a quelque chose de ce rejet de l'Algérien qui continue, parce que cette question n'a jamais été pensée dans sa globalité sur les cinquante dernières années.

In this way, the presence of racism in the novel could make readers understand that the difficulty of closure not only has implications for the appelés themselves, but for society at large. Moreover, the

juxtaposition of colonial violence and contemporary conflicts with immigrants appears to demand attention for the mechanisms that, then and now, turn Algerians and immigrants with Algerian origins into a (rejected) Other.

Throughout the novel, then, *Des Hommes* invites readers to identify with the perspective of the appelés – who are portrayed as both perpetrators and victims, seeing each specific group while connecting them in their universality – , but hinders a sense of sameness by pointing at an essential experiential difference. It positions the readers as listeners (or witnesses), who have the responsibility to try to understand the appelés' silence and are made aware of the aftereffects of the past in the present. Arguably, only this awareness and an active, listening attitude could break down the walls of the “cloistered memories” (Stora in Derderian, 31) that oppose each other in the *guerres de mémoires*, and as the narrator Rabut suggests towards the end of the novel, shed a light on the importance of today's stories:

Peut-être que ça n'a aucune importance, tout ça, cette histoire, qu'on ne sait pas ce que c'est qu'une histoire tant qu'on n'a pas soulevé celles qui sont dessous et qui sont les seuls à compter, comme les fantômes, nos fantômes qui s'accumulent et forment les pierres d'une drôle de maison dans laquelle on s'enferme tout seul, chacun sa maison, et quelles fenêtres, combien de fenêtres ? (272)

As will be discussed in the next section, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* will make a further attempt at breaking down these walls, by focusing on a sense of (impossible) love and the importance of reconciliation between opposed characters and communities. Whereas *Des Hommes* primarily focuses on the silent and silenced stories of the appelés, Khadra's novel will give us a view through multiple 'windows' (in particular, those of the Arab population and pied-noir community) and shatter these by destabilizing homogenous conceptions of belonging and identity.

(Impossible) Love and Reconciliation in *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*

Yasmina Khadra (1955) is the pseudonym of the Algerian author Mohammed Moulessehoul²³, who ended his career in the Algerian army in 2000 in order to fully dedicate himself to writing. In 2001, he and his family moved to France. *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (2008) was his tenth title to appear at Editions Julliard (in Paris), after he had published a dozen earlier works at other publishing houses in both France and Algeria. In Algeria, Sedia Editions published the French version of the novel in 2008 and

²³ An article on Khadra's personal website explains that he has decided to write under a pen name for two reasons: to mark his break with the army (which he describes as “rupture et non reniement”) and to make it easier for him to discuss “l'intolérable et l'intolérance”, key themes in his work, freely. Yasmina and Khadra are the first two names of his wife, and he has chosen them as a sign of love and respect for her, but also to express his deep admiration for “ les femmes algériennes, leur courage, et l'espoir qu'elles entretiennent, comme on entretient une flamme, dans un pays désespéré, qui a peut-être sous les yeux, et à portée de main, de purs et hauts repères qu'il ne voit pas” (Filippi (2004), n.p.).

the Arabic translation in 2014. Although *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* has received less scholarly attention than some of his earlier works – most notably his trilogy about the conflicts between the Orient and the Occident (*Les hirondelles de Kaboul* (2002), *L'attentat* (2005) and *Les sirènes de Bagdad* (2006)) – it was well received. The novel's page at the website of Editions Julliard mentions that over 250 000 copies have been sold, and it has been awarded the title of "Meilleur livre de l'année 2008" by magazine *LIRE* and the "Prix France Télévisions 2008".

If it was shown that, in *Des Hommes*, concepts of perspective, silence, and the impossibility of closure play an important role, one could say that *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* revolves around notions of unsettling, singular-plural identity, common experiences of violence and love, and an attitude towards the presence of the past that accentuates a need for reconciliation. The last part of the novel, entitled "Aix-en-Provence (aujourd'hui)", reveals that the story is narrated from contemporary France, but the majority of the action is set in Algeria in the period between 1936 and 1962 – covering the Algerian war and the two decades preceding it. It is the story of – and told by – Younes, an old man looking back on his life, and especially his youth, in Algeria. It could be classified as a mixture of a Bildungsroman and a historical novel, but, as will be discussed further on, also has aspects of a romance. Khadra himself speaks of a "roman d'amour" or "saga romanesque", inspired by titles like *Anna Karenina* and *Gone With the Wind* (Khadra in Galler, 40).

Even though he has presented his novel in this way in interviews in both France and Algeria, the official book descriptions of the French and Algerian versions show an interesting difference. The synopsis on the cover of the book by Editions Julliard begins with a quote about love and portrays the novel as "un grand roman de l'Algérie coloniale (...) – une Algérie torrentielle, passionnée et douloureuse" which sheds a light on "la dislocation atroce de deux communautés amoureuses d'un meme pays" (namely, the pieds-noirs and the Arab population). Sedia's description, however, mentions that the protagonist's uncle receives Arabs and Berbers from all over the country, who discuss the future of a "pays spolié, assujetti, muselé et qui ruminait ses colères comme un aliment avarié – l'Algérie des Jenane Jato, des fractures ouvertes et des terres brûlées, des souffre-douleur et des portefaix... un pays qu'il restait à redéfinir et où tous les paradoxes du monde semblaient avoir choisi de vivre en rentiers". While the content of both books is the same, this paratextual information frames the story in different ways (focusing on the grandeur of the themes and on the fate of both communities, or – in the other case - on the moment of change for a repressed country), and this might have an important impact on the way in which readers approach the text.

The novel itself starts in the Algerian country side, where Younes lived until he was ten years old. As their living conditions have become untenable, he and his family move to Oran, a big city that could potentially offer more chances. Unfortunately, their situation does not improve and Younes' father feels forced to entrust him to his brother. This man, Younes's uncle, has had more luck: he owns a pharmacy in one of the city's wealthier neighborhoods and is married to Germaine, a woman belonging to the "quatrième génération" (117) of pieds-noirs. They are both very happy to be able to take care of Younes

and raise him as their own son. Although this ‘adoption’ also works out favorably for Younes himself – he gets to grow up in a safe environment and to go to school, which is quite rare in a context that deems that “les petits Arabes ne sont pas fait pour les etudes” (41) – it turns out to be more than a change of situation: it also brings about a change of identity. Upon his arrival, Germaine washes him, gives him new clothes, and – most importantly – renames him “Jonas” (73). When he sees himself in the mirror, Younes concludes that he has become “quelqu’un d’autre” (74).

First, this new situation primarily highlights the discrepancies between the ways of living of the Arab population and of the pieds-noirs community. The material conditions are different – his new room is two times bigger than his family’s entire ‘house’ in the Jenane Jato ghetto in Oran – but the mentalities as well. When Younes asks his uncle if it is true that Arabs are lazy – something he has picked up from a class mate – he receives the following answer:

Nous ne sommes pas paresseux. Nous prenons seulement le temps de vivre. Ce qui n’est pas le cas des Occidentaux. Pour eux, le temps c’est de l’argent. Pour nous, le temps, ça n’a pas de prix. Un verre de thé suffit à notre bonheur, alors qu’aucun bonheur ne leur suffit. Toute la différence est là, mon garçon. (94)

Contrasts like these establish an opposition between the ‘Arabs’ and the ‘Occidentals’ – an interesting choice of word, as it points at a universal western frame of mind, rather than at a context specific behavior of the pieds-noirs – in which the former, from a moral point of view, are clearly put in a better light. This opposition could arguably have a similar function as the presence of Éliane and the mayor in *Des Hommes*: western readers could recognize themselves in the image of the Occidentals, while at the same time feeling the urge to distance themselves from the negative aspects of that image²⁴. In this way, the sense of a homogenous Occidental (group) identity could be destabilized in the reading process. In the course of the novel, Younes’s sense of identity is also destabilized: he gets used to his new circumstances, and when his ‘new’ family moves to the pieds-noirs town Rio Salado, he grows up as Jonas, and what was Other gradually becomes a part of his Self. In the rest of the story, the double identity of Younes/Jonas allows him to notice the increasing violence and suffering of both communities he feels connected to, which oppose each other ever more strongly. An example of this is the following passage, in which he describes the events taking place during his visit to Oran, towards the end of the war:

²⁴ This is also what Karl Ågerup (2011) suggests in his study of Khadra’s trilogy, in which, as was mentioned above, the contrasts between the Orient and the Occident occupy an even more prominent place. Ågerup uses the notion of ‘Autre occidental’ to describe the reader’s possible distancing response: “Selon l’hypothèse de l’Autre occidental, le roman de Yasmina Khadra crée une structure triangulaire où le lecteur a la possibilité de se montrer du bon côté par rapport au “mauvais” Occidental évoqué par le texte. (...) Simultanément il prend ses distances par rapport à l’Occidental ignorant. Le regard est projeté vers le reste du groupe occidental : au prochain de montrer qu’il est assez généreux pour adopter l’Algérien qui démasque l’Occident (85)”.

J'étais là quand il y avait eu ces deux voitures piégées sur la Tahtaha qui firent cent morts et des dizaines de mutilés dans les rangs de la population musulmane de Médine J'dida; j'étais là quand on avait repêché des dizaines de cadavres d'Européens dans les eaux polluées de Petit Lac ; j'étais là lorsqu'un commando OAS avait opéré un raid dans la prison de la ville pour faire sortir des prisonniers FLN dans la rue et les exécuter au vu et au su des foules ; j'étais là quand des saboteurs avaient dynamité les dépôts de carburant dans le port et noyé le Front de mer durant des jours sous d'épaisses fumées noires. (362)

The construction of this passage could be related to Edward Said's theory of counterpoint, which Kathryn Lachman discusses in her analysis of the work of Assia Djébar. She points out that 'contrapuntal techniques' such as "the simultaneous development of multiple narratives" and "the juxtaposition of dissonant subject positions" allow Djébar to develop "a compassionate, nuanced and inclusive approach to history—one that accommodates difference, even when it comes to the most entrenched conflicts of the twentieth century" (162). Further on, she adds that "by complicating the binary positions of victim and aggressor, [Djébar] envisions new possibilities for empathy and solidarity" (163). In this fragment, Khadra seems to use similar techniques: by juxtaposing the (endured) violence of both opposed communities, he blurs the distinctions between perpetrator and victim. In this way, the text illuminates points of commonality, something which, as McCormack (discussed in Eldridge, n.p.) suggested, might allow mnemonic communities on both sides of the Mediterranean to approach each other in a more understanding way.

Although Mauvignier's *Des Hommes* also pays attention to the violence and suffering on both sides, often explicitly stressing the humanness they all have in common, the events are never juxtaposed in a truly equal way because focalization always lies with the appelés. As Derderian suggests, even (literary) books that deal with multiple mnemonic perspectives are often structured according to particular communities of memory, or focus primarily on only one of these communities (31). This makes Younes/Jonas's position as a focal point, protagonist, and narrator all the more interesting, as the reader is asked to identify with a character placed in a connecting in-between position, going beyond the clear cut binaries between different groups.

From this point of view, Younes/Jonas not only shows the common suffering of the two parties, but also their common love for Algeria. As was mentioned above, the back cover of the French edition of the novel speaks of "deux communautés *amoureuses* d'un meme pays" (my emphasis). Examples of this are the respectful way in which the Arabs refer to the land of their ancestors (56, 290) and the profound sadness of the pieds-noirs when, at independence, they have to leave the country (363). Although this love for the same country does not unite them – on the contrary, this love and the feeling of belonging to Algeria seem to be at the origin of the mutual violence – it nevertheless succeeds in framing the war differently and creates a sense of impossible love that might leave some readers with the bitter impression that, if the circumstances had been different, the (hi)story could perhaps have evolved in a different way.

Younes, however, is not just a witness of conflict and impossible love: he also experiences them in his personal life. In the course of the novel, his double identity troubles him more and more. As the violence surrounding him becomes more visible, he realizes that he will be obligated to choose, “tôt ou tard, pour un camp. Quand bien même je refuserais de me décider, les événements finiraient par choisir pour moi” (189). More than once, the importance of this choice is underlined by Jelloul, the Arab servant of one of the more racist *pieds-noirs* in Rio Salado. He accuses Younes of cowardice and opportunism, and adds:

La vie, c'est comme dans les films: il y a des acteurs qui nourrissent l'histoire, et des figurants qui se fondent dans le décor. Ces derniers sont là, mais ils n'intéressent personne. Tu en fais partie, Jonas. Si je ne t'en veux pas, je te plains. (342)

This passage appears to have an auto-reflective dimension: in the type of story described by Jelloul, Younes would be an uninteresting character. Nevertheless, he is the protagonist in Khadra's novel, who, in this way, seems to offer an alternative to the kind of story – and History – that focuses primarily on people engaged in violent struggles. *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, by contrast, highlights the experience of people who refuse to pick a side and abstain from violence. In this respect, it is also interesting to note that the novel portrays Rio Salado as a somewhat secluded community, in which the peaceful daily life continues for a long time while the war already rages in the rest of the country (see, for example, 219, 293). This portrayal might make it easier for readers to identify with the characters, and, although Younes's situation and the increasing visibility of violence will probably stand in the way of an appropriation of their experiences, the sense of an unbridgeable difference caused by a lack of first-hand experience is less prominently present than in *Des Hommes*.

Still, the feeling of having to choose a camp weighs heavily on Younes. In a sense, his situation seems to be comparable to that of Algeria: he is “en guerre ouverte” against himself. This internal conflict distances him from his best friends, who are all *pieds-noirs*. Although Younes's Arab origins never constituted a problem for them, he feels that his own attitude has changed: “C'était moi qui avais changé. Jonas s'effaçait derrière Younes” (274). Another factor that distances Younes from his friends is love. When the beautiful *pied-noir* girl Émilie moves to Rio Salado, nearly all the boys fall in love with her, and misunderstandings and jealousy cause a big conflict between Younes and Jean-Christophe, one of his best friends. When the latter returns from his military service in the French army, he is still unable to bury the hatchet. For a lot of different reasons, Émilie and Younes are never able to be together, despite the fact that they love each other.

The relations between Younes and Jean-Christophe on the one hand, and between Younes and Émilie on the other, could be seen as a metaphor for or *mise en abyme* of the Algerian war. However, they are also important on their own and constitute a prominent part of the novel, to the point that Algeria and the war could sometimes appear to function as a (mere) background for a story about love and friendship. There is a contrast between the universality of these themes and the specificity of many of

the historical references – the novel mentions the dates of important events (like the 8th of May for liberation in France and the Sétif massacres in Algeria), the names of opposed parties (like the FLN and the OAS) and political figures (like the early independence leader Messali Hadj and the French president Charles de Gaulle) - and it would be interesting to see how readers respond to this contrast, and which of these aspects predominates in their views of the novel.

From the perspective of memory studies, the last part of the novel – taking place in contemporary France – is most interesting. Younes– who, after independence, had been able to stay in Algeria while the pieds-noirs had felt forced to leave– has become an old man, and spends a few days in Aix-en-Provence to visit Émilie’s grave and to see his friends. Their conversations are dominated by beautiful memories and “nostalgérie” (400), but like in *Des Hommes*, it is also clear that the past can have a haunting impact on the present. However, the themes of silence and the difficulty of speaking are not addressed here – on the contrary, the pieds-noirs speak amply of the difficulty of reconstructing their lives after their departure and of the negative, generalizing way in which they are often represented. The way in which these passages combine nostalgia with a certain social critique seem to be a good illustration of Welch and McGonagle’s assertion that, rather than merely idealizing the past, nostalgérie can challenge aspects of national memory (23). The civil war in Algeria is also a subject of discussion, and the kind of questions asked to Younes – “Pourquoi ces massacres incroyables, ces attentats qui n’en finissent pas? Vous vouliez l’indépendance? Vous l’avez. Vous vouliez décider par vous-mêmes de votre sort? Qu’à cela ne tienne. Alors pourquoi la guerre civile? Pourquoi ces maquis infestés d’islamistes? Ces militaires qui se donnent en spectacle?” (392) – create the impression that the novel addresses both French and Algerian readers. This impression is reinforced by other passages, for example by the earlier mentioned presence of independence leader Messali Hadj, who has only returned in Algerian collective memory in recent years.

In some passages, the past and memory are connected to notions of identity. When André, one of the pieds-noirs, speaks of the part of his life spent in Algeria, he says: “Comment oublier? J’ai voulu mettre une croix sur mes souvenirs de jeunesse, passer à autre chose, repartir à zéro. Peines perdues. Je ne suis pas un chat et je n’ai qu’une vie, et ma vie est restée là-bas, au bled...” (400). This remark resembles the last sentence of *Des Hommes*, in which the narrator Rabut asks himself “si l’on peut commencer à vivre quand on sait que c’est trop tard” (283). The other pieds-noirs share André’s experience, confirming that Algeria has always played an important role in their self-perception and that they feel like “orphelins de notre pays” (399). Younes’ reflections on the relation between past and identity are somewhat more nuanced:

Qui sommes-nous au juste ? Ce que nous avons été ou bien ce que nous aurions aimé être ? Le tort que nous avons causé ou bien celui que nous avons subi ? (...) Nous sommes tout cela en même temps, toute la vie qui a été la nôtre, avec ses hauts et ses bas, ses prouesses et ses vicissitudes ; nous sommes aussi l’ensemble des fantômes qui nous hantent... nous sommes plusieurs personnages en un, si convaincants dans les différents rôles que nous avons assumés

qu'il nous est impossible de savoir lequel nous avons été vraiment, lequel nous sommes devenus, lequel nous survivra. (406)

If Younes's double identity already connected two groups, this passage presents an even more fluid sense of identity that resembles Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of singular-plurality. Nancy contests Heidegger's polarized discussion of the concept of Being-with, in which both the individual (the *Anyone*, the One-me) and the group (*the people*, the One-all – see Nancy (2000), 92 and Nancy (2008), 1) are presented as homogenous entities. Nancy points out that this way of thinking can lead to exclusions based on a notion of Self and Other, and that this can lead to murder (Nancy 2000, 92) and repressive totalitarian regimes (Nancy 2008,4). According to him, it does not do justice to the *with* in Being-with – that is, to the manifold relationships that constitute our ever changing identity, and on the basis of which we interact with other singular-plural beings. In this respect, this particular passage seems to show that we are more than our past, and, moreover, that this past is not univocal. By rethinking who we are, and not letting our sense of identity be determined by one aspect of our experiences – however prominent that may be – it could become possible to deal the past (and consequently, with the present and future) in a different way.

A bit further on, Younes ponders again over the question which attitude 'we' should adopt with regard to the past. He observes that we are "les otages de nos souvenirs" (407), and after having mentally relived some scenes of the end of the war, he wonders: "Que faire de ma nuit? À qui me confier? En réalité, je ne veux rien faire de ma nuit ni me confier... Il est une vérité qui nous venge de toutes les autres : Il y a une fin en toute chose, et aucun malheur n'est éternel (408)". This transition from the impression of being held hostage by one's memories to the conclusion that no grief is eternal could be seen as an attempt to confront and accept the past. This conclusion is confirmed when, thanks to a letter she had left him before her death, Younes can finally appease his thoughts about Émilie, and most of all in the last passage of the novel, in which Jean-Christophe – who had been absent at the pieds-noir reunion – shows up at the airport minutes before Younes's departure. When, at their "âge finissant" (316), these two men are finally reconciled, Younes eventually manages to make peace with the past. Then, it is time to board the plane: "Au moment où je m'apprête à franchir le seuil de la zone franche, je lève une dernière fois la tête sur ce que je laisse derrière moi et les vois tous, au grand complet, les morts et les vivants, debout contre la baie vitrée, en train de me faire des signes d'adieu" (413).

The entire last part of the novel, and especially this final scene in which all the "morts et vivants" are peacefully reunited, could be considered as an invitation to all the groups that love or once loved Algeria, and whose relations continue to be impacted by the past: in order to stop being hostages of their memories, they should try to reconcile with the past and with each other. This message also shines through in a remark by Émilie, reported by her son Michel: "les gens sensés finissent obligatoirement par se réconcilier" (394). Powerful as this message might be, however, the necessity of this memory work seems to be partly negated by the sense of closure presented in this ending, creating the impression that all is well that ends well. This closure can be related to Santner's notion of "narrative

fetishism” and to points made by LaCapra and Martin, the latter claiming that closure seems to allow “readers the comfort of watching (...) characters recover” (60), thus gratifying “a longing for oblivion – for the luxury of forgetting and for the absolution of amnesia” (61).

The question remains, then, to which extent readers will recognize and respond to the invitation – or responsibility – that is brought forward in the text. Do they refer to a need to remember the past, or a need for renewed relations between different communities? To which extent do readers feel personally called upon, in this respect? Are there differences between the ways in which Algerian and French readers consider these issues, or between the responses of professional and non-professional readers?

Of course, these questions about literature’s functions and effects within and beyond the lines of communities are also relevant with regard to *Des Hommes*. Will readers assume the listening role that appears to be assigned to them, and does this indeed lead to a greater understanding? Do they connect the themes brought forward in the novel to the (social) reality outside the text? These questions, and others, will be addressed in the next chapter.

4. Reading and Responding to the Algerian War

In the previous chapter, it was argued that – despite their different perspectives on the Algerian war and its aftermath – the ways in which *Des Hommes* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* position the (implied) reader both center on a sense of responsibility. In the case of the former, it concerns a responsibility to listen and try to understand the difficulty of finding closure, whereas the latter addresses the responsibility to strive for reconciliation. Both texts have the (transformative) mnemonic potential to create awareness of this responsibility, of the aftermath of the war and of the consequences of the past in the present, and to create a certain empathy for – or, in Nancy’s more singular plural sense, perhaps even *beyond* – other (social) groups. This potential and these types of positioning are interesting on their own, and many studies might stop at his point. This seems unfortunate, however, because – as has been mentioned several times in this thesis – Ricœur’s mimesis₂ does not equal nor (fully) account for mimesis₃; a text’s mnemonic potential is not necessarily actualized in its refiguration in memory culture. As was discussed in the first chapter, Erll (2011) mentions that literary works must first of all be received as media of memory in order to be able to affect cultural memory (155). Moreover, she suggests that a text’s mnemonic potential could be limited by the fact that readers might only attend to works that fit in with their own images of the past (165), a point that is also brought forward by Irwin-Zarecka and Kansteiner (see Kansteiner, 192).

Furthermore, besides the texts themselves and the experiences and attitudes of the readers, other factors can also greatly influence reception and refiguration. In the introduction to their book about the visual presence of the Franco-Algerian relationship in France, Edward Welch and Joseph McGonagle (2013) discuss a display of books about French Algeria and the Algerian war, which one of them, in September 2009, had encountered in the famous Mollat bookshop in Bordeaux. They point out that “the display had undoubtedly been motivated by the publication a few weeks earlier of the novel *Des Hommes* by Laurent Mauvignier, prominently displayed at the center of the table” (5). The novel’s central position between these other books, most of which belonging to non-fictional genres, is a literal example of the various ways in which the reception of a novel is already framed before it reaches the reader²⁵. Publicity, of course, is another factor, as are the manifold literary prizes that are awarded every year. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, *Des Hommes* obtained the Prix Millepages, the Prix Initiales and the Prix des Libraires, and in 2009 it made the third selection of nominations for the prestigious Prix Goncourt – which amounts to 10 euros, but turns the winning book into a guaranteed best seller. *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* was awarded the title of “Meilleur livre de l’année 2008” by magazine *LIRE* and the “Prix France Télévisions 2008”, although various newspaper articles reported

²⁵ The authors seem to perceive this table as a somewhat ephemeral form of collective memory (as compared to, for example, “street naming or the inscription of war memorials” (6)), as the books will only be on display for a short while. However, the bookstore’s choice to take up the novel as an occasion to encourage the (renewed) circulation of a whole series of books about the Algerian war is interesting and might contribute to more durable – although less ‘tangible’ – memory effects.

Khadra's belief that the committees of literary prizes and the (Parisian) publishing industry in general plotted against him. As will be discussed later on, this kind of media visibility – that also surrounds Khadra at this moment ²⁶ – might also impact readers' attitudes and responses towards his novels.

The question remains, then, how actual readers respond to the novels by Mauvignier and Khadra, and what kind of functions and effects they see them fulfill. This chapter will make a first attempt at answering these questions, by analyzing a large corpus of professional and lay reader responses drawn from reviews and comments in newspapers, weblogs, discussion forums, and websites like *Amazon.fr* and *Babelio.com*. The position of the professional reviews is interesting, as their authors are readers themselves, but can also play a role in influencing other readers' decisions, expectations, and interpretations. To a certain extent, this also holds true for 'lay' readers who share their experiences on the internet, but usually these readers do not have the same status and their 'audience' is smaller. In the case of *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, the double position of these reviews will allow for a comparison between French and Algerian professional and non-professional reader responses. In the case of *Des Hommes* – which will be discussed first – similar comparisons will be made, but as it proved hard to find amateur responses by Algerian readers for this novel, the French perspective will be a bit more prominent here. The analysis will proceed from the theoretical concepts which were introduced in the first chapter and proved useful in the discussion of the novels, and measured against the functions, effects, and aspects that are brought up by the readers themselves. What do readers expect from a literary work that deals with the Algerian war, and do the works meet these expectations? Do readers recognize the responsibilities that seem to be central in the novels, and do they consider them beyond the realm of the text? What is the role of textual features and of readers' own experiences and attitudes, in this respect? And, perhaps most importantly: does literature indeed have a transformative power, and does this power succeed in breaking down walls between cloistered mnemonic communities?

Des Hommes

Professional Reader Responses

As was mentioned above, the Mollet bookstore decided to showcase *Des Hommes* between a number of non-fictional works about the Algerian war. This creates the impression that a certain historical, referential dimension is ascribed to the novel, and Eibl points out that this was also the case in many literary reviews (98). However, when reading the reviews that were published in French newspapers and

²⁶ In 2013, Khadra announced his candidacy for the 2014 presidential elections in Algeria, which he ultimately could not push through because of a lack of official support (the so-called "parrainages", see, for example, Aissaoui (2014)). In May 2014, Khadra quit as director of the Algerian cultural center in Paris – a position for which he was appointed by the Algerian government in 2007. Over time, Khadra has shown himself ever more critical towards contemporary Algerian politics and society – in the media, but also in his most recent novel *Qu'attendent les singes* (2014) – and many articles propose this as the reason for his replacement (see, for example, Ardines (2014) and Morin (2014)).

magazines²⁷, it is also noteworthy that a couple of them explicitly renounce that *Des Hommes* is a book about the Algerian war. Joseph Macé-Scaron, writing for *Marianne*, points out that “On voudrait tant empêcher qu'un public s'éloigne sous le fallacieux prétexte que ce roman parle de jeunes appelés qui ont fait la guerre d'Algérie et de leur incapacité à trouver la paix”, and seems to anticipate that the novel's theme might deter a part of the reading public. Possibly, this also plays a role in Jérôme Garcin's review for *Le Nouvel Observateur* – that, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, has been reprinted on the back cover – in which he explains that *Des Hommes* “n'est pas un livre sur la guerre d'Algérie, c'est un livre où parlent tous ceux qui ne trouveront jamais la paix. C'est un livre sur la guerre qui continue après la guerre”. By introducing the novel in these ways, both reviewers indicate that there is more to the book than the depiction of the Algerian war: it not only incorporates different themes (such as the aftermath underlined by Garcin), but potentially also has other functions than a mere referential one.

For Garcin, Macé-Scaron, and many of the other reviewers, one of these functions seems to lie in the novel's transporting qualities. They describe and praise the way in which *Des Hommes* allows its readers to ‘experience’ the war from the ‘inside’, favoring a process of identification with the situation and feelings of the appelés. Macé-Scaron mentions that “face à cette guerre, nous sommes semblables aux protagonistes de ce roman polyphonique”, and according to Jacques-Pierre Amiette, writing for *le Point*, one of Mauvignier's talents is the fact that “il nous fait partager ce temps de la fatalité historique qui enlise et broie les générations”. Patrick Williams, writing for *Elle*, perceives this way of ‘sharing’ a specific time and experience, “en nous plaçant dans la tête des personnages” as the originality and force of the novel, and Patrick Grainville, in *le Figaro Littéraire*, seems to agree with this when he claims that “cette phénoménologie intérieure au vif de l'action même est la plus convaincante du roman”.

The emphasis on this sense of a shared experience recalls Landsberg's discussion of prosthetic memory, in which she suggests that the experiential dimension of literary works and other media can allow us to identify with the characters, and thus create ‘memories’ which are not our own, but allow us to foster new, empathic relationships with other individuals and groups. However, both Landsberg and LaCapra point out that, in order for this identification to be ‘productive’ and ethical – instead of colonizing or appropriating – readers should still be aware of the difference between the protagonists and themselves. Even though the reviewers do not explicitly refer to the ways in which they differ from the appelés, their sense of identification does not appear to become a tool for appropriation. Although Macé-Scaron's claim that “nous sommes semblables aux protagonistes” seems to indicate the contrary, the similarity he points at precisely concerns the failure to fully understand the specificity of the appelés' war experiences.

²⁷ The analysis is based on the reading of approximately 12 French and 9 francophone Algerian reviews. Although not exhaustive, these reviews are believed to give an adequate representation of the (divergent) opinions and interpretations that have appeared in French and francophone Algerian media.

Indeed, most reviewers seem to perceive the force of identification in relation to an increased understanding of Bernard and the other appelés. Minh Tran Huy, writing for *le Magazine Littéraire*, claims that, in the course of the novel – and especially after the part dealing with the war experiences – “le regard que nous posons sur (...) Bernard/Feu-de-Bois, et l’incident du premier chapitre, change du tout au tout”. Further on, she adds that, instead of seeking to provide the appelés with “un impossible apaisement”, the novel seeks to guide us “dans le labyrinthe de leurs pensées, de leurs souffrances, de leurs regrets – en un mot, de leur humanité”. The way in which Tran Huy contrasts the sense of an “impossible appeasement” to the novel’s guiding role is interesting as it suggests that the process of identification can play a role in bringing the absence of closure to the fore.

This absence of closure is discussed in many of the reviews, and often already shines through in the title or the first sentences. The title of Brigaudeau’s review, for example, is “la guerre d’Algérie saigne encore”, and Audrerie begins by pointing out that “Laurent Mauvignier dessine les cicatrices laissées dans un village français par la guerre d’Algérie”. Slimane Aït Sidhoum, writing for the Algerian newspaper *El Watan*, manages to capture the explosiveness of the war’s aftereffects by speaking of “mémoires dégoupilées” (referring to the action of unpinning a grenade). In the analysis of the novel in the previous chapter, it was pointed out that the emphasis on this aftermath also creates an implicit link between the war and racism in contemporary society. Although many reviews mention Bernard’s behavior towards Chefraoui and understand the way in which the novel connects this to his past, none of the reviewers take this beyond the realm of the novel. Sabine Audrerie, writing for *La Croix*, remarks that “Ils sont nombreux, les hommes comme feu-de-bois, dans nos bourgs de province”, but at the same time she presents him as an exception : “mais lui, on le pressent, porte un secret qui justifie son opprobre”. This suggests that, even if the novel encourages an increased understanding of the protagonist’s behavior, this understanding is not necessarily or automatically generalized to issues at stake in contemporary daily life.

In most reviews, the aftermath is related to the theme of silence, which, as was discussed in the last chapter, is really prominent in the novel. Some reviewers see the power and originality of the novel in breaking this silence. Anne Brigaudeau (writing for France2.fr), for example, starts by wondering “La guerre d’Algérie est-elle un non-sujet littéraire ? Alors que la deuxième guerre mondiale suscite un flot de fictions, les romanciers français se sont peu emparés du thème algérien, l’abandonnant volontiers aux historiens”. At the end, she compliments the author : “Bravo à Laurent Mauvignier d’avoir rendu, avec son talent d’écriture et sa force de romancier cette guerre volontairement oubliée, qu’il reste à inscrire dans la littérature”. Other French and Algerian articles discuss the silence in relation to the forgetfulness of the (French) authorities, or of society as a whole. However, as was pointed out in the second chapter, French memory of the Algerian war has gradually become more visible in the last two decades and the war has been the subject or background of many literary works. Remarks like that by Brigaudeau appear to be typical of the phenomenon Schyns refers to as “sensation de l’oubli” (36), and although it would be easy to say that this sensation is mistaken, ‘breaking the silence’ is apparently still a

function that can be ascribed to novels dealing with the (memory of the) Algerian war. Further on in this chapter, a comparison with the 'lay' reader responses and with responses to *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* should give us a sense of the importance of this function and of the extent to which the theme of silence plays a role in underlining it.

Although nearly all the reviews pay due attention to the topic of silence, only a couple of them refer to the role of the reader/listener – and only in implicit ways. Patrick Williams points out that *Des Hommes* “n’est pas forcément facile, mais c’est bien contre une certaine facilité dans notre façon de voir le monde que cet écrivain bataille”, thus encouraging the readers to take responsibility, to accept the challenge that the novel seems to present. Tran Huy, cited above, underlined the novel’s function in making readers understand the thoughts and feelings of the appelés, and Williams seems to take this one step further by suggesting that the novel makes the readers aware that they do not understand the complexity of ‘the world’. If Williams addresses a certain way of seeing the world, Macé-Scaron rather suggests that ‘we’ do not see at all: “Nous faisons comme si l’Algérie n’avait jamais existé, comme si des jeunes Français n’étaient jamais partis là-bas durant vingt-huit mois, n’avaient jamais eu autour du cou une plaque de métal...”.

Williams, Tran Huy, and Macé-Scaron all use the word ‘nous’, a collective form that suggests that all readers (of the novel and the reviews) are positioned by the text in a similar way, and can be expected to look at the world and respond to the text in ways that are comparable to that of the reviewer. This creates the illusion of a homogenous reading public, which, judging by the comments of these reviewers, consists of readers who all have a limited or simplistic understanding of the Algerian war, and presumably have no personal connection to it. This seems to exemplify a common characteristic of the (French) reviews: they mention the status of the author and the publishing house and praise its themes and stylistic features, but all in a very general way – they do not discuss the variety of (mnemonic) communities existing in society and to which readers might belong, and apart from some remarks about their reading pleasure and the captivating aspects of the book, none of them mentions the (emotional or cognitive) impact the text has had on them, as individual readers.

Such a personal dimension appears to be slightly more present in the Algerian press. The person interviewing Mauvignier for *Liberté Algérie*, for example, indicates that “à la lecture, on se sent comme oppressé ; on suffoque”. Even if the interviewer still uses the collective pronoun ‘on’, this refers more directly to an actual reading experience, which appears to be painful and threatening. A bigger difference between French and Algerian articles, however, concerns the way in which the novel’s portrayal of war events is presented. Many French reviewers mention the violence on both sides and point out that the novel attenuates the distinction between perpetrators and victims, whereas the Algerian reviews often only mention the acts carried out by the appelés. Slimane Aït Sidhoum (writing for *El Watan*), for instance, points out that the variety of voices in the novel “met à l’abri contre les abus des vérités dogmatiques”, but explains Bernard’s behavior solely by mentioning that “ce reflux des événements et l’ampleur des violences subies par le peuple algérien ont creusé dans les consciences de

certaines de ces soldats des sillons de haine” (my emphasis). R.C., writing for the newspaper *le Maghreb*, gives his review the title “Un récit poignant sur la torture”, focusing on an aspect that – although not absent from the novel – is far from being its central theme. Kharfi, writing for *Liberté Algérie*, suggests that the novel does not pronounce a judgment, but leaves this task to the reader: “Un roman puissant qui propose au lecteur de [re]composer un propos. Car il est seul juge des actes des protagonistes”. As compared to the analysis of the position of the reader that was proposed in the previous chapter, Kharfi assigns the readers a different responsibility: instead of being witnesses, they become judges, which seems to suggest that they are not implicated in the memory process themselves.

These differences might perhaps be explained with an eye to the different ways in which the Algerian war is remembered in France and Algeria. Even if the novel encourages identification with the appelés, Algerian readers might more easily identify with the Algerian characters in the novel, and – as was discussed in chapter two – binary oppositions still play a rather important role in the mnemonic context in Algeria. The fact that the novel challenges the distinctions between victims and perpetrators might conflict with these existing memory frames and incite the reader to reflect on the ‘justice’ of such a representation. For many French readers, the appelés might precisely be the easiest group to identify with, as many readers might have uncles, fathers or grandfathers who did their military service in Algeria. From that point of view, it is imaginable that they are more likely to accept a nuanced representation of the appelés, or even to perceive that it is nuanced.

One last review that is interesting to look at, in this respect, is “Des Hommes, une histoire algérienne”, written by Akram Belkaïd and published in *Le Quotidien d’Oran*. Although the title seems to suggest that this review – much like the ones mentioned above – primarily addresses the Algerian perspective, it discusses the violence on both sides in a very nuanced way, and gives an impression of the potential functions and effects of *Des Hommes* beyond the community of the appelés and the French mnemonic context. Early on, Belkaïd points out that *Des Hommes* “ne peut laisser aucun Algérien indifférent même si cela concerne ceux d’ ‘en face’”, and further on he declares that “en France, en cherchant bien, on trouve toujours une histoire algérienne cachée derrière la personne qui vous parle”. This last remark shows that he connects the story to the reality outside of the text – something which, as was mentioned earlier, is not really done by any of the other reviewers. He concludes his review by pointing out that “À l’heure où l’on devine qu’une nouvelle bataille mémorielle, officielle et politicienne, va se jouer entre l’Algérie et la France, on se dit qu’il est heureux que des livres puissent encore offrir à la fois un refuge et une main tendue pour comprendre l’autre”. The value that he attributes to the novel with regard to contemporary memory issues seems to confirm Alison Landsberg’s remarks about literature’s potential to foster new or improved (political) relations across lines of difference. Interestingly, he frames the notion of understanding the other – which, as was discussed above and in the previous chapter, is arguably at the core of *Des Hommes* – as an invitation and opportunity, rather than a responsibility.

Although these different reviews provide some interesting insights about the way in which *Des Hommes* was received by the French and Algerian press, they are at once too general to get a sense of the variety

of functions and effects that the novel might have for individual readers, and too few in number to create an impression of the larger patterns that may exist in this respect. Moreover, as reviewers write on behalf of a newspaper or magazine, their critiques offer little space to explain their motivations to read the book – quite often, these might be professional rather than personal – and to comment on their own attitudes to the Algerian war. Frequently, the comments that people leave behind on retail websites like *Amazon.fr* or literary platforms like *Babelio.com* also take the form of reviews, which – much like the professional ones – offer a synopsis, an opinion, and some information about the author and his earlier work. However, as the next section will show, the ‘informal’ setting of these websites allows them to be more personal and therefore arguably gives a better sense of the experiences of the ‘average’ reader.

Non-Professional Reader Responses

When considering the online comments by ‘lay’ readers²⁸, one of the first elements to come into view is the fact that some of them – in contrast to all of the professional reviews that were discussed above – report on their own personal connections to the (hi)story that is portrayed in the novel. The fact that they mention these connections arguably implies that these have framed their reading experience in some way, and it is interesting to observe what kind of functions and effects these readers ascribe to the text and how the novel fits in with their own knowledge and experiences.

Two of the readers in the corpus point out that they have been *appelés* themselves, and remarkably, their opinions on the novel are almost opposite. Whereas some of the reviews that were discussed above explicitly pointed out that *Des Hommes* is not a novel about the Algerian war – thereby implying that the representation of the historical events is not its most important aspect – the response by Jean-Claude Ponsolles on *Amazon.fr* gives concerns about notions of truth and credibility a central place. Ponsolles claims that it is very unlikely that any veteran could have experienced all the events that occur in the novel, and mentions that he is a member of a veteran association that militates for peace and respect for the truth. Rigney (2008) mentions that literature and other creative media have a certain “poetic license” that allows them to have other functions than a (mere) referential one, but Ponsolles – at least in the case of *Des Hommes* – does not seem to agree with this. Even if he appears to be duly aware of the text’s fictionality, he seems to ascribe it the responsibility to give an accurate portrayal of the past, especially with regard to the image that it conveys to the reader. He wants other readers to realize that “statistiquement, neuf soldats sur dix n'ont jamais tué” and wonders “que vont penser de nous les jeunes générations”. Besides truth, this remark about the opinion of younger generations also seems to indicate that he worries about a sense of judgment. This is even clearer at the beginning of his

²⁸ The analysis of non-professional reader responses to *Des Hommes* is based on more than 60 comments posted on the websites *Amazon.fr*, *Babelio.com*, and various (literary) weblogs connected to the posts that appeared on *Babelio.com*. A complete list of readers, sorted in alphabetical order, is included in a separate section of the bibliography. Whenever the real (first) names of readers were known, these are used. In other cases, it concerns their username.

response, where he claims that “Les anciens d'Algérie sont ici jugés par une génération qui ne connaît que les clichés qui ont surnagé sur l'écume des [soi-disant] non-dits”. The way in which he positions the readers of this generation – and perhaps even Mauvignier himself – as ‘judges’, recalls some of the Algerian reviews that were discussed above.

On the basis of the other reader comments, however, these worries cannot be confirmed. Although all the readers express their opinion on the book, hardly anyone judges the appelés themselves. The only exception is the author of the weblog “La Terre Adele lit”, who indicates that she hates the novel precisely because it does not judge the appelés. According to her, the novel should present the protagonists in a less extenuating way, or instead focus on soldiers who refused to take part in the violence of the war. However, all the readers commenting on her weblog disagree and feel the need to defend the novel; they praise the fact that Mauvignier does not pronounce a judgment and indicate that she – the weblog writer – is not in a position to judge, as she has not experienced the events herself. Some readers on *Amazon.fr* and *Babelio.com* make similar points. Drych, for example, remarks that he has been “sensible à la solitude de Feu-de-Bois et aux jugements faciles que les autres n'hésitent pas à porter sur lui, sans rien connaître de sa vie. Une promptitude à juger si courante dans notre société sans indulgence”, and Caroline even conceives of this lack of judgment as the moral of the novel.

Although the former appelé Ponsolles worries about consequences with respect to the reception of the novel, he does not pay much attention to the way in which the aftermath of the war is discussed in the text. However, for other veterans, the discussion and representation of this aftermath seems precisely to be what makes the novel truthful, and therefore valuable. The website 4ACG.org, belonging to the Association des Anciens Appelés en Algérie et leurs Amis Contre la Guerre, reports on a book presentation by Laurent Mauvignier which was attended by many veterans, who were

tous fortement touchés. D'une voix empreinte d'émotion, ils ont salué l'authenticité de ce récit, tant sur la description de ce temps passé en Algérie que sur l'après, le silence qui les a accueillis à leur retour, l'incrédulité, les cauchemars toujours présents... L'un d'eux n'avait pas pu lire en entier le livre, qui le bouleversait trop... un autre avait préparé puis lu ce qu'il souhaitait exprimer suite à sa lecture... (4ACG.org)²⁹

In this way, the event – with Mauvignier’s novel at its center – became an occasion to share experiences and emotions which veterans, as both the novel and critical publications about the appelés suggest, usually find difficult to express. Although the appelés were in the center of attention and the book presentation might certainly have strengthened their sense of community, the fact that it was a public occasion means that there probably also were ‘outsiders’ present that night – who were allowed (or forced?) to witness the emotions, silences, and stories of these veterans.

²⁹ Another interesting article on this website, written by Olivier Balvet, is entitled “Avec la littérature algérienne, une autre vision de l'histoire de l'Algérie”. Balvet suggests that reading work by Algerian writers can both be a sign of and a step towards fraternization.

The emphasis on authenticity and the desire to share (reading) experiences are also present in the response by a reader called Bourgeois. He describes how he himself escaped death during an operation in 1959, in which ten of his fellow soldiers were killed, and points out that he has read and reread the novel “d'un seul trait, ce livre dont j'ai vécu jour après jour le traumatisme d'une sale guerre dont je ne peux même pas parler à mes enfants”. Because of this last reason, he has decided to give a copy of the novel to each of his children. In this respect, the title of his response is worth noticing: “Un livre émouvant et juste pour ceux qui ont participé à ce traumatisme, un témoignage pour les autres”³⁰. By referring to the novel as a testimony – which makes a struggling attempt to tell the story that he has never been able to tell himself – he also seems to position the readers, among whom his own children, as (vicarious) witnesses. This corresponds to the analysis that was brought forward in the previous chapter, in which it was argued that the novel places more emphasis on the importance of listening and understanding the *appelés'* silence than on speaking and breaking this silence. From this point of view, the way in which Bourgeois thanks the writer is meaningful: “Merci Laurent d'avoir su *entendre et comprendre* votre Père (est-ce exact ?) pour nous retransmettre ce message indigne de l'Humanité mais bien réel de la barbarie des hommes” (my emphasis). Even the writer himself is first and foremost positioned as a listener, and this witnessing role appears to be a prerequisite in order to be able to transmit the story to the readers.

If, for Bourgeois and for the *appelés* that were present at Mauvignier's book presentation, the novel seems to function as a means of passing on their stories and silences to others – belonging to the same or to younger generations – others precisely turn to the novel to ‘receive’ these memories, and learn more about the experiences of their family members; a desire that could be linked to Hirsch's notion of postmemory. Sylire, for example, indicates that she feels personally concerned by *Des Hommes* because her father was an *appelé*. For that reason, the Algerian war does not feel like history to her.

Interestingly, she points out that, to her, this personal connection was a crucial motivator to finish the book: in contrast to the “critiques dithyrambiques” that had sparked her attention – which hints at the influence of professional reviews –, she was really annoyed by Mauvignier's writing style: “l'intérêt que j'ai pour le sujet a dépassé l'agacement [pour le style] mais j'aurais abandonné si la motivation n'avait pas été là”. In this respect, she does not stand alone: when considering the entire corpus of reader comments, the divergent opinions about the writing style are remarkable. Readers who do not appreciate the style point out that it is dense (Marta Palumbo), hard to read (Peter Guizmo), disorienting (Jean Paul), and lacks structure (El Rey), and for some of them this is even reason to refrain from finishing the novel or from commenting on any other aspect, such as the content or context.

³⁰ Another aspect worth noticing with regard to this title is the use of the word ‘juste’, which also returns in the response itself. This word is used by remarkably many of the readers; also by those who do not refer to their personal connections or experiences with the war. It not only attests to their appreciation of the novel, but also suggests that they have pre-existing ideas about the war and about the ways in which it should or should not be represented, and apparently the novel fits in with these expectations.

As was discussed in the first chapter, Ann Rigney (2008) sees part of the interest of literary texts – as compared to history textbooks, for example – in their potential to attract readers who do not have a prior interest in the subject by offering them an aesthetic experience that is valuable on its own. However, comments like these suggest that there is a limit to this potential, and that a certain use of stylistic features can also lead a part of the reading public to distance itself from the text and its subject. Furthermore, Sylire’s comment creates the impression that, in the case of *Des Hommes*, a prior interest in the subject might be a more important motivation to read the novel than the promise of a literary experience. This also shines through when she remarks that “C’est un livre que je conseille, mais uniquement si l’on est motivé par le sujet”. Keisha, one of the readers of Sylire’s weblog, responds: “Mouais. Pas sûr que je le lise, en plus pas de raison personnelle, mon père n’était pas de cette génération-là”. Comments like these exemplify the way in which discussions on weblogs can sometimes also provide insight in the reasons why specific books are *not* read, which – on a larger scale and over a longer period of time – could prove interesting for the study of literary afterlives. In this particular case, this kind of response suggests that there is a limit to a text’s potential to circulate beyond the ‘borders’ of mnemonic communities, as some readers without a personal connection to the war or to the point of view of the appelés might not be willing to make the effort that the text precisely and consciously seems to ask of them.

However, other readers without a personal connection to this history – or who, in any case, do not mention this connection, which arguably indicates that it is not essential in their reception of the novel – are more positive about Mauvignier’s writing style. Like the professional reviewers – though with a greater emphasis on experience and emotion – they link this style to a process of identification. Sebastien Fritsch, for example, speaks of “un style proche du langage parlé (ou plutôt pensé), avec ses doutes, ses dénégations, ses contradictions, ses phrases qui s’interrompent, cèdent la place à une autre idée, qui se confond avec une autre, puis une autre, comme va le fil des pensées. Cela donne une narration très vivante, très humaine, qui nous plonge dans l’esprit du narrateur et nous pousse à vraiment nous identifier à lui”. The verb ‘pousse’ suggests a sense of obligation or loss of control on the part of the reader, something which is also expressed by Sentinelle, who remarks that “ nous sommes ici et maintenant dans les pensées des protagonistes, contraints de plonger la tête la première dans leurs angoisses, nous errons au plus près de leurs doutes et incertitudes”. Although most readers go along with this, Racines indicates that it prevented her from completely adhering to the novel, because she was “dérangée par ce parti-pris constant de vouloir forcer l’émotion du lecteur, de le prendre en otage”. The reader’s responsibility to listen, then, might be preceded by a need to surrender, which puts the reader in a much more vulnerable position than the sense of an ‘invitation’ that was suggested by the Algerian reviewer Belkaïd.

Something that could perhaps be related to this sense of vulnerability is the fact that a remarkable number of readers describe the reading process as a painful or even physical experience. Danielle Renaud refers to the discussion of the war as a “sujet brûlant, torturant” and Titine75 points out that it

is “une écriture que l'on ressent physiquement, on se sent oppressé par ce flot de paroles”. Most interesting, from this point of view, is the response by Nadiejda, who calls the novel upsetting and unforgettable, and quotes the French-Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran to convey the message that any written text should be painful, re-open and create wounds, and most of all constitute a danger. She concludes that *Des Hommes* is perhaps even too disturbing, and that the reader feels this physically “dans le sens où on étouffe comme Feu-de-Bois qui ne peut communiquer sa souffrance”. The quotation by Cioran strongly recalls Alison Landsberg’s claim that in order for literary works – and other media – to create (prosthetic) memories that catalyze empathy and action, they need to be “visceral, painful, and scarring” (106).

Although the responses do not show whether the visceral experiences of these readers indeed influence their actions, their comments nevertheless give a sense of the impact of the novel, for example on shaping readers’ attitudes and thoughts. Several readers point out that the novel and characters like Feu-de-Bois will stay with them for a long time, and that it enforces reflection. Franz D., who indicates that he already had a ‘passion’ for the history of the Algerian war, describes the novel as a “grand livre que l'on referme avec la certitude que quelque chose s'est passé, le type même du livre qui vous emporte et ne vous repose pas au même endroit”. Whereas some readers – like most of the reviews that were discussed above – mainly address their changed perceptions of events and characters within the text, others more explicitly connect the novel to the extra-textual reality. Fabrice affirms that this book about the war and its traumas has really touched him, “peut-être car mon père l'a faite et que cela m'a permis de comprendre ce qu'il a pu ressentir”. Although this reader once again emphasizes his personal connection to the story, which might say more about his prior willingness to understand his father than about the transformative potential of the text, Canel – who only read the novel because it was recommended to her, and did not really like it – suggests that it can also have this effect without this prior interest, as the novel has led her to “voir différemment le mutisme des hommes qui y sont allés, je comprends mieux, disons...”.

Alison Landsberg points out that this sense of understanding is an important aspect of empathy – the response that, according to her, could encourage new and better relations between different communities. As was suggested before, however, for many French readers the appelés might feel less like a different community than other groups related to the Algerian war, like the pieds-noirs or Algerian immigrants. Many of these groups are present in the novel and represented in a nuanced way, but focalization always lies with the appelés. This seems to be visible in the reader responses, which often pay due attention to the position of the appelés both within and ‘outside’ of the text, but say little about the other communities involved, especially when it comes to the aftermath of the war. The connection between the impact of this war and contemporary racism, which was not made explicit by any of the French reviewers, is only mentioned by one of the lay readers, C. Prévost. In his comment, the relation between the past and the present clearly stands out, and he concludes that “*Des Hommes* est un livre pour aujourd'hui. La guerre d'Algérie n'est peut-être pas terminée?”.

C. Prévost sees the originality and force of the novel in the way it discusses the aftermath and silences of the war – and not in breaking this silence. He disagrees with the press’s presentation of *Des Hommes* as “l’une des rares ‘prises en charge’ narratives de la guerre d’Algérie”, a tendency that was also noted above and referred to as an example of what Schyns calls a “sensation d’oubli”. This sensation is also visible in many of the lay reader responses. Titine⁷⁵ describes the war as “cette période de notre histoire dont on ne parle pas”, and several other readers use the term “tabou”, a notion that implies both an interdiction to speak about the subject and an unwillingness to listen. Aristide France speaks of “un récit très efficace dans le nécessaire et encore imparfait devoir de mémoire historique qui nous incombe”, and quite a few of the readers point at the necessity of this memory work in their recommendation of the novel. Josiane Bicrel describes it as “un livre à lire, pour comprendre un peu”, and Carnets de Sel mentions that she deeply regretted the fact that the novel did not win the Prix Goncourt: “Pas pour le prix en lui-même, mais parce que nous savons tous que ce prix ‘fait énormément vendre’ le livre récompensé. Or, c’est ce qui aurait pu arriver de mieux à ce magnifique travail de mémoire contre la force de l’oubli”.

These comments about the taboo that lingers around the Algerian war and the recommendations to other readers are interesting and relevant, as they show that readers are aware of the lack of closure when it comes to this part of history, that society still fails to deal with in an adequate way. In contrast to some other readers who particularly recommend the novel to people who are already interested in the Algerian war and want to learn more about it (such as Anne, and Bernard Estorgues), these recommendations seem to point at a desire to pass the novel on to other readers in society ‘at large’, and suggest that *Des Hommes* has the potential to promote the memory of the war beyond the realm of a specific mnemonic community, and can contribute to a better understanding – not just of the events, but, as Nathalie de la Butardière asserts, also of the silence that has surrounded them.

However, the emphasis on the importance of memory work and the concomitant need to read the novel seems to overshadow another aspect that is illuminated by *Des Hommes*: the fact that merely speaking about the war, even if a willing listener is found, does not offer redemption. Some readers, like InColdBlog, touch upon the difficulty of speaking and the way in which this is represented by means of the many interrupted sentences. This reader concludes that it is up to the “lecteur, alors, de finir les phrases, de combler les manques...”. Although this kind of response is understandable, it seems to point at a certain desire for closure, which also appears visible in Aristide France’s remark that the novel is very effective in doing its memory work. This risks creating the impression that understanding and remembering the stories and silences of the appelés is enough in itself, and the ongoing struggles of the veterans and their potential (indirect) consequences – like the barely discussed problem of racism – might easily be overlooked.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, Khadra’s novel seems to offer the kind of closure that is absent and problematized in *Des Hommes*, and it would be interesting to see if that forms a bigger incentive for readers to comment on this aspect. Moreover, although the review by Belka⁷⁶ and the

comments by many of the French readers show that the novel can play a role in fostering empathy and understanding from the part of readers who are not personally connected to the experiences of the appelés, it seems to be less effective in affecting readers' views on other mnemonic communities. From this point of view, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* might have more potential. How do professional and non-professional readers in France and Algeria respond to Younes/Jonas's position between different groups, and to the novel's emphasis on love and the importance of reconciliation?

Ce que le jour doit à la nuit

Professional Reader Responses³¹

If some of the French reviews of *Des Hommes* that were discussed above explicitly pointed out that Mauvignier's novel was not – or not only – about the Algerian war, this seemed to emphasize its other functions rather than to negate the importance of this theme altogether. In this respect, the French reviews about *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* seem to go a bit further: although nearly all of them mention the war, the notion of 'love' is much more present. Sylvie Lainé (writing for *l'Indépendant*), for example, entitles her review "Yasmina Khadra choisit l'amour et l'amitié", Christine Rousseau (*le Monde des Livres*) speaks of "l'amour pluriel de l'Algérie", and several critics define the novel as a "roman d'amour" or "saga romanesque". As was discussed in the previous chapter, the theme of love does indeed play an important role in the novel, and appears to constitute an alternative way of framing the past.

However, as was discussed in the previous chapter, Khadra draws attention to multiple aspects of love - its beauty, but also its bitterness and impossibility – and connects this to the complex historical context. This complexity is not always visible in the press, as some reviews appear to focus almost exclusively on the positive connotations of love, which influences the way in which they interpret and frame the novel. According to Lainé, the novel shows that the night (marked by alienation, hatred, and war) can give rise to "un jour lumineux comme un soleil" that is characterized by friendship, love, and fraternity. She concludes that *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* is a "formidable histoire d'amour et d'amitié glorifiant avec lyrisme et dans un style époustouflant les plus beaux des sentiments humains".

Although other reviewers pay more attention to the impossibility of love, and more explicitly draw the parallel between Younes/Jonas's story and that of the two opposed communities, they sometimes still – subtly but significantly – simplify historical aspects of the novel. Rousseau, for example, points out that "plus encore que l'amour impossible entre un Algérien et une Française", the novel highlights the love of "deux peuples qui ont chéri ensemble, pendant plus d'un siècle, la même terre avant de s'entre-déchirer". While she later goes on to describe the protagonist's position between the two communities, the opposition she creates between "un Algérien et une Française" seems to be in contrast with the more hybrid (or even singular-plural) sense of identity that is set up in the novel. Besides the fact that

³¹ The analysis of the professional responses is based on 7 reviews that appeared in the French press and 5 reviews/articles that were published in the francophone Algerian press.

one could consider the term ‘Algérien’ as an anachronism – although Algeria did of course exist, Younes would have been called an ‘arabe’ or ‘musulman français’ – this notion gives too limited a sense of his perspective. Similarly, calling Émilie a Française does not do justice to the fact that she – like the other pied-noirs – is also born and raised in the country. Of course, a simplification of this kind is understandable with regard to the comprehensibility of the review, but it is noteworthy that this kind of ‘labeling’ occurs in several critiques. Lainé’s review begins with the keyword ‘pieds-noirs’, – suggesting that the novel is primarily interested in, and perhaps also interesting *for* this particular group – and Grégoire Leménager, writing for *Nouvel Observateur*, immediately announces that, in this novel, Yasmina Khadra “raconte l’indépendance de son pays”. Although this point is not factually wrong, it immediately frames *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* as a novel by an Algerian author about Algeria, which seems to neglect the French implicatedness in this history.

From this point of view, the (disproportionate) attention to love and simplifying labels appear to be but two examples of a broader tendency that is visible in the French reviews: most of them pay very little attention to the specific historical context in which the story is set. While some of them mention referential aspects that are brought up in the novel itself – like the FLN and the early independence leader Messali Hadj – they do not proceed to discuss or explain these aspects. In this respect, the way in which some reviewers emphasize the importance of the novel’s humanist dimension also merits to be observed critically. Claire Devarrieux (writing for *Libération*) refers to Younes/Jonas’ position between the two communities to argue that “l’ambivalence identitaire du héros contribue à la teneur humaniste du livre”, and Leménager also speaks of humanism when he praises Khadra’s “puissante empathie pour chaque personnage”. Although these remarks could imply that the novel indeed succeeds in going beyond communities, instead of merely connecting them, the reviewers’ focus on a common humanity might correspond more closely to Heidegger’s sense of a “one-all” than to Nancy’s singular-plurality. Even though an emphasis on the human could, perhaps, help breaking down the walls of “cloistered” mnemonic communities, this should not go at the expense of an awareness of the specific historical circumstances, as this might lead to the disappearance of a sense of implicatedness in the past and responsibility in the present.

In this respect, Rousseau’s generalizing focus on “un Algérien et une Française” might yet be more specific, and could perhaps call attention to the way in which the Algerian war continues to impact French-Algerian relations in the present. Further on in her review, she hints at the novel’s relevance for memory by explaining how it revives “cette passion commune que l’histoire a trop souvent tendance à oublier”. Lainé explicitly relates this emphasis on a common passion to the notion of reconciliation by pointing out that Khadra “a l’audace de vouloir réconcilier ici les pieds-noirs et les Algériens, la France et l’Algérie”. Moreover, in this respect she perceives the novel as “une main tendue vers la réconciliation”, which recalls the sense of an invitation that was also brought up in Belkaïd’s review of *Des Hommes*, although many of the readers seemed to think of their reading experience as more forcing or obliging. If Khadra’s novel can indeed be seen as an invitation, this calls attention to a sense of agency: readers

would need to take the hand that is been held out to them; to accept, to respond. This is in contrast with the interpretation of the novel that is presented by Bernard Fauconnier (in *Magazine Littéraire*), who argues that the end of the story (which he qualifies as “très contemporaine”) provides the novel with a quasi-Proustian depth: “nostalgie du temps perdu, absurdité nécessaire des conflits, travail du temps qui égalise toutes choses, et de la mort qui met tout le monde d’accord”. Although the strong sense of closure that shines through in this description is, in a way, also present in the novel itself, Fauconnier reinforces this by placing the agency with inanimate concepts like time and death, rather than pointing at the role of the characters themselves – let alone at the responsibility of the reader.

In the Algerian reviews of the novel, the themes of love and reconciliation are quite prominently present as well. Rémi Yacine (writing in *El Watan*), for example, describes *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* as “Une œuvre d'une rare puissance, un flot ininterrompu d'humanisme, de réconciliation et de fraternité et aussi un très beau roman d'amour”. Yacine Idjer (*InfoSoir*) recalls Christine Rousseau’s review by pointing out that the novel illuminates an aspect of Algerian history that is often forgotten : “cette autre histoire que tout un chacun ignore, celle où se mêlent des histoires d'amours et d'amitiés entre musulmans, chrétiens et juifs, entre Algériens autochtones et Algériens d'origine européenne”. At first sight, then, these reviews are quite close to their French counterparts, even with regard to their vocabulary. However, an important difference lies in the fact that the Algerian critics more profoundly discuss the novel’s position in its historical context. Yacine Idjer and Djamel Benyekhlef (who, like Rémi Yacine, writes for *El Watan*) both point out that Younes/Jonas and his uncle are in a privileged situation, as they have access to education and other resources that only few Algerians had at that time. Because of this, Benyekhlef stipulates that Younes’s perspective on the events of his time will differ from that of many others. With regard to the colonizers, he contextualizes the story by mentioning that “l’insouciance, l’inculture politique, le mépris et l’arrogance ont empêché les dirigeants français de voir venir le tsunami politique qui se préparait”.

In this last respect, however, Benyekhlef also adds that the tools to predict the ‘political weather’ were still rudimentary at that time, and in this way he seems to hint at a contrast between the past and the present. This also appears to be visible in the reviews by Yacine and Idjer, whose appraisal of the themes of love, fraternity, and reconciliation leads them to wonder about the possibility of these relations around the time of the war. When Yacine asks himself if, in Algeria at that time, there was a place for both communities, he concludes: “Sûrement, mais pas avec l’ordre ancien, colonial. La pyramide sociale était trop injuste pour que le système colonial perdure”. Yacine Idjer points out that the novel shows how “le rapprochement et la cohabitation entre les différentes communautés auraient été possibles si, toutefois, les uns avaient fait preuve de sagesse et de modestie, et si les autres avaient fait don de pardon et de mansuétude”. Their remarks are strikingly similar in the sense that both critics emphasize a notion of conditionality. Reconciliation is not a given, or – as Bernard Fauconnier would have it seem –, a state that will be reached when time has healed all wounds, but on the contrary necessitates a change of attitude in one or both of the parties involved.

From that point of view, it is particularly interesting to note that Idjer repeatedly refers to Khadra's novel as a lesson. The title of his review is "Une leçon d'amour et de rapprochement", and he concludes with the following passage:

Ce que le jour doit à la nuit est une leçon d'amour et d'amitié, de pardon et de tolérance, de respect et de rapprochement, une leçon que tout un chacun doit porter sur soi, dans son cœur comme dans ses pensées. Une leçon que nous devons apprendre pour traverser le présent et aller vers l'avenir, pour construire un monde commun à tous.

By framing the novel as a lesson, Idjer not only implies that the text positions the reader as a student or learner, but also calls upon the reader's cognitive and emotional responsibility to accept this position. In a way, this need to learn resembles the need to listen and bear witness that appeared to be central in *Des Hommes*. However, by comparison, the position as a learner could perhaps more straightforwardly be related to self-development with an eye to the future – which, despite the fact that it is not explicitly alluded to in the novel, is so clearly marked out by Idjer.

The potential power that Idjer ascribes to the text is also mentioned in some of the other Algerian articles. Benyekhlef ends his article by pointing out that the following quote by Pierre Barbéris could be applicable to Khadra's novel: "La littérature est dehors de l'idéologie par l'espèce de décision qu'elle prend de parler autrement des problèmes du monde. Elle tourne le discours dominant en abandonnant les formes qu'il contrôle et en recourant à des formes dont il ne soupçonne toujours pas l'efficacité." Even though he emphasizes that the protagonist's perspective will most likely differ from the experiences of many other Algerians, he suggests that this perspective can nevertheless offer an effective alternative to the dominant ways of presenting the past, as a counter history that takes shape beyond the realm of (official) ideology – which in Algeria, as has been discussed in chapter 2, is still strongly influenced by the state. In an article (published in *Le Maghreb*) that discusses a meeting with Yasmina Khadra, Yasmine Ben makes a similar point with regard to the notion of reconciliation:

Si la réconciliation (sans le pardon) ne vient pas des politiques, et bien elle peut dévaler d'une œuvre artistique, autrement dit de l'univers culturel. Si elle venait par-là cela sous-entendrait que d'abord c'est moins engageant pour un pays au sens politique du terme et plus engageant pour un auteur, capable de préparer les esprits ou l'opinion pour une réconciliation sereine entre l'Algérie et la France.

This sense of a "preparation" of spirits and of public opinion resembles the lesson brought forward by Idjer, and attests to the belief that literature (and other cultural forms) could indeed have a transformative effect.

As compared to the French reviewers, then, the Algerian critics are both more nuanced – with regard to the novel's place in the historical context, and the conditions under which improved relations can come about – and more explicit when it comes to the novel's transformative potential. Reviewers on both

sides of the Mediterranean, however, seem open to this potential and emphasize and praise Khadra's focus on reconciliation. As will be discussed in the next section, this aspect also stands out for quite a few of the non-professional readers in France, while many Algerian readers appear to be more critical³².

Non-Professional Reader Responses³³

One of the first things to come into view when considering the (French) responses to *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* is the fact that many readers emphasize their reading pleasure. They praise the richness and beauty of Khadra's writing style and some readers connect this style to the novel's referential and emotional value. Florens, for example, remarks that he has never before read "un livre aussi magnifique et aussi sincère. Les mots sont choisis avec soin pour donner aux phrases un sens d'une incroyable beauté et d'une grande justesse". Pierre Chatail reports another 'first time experience' in the sense that he believes that "c'est la première fois, pour un livre, qu'à plusieurs reprises j'ai été saisi de gros sanglots difficiles à étouffer", a reaction that also comes forward in the responses by Marilyn Millon, Nadouch, and others. Although the connection between the form of the text and a notion of truth or truthfulness was also made by many of the readers of *Des Hommes*, and even though these readers were also emotionally impacted by the text, the way in which the styles of both works are experienced nevertheless show some notable differences. Whereas quite a few readers of Mauvignier's novel struggled with the complex structure of the text and therefore sometimes gave up on reading it, this problem does not appear to occur for Khadra's text. Moreover, while many readers of *Des Hommes* described their reading experience as painful, this is not really the case here: readers are profoundly moved and sometimes "bouleversés", but overall a sense of pleasure seems to dominate.

An aspect in which the responses to both texts are similar, however, is the fact that readers relate their experience of the writing style to processes of transportation and identification. Pomme Verte, for instance, points out that *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* "est tellement bien écrit, j'ai voyagé dans le temps", and many readers indicate that the novel has allowed them to (re)live this historical period from the inside. According to Alison Landsberg, this kind of experiential dimension plays an essential role in creating empathy and understanding – but she asserts that, in order for these effects to come about and be durable, this reading experience should be painful and leave scars. However, some of the reader comments seem to suggest that the novel can also have a profound impact if this bodily dimension plays a less important role. Several responses create the impression that the mind, *l'esprit*, is more involved here. Bilip points out that Khadra creates "dans nos esprits des images si fortes qui laisseront pour

³² Just like in the case of the professional reviews, the French and Algerian responses will be discussed separately to make the differences and similarities stand out more clearly. For the same reason, the words 'French' and 'Algerian' are often used to refer specifically to one of the two corpora of reader responses, although I am very conscious of their heterogeneity.

³³ For the analysis of non-professional responses, approximately 100 French and 30 francophone Algerian reader comments were analyzed. The French responses were, once again, retrieved from *Amazon.fr*, *Babelio.com* and various weblogs, whereas Algerian comments were found on weblogs, discussion forums (such as *Dziriya.net*, *Algerie-dz.com*, and *Setif.dz*), and news websites.

toujours des traces indélébiles”, and Ptitgateau similarly remarks that the novel continues to resonate in her mind. One of the effects of this cognitive (and often also emotional) impact appears to be a renewed understanding of the past. Aniwann, for example, points out that

Depuis des dizaines d'années , j'ai entendu et écouté tant de récits contant l'Algérie coloniale avec son cortège de joies, de souffrances, de peines et de nostalgies multiples sans comprendre ni saisir même ce que cela pouvait représenter pour tous ces êtres déracinés. Ce livre m'a ouvert un espace de compréhension majeure quant à cette période de notre histoire.

The fact that this reader refers to this period as “notre histoire” seems to indicate a sense of connectedness or involvement, which is also present in Sabine’s remark that the novel succeeds in revealing “un pan enfoui de notre histoire”. Although other readers frame this past as “le conflit qui oppose la France à l’Algérie (Lounima) or “l’Algérie d’autrefois”(Carre), – denominations that make the war appear a bit more distant – they all emphasize the importance of this renewed understanding of the past.

Sabine’s allusion to a ‘hidden’ past suggests that, to her, the novel plays an initiating role in representing this period – an aspect that is also brought to the fore in some of the other responses. Bilip, for example, proclaims that there finally (“enfin”) is a novel that deals with “la présence française en Algérie avant et pendant la guerre” and Dupon points out that the quality of the work lies in its story, “ qui nous fait découvrir ce que nos gouvernements successifs se sont efforcés de nous faire oublier”. As was discussed in the first part of this chapter, this impression of a state of silence or amnesia that is ended at long last – a ‘sensation d’oubli’ – was also clearly present in both the professional and non-professional reader response to *Des Hommes*. However, in that case, this impression – that arguably does not fully do justice to the omnipresence of the war in recent years – could also be stimulated by the novel’s emphasis on the themes of silence and the return of a repressed past. This is not really the case in *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, and therefore this kind of response seems to suggest that the focus on the importance of remembering is not only something that readers pick up from the text, but – for some readers at least – might indeed still be an important function of literature about the Algerian war.

However, even if the novel does not discuss the *processes* of forgetting, remembering, and transmitting the past in much detail, the need for memory work – in the sense of coming to terms with the past – is still underlined with regard to social relations. In the previous chapter, it was argued that Younes’ position between the two communities, and his final rapprochement with his friends, could potentially play a role in creating an openness to the experiences of people on different sides of the conflict, as well as a certain awareness of the need for reconciliation. For many readers, this seems indeed to be the case. Although one reader, Marie, mentions – in a very generalizing way – that she was really annoyed by the mentality and behavior of the Arabs at that time (an attitude that, judging by her comments, presumably preceded the reading experience and is not likely to change in the future), this response is by far outnumbered by readers who mention that Younes’ position has given them a sense of

understanding for the motivations underlying the other's behavior (see, for example, Andrée-Geneviève Verne), for the fact that there can be more than one truth (see Gauthier), and that it is therefore difficult to judge (Nelson⁴³). Véronique Dujardin more generally speaks of an increased understanding of the causes of the war, and explicitly links this to the prospect of reconciliation: "un grand pas vers une meilleure compréhension des causes de la guerre d'Algérie (pardon, des "événements ") (...) Un grand pas pour une meilleure réconciliation après cette période".

Although it was feared that the (fetishizing) sense of closure provided at the end of the story would make reconciliation seem as a state that can be reached when time has cured all wounds, it is noteworthy that various readers rather speak of the novel as a message or a lesson, in this respect. Kathy, for example, calls it "une belle leçon de fraternité", and several readers describe the novel as instructive – and more so than their history lessons (see, for instance, Jay). A reader called Ode suggests that Khadra "fait passer un message d'ouverture et de tolérance", and Marce Jean underlines that "Il faudrait que le monde entier comprenne le message", thus stressing its importance in society at large.

This sense of a message or a lesson about openness, fraternity, and reconciliation was also visible in the review by the Algerian critic Idjer. It was argued that this way of approaching the novel calls attention to the relevance of these relations for the present and future – instead of merely providing a sense of closure with regard to the past. And indeed, rather than just discussing the conflicts between the two communities at the time of the war, several readers also comment on the contemporary relations between France and Algeria. Célia points out that the unique historical context of the story "touchera la France et l'Algérie à jamais", and Elrousa remarks that "Ceux qui s'interrogent aujourd'hui, sans arrière-pensées idéologiques, politiques ou religieuses, sur ce que pourrait être 'le jour' à venir des relations entre la France et l'Algérie, tireront profit du message de l'ouvrage de Yasmina Khadra, pour qui la 'nuit' de ces relations ne fut pas seulement une nuit sans étoiles".

Philisine Cave similarly addresses these relations by arguing that the novel provides insight in "les raisons qui conduisent aujourd'hui encore nos deux communautés à cette difficulté de communication", but she also discusses the novel's effectiveness when it comes to giving an understanding of the difficult reconstruction of Algeria after decolonization – a subject that is hinted at several times in the novel, most explicitly in the last part – and, in that way, shifts attention to the contemporary situation in one of the two countries, rather than only focusing on their relations. Similarly, Olivier Dal Zuffo links the past to the current situation in France: "Ce roman rappelle à l'ordre cette France coloniale qui a choisi aujourd'hui de parquer ces enfants dans des cités sans avenir". This comment seems to refer to the contemporary problems associated with the *banlieues*, the suburbs of Paris and other major French cities that house many people of maghrebian origin³⁴. In this way, then, this reader seems to suggest that the text not only calls attention to the responsibility to strive for reconciliation between France and

³⁴ The riots that took place in October and November 2005 are the best known example of these problems. However, as Truong (2012) argues, these *banlieues* also appear to have become the center of a discourse in which the existence of (social) problems is presented as a given.

Algeria, but also to the responsibility of the French state towards all of its citizens. The link between “cette France coloniale” and “aujourd’hui” hints at the fact that – at least according to this reader – the attitudes that governed in the colonial times are still present today, and in this way he establishes a connection between the past and the present that is not really visible in the novel itself.

Although this suggests that the novel can provoke reflections about other events than those that are explicitly brought up in the text – an aspect that appeared to be nearly absent in the case of *Des Hommes* – it is noteworthy that Olivier Dal Zuff seems to imply that (colonial) France is the addressee of the message sent out by the novel. As this particular reader appears to live in Luxembourg this seeming distance is understandable, but it nevertheless raises the question to which extent readers *themselves* feel called upon by the text, and to which extent they hold themselves responsible for bringing the novel’s lessons into practice.

One could wonder about something similar with regard to the readers who discuss the behavior of the colonizers. Although Younes’ position in between the communities does provide many readers with the understanding that it is difficult to judge and that reconciliation is important, some of them still seem to see the novel essentially as a critique of colonialism. In this respect, Odilette speaks of a binary opposition between “arabe et colon, dominé et dominant, serf et seigneur”, Darkmoon claims that “le mépris colonia[liste] qui engendre frustration, haine et colère est (...) le cœur du roman”, and Frankie indicates to be shocked by the colonizers’ behavior. As was discussed in the first chapter with regard to notions of guilt and responsibility, Roger R. Simon claims that “responsibility is circumscribed if guilt is split off from the present and attributed to past institutional policies and the people responsible for them. In such circumstances, those in the present view the colonial practices of the past as not their fault or deed, and hence they bear no responsibility for its consequences” (136). Although none of the readers explicitly distance themselves from the position of the colonizers, it is unclear to which extent they associate themselves with the colonizer’s guilt, or – if this is not the case – to which extent they take the responsibility for reconciliation upon themselves, instead of deferring it to the state or to social groups they might not feel connected with.

However, sometimes readers’ personal connections to the (hi)story that is described in the novel are more clear. This is particularly true in the case of the responses that are left by pieds-noirs, who sometimes seem to perceive the novel as their own story³⁵. Gedema, for example, describes how, “Née en 1948 précisément dans cette région, celle dans laquelle se déroule l'action : l'Oranie, de familles installées en Algérie depuis les années 1880, j'ai cru revivre une partie de ma vie”, and Ptitgateau more generally states that “c'est le roman des amoureux de l'Algérie que dis-je des amoureux, des nostalgiques de ce pays perdu pour eux, pays où les confessions se côtoyaient pacifiquement, se respectaient et partageaient leurs richesses”. Whereas the responses that were discussed until now – and especially those that emphasized the importance of reconciliation – attested to the novel’s potential

³⁵ In total, approximately 10 readers in the French corpus appear to be (or descend from) pieds-noirs.

effectiveness outside the framework of a specific community, the fact that some of the pied-noir readers appear to claim the story as their own suggests that Younes' in-between position is not immune to appropriation by one of the concerned groups.

Although this identification with the story could mean that the pieds-noirs, even more than other readers, feel called upon by the reconciling message of the text, the comments by Gedema and Ptitgateau imply that it is first and foremost a source of nostalgia. As was brought up in chapter 2, this sense of nostalgia is often regarded negatively, as it risks giving a paradisiacal image of the past that does not do justice to the wrong things that happened during the colonial period. However, as Welch and McGonagle have suggested, nostalgia – or “nostalgérie” – could also be seen as “a form of resistance to official history, [challenging] the silences and opacities of national memory” (23). In the remainder of her response, Gedema seems to affirm this : “Ce magnifique roman retrace avec une vérité absolue les ambiances, les bonheurs, les douleurs et les haines de cette époque. Yasmina Khadra *fait partager bien mieux que n'importe quel historien la véritable histoire* de l'Algérie de cette période. Il faut lire ce roman et le faire lire” (my emphasis). Although she does not specify in which respect the novel differs from the work of historians, her description suggests that this primarily concerns a sense of nuance and a certain experiential dimension – aspects that are also brought forward by other pieds-noirs (see, for example, the comment by Latour07).

It is also interesting that, for this reason, Gedema underlines the importance of reading the novel and of encouraging others to read it as well. This desire to recommend is visible in several of the pied-noir responses. De Cicco recommends it to everyone who used to live in the Oran region, “par pur plaisir de l'expression écrite. Pour tous les lecteurs qui veulent retourner ‘au Pays’”, and Cacavelle makes a similar comment : “Je le recommande particulièrement à tous celles et ceux qui ont eu le privilège de vivre en Algérie dans la période de 1930 à 1962”. These remarks all seem to show the desire to share the reading experience with other people from the same community. As was discussed above, this is also the case for some of the veterans who have read *Des Hommes*. However, if the appelés were (primarily) concerned with the transmission of their memories to the next generation, the pieds-noirs mostly appear to address those who have – like them – lived in Algeria themselves. This creates the impression that, for these pieds-noirs, the aspect of postmemory plays a less important role.

This impression is reinforced by Célia, who indicates that her mother and her grand-parents on her mother's side are pieds-noirs, but that she has personally never had any interest in the Algerian war or the pied-noir community. Nevertheless, when she saw Khadra's novel lying around at her friend's house she could not resist borrowing it. However, even after reading she indicates that it mostly interested her because the novel did such a good job at describing the feeling of living in-between two worlds, which she recognized because she had lived in Italy for three years and did not feel at home in any of the two countries anymore. This type of comment could be seen as an example of what both Landsberg and LaCapra define as sympathy: a feeling for the characters that is based on (superficial) similarities, instead of on a (historically situated) sense of difference.

Manou, on the contrary, shows a great interest for the experiences and memories of the pieds-noirs. She also indicates that her mother and grand-parents belong to this community, and that this is precisely why the novel touches her so much:

Ce que le jour doit à la nuit a remporté mon entière adhésion car son sujet, l'Algérie et ses troubles qui menèrent à la guerre portant son nom, et ses répercussions tant pour les Algériens que pour les émigrés européens ou les pieds-noirs, est profondément liée à mon histoire familiale (...); alors vous pouvez imaginer l'émotion qui m'a saisie en approchant, par le biais de la fiction, tout un pan de mon histoire filiale.

If, in the case of *Des Hommes*, some readers turned to the novel to understand what their fathers and uncles had lived through, Khadra's novel seems to have a similar function for this reader in the sense that it illuminates her family's history. However, silence appears to play a less important role in the case of the pieds-noirs, which suggests that, for younger generations, literature can be more than just an answer that family members could not give themselves. Besides the experiential dimension which was mentioned earlier, it could perhaps shed a light on the perspectives of other communities. For Manou, in any case, this is the most important aspect of the novel: "Le fait que l'auteur aborde tous les points de vue constitue (...) la principale force de ce roman. Que ce soit les arabes, les émigrés espagnols ou les français, chacun a son mot à dire sur la façon dont ils vivent leur relation à l'Algérie, et leur positionnement sur l'indépendance". She goes on thanking the author for giving a voice to the pieds-noirs, as well as to the Arab community. She is also touched by the fact that an Algerian author has paid so much attention to the point of view of the pieds-noirs, and thinks that her grandfather, who always said "Ma Terre" when he spoke of Algeria, would have loved that. By juxtaposing what the novel means to her to what it would have meant to her grandfather, she seems to hint at the similarities and differences in the significance that both generations ascribe to the novel. Whereas her grandfather might have experienced a sense of recognition and nostalgia, she herself primarily praises the focus on different (mnemonic) communities.

However, an article published in the Algerian newspaper *La Voix de l'Oranie* reveals that the sense of nostalgia that predominates in the responses by the first generation of pied-noir rapatriés does not exclude attention to these other communities, and sometimes might indeed encourage the reconciliation that appears to be called for in the novel. This article, written by Mohamed Mir, cites some passages from a letter written by a pied-noir woman called Huguette Rivière, addressed to Khadra.³⁶ In this letter, Rivière first (nostalgically) mentions that the novel, for her, has "[fait] renaître des cendres toute une période riche en souvenirs enfouies dans les méandres de la mémoire", which, as she points out later, has encouraged her to revisit the place where she lived in her youth – although she is conscious of the fact that it will be different from her memories. She knows that Arab friends are

³⁶ The article mentions that this woman is an acquaintance of one of the newspapers' employees, and that (part of) her letter is published there on her demand.

waiting for her there, and conceives of her journey as a pilgrimage that she will undertake for herself, for her family, *and* for these friends. She ends her letter by evoking the image of the “mains tendues” that was discussed several times in this chapter: “Ali et Mohamed m’offrent des trésors d’amitié, je saisis leurs mains tendues avec émotion et reconnaissance en signe de réconciliation et d’amitié entre deux communautés si cruellement séparées par l’histoire”.

If nostalgia does not necessarily exclude an openness to (the perspectives of) other communities, the responses show that nostalgia itself can also go beyond the boundaries of groups. Although, as was pointed out in chapter 2, “nostalgérie” is usually connected to the experiences of the *pieds-noirs*, Jacques Cuenin, who describes himself as “un ancien qui a participé ‘au maintien de l’ordre en Algérie’”, also considers the novel as a “belle évocation” of a part of his life: “que de souvenirs”. Moreover, the characteristic way in which many *pieds-noirs* introduce their nostalgia (referring to colors, landscapes, and scents – see, for instance, *Jacbloc*) is also present in quite a few of the responses by readers who do not appear to have any personal connection to the events described in the text.

Particularly in this last case, however, the emphasis on these ‘idyllic’ and exotic aspects to describe their sense of transportation appears to be rather problematic, as many of these readers focus primarily on the pleasure that these aspects give them, and often refrain from paying attention to the historical context. The entire review of *Evelyne*, for example, consists of the following: “On est dans l’ambiance, on a l’odeur des merguez dans le nez, on vit avec eux l’insouciance de leur 20 ans dans l’harmonie de leur diversité..... l’histoire est belle... et tellement vraie. Mais avant tout c’est la plume de l’auteur, la richesse du vocabulaire : l’écriture de Yasmina KHADRA délicieuse comme une corne de gazelle !!!” This “corne de gazelle” is a pastry of maghrebian origin, and by comparing Khadra’s writing style to this treat, this reader reinforces the sense of exoticism that is already present in the rest of her comment.

Whereas, in the case of *Des Hommes*, readers’ displeasure with the novel’s writing style sometimes made the historical situation disappear from view, the opposite – an intense reading pleasure – could arguably have the same effect. Both of these cases appear to necessitate a nuancing of Rigney’s (2008) claim that a literary experience can arouse readers’ interest for a historical context they did not know about before. The love story between Younes/Jonas and Émilie could also have a role to play in this respect, as some readers who do not refer to the Algerian war *do* comment on this impossible relationship. For some, it is the most beautiful love story that they have ever read (see, for example, Jacqueline Brunetti), but other readers point out that they found this dimension of the novel very deceiving. Helene H calls it a “version algérienne d’un ‘Harlequin’”, and Ludwig J.S. Zapette remarks that the subject is too light for this context, which presents “Les ‘événements’ (...) de manière édulcorée”.

This sense of inappropriateness is also very present in the responses by Algerian readers. Quite a few of them claim that the entire novel – and not just the love story – does not do justice to the situation as it really was at that time, or as it can be in the present. Ahmed Bensaada, for example, mentions that the text idealizes the relation between the colonizer and the colonized, and that it remains silent about “la

misère et l'obscurantisme dans lesquels les populations autochtones ont été maintenues, non pas par l'Islam, mais par le colonialisme". Similarly, Djeha – who responds to the announcement of the movie adaptation of the novel, but whose comment could be applied to both versions– points out that it is "Encore une fois l'apologie du 'Nous étions très bien ensemble' pour faire oublier toutes les souffrances du peuple algérien". If, as Rigney (2008) has argued, fictional works have a certain 'poetic license' that allows them to do "different things" (81) than, for instance, historiographical works, – and thus, to have different functions than a mere referential one – these responses suggests that Khadra's story takes this too far. The reference to a sense of silence and the accusation that the author attempts to let the suffering of the Algerian people pass into oblivion show that, to these people, this is not just a matter of bad taste, but a concern for memory.

Both this concern and the concomitant question of poetic license are also discussed in a blogpost by Artness DZ, which anticipates that the movie, much like the novel, will be a source for polemics. The post describes how the readers of the work have been divided over one central question: ""peut-t-on idéaliser la période coloniale dans une oeuvre artistique?" The author indicates that, for some readers, even the focus on the possibility of reconciliation between the two communities is "une tentative de blanchiment du passé colonial français". This seems to be confirmed by comments left on other websites, such as that by Togir who claims that "le rêve décrit par YK dans son [roman] est inimaginable", and by Inata, who mentions that besides the fact that she did not like the novel because of its "histoire revue et retravaillée", she also thinks that it searches for "une vérité qui pourrait apaiser les uns et les autres, alors qu'il s'agit d'une pénible guerre"³⁷. She adds that the emotional value that is ascribed to the novel and the film might stem from the fact that this period is a source of nostalgia to some – especially to those "qui ont grandi parmi les français, se sont fait des amis et aujourd'hui ne comprennent pas pourquoi on leur en veut d'avoir l'oeil humide pour une telle époque".

In this way, this reader touches upon another aspect that is pointed out by many Algerian readers. Above, it was discussed that – despite the fact that the novel represents the perspectives of two communities – a number of pied-noir readers emphasize how much it reminds them of their own (hi)story, and claim it as their own. The responses by Algerian readers suggest that they attempt something similar, but fail to recognize themselves as the implied readers of the text. A reader called Talapouch puts it this way:

Je soupçonne fortement Yasmina Khadra d'avoir écrit ce roman (...) pour plaire à une catégorie bien précise de lecteurs: les nostalgiques de l'Algérie Française. Les plus ultras. Ceux de l'OAS, sympathisants et criminels. Ceux qui sont prêts à revenir se battre pour arracher 'leur Algérie' à nous, ses 'usurpateurs'. Je le dis simplement: ce roman ne me concerne en rien. Ce n'est pas de moi qu'il parle, il parle des assassins de mon peuple.

³⁷ In response to this, Entre2Riv points out that appreciating the novel does not mean "oublier notre guerre et nos morts" and she connects this to the fact that the protagonist spends his entire life in Algeria. Although this is a more positive approach to the novel, it is still evaluated on the basis of mnemonic concerns.

The aggressive way in which this reader describes the pieds-noirs (“les assassins de mon peuple”) and the assumptions he makes about their violent intentions could arguably be seen as the opposite of the sense of reconciliation that the novel seems to encourage. The fierceness of this reader’s tone might in part be caused by his expectations, as he indicates to have read and loved all of Khadra’s other works. Although other readers are less fierce, they still ‘accuse’ the author of seeking to please the pieds-noirs (and, more generally, the French), by rewarding their taste for exoticism (see, for instance, the comments by Kabyliste and Philippe) and by caressing “la bête dans le sens du poil” (Abdelkader and Imsa Trym). This last reader, however, admits never to have read any of Khadra’s novels, but has come to this conclusion (and to this decision) based on what he has seen and heard from the author in the media. Indeed, as was also noted at the start of this chapter, Khadra is not only a writer, but also a very visible public figure. An important contributing factor in this respect is the fact that – at the time the novel was published and in the last few years – Khadra was the head of the Algerian cultural center in Paris. Although this appears to fill many Algerians with pride, it also makes them conscious of his role as a representative of the country, and this seems to weigh heavily in the way in which readers approach his novel, perhaps precisely as it professes to give insight in the experiences of both communities.

Another aspect of the discourse around Khadra that is worth mentioning is the rumor that *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* is plagiarized from the novel *Les amants de Padovani* (2004) by Youcef Dris, a less well known Algerian writer who still lives and publishes his work in Algeria. Although only two of the French readers (Helene H and Lybertaire) comment on this rumor – which appears to have circulated less widely in France – it is brought up on practically all the Algerian weblogs and discussion forums I have seen. Whereas some readers seem to doubt its veracity or point out that the quality of the novel remains the same, this rumor could arguably contribute to the image that Khadra might be more concerned with his own success than with the representation of his native country and the interests of his compatriots.

Besides the impression that Khadra primarily writes for a French audience, some readers also comment on the apparent importance of this personal (commercial) success as a reason for the fact that they do not feel implicated by the novel. Linda Matiss describes her reading experience as follows:

Au début, je ne lâchais pas le livre tellement je trouverais l'histoire de Younes magnifiquement algérienne, je me disais son histoire m'appartient. Pour une fois qu'un écrivain algérien moderne dépeint ses compatriotes affamés de l'Algérie française avec autant de lyrisme et de force ! (...) Mais au fur et mesure que Younes se transformait en Jonas, ma peine à finir les pages devenait presque physique ! Non Younes n'est pas né dans l'imaginaire de l'écrivain pour être digne de nous et nous de lui dans l'Algérie française comme ceux que vous en connaissez probablement, mais plutôt un être sans idéologie, sans sympathie pour les siens même dans cette Algérie meurtrie du Colonialisme! (...) Ce livre n'est pas pour notre Histoire amis algériens, il est pour les médailles et autres honneurs de salons que l'écrivain ambitionne. L'Histoire de l'Algérie ne l'intéresse pas, c'est son fond de commerce.

Interestingly, the fact that this reader feels that Khadra is not interested in giving an (adequate) representation of Algerian history seems to be connected to Younes' undecidedness in the context of the war. The fact that he does not choose to help "les siens" makes him unworthy of "nous", the Algerians. A strikingly similar remark is made by the French reader Philisine Cave, who points out that she often had the desire to shake Younes up, and claims that the story would have deserved a better witness. In fact, this desire to give Younes a shaking is brought up by various French readers (see, for example, Erveine and Marion Lefebvre), and several others also describe Younes as a witness of the war or even of his own life (Odilette, Ode). The previous chapter discussed Judith Herman's claim that a witness of human conflict is always forced to take sides – a point that appeared to be challenged by Mauvignier's deconstruction of the binary opposition between victims and perpetrators, and that indeed did not come forward in the responses of the readers who assumed their positions as witnesses. Although Khadra also seems to blur the distinction between perpetrators and victims, (French and Algerian) readers do not appear to accept such an undecided position with regard to his protagonist. Whereas French comments primarily point at a need for agency – which is interesting with regard to the sense of responsibility that appears to be central in the novel – Algerian readers more directly seem to indicate that Younes should have come to the aid of the Arab community.

Although most of the Algerian readers feel that the novel is not addressed to them, this does not necessarily mean that they all respond to it in an exclusively negative way. Emraude, for example, points out that it is true that the pied-noir community appears to have a more prominent place in the work, but that it is important that people in Algeria know this part of their history in order to be able to understand it. Even if it primarily addresses French readers, she thinks that this is only for the best: "plus nous ouvrons nos horizons aux autres, plus nous ferons connaître notre culture et notre passé". In this way, she emphasizes literature's potential roles in travelling across national and social borders, as well as its possible functions in transmitting knowledge about the past. The rest of her comment shows that, in this respect, the novel's value lies not merely in the information it conveys, but also in its experiential dimensions: "J'ai beaucoup aimé le livre, ça a été un des meilleurs que j'ai lu, en le lisant j'ai appris, j'ai ris, j'ai pleuré, j'ai été bouleversé, en colère, soulagé, mais contente de découvrir l'Algérie des années 30 à l'indépendance".

This experiential dimension, and Khadra's writing style, lead some readers to express separate opinions on the novel's content and its form. Naziha, for instance, says that she loves the text for its elegance, its well-chosen words, and its detailed descriptions, and has read it with a lot of emotion. However, she stresses that, from a thematic point of view, the harmonious relations between the different communities can be seen as a mystification of reality that – once again – appears to be addressed primarily to a French or pied-noir readership. Some readers do not mention the historical dimension at all and just discuss its transporting qualities (like Bassou) or their reading pleasure (Badia, for instance) – a respect in which they are similar to quite a few of the French readers.

In general, then, the Algerian readers appear to either despise, extenuate, or ignore the way in which the (past and present) relations between different communities are represented in the novel - those who are completely positive about this aspect are scarce. Dadi Labib and Mayana seem to be exceptions, from this point of view. Labib distinguishes himself sharply from the (many) people who dislike Khadra without ever having read a single one of his books, and seems to go along with the notion that the major communities who fought each other during the war were, in fact, all Algerians. Mayana praises the fact that the novel not only focuses on hate, but shows that – even in days of war – there were people who loved each other. She mentions that, to her, the end of the novel felt as a reconciliation: “ le jour ne rencontre jamais la nuit mais ils ne se séparent pas aussi, l'un jamais sans l'autre”. Labib and Mayana both discuss the novel on their weblogs, and in general these might allow for the expression of more nuanced views than the discussion forums from which most of the other responses were drawn. However, I believe that these comments nevertheless succeed in illuminating some relevant aspects that remain absent in the French reader comments and the professional Algerian reviews.

Above, it was shown that French professional critics responded very positively to the way in which the themes of love and reconciliation are brought forward in Khadra's novel. However, this sometimes seemed to go at the expense of a critical awareness of the historical context. This context was a bit more present in the comments of French lay readers, although the possibility for renewed relations between the two countries still was not really problematized. Algerian reviews appeared to be more nuanced in this respect, as they tended to juxtapose the past and the present and to indicate that reconciliation can only take place if the attitudes of one or both of the communities have changed. Algerian lay readers, however, do not make this distinction, as they sometimes predict that the attitudes of the *piets-noirs* (or of the French in general) have *not* changed – something that became particularly clear from the fierce comments by Talapouch – or simply feel that the nature of the conflict does not lend itself for the kind of appeasement that seems to be proposed in the novel.

On the one hand, this difference could perhaps in part be explained by the mnemonic context in both countries. As was discussed in the second chapter, history and memory in Algeria are still heavily influenced by the state and often continue to rely on a strong binary opposition between (French) perpetrators and Algerian victims. Although a number of the professional reviewers referred to the novel's potential as a counter history to this official state narrative, their relatively critical stance might not be shared by all the lay readers. From the point of view of the *guerres de mémoires* in the French context, the focus on a shared love for the same country could appear to be an interesting alternative way of framing the past – that could perhaps provide a ground for reconciliation in the present.

However, an inherent risk to the French readers' positive responses to the prospect of reconciliation might be that this desire could in part be a desire to forget. Although several readers point at the importance of remembering the Algerian war, it seems conceivable that people in France are more eager to move on from this 'dark page' of their history than people in Algeria might be. In this respect,

the responses by Algerian readers not merely reflect the official narrative, but – as was suggested above – show a concern for memory and a fear of oblivion. This was also visible in the response by the veteran Ponsolles with regard to *Des Hommes*, who felt that the novel should give an adequate portrayal of the appelés' experiences, especially with an eye on the image of this period that would be conveyed to future generations. Although all of these readers appear to be duly aware of the fictional nature of the novels, the fact that they believe that (their) memory is threatened incites them to primarily ascribe a referential responsibility to these texts. Inversely, when this threat appears to be absent (for example, for the pieds-noirs and appelés who recognized themselves in the stories, or – on the contrary – for those who did not feel connected to this history in any way) the text's literary and experiential dimensions tend to come more to the fore.

The fact that pied-noir and Algerian readers both seem to feel that *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* primarily tells the story of the former group contradicts the belief that Younes/Jonas' in-between position could prevent an appropriation of the novel by a single community. However, the image of a (relatively) peaceful co-existence might precisely correspond to the way in which many rapatriés remember this period. The fact that Algerian readers do not feel addressed by the text – and do not agree with this image – also implies that they are not likely to feel called upon to contribute to the sense of reconciliation that is brought forward in the novel, nor to reflect on the aspects brought up in the passages in which their position as implied readers appears to be clearer (for instance, with regard to postwar politics in Algeria). In order for the novel to contribute to improved relations, then, this responsibility in first instance appears to lie with the French readers – who might have to prove that their ambition is not to 'reconquer' Algeria, as Talapouch suggests.

Although many French readers do indeed seem to recognize this responsibility – in the sense that they perceive the novel as a lesson, or a message – the question remains to which extent they will take it upon themselves, instead of only pointing it out, or deferring responsibility to the state or specific social groups. A similar question can also be asked with regard to *Des Hommes*, where many readers assume the witnessing role that is ascribed to them, but appear to fail to take their greater understanding of the appelés beyond the text, to relate it to contemporary racism or other issues that might be at stake in society. Moreover, they do not always seem to perceive that merely breaking the silence about these events is not necessarily enough to come to terms with the past. Although the many reader comments that were discussed in this chapter show that the novels – dependent on the specific interactions between the text, the (mnemonic) context and the reader – do have the potential to pass on information and memories, to foster empathy and understanding within and beyond the lines of communities, what appears to remain underexposed is a sense of agency.

Nevertheless, all these readers have shown agency in at least one respect: they have decided to put their thoughts about the novels down in words, and to share them with others. Although this might only seem to be a small gesture, by writing these (professional and non-professional) reviews, their reading experiences become connected to – and part of – a broader social discussion. The information,

empathy, and understanding that people take away from reading *Des Hommes* or *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* – but also their skepticism, frustrations, and concerns – can all contribute to the way in which the collective memory of this period continues to be shaped and negotiated. In this way – or, more precisely – in this great variety of different ways, literature can be a seed-bed for the ever evolving public debate about the Algerian war and its importance for the present and future.

Conclusion – Reading and Resonance

Si certaines lectures nous échappent quand d'autres nous frappent de plein fouet, on peut se demander quelle en est la cause; à mes yeux, c'est la part de résonance provoquée chez le lecteur qui fait toute la différence (Manou, response to *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*).

“Que peut la littérature, dans ce cadre?” - This question, raised by France Culture with regard to the memory of the Algerian war, was brought forward at the end of the introduction and has played a guiding role throughout this thesis. What, indeed, are the functions and effects of literary texts when it comes to shaping and negotiating the collective memory of a period that, so many years after the facts, continues to be a source of conflict and contestation? From a theoretical point of view, this question had already been discussed by various scholars within the fields of memory studies and postcolonialism – both with respect to specific novels about the Algerian war and in a more general, reflexive sense. However, although it has been acknowledged that a text’s mnemonic potential in itself cannot account for the way in which it is received by readers, and that “actual reading practices” are therefore “in dire need of rigorous study” (Erll, 171), until now few critics had suited the action to the word.

It was argued that this could in part be explained by the fact that reader research is still looked at with a certain skepticism, because – dependent on the chosen method – the outcomes might not always be representative of the ways in which texts are normally read, or of the entirety of people who have read a particular work. Although being aware of these potential pitfalls is important, I hope to have shown that they do not measure up to the wealth of information that reader responses can give about the discourse that is created around specific texts, and about their impact on a broader mnemonic context. Moreover, I believe that these pitfalls can for a large part be overcome by carefully analyzing literary works and reader responses in the light of this context, and by asking questions that are not only relevant to the *casus per se*, but that can also illuminate new aspects with regard to the theoretical discussions in which they are grounded.

From the point of view of the ‘guerres de mémoires’ that continue to influence social and political relations between different communities in France as well as between France and Algeria, the questions that were central to this thesis were primarily drawn from discussions about literature’s potential (transformative) functions and effects within and beyond the lines of communities. Are literary works especially interesting to individuals or groups who feel a personal connection to the historical situation and perspective brought forward in a particular text? Or does the promise of an aesthetic and immersing experience indeed, as scholars like Rigney and Landsberg have argued, allow these texts to attract a broader range of readers, and to encourage identification, understanding and empathy across social and ethnic borders? Would a reading experience need to be scarring and unsettling in order to produce these effects? Do readers refer to a need to learn about the past, and to their responsibilities in the present and future? How important is the awareness of a sense of difference and the absence of closure for readers to become conscious of these responsibilities?

In an (initial) attempt to answer these questions, this study has combined an analysis of professional and non-professional reader responses with a critical close reading of the novels *Des Hommes* (2009) by Laurent Mauvignier and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (2008) by Yasmina Khadra. With regard to the novels, special attention was paid to their position in relation to the historical events they are representing, the mnemonic contexts in which they were written and received, and the readers that they appear to address. It was shown that, by explicitly connecting the Algerian war to issues at stake in the present, both of these texts appeared to point at the relevance of this period to contemporary society and to ascribe a particular responsibility to contemporary readers. The major differences, in this respect, consisted of the perspective from which the events are presented and the way in which each novel deals with a sense of closure, or the (im)possibility to come to terms with the past.

It was argued that, in the case of *Des Hommes*, readers were positioned as witnesses to the silenced stories of the appelés and given the responsibility to try to understand the impact that their war experiences continue to have on their daily lives, even if they try to leave their past behind. As various other groups (like the harkis, the pieds-noirs, and immigrants – who often have to deal with racism, a problem that the novel also connects to the repercussions of the war) are also represented, this understanding could possibly go beyond the sphere of a single community. However, focalization always lies with the appelés. It was expected that *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* would have more potential in this respect, as Younes/Jonas's position between the Arab and pied-noir community seemed to destabilize a sense of homogenous identity and allowed for the juxtaposition of the violence and suffering of both parties, as well as of their shared love for the same country. As the end of the novel shows how the protagonist makes peace with the past and with his old friends, readers appeared to be pointed at the importance of striving towards reconciliation. However, the ease with which this process is fulfilled in the novel seemed to negate the necessity of this memory work, and it remained to be seen to which extent readers would feel personally called upon to contribute to improved relations.

To get a sense of the way in which the mnemonic potential of these texts was actualized in their reception, a great number of professional reviews and non-professional responses by French and Algerian readers were analyzed with an eye to the general theoretical questions discussed above, while close attention was also paid to points that were brought forward by readers themselves. One of the first aspects to come into view, in this respect, was the fact that readers did not only comment on their (changed) understanding of the war, but also presented memory in itself as an important matter of concern. Many (French) readers of both *Des Hommes* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* pointed out that there finally was a novel that had taken it upon itself to represent this period which, for such a long time, had been forgotten. However, as was discussed in the second chapter, these events had been the subject of literary texts ever since the end of the war and – although there had indeed been question of a certain amnesia from the part of the State and within different communities – the war had 'returned' in the center of public attention approximately ten years before the publication of these novels.

Although, in the case of *Des Hommes*, the attention to the “return of the repressed” could have been encouraged by the central place of silence and memory processes in the text, the fact that similar remarks were made with regard to Khadra’s novel suggests that this concern stems from readers’ assumptions prior to the reading experience rather than from the content of the works themselves. This confirms the notion of a “sensation d’oubli” which was brought forward by Désirée Schyns, and which she interprets as society’s difficulty to take in the amplitude of this historical period all at once. Although this might certainly be the case, I think that what – from the more general perspective of memory studies – is most interesting here, is the fact that this ‘sensation’ motivates readers to recommend the novels to others. This shows, at once, that readers feel the urge to spread the story in society at large – beyond the borders of a specific community –, and that they believe that literature can play an important role in this respect. This urge seems to be motivated by a desire to educate each other, which suggests that readers believe that (the memory of) this period is still relevant to contemporary society. Although turning to and recommending these novels in order to learn about the past clearly indicates that readers ascribe a referential function to these fictional works, the way in which many of them compare the instructiveness of the novels to their history lessons suggests that they also provide another, more experiential kind of knowledge.

At the same time, however, other readers expressed the concern that literature would harm the memory of the Algerian war. The veteran Ponsolles was afraid that, because of Mauvignier’s novel, future generations would think badly about the *appelés*, and many Algerian readers suggested that Khadra’s alternative way of framing the past – focusing on the shared love of both communities, and on the harmonious relations that sometimes existed between them – would cause the suffering of the Algerian people to fall into oblivion. Although these concerns show that there is a limit to the ‘poetic license’ that Rigney defines as a characteristic of fictional works, they do not contradict the belief that literature has the potential to change our perspective on the past. On the contrary, this belief exactly seems to be the reason why these readers appeared to ascribe a certain referential responsibility to the texts. Although it would be easy to say that these readers lack a certain openness to the distinct functions that literary texts can have, and to the ways in which they differ from, say, historiographical works, I think that their comments are precisely useful in providing insight in issues that might be at stake in memory culture.

If readers who were worried about the memory of the war tended to focus primarily on the content of the texts, readers who did not share these concerns appeared to pay more attention to their formal characteristics. In the case of *Des Hommes*, the modernist or postmodern writing style proved to be a challenge for many readers, and therefore a prior sense of connectedness to the presented (hi)story appeared to be a more important motivator to read and finish the novel than the promise of a literary experience. This obstacle was less present with regard to *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, as many readers found Khadra’s imaginative writing style very pleasant. However, this reading pleasure and the novel’s love story sometimes went at the expense of a certain historical awareness, and gave way to a

problematic sense of exoticism. In inversed but similar ways, both of these reactions appear to necessitate a nuancing of Rigney's assertion that literary texts have the potential to attract readers without a pre-existing interest in a particular historical context, and to raise this interest during the reading process. Of course, it needs to be noted that the literary techniques used by Mauvignier have a value that goes beyond their potential appeal to the reader, as his fragmentary sentences mimicked the veterans' difficulty of speaking about their war experiences. In this respect, the fact that some people gave up on reading the novel only seems to illustrate the problems related to finding a willing listener. If the writing style had been more accessible, these readers would perhaps have finished the novel, but its message would have been less powerful.

Does all of this mean that, as Assmann and Irwin-Zarecka have argued, literature can only impact collective memory if it fits in with readers' prior images and ideas about the past? I think that this is not necessarily the case. On the one hand, as the responses by many of the Algerian readers showed, precisely a strong sense of disagreement with the perspective or message brought forward in a novel can give it a central place in discussions about memory, and it is in these discussions – and not merely in people's individual reading experiences – that collective memory is negotiated and shaped. On the other hand, the comments indicated that many other readers were willing to challenge – and sometimes change – their images and ideas. For the majority of them, this willingness might have preceded the reading experience, but others more explicitly ascribed this transformative power to the text. And indeed, as Alison Landsberg has suggested, a sense of transportation appeared to play an important role in this respect.

Readers of both novels described the potential to experience this historical period from the inside as one of the text's most noteworthy aspects. Often, this encouraged them to identify and empathize with the protagonists and to come to a greater understanding of the past and present situation of the *appelés*, on the one hand, and the *piets-noirs* and the Algerians (or France and Algeria) on the other. If Landsberg emphasizes the importance of a painful and scarring reading experience in order to bring about these (transformative) effects, I think that the responses have shown that this is not absolutely necessary. Although the *transmission* of experiences and memories indeed appeared to play a crucial role in this respect, it seems that this transmission can be cognitive as well as 'physical', and that its form largely depends on the kind of understanding that the text seeks to convey and on the way in which it positions the reader. Khadra's novel pays a lot of attention to the circumstances of both communities in the period leading up to and during the war and primarily seems to provide insight in the factors that caused the conflict between them, despite their shared love for the same country. The fact that many readers mentioned the story's lasting impact on their minds, in this respect, seems to correspond to this 'instructive' mode. As Mauvignier's novel focuses instead on the (traumatic) impact of the war on the veterans, such a sense of intellectual mastery or understanding would not be appropriate, nor correspond to the experience of the *appelés*. It is meaningful, then, that many readers

of *Des Hommes* described their experience in a more vulnerable, bodily way and seemed to feel obliged to accept the witnessing position that the text asked of them.

In general, this sense of witnessing – and its arguable counterpart, judging – appeared to play more important roles in the reading process than was expected in advance. The combination of the texts' referential and fictional aspects seemed to create a certain ambivalence with regard to the attitudes readers felt they had to adopt (should they make a distinction between perpetrators and victims – as, according to Herman, is the case for witnesses of human conflict – or could they accept the more nuanced portrayal put forward in each of the novels?) as well as with regard to the attitudes that they expected from the characters (was Younes allowed to be a mere witness to the war, or should he have come into action and picked a side?). Although various scholars (such as Kopf and Kacandes) have suggested that literary texts can sometimes employ certain aspects of the genre of testimony – which indeed appeared to be the case in *Des Hommes* – I think that more critical attention could be paid to the impact of precisely this combination of fictional and referential elements on the way in which readers are positioned by a text.

Although many readers reported that the novel had given them a greater understanding of the past and present situation or relations of the group(s) that were central in the texts, only few of them referred to other issues that were dealt with more succinctly, such as contemporary racism in the case of *Des Hommes* and Algerian post-war politics in *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*. Moreover, apart from the comments discussing the amnesia around the Algerian war, reflections on broader historical, mnemonic, or political contexts were almost entirely absent. Although this does not necessarily mean that these broader reflections did not exist, readers appear to be less inclined to bring them forward in their responses to the novels. This suggests that the *collective* mnemonic impact of these texts is unlikely to go much further than the subjects that they deal with explicitly and extensively, as only these are widely discussed.

In this respect, it was expected that Khadra's novel had the greatest potential to go beyond the 'cloistered' mnemonic communities that oppose each other in the *guerres de mémoires*, as it not only juxtaposed two perspectives but focused on a character that was connected to these communities as well as to the past and the present in a fluid and arguably 'singular-plural' way. However, it turned out that various readers reconstructed a binary opposition between these two communities in their responses and, moreover, that many pied-noir readers appeared to claim the story as their own. The responses by Algerian readers showed that they were also looking for their own perspective in the novel, but strongly felt that it did not address them. As a consequence, Rigney's *faute-de-mieux* principle, asserting that social groups will often value any literary text that represents their story over historical works that are 'irrelevant' to them, did not apply. Although scholars like Derderian have underlined the importance of works that combine the perspectives of different communities, it could be argued that this raises expectations about the balancedness of these works. Instead of stimulating openness to the story of the Other, this might precisely put readers in a defensive, competitive mode –

especially if they already have the impression that their version of the past is threatened by that of the other represented group(s). With regard to *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* this matter seems even more delicate, as Khadra was a representative of Algerian culture at that time, but – according to the Algerian readers – seemed to privilege the French perspective.

From this point of view, *Des Hommes* seemed yet to be more effective in crossing boundaries between different groups. Although some Algerian reviewers still mainly highlighted the violence caused by the appelés, they were generally open to this different perspective and one of them (Akram Belkaïd) even emphasized the power of literature in creating a greater understanding for the story of the Other. Moreover, although many veterans – much like the pieds-noirs with regard to Khadra's book – were particularly touched by the novel because they felt it did a great job at representing their story, they seemed to take this as an incentive to share the novel (and their emotional responses to it) with 'outsiders' and with younger generations, rather than merely with people who had shared the same experiences. In part, this might not only be due to differences between the texts, but also to the different positions of both communities in France (the appelés came from the entire population, whereas the pieds-noirs in some respects might still be a community *à part*) and it would therefore be interesting to observe and analyze their responses to other (fictional) works that deal with their experiences.

Overall, I believe that the great variety of responses have shown that the different interactions between the text, the (mnemonic) context and the backgrounds and attitudes of the readers can impact individual readers in very specific and singular ways, while also enabling a sense of understanding and empathy that might surpass the boundaries of groups and has the potential to generate discussions about the collective memory of the Algerian war. However, as was discussed in chapter 4, it often remains unclear to which extent readers feel personally called upon to contribute to improved relations between different mnemonic communities. Although it was pointed out that all the readers who have chosen to write down their thoughts and share them with others have shown the agency to step into the public debate – a step which, I think, is very relevant – there might be ways to gain some more insight into the (textual) factors that lead to a greater and clearer sense of personal responsibility and into the different ways in which this responsibility can (or fails to) take a concrete shape in the practice of readers' daily lives.

On the one hand, the kind of analysis carried out in this thesis could be repeated with regard to different novels. It would, for example, be interesting to observe if Algerian readers would feel more implicated by novels that deal more exclusively with the Algerian perspective (or with a variety of Algerian perspectives) and if this would increase their sense of responsibility. In this respect, one could for instance look into texts that focus on the experiences of the harkis, whose place in Algeria and in Algerian memory is still very much contested. With regard to French readers, it would be interesting to see if novels representing aspects of the war taking place in France itself – like the events of October 17, or the precarious circumstances in which harki refugees were forced to live – would increase their sense

of connectedness to this period. From this point of view, it might also be worthwhile considering texts that focus more explicitly on the consequences of the war in today's society. To a certain degree, these were also present in *Des Hommes* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, but the fact that these novels primarily emphasize the continuing impact of the war on people that have experienced this period themselves might create the (unjust) impression that these problems will be solved once this generation is no longer around.

Another way to examine if readers feel personally called upon by a specific text and if – and how – this shows from their actions would be to conduct interviews or to let readers fill out a questionnaire. Some major downsides to this method are the fact that, from an organizational point of view, it can be hard to make a sufficiently large group of people read the same text and that, from a theoretical point of view, the research questions risk steering the readers in a certain direction. As a consequence, the outcomes might say more about how readers *can* respond to a particular work when they are asked to, than about the ways in which they would actually respond. Nevertheless, such a sociological approach would allow the researcher to engage more directly and thoroughly with what readers are saying, and perhaps also to keep track of the impact of a text on the long term. With regard to the texts and responses discussed in this thesis, an interesting possibility for follow-up research could be to try to get in touch with the readers and inquire how their thoughts about the novel have evolved over time.

From the point of view of these long term functions and effects of literary texts, it would also be interesting to focus on older works and to observe how these have been received and responded to over the years, within evolving mnemonic contexts. Such a diachronic perspective, which, as was briefly pointed out in chapter 2, would have gone beyond the scope of this thesis, could allow for other aspects of literature's impact on collective memory to come to the fore. A comparison between reviews that appeared when the particular text was first published and contemporary (online) responses, could, for instance, provide insight in the relative importance of the horizons of the text and of the reader with regard to the (mnemonic) value that is ascribed to it. In this respect, one could also consider the processes of canonization which lead certain texts – as Aleida Assmann has argued – to become cultural texts that seem to embody and transmit a sense of truth, identity, and shared values and norms; and give the reader the certainty that “he or she is, through the act of reading, part of a mnemonic community” (Erll in reference to Assmann, 162-163). It would be interesting to observe if and how cultural texts can come into being if the ‘truth’ and memory of the events they represent is still shaped, contested, and negotiated. And if this is possible, would these cultural texts be able to cross generational and social divides without losing their cultural status?

Although canonical and cultural texts are certainly worth studying, I would nevertheless argue that this longevity is not necessarily the most interesting aspect when it comes to literature's functions and effects with regard to the construction of collective memory. ‘Newer’ texts, which might not always be granted a long cultural life – although the most recent comments on *Amazon.fr* and *Babelio.com* show that the two works studied in this thesis still elicit responses – could have more to offer in this respect.

These texts address the mnemonic contexts in which they are received, and although they might rapidly be forgotten if this mnemonic context changes, they could arguably play a role in bringing these changes about. In contrast to canonical works, their 'meaning' has not yet been fixed through various processes of institutionalization, and therefore they could give a greater variety of impulses to the public debate.

With regard to these impulses, the notion of 'résonance' brought forward by Khadra's reader Manou in the passage quoted at the start of this conclusion seems to be rightly chosen. It evokes the image of the reader as a sounding board that, on the one hand, receives and is impacted by a 'signal' that is sent out by a particular text, and, on the other hand, reverberates this signal into the wider world; thus connecting an individual reading experience to collective processes of meaning making and remembering. In this respect, the sounding board both carries and influences the text's mnemonic potential. Although part of literature's 'resonance' in the construction of collective memory can be predicted and brought to the fore by means of a textual analysis, the responses analyzed in this thesis show that precisely the interaction with the context and the readers' own expectations, interests, and concerns play a crucial role in determining the text's echoes and reverberations. In this respect, the combination of a careful analysis of text, context, and reader response seems to provide the best basis to come to a fuller and more nuanced understanding of literature's functions and effects in memory culture.

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Appendix A

Message with questions posted on various internet forums

Bonjour,

Commençons par une brève introduction: je m'appelle Marjolein, je suis une étudiante néerlandaise et je fais des études en littérature comparée. Mon mémoire de maîtrise porte sur les expériences et les attitudes des lecteurs face à la littérature qui traite de la guerre d'Algérie (1954-1962).

Au cours des années, cette guerre a été – et continue d'être – le sujet de beaucoup de romans, poèmes, etc. écrits en France et en Algérie. Je m'intéresse aux fonctions et effets de ces textes pour les lecteurs et j'aimerais bien en apprendre plus sur ce que ces textes signifient (ou ont signifié) pour vous, en tant que lecteurs individuels.

Voilà pourquoi j'aimerais vous demander de participer à ma recherche en répondant aux questions mentionnées ci-dessous. Bien sûr je comprends si vous n'avez pas le temps de répondre à chacune des questions, mais toutes vos réflexions sur ce sujet me seront très utiles.

Voici les questions:

- Quels textes littéraires vous viennent à l'esprit, quand vous pensez à la guerre d'Algérie ? Avez- vous lu ces textes?
- Qu'est-ce que ces textes signifient pour vous ? (les considérez-vous par exemple comme des sources d'information, comme des symboles de l'histoire nationale/ de votre famille, provoquent-ils des réflexions, des émotions?)
- Quel type de texte 'préférez'-vous, quand il s'agit de la représentation de la guerre ? (Des textes qui se déroulent pendant la guerre / qui mettent plutôt l'accent sur les conséquences de la guerre et sur l'avenir / qui donnent une représentation plutôt factuelle / qui mettent l'accent sur les relations humaines, etc.)
- Quelle est l'importance, pour vous, du style du texte et de la langue dans laquelle il a été écrit?
- Que pensez-vous de l'importance de la littérature dans la construction de la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie, en comparaison avec les autres média et les histoires personnelles de famille/ des ami(e)s, par exemple?

Vos réponses seront traitées avec respect et de façon anonyme.

Merci beaucoup d'avance de votre aide!

Bien cordialement,

Marjolein