

# ***An Analysis of the Self-Identification of Algerian Novelists Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra and their French Education***

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## **Abstract**

From 1830 to 1962, the French maintained an Algerian colony; they educated the Algerian young, inculcating French values, literature, and history into their hearts and minds. This *mission civilisatrice* provides the context in which this project analyzes the Franco-Algerian fictional and autobiographical works of Mouloud Feraoun and Mohammed Moulessehoul--alias, Yasmina Khadra. Both authors, representing different regions and generations of Algeria, write of divided selves, and, in doing so, define themselves first and foremost as writers. This analysis of the authors' self-representations offers an interdisciplinary contribution to researchers interested in the psycho-social consequences of colonial rule and its remnants.

## **Introduction**

French colonization of Algeria, from 1830 to 1962, lasted for over a century until an Algerian nationalist movement violently realized its demand for the independence of Algeria. Support for revolution was not unanimous, but was at the center of Algerian identity-formation. A story Frantz Fanon tells of a young Algerian man's psychological state in this period illustrates the subsequent war's impact on individual subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> This young man was not invested in the nationalist movement because he was preoccupied with fulfilling his career objective of becoming a specialist in multicopying-machines. As the war progressed, the young man began to hear voices calling him a coward and a traitor, which scared him so much that he locked himself in his room and refused to come out.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, I will refrain from using the terms "native" and "indigenous" to describe the non-European Algerian population. I find these terms to carry a negative connotation. If these words are present in this paper, they will be in quotation marks or figure in citations. The term "colonized" will be used to speak of the Algerian population under the French colonial regime, and the term "colonizer" refers to the French and other European settlers in Algeria prior to independence. I will use the term "Algerian" to refer to the non-European population living in Algeria prior to, during, and after the Algerian war for independence; I will use this term loosely as I include Arabs, Berbers, Kabyles, and other ethnic, non-European groups. Additionally, the term "savage war" for describing the Algerian struggle for independence will not be used. Though the war was extremely violent and used non-orthodox war tactics on both sides, I will not refer to the war in this manner. I will also use the term *colons* to refer to the French settlers and their descendants in Algeria.

One day, however, he ventured into a European part of town, stumbling around like a madman. The young man, suffering from guilt resulting from years of complacency toward his people's nationalist goals, sought to "prove" that he was one of the oppressed. He imagined that if he was apprehended by the authorities, he would demonstrate some commitment to the revolutionary cause. Surprisingly, he was not stopped by the colonial police or by the French soldiers to be searched or questioned. The disturbed young man became furious because, for him, the authorities' lack of action signified his non-Algerian-ness. Since the patrols continued to ignore him, the man came to believe that everyone knew that he was "with the French." As he attempted to wrestle a machine gun away from a soldier, he felt the contemptuous glances of humiliated Algerians undergoing police persecution. Deranged and furious over his imagined association with the occupying power, he yelled, "I am an Algerian!" This proud proclamation of identity sealed by the weight of the gun, triggered the desired response. The young man was captured by the French army and questioned. However, the soldiers quickly concluded that the young man was mentally ill and delivered him to the hospital.<sup>2</sup>

During the Algerian War for independence from France, not all Algerians participated in the nationalist movement, but did this mean that they were not truly Algerian and that they were "with the French"? In the above example, the young man assumes that his compatriots call him a coward and a traitor and place him "with the French" because of his devotion to his studies and his ambitions to have a profession and he feels ashamed. He also assumes that because he is ignored by the French police and military that he has been "accepted" or exempted from the way these foreign forces typically treated the non-European Algerians, and this also shames him. Striving to make something of oneself through colonial education leads to an acquisition of and appreciation for the colonizer's culture. An identity conundrum arises when the Algerian educated individual struggles to reconcile his or her ethnic identity with his or her learned "French" identity while not wanting to be identified as a traitor or "with the French" by his or her people. This uncomfortable combination of identities and loyalties are the subject of this study; during and following the Algerian struggle for independence, many Algerians questioned their identity, where did they fit in? Why? The novels and autobiographical works written by Algerian intellectuals offer a rich site for investigating Algerians' experience with identity conflict. Throughout this study, I will examine how Algerian-ness is named, proclaimed, and interrogated.

### *Frantz Fanon*

This study draws from the works of Frantz Fanon to frame the argument concerning the effects of the colonial system on the colonized people. Fanon writes about the "native intellectual" as well as the "native writer" which are the relevant subgroups for this study. Martinique-born, Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist, philosopher, writer, and revolutionary. Serving as the head of the psychiatry department at Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital from 1953 to 1956, Fanon was able to observe and treat patients such as the troubled young man aforementioned as well as Algerian and French victims of torture. As a psychiatrist, Fanon witnessed the psychological effects of colonialism first-hand when the war first broke out in 1954.

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<sup>2</sup> Fanon, F. (1968). *The Wretched of the Earth* (pp. 272-275). New York, NY: Grove Press Inc.

In reference to the nationalistic culture of the Algerian struggle for independence, Fanon asks if there is a “suspension of culture” during the conflict or if the national struggle is an “expression of a culture.” He answers his own questions: “We believe that the conscious and organized undertaking by a colonized people to re-establish the sovereignty of the nation constitutes the most complete and obvious cultural manifestation that exists.”<sup>3</sup> In Fanon’s view, the frantic attitude of the young man in the opening paragraph indicates a disorientation due to non-engagement in the nationalist movement: By not getting involved the young man had cut himself off from the emergent national culture. So, who is he? To what culture does he belong if not to that of his ancestors? To that of the French?

Fanon describes the attitudes of the *colons* or the Europeans who came to settle in colonial states and their progeny. According to Fanon, this Western bourgeoisie need not fear the competition of “those whom it exploits and holds in contempt;” European prejudice as regards the colonized people is “a racism of contempt; it is a racism that minimizes what it hates.”<sup>4</sup> Even though they are rejected by the colonizer, Fanon argues that the “native intellectual” who still attempts to belong to the colonizer’s culture or tries to adhere to both the cultures of the colonizer and that of the emergent nation will choose to abandon one of the cultures:

It will also be quite normal to hear certain natives to declare...’I speak as an Algerian and as a Frenchman...’ The intellectual who is Arab and French or Nigerian and English, when he comes up against the need to take on two nationalities, chooses, if he wants to remain true to himself, the negation of one of these determinations.<sup>5</sup>

The colonizer’s insistence on the colonized people’s dependence upon them exacerbates this impossibility of complete assimilation into the culture of the colonizer. The objective of colonization was to persuade the colonized people that the occupying power came to “lighten their darkness;” the colonizers sought to convince the native population that if the settlers were to leave, they would return to “barbarism, degradation, and bestiality.”<sup>6</sup> Fanon argued that colonialism is violence—physical and mental— “in its natural state,” and the only way out to escape the oppressive colonial system was through a violent uprising by the native population.<sup>7</sup>

### *Albert Memmi*

This study is further contextualized through the work of Albert Memmi who expressed arguments concerning the colonized intellectual and the colonized writer similar to Fanon’s in his book, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. In this book, Memmi offered a critique of colonialism as a “social relation and psychological drama.”<sup>8</sup> Memmi’s work derived its authority from the author’s own experience as a Jewish, French-speaking, Tunisian of Berber ancestry, which placed him in a unique societal position because he was among the colonized but treated differently.

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<sup>3</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 245

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 163

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 218

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 210-211

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 61

<sup>8</sup> Wainwright, J. (2005). Book Review: *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29, p.532.

Memmi wrote about the effect of colonialism on the colonized, including depersonalization and dehumanization. Like Fanon, Memmi believed that the problems of the colonized could not be changed within the colonial relationship and argued that the only way to end the colonial domination was through revolt. Memmi came to this conclusion after explaining the impossibility of assimilation in the face of colonial racism. According to Memmi, those colonized people who seek assimilation typically grow tired of the “exorbitant price” they must pay and which they “never finish owing.” The price is twofold: the alienation of the French-educated from their own people and the rejection by the French themselves. Describing the alienation of the intellectual, he writes, “it is a dramatic moment when he [the intellectual] realizes that he has assumed all the accusations and condemnations of the colonizer, that he is becoming accustomed to looking at his own people through the eyes of their procurer.” Assimilation is impossible because “everything is mobilized so that the colonized cannot cross the doorstep” into equality with the colonizer.<sup>9</sup>

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

[The native intellectual] throws himself in frenzied fashion into the frantic acquisition of the culture of the occupying power and takes every opportunity of unfavorably criticizing his own national culture, or else takes refuge in setting out and substantiating the claims of that culture in a way that is passionate but rapidly becomes unproductive.<sup>10</sup>

According to Fanon, no matter how much European education the “native middle class” acquires, they will always fail to replicate the Europeans and remain caricatures of the occupying power.<sup>11</sup> Fanon and Memmi want the colonized people to understand that since complete assimilation will never occur, the only escape from the oppressive colonial system is through violence and revolt. They locate the individual within the system and associate the resolution of the individual’s identity problems with the end of colonization.

However, identity was a complicated, personal matter that the colonized people had to come to terms with, before and during decolonization. The “native intellectual” was in a unique situation because he or she had been successful in getting as close to the colonizer as possible, most commonly through success in the colonial education system. In the case of Algeria, which is the focus of this study, Algerian intellectuals struggled to reconcile their Algerian nationality—which complicated identity further because one could argue that the Algerian nation did not exist until the Revolution—with their ethnic identity (i.e. Berber, Kabyle) and both of those compounded with their Francophone identity which was inculcated in them as children in school where they were taught French grammar and French history. This study will seek to answer the following questions: How did Algerian intellectuals cope with receiving a French education and desiring and fighting for an independent Algeria? How did (and do) Algerian novelists see themselves? How did they interpret their role in the context of the fight for Algerian

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<sup>9</sup> Memmi, A. (1965). *The Colonizer and the Colonizer* (pp. 123, 125). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

<sup>10</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 218, 237

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 175

independence? What did (and does) it mean to be Algerian? Is the native intellectual simply stuck “entre-deux”—between two different cultures?

### *Mission civilisatrice, Assimilation vs. Association*

Before beginning an analysis of the selected authors and their works, a quick clarification of the terms “assimilation” and “association” as used in the French colonial context is in order. According to Elsa M. Harik, the most common meaning of assimilation “stemmed from the tendency of French culture, with roots in both Revolutionary and Romantic thought, to see things in terms of universals, truths applicable for the good of all humanity.” The desire to make the conquered people of Algeria Frenchmen—“or at least to strive for a close harmony of races within the embrace of France civilization”—was the original goal of the French settlers in the first few years of Algerian occupation.<sup>12</sup> This mindset draws attention to the idea that the “indigenous culture could be ignored or even suppressed;” Fanon also points to this minimizing of the colonized people’s culture in favor of the occupiers culture. For him, it is through culture that a nation expresses itself; in the colonial situation, “culture, which is doubly deprived of the support of the nation and of the state, falls away and dies.”<sup>13</sup>

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, the assimilationist attitude of the European settlers would die out in favor of “association.” Association “called for a more flexible, practical policy, recognition of differences among peoples, respect for indigenous customs;” in short, association sought to achieve a cooperative partnership between the colonizer and the colonized based on fraternity and mutual interests—but not based on equality.<sup>14</sup> Although Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra grew up and wrote after the *colons*’ policy shifted to association, the gap between the promises of French education and French cultural values and the Algerian reality loomed as large if not larger once inequality became “official.”

When the *colons* talked about assimilation, “they were demanding political and administrative assimilation with France. This included the full benefits of French citizenship and the installation of French political institutions in the colony—basically the *colons* wanted an end to the military rule in the colony which obstructed their claim for unimpeded access to the land. Around 1900, the *colons* rejected *this* form of assimilation and “demanded as much independence of action [in the colony] as possible.”<sup>15</sup>

Thus, there are two different instances of assimilation. One involved the suppression of the Algerian culture in order to assimilate the Algerian people to French culture during the first few years of the French occupation of Algeria. The second assimilation describes the attitude of the *colons* who wanted to assimilate to the French administration of the *métropole* so that they could enjoy the full benefits of French citizenship and French institutions. Both of these assimilations were abandoned in the 1900s. The first was to be replaced with “association” and the second was dismissed when the *colons* decided that independence from the French

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<sup>12</sup>Harik, E., & Marston, D. (1984). *The Politics of Education in Colonial Algeria* (p. 10). Athens, OH: Ohio University, Center for International Studies.

<sup>13</sup>Fanon, *Wretched*, 244

<sup>14</sup>Harik & Marston, *The Politics of Education*, 10

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

administration would better serve their interests in Algeria. The differences between the two “assimilations” may cause confusion; for this reason, “assimilation” as used in this study refers to the first assimilation—that of the Algerians’ culture being replaced with that of the French occupiers.

### *Purpose of Study*

This study seeks to analyze the self-identification struggle of two Algerian authors through their novels and autobiographical works: Mouloud Feraoun and Mohamed Moulessehou (Yasmina Khadra).<sup>16</sup> This study will not assess these authors’ identities based on what others have said—scholarly claims or otherwise—but rather seeks to examine what the authors have said about themselves or what can be inferred about the authors’ struggle for identity from the characters in their novels. This study will not address the politics of Algerian identity in the context of the Algerian War for independence; this study seeks to simply analyze the authors’ self-assessment of their identity struggle as evidenced in their works. Using the writings of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi mentioned above, this study will operate within the colonial framework these two authors describe: The impossible situation of the colonized who achieves a French education and immersion in French culture but who is not accepted as French and does not see himself as French. These Francophone Algerian writers use writing to define themselves as not between two chairs, to orient themselves in place and culture, to make something possible out of the impossible. They recognize the constraints on their self-realization, as described by Fanon and Memmi, but also reject the “impossibility” of their situation. In a way, they carve out a third identity: “intellectual” or “writer.”

Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra were both educated in French at a young age. Not only were these authors exposed to the French education system, but they were also able to succeed within it: Feraoun would go on to become a French schoolteacher and Khadra was successful in his schooling in the post-independence military academies. Both authors mention their educational experiences in their novels and autobiographical works; thus, it is easy to conclude that their Western education had a profound impact on them as young children and during their adult life.

## **The French Colonial Education System**

### *Pre-colonization Education*

In order to analyze the impact of French colonial education on Feraoun and Khadra, the French colonial education system itself must be explored. Prior to the French invasion of Algeria in 1830, only primary and secondary education was available in Algeria.<sup>17</sup> Arabic reading, writing, and the memorization of Qur’anic verses made up the simple Algerian primary school

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<sup>16</sup> In the rest of the paper, I will refer to Moulessehou by his pen name, Yasmina Khadra and the singular masculine personal pronoun.

<sup>17</sup> Heggoy, A. A. (1975). Arab Education in Colonial Algeria. *Journal of African Studies*, 2(2),149.

curriculum.<sup>18</sup>The next level of education was a type of middle school located either in mosques or in *zawiyah*—the headquarters of religious brotherhoods; here students continued to improve their Arabic reading skills with supplementary courses in Qur’anic commentary and in elementary grammar. The superior level of education—referred to as “secondary” education in Algeria—also operated out of the mosques or independent quarters known as the *madrasah*; the curriculum for a wide age spectrum of young Algerians featured classes on law, jurisprudence, theology and the best *madaris* taught arithmetic, astronomy, geography, history, and, sometimes natural history and medicine. The Algerian state was not directly involved in education and it was more available in the cities than in rural tribal areas. All levels of education were free, paid for by pious donations or donations of property.<sup>19</sup>

### *Education during Occupation*

When France conquered Algeria in 1830, the colonial administration promised not to interfere with Islam—the religion of almost all Algerians—or to attack personal status as defined in Muslim law. Thus, French officials ignored the activities of the Qur’anic schools and the *madaris*, but managed to indirectly undermine the existing free-school system by offering a French alternative.<sup>20</sup> By 1883, the French colonial government imposed the same education system that existed in metropolitan France in Algeria.<sup>21</sup> In 1895, the teaching of both Arabic and French was strengthened in French-sponsored *madaris*; the colonial government sought to create schools for advanced Muslim studies under French guidance.<sup>22</sup> Despite this aspiration, French efforts to educate Algerian children were limited in scope; for instance, there were only 33,000 young Muslims in official schools in 1907 out of close to 1.75 million children in Algeria. It was not until 1917, that primary education was made compulsory for boys, but this decree could not be enforced because there were not enough schools or trained teachers to accommodate them.<sup>23</sup> In the following decade—the 1920s—Mouloud Feraoun began his colonial primary schooling in the Kabylia region of Algeria.

Returning Algerian migrant workers from France—having witnessed first-hand the benefits of a French education—began to pressure the colonial government in the 1930s for more and better public education opportunities for their children. As a result of this lobbying, the French redoubled their efforts to turn their Algerian subjects into Frenchmen—which contributed to their supposed commitment to assimilation. However, the enormous cost of building schools and training enough teachers in conjunction with the deep distrust Algerians felt toward all French institutions presented obstacles to this expansion of education and compulsory primary education for all Algerian children seemed unrealizable.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Heggoy, Arab Education, 149

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 150-151

<sup>21</sup> Colonna, F. (2008). Training the National Elites in Colonial Algeria 1920-1954. *Historical Social Research*, 33(2), 285

<sup>22</sup> Heggoy, Arab Education, 151

<sup>23</sup> Heggoy, A.A. (1973a). Education in French Algeria: An Essay on Cultural Conflict. *Comparative Education Review*, 17(2), 185-186.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 186.

The colonial school system trained Algerian teachers to teach in the French schools alongside European teachers. Fanny Colonna argues that one of the main objectives of the French in training native Algerian teachers—like Feraoun— was to create cultural mediators who would be put in charge of spreading French culture.<sup>25</sup> While the French built new schools to teach French literature, history, and culture, Islamic schools struggled to continue to attract a significant number of students and to retain funding for their education programs. This conflict between French public schools and traditional Arab schools occurred against the backdrop of the larger issue of Arabic being recognized by the French government as an official language in colonial Algeria. When the French took over the administration of Algeria, Arabic lost its official language status and French became the sole official language in colonial Algeria. The Arabic language would not be given official status until 1947 following World War II as a reward to the Algerians for their participation in the French forces<sup>26</sup> In Colonna’s view, the colonial school system structured society beyond the colonial period: “Arab speakers were and are still today in an inferior, dominated position.” She concluded that the colonial system is not a “dichotomy, it’s not [two] worlds that ignore each other but on the contrary, worlds which observe each other with envy (but the envy only goes one way.)”<sup>27</sup>

### *Colonial Education as a Counterinsurgency Tactic*

During the Algerian War for Independence (1954-1962), the French military became involved with colonial education because it saw that it could be used as a counterinsurgency program. The French military had an interest in bettering the lives of the Algerian people in order to discourage them from joining the revolutionary movement. Additionally, education provided a context in which the French could continue their “civilizing” mission and instill French values in the native Algerians which the French hoped would foster loyalty to the colonial regime. Counterinsurgency education programs fostered personal contact between the French administration and the Algerian people; this contact enabled the French military to gather the intelligence information they desperately needed to combat the Algerian rebels during the Algerian war.<sup>28</sup>

The French military developed programs such as the Special Administrative Services (SAS), the *Service de Formation des Jeunes en Algérie*, the *Centres Sociaux*, the *Formation Professionnelle Accélérée*, and the *Formation Professionnelle des Adultes*; these programs focused on improving and expanding primary, vocational and technical education. Despite the valiant effort on behalf of the French to rehabilitate the education system and offer better opportunities for the Algerian children and adults—while also serving their own “civilizing” and militaristic goals for the colony—many Algerians remained unaffected by these programs. It proved difficult for the basic education programs to keep up financially with an annual population increase of 2.85%. When gathering intelligence through the families encountered through these educational programs, the military would often resort to torture or other violent means to extract information

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<sup>25</sup> Colonna, *Training the National Elites*, 289.

<sup>26</sup> Heggoy, *Arab Education*, 151-152

<sup>27</sup> Colonna, *Training the National Elites*, 288.

<sup>28</sup> Heggoy, A. A. (1973b, December). *Kepi and Chalkboards: French Soldiers and Education in Revolutionary Algeria*. *Military Affairs*, 37(4),141-142.



about the Algerian rebel cause. This brutality shed light on the superficiality of the perceived benevolence of these military-sponsored educational services and contributed to the French military's failure to deter Algerians from joining the resistance movement. The Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) was suspicious of these educational programs, and began to see the officers of the SAS in particular as their most dangerous enemies.<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that while Feraoun seemed “to trust the aims of the *Centres Sociaux*, he openly distrusted the role of the SAS in the Algerian conflict and comments on it frequently” in *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*. Feraoun himself joined the *Centres Sociaux* in October 1960.<sup>30</sup> In conclusion, these education initiatives by the French military were not as influential or far-reaching as they could have been, except for the SAS which was one of the programs that was successful and could have seen a greater level of success if other activities—such as the gathering of intelligence through the use of torture—had not undermined its progress.<sup>31</sup>

### *Selected Authors and their Education*

How did the colonial education system affect the Algerian people and the authors selected? Mouloud Feraoun (1913-1962) and Yasmina Khadra (1955-) both received a French education in Algeria. Feraoun was chosen for this study because he wrote before and during the war for independence. He was a man from the Kabylia region of Algeria. Khadra was chosen because he wrote after the war for independence in which his father was a military hero. He was from the western Sahara desert region of Algeria and he spent many years in the Algerian army writing behind a female name. He duped his audience into thinking that they were appreciating a female's point of view on the Muslim world when in reality they were reading the words of an Algerian major.

Both of these authors wrote in French. Their use of the language of the colonizer as well as their use of the French form of writing—autobiographies and novels—further complicated identifying them in one way versus another. The encyclopedia entry for Feraoun in the 1983 Grand Larousse Universel read, “Algerian writer of the French language (Tizi-Hibel, Grande Kabylie, 1913- El-Biar, 1962).”<sup>32</sup> That entry was ambiguous; what did it mean to be an Algerian writer of the French language from Kabylia? Ties to Algeria, France, and Kabylia all at once made self-identification difficult for Feraoun during his lifetime. Compound this complex background with a French education and internal confusion was inevitable. Feraoun and Khadra explored and expressed their identity in their novels and autobiographies. The purpose of this paper is to study these authors' self-identification as evidenced by their written works.

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<sup>29</sup> Heggoy, Kepi and Chalkboards, 141-144.

<sup>30</sup> Le Sueur, J.D. (2000). Introduction. In M. Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* (pp. xviii). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

<sup>31</sup> Heggoy, Kepi and Chalkboards, 144.

<sup>32</sup> Thenault, S. (1999, July). Mouloud Feraoun. Un écrivain dans la guerre d'Algérie. *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 63, 65. (my translation).

## Methodology

This study is informed by the Postcolonial approach. Postcolonial studies examine the effects of colonization on the organization of political, social, and economic life and on culture. Postcolonial studies interrogate the colonial relationship and demonstrate how influence is not unidirectional and culture generated by the encounter between colonizer and colonized is hybridic. The writers with a French education are not passive recipients of that education but use it to express themselves as colonized and as Algerians. One of the many objectives of Postcolonial studies is to draw attention to a “necessary shift in emphasis, a strategy of reading, an attempt to point out what was missing in previous analyses, and an attempt to rewrite and to correct.” Building on the ideas of Fanon and Memmi, postcolonial studies demonstrate that the Western paradigm—Manichean (good vs. evil) and binary—is highly problematical.<sup>33</sup>

The significance of this study is in drawing attention back to the individual from the colonial framework and its legacy. The study looks at what the authors within the colonial system and after it write about themselves instead of generalizing about a group of “native intellectuals”. Fanon and Memmi make strong arguments about the impossibility of the “French Algerian” but Feraoun and Khadra argue differently. In this study, I will analyze how Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra experienced and wrote about conflicts of identity.

I have chosen to read a memoir and a novel by each author because each literary genre allows for the exploration of subjective experience in different ways. The memoir or autobiography presents a more consciously crafted self while a novel allows for the fictionalization of the self and the development of themes among multiple characters. By Mouloud Feraoun, I have chosen to read *Le Fils du pauvre* (*The Poor Man’s Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*) and *Journal 1955-1962* (*Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*). I chose to read *Le Fils du pauvre* because it is considered an autobiographical novel in that the protagonist’s name is Menrad Fouroulou which is an anagram of Mouloud Feraoun. Fouroulou’s coming of age story and family life mirrors Feraoun’s own life story, and, thus, reveals useful information relevant to the author’s identity struggles throughout his life. *Journal 1955-1962* is Feraoun’s almost daily journal which chronicles the Algerian War. Feraoun’s personal writing offers insightful information on his daily life as well as fascinating introspection on what the war meant for him and where he placed himself in the conflict between the French and the nationalist Algerians.

The two books by Yasmina Khadra that I have chosen to read for this study are *L’Écrivain* (*The Writer*) and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (*What the Day Owes the Night*). *L’Écrivain* tells the autobiographical story of Khadra’s upbringing and the beginnings of his military career in the military academies he attended as a young boy and as a young adult. The story centers around his education in the academies and his self-definition as a writer as evidenced by the title of his autobiography. Thus, this work is a rich source of information regarding Khadra’s identity struggles growing up in post-colonial Algeria. *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (*What the Day Owes the Night*) is a novel that tells the story of Younes, a poor boy from

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<sup>33</sup> Groden, M., Kreiswirth, M., & Szeman, I. (Eds.). (2005). Postcolonial Cultural Studies: 1. Origins to the 1980s. In *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved July 9, 2013, from Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism.

the Algerian countryside who comes to live with his uncle and his French wife in the European part of Oran and Río Salado in Algeria. Renamed “Jonas” and educated in a French school, the young boy’s self-identification evolves throughout the novel as he experiences pre-independence, wartime, and post-war Algeria. This first-person narrative offers valuable insight into the personal, unique experience of the protagonist concerning his internal identity strife during a historically difficult period. The personal identity crisis of Younes/Jonas reflects Khadra’s opinion of internal battles concerning identity.

All of these novels were originally published in French. This study is limited to an analysis of the English translations of *Le Fils du pauvre* and *Journal 1955-1962. L’Écrivain* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* will be analyzed in their original French versions.

### Mouloud Feraoun

According to Monique Gadant-Benzine, it still common today, upon the mention of Mouloud Feraoun to hear people say, “Feraoun? C’était un Français!” (“He was a Frenchman!”).<sup>34</sup> Mouloud Feraoun was born on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1913 in Tizi-Hibel in the Kabyle region of Algeria to a family of poor *fellahs* (peasants) with eight children of whom five survived. Mouloud was the third child and the first boy. Since 1910, the father of Feraoun’s family habitually traveled to France to work and provide for his family until 1928, when he was injured in an accident and, as a result, received enough financial compensation to eliminate the need to continue to travel to France. Feraoun won a scholarship to attend *6e* at the *Collège de Tizi-Ouzou*. In 1932, at the age of 19 years old, Feraoun entered *l’École normale d’instituteurs* in Bouzaréa, on the outskirts of Algiers where he received the necessary training to become a schoolteacher.<sup>35</sup> After *l’École*, Feraoun was assigned to teach in Kabylia and eventually served as a principal; he married his cousin, according to Kabyle custom, with whom he would have seven children.<sup>36</sup> Feraoun did not leave Kabylia until 1957 when he became an inspector and co-director at the *Centres de Services Sociaux Éducatifs* at Château Royal near Algiers.<sup>37</sup> He was assassinated on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1962 by French terrorists in the *Organization de l’armée secrète* (OAS).

Feraoun initiated another career in addition to his civil service career when he began a manuscript in 1939 that became *Le Fils du pauvre* (*The Poor Man’s Son*). Over twelve years, Feraoun worked on this manuscript during the night, writing in school notebooks. *Le Fils du pauvre* is an exercise in “auto-fiction” and won Feraoun the Grand Prize of the City of Algiers—the first time this prize was awarded to a non-European Algerian. “In a writing style that was more concerned with a heartfelt layering of personal and collective observation than with literary esthetics,” according to Lucy McNair, “Feraoun’s novels were written and presented by himself as historical testimony: they provided internal witness to the abject yet ignored misery of Colonial Algeria.”<sup>38</sup> McNair provides a useful literary historical context for interpreting the

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<sup>34</sup> Gadant-Benzine, M. (1978, July). Mouloud Feraoun, un Algérien ambigu.? *Peuples Méditerranéens*, 4, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Thenault, Mouloud Feraoun, 66.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*; McNair, L. R. (2006, August). An Algerian-American Primer: Reading Mouloud Feraoun's *The Poor Man's Son*. Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher. *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 10(2), 189.

<sup>37</sup> McNair, An Algerian-American Primer, 189

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

novel as a direct response to the *École d'Algers*—European-Algerian writers like Albert Camus and Emmanuel Roblès. Even though these writers “broke taboos by exposing the brutality of colonial life in opposition to the exotic travel journals French audiences were accustomed to reading,” “native Algerians” were left out of their texts. For Feraoun, this absence of non-European Algerians in these novels shed light on the sad truth of the “brutal, ingrained indifference and ignorance between the Algerians and the European *colons*,” Feraoun also interpreted this absence as an invitation for individuals—like himself—who managed to overcome their ethnic identities enough to imagine a common reality for both sides. For McNair, Feraoun’s books “exhibited a pan-Algerian modesty, a hesitancy to speak about anything not personally lived;” in this way, the writer’s function is to observe, speak as a witness, and bring to light the truth.<sup>39</sup>

McNair addresses two criticisms of Feraoun’s writings: that he used the language of the colonizer and that his style of “folkloric realism” did not address the harsh realities of colonial rule. She suggests that Feraoun, who belonged to the first generation of non-European Algerians capable of mastering written French, wrote in French as “the language of universal values, of human rights, of political and individual freedom.” The “folkloric realism” of the novel takes up the oral models of his ancestors and contributes to Feraoun’s aspirations to put Kabylia and his people on the world map, thus restoring a historical omission.<sup>40</sup>

### *Le Fils du pauvre (The Poor Man’s Son)*

Initially self-published, *Le Fils du pauvre* was reissued by Éditions du Seuil in 1954. The English translation is divided into two parts and documents the daily life of an individual in a poor, rural, traditional Berber community in Algeria in the 1920s and 30s; the story traces the introduction of the main character—Menrad Fouroulou—into the larger context of the colonial world.<sup>41</sup> The main character’s name—Menrad Fouroulou—is an anagram of Mouloud Feraoun and the first edition of *Le Fils du pauvre* was dedicated to Feraoun’s beloved professors, “a mes maîtres vénérés.”<sup>42</sup>

It is significant to note that before the French Éditions du Seuil published *Le Fils du pauvre*, editors asked Feraoun to remove the parts of his narrative concerning his time at *L’École normale d’instituteurs*, his first few years as a teacher in Kabylia, and the entire second part of the book which discussed the Algerians’ situation during and following World War II.<sup>43</sup> This cut is significant because it is in these sections of the book that Feraoun harshly discusses his frustration with France—the Vichy regime, the Gaulists, and the “roumis” or small-town French settlers. These pages contain Feraoun’s assessment of the intersections and dislocations between the French and the Algerian cultures. The second edition of the novel ends with Fouroulou—too old to enter the *L’École normale d’instituteurs*—instead contemplating going to Algiers to find

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<sup>39</sup> McNair, *An Algerian-American Primer*, 189-190.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 190

<sup>41</sup> McNair, L.R. (2005). Introduction. In M. Feraoun, *The Poor Man’s Son* (pp. 2). Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

<sup>42</sup> Adam, J. (1981, November). Les débuts littéraires de Mouloud Feraoun: de "Menrad Fouroulou" au "Fils du pauvre". *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 6. 945

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 951-952

work.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the second edition carved out Feraoun's criticisms of the French during and following World War II to produce a tale with a more manageable ending for European audiences.

*Le Fils du pauvre* is a coming of age story and the voice of the narrator changes in its different sections from intimate to more formal, thus broadening the focus of the novel from the life of an individual to the portrait of a people.<sup>45</sup> In the first part of the novel, the personal pronouns "I," "my," "me" provide the intimacy appropriate for the narrator's introduction of Fouroulou's family life and his early experiences in school and in his village. The narrator shifts in the second part of the book to the third person, "Fouroulou," "he," and "his," and in this section, the hero lives away from home while attending the *École Primaire Supérieure*. The main character has grown up, and he is motivated to study to ensure his success alongside his more affluent classmates; more importantly, he dreams of becoming a teacher. Finally, in the third part of the book, the focus is not so much Fouroulou's life, but more so that of his fellow Kabyles; thus, a universal narrator, aware of the broader issues beyond Fouroulou's life takes over. Fouroulou's experience is still emphasized and serves as a lens through which the reader can acknowledge the suffering of his fellow countrymen. Dalila Belkacem notes that the preface of the second part of the novel, "Le Fils aîné," introduces a narrator who is an unnamed, close friend of Fouroulou: "Fouroulou is passing the pen to a friend... whether out of modesty or out of bashful timidity... [Fouroulou,] you want the narrator to be quiet. No, let him be. He likes you well. He'll tell your story."<sup>46</sup>

This shift between narrators in *Le Fils du pauvre* allows Feraoun to back away from his personal story and present a more complete portrait of his people; the transition between different narrators points to the ambiguous genre of the book itself. Feraoun began writing *Le Fils du pauvre* in 1939 and finished the book in three years from 1945 to 1948. I think that the time Feraoun spent away from writing refined his idea for the novel; at first purely autobiographical, Feraoun later decided to widen the scope of Fouroulou's story and, consequently, turned it into a "novel." The effects of World War II, I believe, inspired Feraoun to record the second half of Fouroulou's life alongside the difficulties that befell all of Kabylia (this is the part Éditions du Seuil cut from their edition). In Belkacem's view, the transition to the third person narrator separates the autobiographical part of Feraoun's work from the "novel" part of the book.<sup>47</sup> Although the book never stops telling the story of Fouroulou/Feraoun, this shift in the narrator calls into question the "true" genre of the book.

Feraoun reconciled the personal nature of autobiographical writing with conventions of privacy—"on garde sa vie pour soi" ("we keep our lives to ourselves")—by attributing his own life story to a character, Menrad Fouroulou, and by shifting from the first person to the third person he makes the reader aware of this construct.<sup>48</sup> The book, "entre-deux," is a cross between autobiography and novel, and a bridge between North African and European cultures. Just as his

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<sup>44</sup> LeSueur, J.D. (2005). Introduction. In M. Feraoun. *The Poor Man's Son, Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher* (pp.xii). Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

<sup>45</sup> In this paragraph, I am referencing this English translation of the novel Feraoun, M. (2005). *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

<sup>46</sup> Belkacem, D. (2005). Du texte autobiographique au texte romanesque dans "Le Fils du pauvre" de Mouloud Feraoun. *Insaniyat*,29-3, 159-173 (my translation).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. (my translation)

“autobiographical novel” is not easily classified as one genre or the other, so is it difficult to classify the author as an Algerian or as a Frenchman or, more specifically, as an Algerian writer or as a French writer.

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

My mother, her sisters, my maternal aunts—my true aunts—adored me; my father gave in to all my wishes; my grandmother, who was the village midwife, spoiled me with all the good things given to her...my uncle, who knew the value of a man at the *djemaâ* and for whom I represented the future of the Menrads, loved me as his son... I remained the sole boy of the household. I was destined to represent the strength and the courage of the family.<sup>49</sup>

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

This exceptionalism continues in the second part of the novel when Fouroulou takes advantage of his privilege to continue his studies and get closer to his dream of becoming a teacher. On the night he learns that he has received the family scholarship to attend the *École Primaire Supérieure*, Fouroulou is the “hero of the evening. His sisters already look upon him with respect” and his mother “prepares supper in his honor.”<sup>50</sup> The third part of the novel marks the end of Fouroulou’s uniqueness. “The times grew difficult. Very difficult. For the Menrads and for their countrymen;” Fouroulou is only trying to survive like the rest of the Kabyles, he is no longer special.<sup>51</sup> Fouroulou struggles to make sure everyone in his family eats during WWII when grain supplies were blocked:

Was it not Fouroulou who told us that couscous—barley, in other words—was the sole staple of the people here? Take barley away from a Kabyle and you sentence him to starvation. It was not taken away. It was given out at warehouses. There were warehouses all over. Even at Beni Rassi, the Menrad’s *douar*.<sup>52</sup>

Feraoun uses this transition from “exceptional” to “common man” to prove that his successes in his studies and in his professional life do not separate him from the suffering of his people. This humility is evidence of his identity as one of the starving Kabyles even as he is aware of his exceptional circumstances. This concentration on the suffering of the Kabyles in the final part of Fouroulou’s story contributes to Feraoun’s goal of placing Kabylia on the world map.

Feraoun’s strong connection to his ethnic identity did not stop him from including many European literary references in his autobiographical novel. According to I.C Tcheho, Feraoun

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<sup>49</sup> Feraoun, M. (2005). *The Poor Man's Son: Menrad, Kabyle Schoolteacher*. (p. 17) Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 100

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 138

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

employed these literary references to demonstrate that he would produce an original work which is “immersed both in his native culture and in the foreign culture.” Integrating both cultures in this manner shows the reader that it is possible for an “African writer to use models from the foreign world.” In the first of the European references Tcheho identifies, Feraoun compares traditional Kabylia heroes to Ulysses, the famous hero in Greek mythology. In another instance, Fouroulou declares that “these heroes are as skinny as Don Quixote.” *Le Fils du pauvre* opens with a quote ascribed to Chekhov, the Russian dramatist and short story writer of the nineteenth century. Feraoun may be drawing a comparison between himself and the Russian writer; according to Tcheho, like Chekhov, “Feraoun elaborates on his characters’ helplessness in the precarious conditions which they are forced to live.” Another comparison drawn in the novel, “pareil au financier de la fable” connects the novel to La Fontaine’s fable entitled “Le Savetier et le financier” (“The Cobbler and the Financier”). Feraoun uses this comparison to introduce an Algerian land owner who, like La Fontaine’s cobbler, has become a slave to his wealth. Feraoun introduces the second part of the novel, “Le Fils aîné,” with a quotation from the French historian Michelet; Michelet’s writing advocates a philosophy of “resistance to pain, of tolerance and patience” in circumstances such as those in which the non-European Algerians live. Feraoun also alludes to French writer Alphonse Daudet when Fouroulou “affirms that in the past the Kabylia land was full of ‘Des héro (...) aussi fiers que Tartarin.’” (“Heroes (...) as proud as Tartarin”). Finally, Feraoun quotes his contemporary, Albert Camus, “Il y a dans les hommes plus de choses à admirer que des choses à mépriser” (“There is in man more things to admire than to despise”). For Tcheho, this citation represents a plea for a “return of confidence in man.”<sup>53</sup>

Feraoun’s novel sheds light on his mastery of French writing and literature. *Le Fils du pauvre* is his story, and it is significant that he chose to include European literary elements in his narrative. Feraoun exhibits the qualities of the *évolué* writer while telling the story of his cultural upbringing in and attachment to Kabylia. Feraoun’s autobiographical work is a testament to his effort to integrate French culture with Kabyle culture.

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

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<sup>53</sup> Tcheho, I. C. (1982). European Literary References in Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*. *Revue CEFLAN*, 1(2). 19-21

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

For seven of the eight years of the Algerian War, Mouloud Feraoun kept a journal of the conflict, from 1955 until his death in 1962. A valuable first-hand account of France's "bitter and long overdue withdrawal from its most prized colonial possession, Algeria," Feraoun's *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* manifests his desire to represent the war as he saw it, without illusions and without self-censorship. He understood that the only way to affect future generations was to honestly capture the war from the inside, from personal experience. According to James D. Le Sueur who wrote the introduction to the 2000 English translation of *Journal*, Feraoun saw the collapse of French power in Algeria and North Africa as bittersweet. He welcomed the right of the Algerians to reclaim their soil and their identity from the French occupiers; additionally, he realized that French and Algerian cultures and intellectuals were deeply intertwined and that it would take generations to untangle the knots of more than a century of colonization. Feraoun had hoped that his daily notes could instruct future generations as they labored at the painful and difficult task of reconstructing the Algerian Algeria.<sup>54</sup>

The war troubled and excited Feraoun as he both welcomed and feared the cultural and political destruction that the war would leave in its wake. Feraoun felt pressured to support violent revolutionary methods he did not approve of; in his opinion, the Algerian nationalists distorted the revolution and the situation to pursue their agenda. Feraoun critiqued these national leaders several times in *Journal*; these negative feelings toward the nationalist party nuanced Feraoun's view of the war, rendering it extremely complex. He frequently referred back to "the dangers of revolutionary mythology, especially the absurd notion that all remnants of colonialism, good or bad, could and should be destroyed." Though he was supportive of the rebels' actions in 1955, the following year Feraoun picked up on the development of another "authoritarian beast (perhaps as dangerous as French colonialism)" within the resistance. In particular, he found the Front de Liberation Nationale's (FLN) expectations of the civilians to be "excessive and disappointing. In *Journal*, Feraoun characterized the prohibitions the FLN imposed on the Algerian people—such as forced observance of Islam and tobacco and alcohol restrictions—as fanatic, racist, and authoritarian; "in a way," he writes, "this is true terrorism." However, Feraoun avoided a complete condemnation of the FLN because he recognized that the French army was also to blame for the violence of the resistance movement and that brutality is generally a part of wartime dynamics.<sup>55</sup>

Feraoun agreed with Frantz Fanon that violence was a legitimate reaction against the French occupation and military violence but not unconditionally – the end did not necessarily justify the means. Feraoun was concerned about the effects of prolonged and devastating violence on post-war society; it is important to remember that Feraoun was himself a victim of the war's extreme brutality. Feraoun's fear of a "new 'colonization'" by Algeria's FLN leadership also contrasts with Fanon's optimistic view of the outcome of violence directed against oppression.<sup>56</sup> Although a practicing Muslim, Feraoun found it difficult to accept the extreme religiosity of the FLN, especially their combination of patriotism and Islam. An entry in *Journal* reads, "And so the people of Tizi-Hibel [his hometown], once the most villainous on the

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<sup>54</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction. In M. Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, ix, xi

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* xxvi-xxvii

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* xxvii-xxviii



surface of the earth, have found their faith again; they are now paying the salary of the muezzin and frequent the mosque assiduously. God is great!”<sup>57</sup>

Feraoun also condemned the FLN’s destruction of French-created schools even though he understood that the French military provoked these attacks by quartering troops in these buildings, Feraoun still saw this destruction as a waste of limited resources.<sup>58</sup> On January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1956 he recorded his own indignation when he heard that the resistance had burned down his childhood school in Tizi-Hibel: “I am angry at my people. I am angry at all those who did not know how to prevent this, who could not prevent it. Shame on all of us forever. Poor kids of Tizi, your parents are not worthy of you.”<sup>59</sup>

Not only were schools lost but as Feraoun observed, a divide developed between French and “native” educators as the two sides “realize the stakes” of the war. He recorded his growing frustration with his French colleagues when they realized that their traditional, racist privileges in Algeria were losing currency.<sup>60</sup> Feraoun left no doubt that he wanted some form of Algerian independence, but the death of colonialism forced him to wrestle with the paradox of his own identity; in many ways, this led him to feel “‘more French’ than the French.” Feraoun still cherished the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity instilled in him by his French education and was heartbroken that the French themselves had forgotten these values. His belief in these values prompted him to insist that the French recognize that the Algerians “no longer wanted to be French and had a right to reject French rule as illegitimate.” Feraoun maintained that France’s racist domination of the Arabs, Berbers and Muslims in Algeria for more than one hundred and thirty years had caused the French-Algerian war because the war forced the *maquis* to violently fight with any means they could against the French. Feraoun had no doubts that France and her so-called *mission civilisatrice* were morally bankrupt.<sup>61</sup>

The *Journal* proclaims the end of hypocrisy, the lifting of the mask, the end of the lie that oppression could continue forever without Algerian resistance. Hatred toward the Other, and crying out against the lies of the colonizer permits someone like Feraoun to situate himself against this dishonest backdrop and recover his dignity: “You can be convinced that I am just as culturally French as you. To think otherwise is disrespectful. I can renounce my culture, but do not think that I disown myself, that I will accept your superiority, your racism, your anger, your hatred, or your lies. A century of lies!”<sup>62</sup>

The reader gets the sense in *Journal*, that Feraoun felt like he has been thrown back on his “Algerian-ness” by a bad mother—France; but like all bad mothers, France has her admirable qualities that help justify “her children’s” love for her in spite of herself. Here, I draw a parallel between a good “son” and a good student, as Feraoun can “appreciate” what mother-France “did for him” when he performed well in school and he obediently carried himself like a “good son” or a “good Frenchman.” A *Journal* entry reads, “[France] has perhaps tricked us for a century to preserve her memory: the best image that our childhood could assemble of her.” In another

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<sup>57</sup> M. Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press. 68.

<sup>58</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction. In M. Feraoun *Journal, 1955-1962*, xxviii

<sup>59</sup> Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, 64

<sup>60</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction. In M. Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, xxxv

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* xxxv, xlvii

<sup>62</sup> Gadant-Benzine, Mouloud Feraoun, 11 (my translation).

profession of his allegiance to opposing ends of his identity, Feraoun writes in *Journal*, “Vive la France, as I have always loved her, Vive Algeria, as I had always hoped she would be!... Yes, Vive Algeria... but when she [Algeria] comes alive and lifts her head, I hope that she will remember France and all that she [Algeria] owes her [France].”<sup>63</sup>

Feraoun manifested his disdain for the way in which the French and European presses wrote about the Algerian situation in *Journal*; these media made it seem as though the Algerian uprising happened all of a sudden, as if a slumbering, exploited people abruptly shot awake.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, Feraoun resented the French efforts to prevent the Algerian question from coming to the floor of the United Nations.<sup>65</sup> In 1958, Feraoun expressed his hope that General Charles de Gaulle would bring closure to the war, “De Gaulle is a wise man. That is what I think.”<sup>66</sup> However, Feraoun stopped writing *Journal* in July 1959 because he thought that the French army had won after several Kabyle villages rallied to the French side. When the European settlers organized a barricade rebellion in the streets of Algiers in January 1960, Feraoun resumed *Journal*.<sup>67</sup> Feraoun watched De Gaulle with admiration as he took on the stubborn settlers who remained unwilling to relinquish control of Algeria.<sup>68</sup>

*Journal* shows that Feraoun “was a man trapped by the infernal logic of colonial warfare.” For Feraoun, the complexity of colonial history prevented simply breaking identity into the two camps of the colonizer and the colonized. *Journal* features Feraoun’s frequent confessions of pain at his uncertain placement in the “no-man’s land of colonial identity during the war.”<sup>69</sup> He lamented:

When I say that I am French, I give myself a label that each French person refuses me. I speak French, and I got my education in a French school. I have learned as much French as the average Frenchman. What am I then, dear God? Is it possible that as long as there are labels, there is not one for me? Which one is mine? Can somebody tell me what I am! Of course, they may want me to pretend that I am wearing a label because they pretend to believe in it. I am very sorry, but this is not enough.<sup>70</sup>

This quote from *Journal* presents significant evidence indicating Feraoun’s identity struggles as he cried out for a “label” or for someone to ascribe one to him even though, as he wrote at the end, “they” only “pretend” to believe in these “labels.” Furthermore, on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1956 he wrote: “The French, the Kabyle, the soldier, and the *fellagha* [rebels] frighten me. I am afraid of myself. The French are inside me, and the Kabyle are inside me. I feel disgust for those who kill, not because they want to kill me, but because they have the backbone to kill.”<sup>71</sup> These entries of Feraoun’s journal show his identification with the French, the rebels and the Kabyles in different ways. His condemnations of the actions of both sides during the war point to the difficulties inherent in this mixed identity and show him to be a man of conscience.

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<sup>63</sup> Gadant-Benzine, Mouloud Feraoun, 14 (my translation).

<sup>64</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction. In M. Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, xxxvi

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. xxxv

<sup>66</sup> Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, 250

<sup>67</sup> Thenault, Mouloud Feraoun, 71.

<sup>68</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction. In M. Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, xxxvii

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. xxxvii, xxxi

<sup>70</sup> Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, 65-66.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 90

Since Feraoun was one of the Algerians who achieved social mobility thanks to France, supporters of French Algeria assumed that he would also rally behind the European cause; this expectation figures in *Journal* as Feraoun regularly received invitations of the French military to attend official receptions.<sup>72</sup> Feraoun found these considerations flattering, but he believed that the Algerian nationalist side viewed him with just as much esteem, trust, and caution.<sup>73</sup> For Fanon and Memmi the effort to assimilate associated with French education sows seeds of rebellion. The colonized learns to value the ideals of the French Revolution but finds that in the eyes of the colonizer they do not apply to him. The unstated objective of the *mission civilisatrice* was to turn the Algerians into Frenchmen, but not “too French;” this project demanded the submission of the Algerians at the same time cultivating a frustration within them that would lead them to revolt.<sup>74</sup> The revolt called into question what it meant to be Algerian for a schoolteacher like Feraoun who served his people and sought to enable them to define themselves in and against the colonial context.

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

I understand quite well what each man is saying, but I would like them to understand me as well. I would like them to understand those of us who are so close to them and so different at the same time. I would like them to put themselves in our place. Those who told me what they really thought last week, who told me that I was not French. Those who are in charge of French sovereignty in this country have treated me as an enemy, they would like me to act as a good French patriot; not even that: they would like me to serve them just as I am, for no other reason than the gratitude for the fact that France has made a teacher, a school administrator, and a writer out of me; for the fact that France pays me a large salary that enables me to raise a large family. In simple terms, I am asked to repay a debt as if everything I do does not deserve a salary, as if this school had been built for my pleasure and filled with students to entertain me, as if my “teaching” were a generous gift that costs me only the pain of extending my hand to take it, as if this writer’s talent with which I am a little infatuated were another gift, involuntary this time, but no less generous, one quite obviously destined to defend the cause of France at the expense of my own people, who may be wrong but who die and suffer the scorn and indifference of civilized countries. Quite simply, I am asked to die as a traitor in return for which I will have paid my debt.... I would like to tell Camus that he is as Algerian as I am, and that all Algerians are proud of him. I would add, though, that it was not so long ago that an Algerian Muslim had to show a passport to go to France. It is true that the Algerian Muslim has never considered himself to be a Frenchman. He has no such illusions.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Thenault, Mouloud Feraoun, 73.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Gadant-Benzine, Mouloud Feraoun, 5.

<sup>75</sup> Feraoun, *Journal*, 1955-1962, 185

In this passage, Feraoun clearly spoke up. The French never considered him a Frenchman before and now they expect his loyalty. Feraoun sarcastically examined how the French portray themselves as generous benefactors who gave everyone an opportunity to succeed, but had that been the case, there would have been many more Algerians like Feraoun. Though he did “owe” the French for his success he refused to pay this debt with what he saw as treason toward his compatriots.

In *Journal*'s final entries—culminating with Feraoun's final *mise-en-garde* hours before his assassination— Feraoun expressed his fatigue and bitterness toward the brutality of the war. Following the end of the 1960 settler barricade revolt, Feraoun confessed in *Journal* that the war was draining his energy; indeed, the war had a negative effect on Feraoun's zest for reflection: “as the war drummed on, his [*Journal*] entries [became] leaner and he [was] less willing to record his impressions because...it was childish to narrate—for myself and in my own style— what the front page of the press from all sides throw at us everyday.”<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the violence and the murder of Feraoun's friends and family members by the French military took a toll on his compassion so much so that he became generally indifferent to the misery he witnessed, especially as the French escalated their modernizing educational efforts.<sup>77</sup> Feraoun expressed ambivalent feelings concerning his decision to serve in the *Centres Sociaux* as an administrator.<sup>78</sup> For the ultras—*colons* extremists—the *Centres Sociaux* could not retain its apolitical position, and they decided that the *Centres* had to be on the side of the Algerian national movement. Between 1957 and 1959, the ultras “discovered” that a handful of *Centres* members had links to the FLN which made Feraoun an easy target.<sup>79</sup>

Three days before the definitive Franco-Algerian cease-fire, on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1962, Feraoun and five colleagues from the *Centres Sociaux* were marched outside and machine-gunned at the hands of a commando squad of the *Organization de l'armée secrete*—a French army-settler terrorist organization.<sup>80</sup> This tragic, abrupt end to *Journal* adds to the work's poignancy.<sup>81</sup> According to Le Sueur, the overall message of *Journal* is clear: “war is hell, even justified wars of liberation with all of their psychological, political, military, and racist repercussions.”<sup>82</sup> Le Sueur concludes his “Introduction” to the 2000 translation of *Journal* by qualifying Feraoun as a “realist, an insider, and teacher” whose identity became increasingly complicated as the war progressed. In Le Sueur's opinion, Feraoun “represents the best of two irreconcilable worlds.”<sup>83</sup>

*Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* by Mouloud Feraoun presents the reader with a detailed, personal, and heartfelt chronicle of the French-Algerian War. The entries reveal much about the daily occurrences of the war, Feraoun's struggle with his personal identity, his disdainful opinions of the FLN and the French army, and his cautionary approach to the violence of the war. The brutality on both sides of the conflict and the end of

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<sup>76</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction. In M. Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, xxxvii

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. xvii

<sup>79</sup> Thomas, M. (2001). Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*. *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 29(2), 191.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Le Sueur, Introduction. In M. Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, xvii

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. xviii

Feraoun's hopes of a fraternal relationship between France and Algeria took a toll on the author that became apparent in *Journal*. The poignancy of the journal was sealed within its abrupt ending, the final entry written the morning of Feraoun's death on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1962.

Through his journal entries, Feraoun explored and lamented his identity conundrum. He admired France and felt duped by her demise; in his eyes she no longer embodied a long-standing tradition of the universal values of liberty, equality, and fraternity since she embarked on this violent crusade to hang on to colonial Algeria. Feraoun never denied his allegiance to French culture and the Algerian national movement and he stayed true to his Kabyle heritage. He both criticized and loved the opposing sides of the French-Algerian conflict. Throughout *Journal*, Feraoun exposed the reader to the complexities of his identity as he tried to reconcile his multifaceted nature as the conflict wore on.

Feraoun tried to make sure that the reader would not get the impression that he was passively watching the war unfold as the two dominant sides of his identity crisis destroyed each other. Indeed, Feraoun's *Journal* reads as a warning about the continued use of violence, the dangers of the FLN's blending of patriotism and Islam, and the stubborn desire to decimate all remnants of the colonial period. Feraoun was especially indignant over the destruction of school buildings and the growing power of the national party. Unfortunately, heart-wrenching lamentations like the following remained unanswered as *Journal* suddenly came to an end: "What am I then, dear God? Is it possible that as long as there are labels, there is not one for me? Which one is mine? Can somebody tell me what I am!"<sup>84</sup> At last relieved from the difficulties of establishing his identity and having written his final journal entry, Feraoun died assassinated by French terrorists, neither a traitor nor a hero.

### Conclusions

Attentive readings of Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre* and *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* reveal Feraoun's personal identity struggle as a French-educated Algerian prior to and during the war for independence. Both works shed light on the self-identification difficulties of a man who felt deeply connected to France and to Algeria and found himself by asserting his mixed loyalties. In his first novel, *Le Fils du pauvre*, Feraoun told the story of his growing up in Kabylia, his French educational journey, and the harsh realities of life in Kabylia during and following World War II by effortlessly blending his sense of belonging to both cultures. He accomplished this through the ambiguous nature of this autobiographical novel, his use of the French language to write about life in Kabylia, and his choice to ascribe his life story to a character—Menrad Fouroulou—while still writing a novel—an occidental art form—in addition to his use of European literary references to talk about his upbringing in Kabylia. This *mélange* of French and Algerian elements points to the internal identity struggle Feraoun experienced as he tried to reconcile his ties to both cultures.

*Journal* allowed Feraoun to meditate on the effects of the war on both sides of the conflict. His identity struggle is apparent in his daily musings because the war affects him and those around him on a personal level while he lived first in Kabylia and later when he moved to

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<sup>84</sup> Feraoun, *Journal, 1955-1962*, 65-66.

Algiers. In one entry, Feraoun rhetorically asked what his proper “label” was, and—knowing that he did not actually want one—asked that one be given to him to end his miserable identity anxiety.

A number of entries reveal Feraoun’s concern for post-colonial Algeria, especially the effect of violence on Algerian society, the growing power of the nationalist party, the FLN’s dangerous intertwining of Islam and patriotism, and the determination to annihilate all remnants of the colonial period—Feraoun was especially intolerant of the destruction of school buildings. Feraoun’s *Journal* not only recorded his feelings about his own identity, but also the shift in the way that those around him treated him. Crying out against the lies that his “adoptive French mother” fed him, Feraoun came to terms with the fact that although he felt culturally French, no one else would ever qualify him that way; addressing the lies the colonial system told the Algerians indicated Feraoun’s disenchantment with France and her so-called universal values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Along with his disappointment in his adoptive culture, Feraoun abandoned his hope for a fraternal partnership between France and Algeria as the war droned on.

Mouloud Feraoun, an ambiguous Algerian, amidst his struggle for identity, consistently acted upon his loyalty to his French and Kabyle culture. His admiration for the French manifested itself in his profession as a schoolteacher and his use of devices and concepts he learned through the colonial education system. On the other hand, his apparent allegiance and love for the Algerian people are evident in his honoring of North African traditions, his warnings against future strife in Algeria, as well as his insistence against ever betraying his people. Feraoun’s struggle to define himself is evident in *Le Fils du pauvre* and *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*. Mouloud Feraoun, “Algerian writer of the French language,”<sup>85</sup> did not die “seated between two chairs,” but very well seated on his own, saddened by the failure of the French to live up to their proclaimed values, yet enthusiastic for the future of Algeria, a unique voice seeking the truth of the colonial situation to help guide future generations of Algerians.<sup>86</sup>

### **Mohamed Moulessehoul (Yasmina Khadra)**

Mohamed Moulessehoul of the Doui Meniâ tribe was born on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1955 in Kénadsa in the Sahara Desert of southwestern Algeria. In September 1964, at the age of nine, Moulessehoul’s father dropped him off at *l’École Nationale des Cadets de la Révolution*, a military academy near Tlemcen where he would begin his military career. During his thirty-six year military career, Moulessehoul published twelve books under the pseudonym “Yasmina Khadra”—his wife’s first two names—to avoid military censorship of his works. Having left the army in 2000 to devote himself entirely to his literary career, “Yasmina Khadra” revealed *his* true identity in 2001 to the shock of fans and critics of his works. Khadra is married with three children and currently lives in Aix-en-Provence, France; he has been the director of the Algerian Cultural Center in Paris, France since 2007.

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<sup>85</sup> Thenault, Mouloud Feraoun, 65. (my translation).

<sup>86</sup> McNair, *An Algerian-American Primer*, 190.

An interview of Yasmina Khadra conducted by Youcef Merahi was transcribed in a short book, entitled, *Qui êtes-vous, Monsieur Khadra? (Who Are You, Mr. Khadra?)*. The first question Merahi asked Khadra concerned how the interviewer should address the author; Khadra replied that Merahi can address him “like everyone else does, as Yasmina Khadra.” Khadra decided to keep the pseudonym even after having revealed his true male—and former military—identity. When asked why he continued to write behind a woman’s penname, he replied that it is a way for him to defend femininity, and show that there is no shame in recognizing the courage and the strength of women: “I am proud to write under a woman’s penname. It increases my self-esteem and places me on the same level as all of the women whom I love and admire: my wife, my mother, my daughters, my sisters, Hassiba Boulmerka...” In his view, Algerian women never betray their people or break promises in trying times.<sup>87</sup>

Khadra served in the post-colonial Algerian army for over thirty years as a lieutenant, a captain, and a major; educated in French and Arabic at successive military academies, he chose to write French novels. Khadra stated in his interview with Merahi that he refused to let his military identification number and his military career sum up his entire person.<sup>88</sup> He took a penname to reinvent himself, to distance himself from his military identity and to create a new identity: a French writer.

Yasmina Khadra enjoyed success in France and was quickly “clasped to the Gallic literary bosom as a writer who would, finally, give an insight into what Arab women were really thinking.”<sup>89</sup> At the time, the Algerian military faced opprobrium in the French media as a result of the army’s violent conflict with armed Islamist radicals. For this reason, in 2001 when Yasmina Khadra revealed his true identity, the French literary community was utterly shocked. To add to the French literary community’s distress, this man not only served in the Algerian army, but held positions of high authority. “There were many misunderstandings because people found it hard to understand a writer who was a soldier,” Khadra confided in an interview with a British newspaper, “I had to really fight against those who did not appreciate my work because they pigeonholed me as some sort of brute who was responsible for military massacres.”<sup>90</sup>

In response to the allegations accusing the Algerian army of massacring civilians during the repression of the Islamist radicals, Khadra countered, “In the eight years I led the fight against terrorism, there were no massacres. Let me tell you, it was a hard battle—there is no honesty or integrity among the pseudo-intellectuals I had to take on. There’s much more honesty and integrity among soldiers, trust me.”<sup>91</sup> Khadra had to cope with his readers’ misunderstanding of his military identity. Somewhat paradoxically, writing under the name Yasmina Khadra may have been a way to simplify his identity: he was an Algerian woman writer. Certainly, readers had preconceptions about what that might mean, but nothing like those he expected “pseudo intellectuals” would have toward an officer or what his military peers might think of a French

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<sup>87</sup> Khadra, Y., & Merahi, Y. (2007). *Qui êtes-vous, Monsieur Khadra?* (p. 17, 19-20). Algiers, Algeria: Éditions Sedia

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 20

<sup>89</sup> Jeffries, S. (2005, June 22). G2: Inside Story: Reader, I'm a he: When novels by 'Yasmina Khadra' first appeared, literary France thought it had at last found the authentic voice of the Arab woman. But then she turned out to be a man—and not just a man but a veteran Algerian army officer. Stuart Jeffries meets Mohammed Moulessehoul. *The Guardian (London)*, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

writer and poet. The adoption of a penname uncomplicated Khadra's life in a number of ways; he was able to write freely and avoid military censorship, and maybe writing as a woman was the best disguise.

Yasmina Khadra exhibited a "Westernized" consciousness of women that one would not typically expect from a man of his background. When asked why he chose to write under his wife's name in particular, he responded, "You don't understand, it was my wife who suggested that I use her name." Khadra affectionately referred to his mother as the reason that he remained in the army even though he itched to become a writer, "For my mother it was her greatest hope that I was a soldier and continued the work my father had done. I [stayed in the army] to console my mother. I willingly sacrificed 36 years of my life for her."<sup>92</sup> In these references to the women in his life Khadra comes off as a true romantic; his wife "insisted" that he use her name and he selflessly remained in the army for the sake of his mother's dreams. I think he behaves like a stereotypical Frenchman—charming, and a true gentleman with regard for women and their opinions.

Khadra cited his elder Algerian writers—including Mouloud Feraoun—as inspiration to tackle writing himself. Khadra admitted that the first time he read the work of Algerian poet Malak Haddad he was awestruck, and decided that he too would create irresistible literature.<sup>93</sup> Khadra also cited Albert Camus and John Steinbeck as inspirations for his writing. Khadra presented himself as versatile because of his immersion in two literary traditions: "I have written a western tragedy, but also a book that is filled with eastern storytelling. When there are two perspectives there's a better chance of understanding."<sup>94</sup>

Khadra's identity is full of contradictions. He was an army officer and a novelist; he is a man with a woman's name. He was educated in French and Arabic, born in the Sahara desert, but currently lives in France, and inspired by Algerian and Western authors. Mohammed Moulessehouel seems to have embraced his multi-faceted identity and denies its contradictory nature. He rejected the categories of "soldier" or "Arab woman writer" as definitive, responding in his own way to expectations about the "native intellectual" even if his public might see him as a man with a mask or a (woman) writer who turned out to be a fraud.

### *L'Écrivain (The Writer)*

*L'Écrivain*, published in 2001, played an integral role in the "unveiling" of Yasmina Khadra. This first-person autobiography told the story of Moulessehouel's growing up in the military academies of Tlemcen and Koléa. Divulged in the title, this autobiography focused on Khadra's maturation into a young man who came to excel in and appreciate reading and writing first in Arabic and then increasingly in French; Khadra believed that he was destined to become a writer: "I feel deeply that I was brought into this world to write."<sup>95</sup> The title speaks to the type of writer that Yasmina Khadra became—a French writer:

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<sup>92</sup> Jefferies, G2: Inside story, 4

<sup>93</sup> Khadra & Merahi, *Qui êtes-vous*, 22

<sup>94</sup> Jefferies, G2: Inside Story, 4

<sup>95</sup> Khadra & Merahi, *Qui êtes-vous*, 20



It was while reading *Le Petit Poucet* that the light came on and I received a revelation. The verb was a gift from above. I was born to write! In reading this beautiful book, thumbing the splendidly illustrated pages, dazzled with profound affection, I was incurably fixated: I had to write books... I was *fascinated* by words... this assembly of dead characters who, arranged between a capital letter and a period, suddenly came back to life, became sentences... and demonstrated strength and spirit.<sup>96</sup>

In 1966, Khadra wrote his first text, a readaptation of the *Le Petit Poucet* in Arabic; he submitted his story to his teacher who relayed it to the one of the lieutenants at the academy. Khadra's inaugural attempt at literature earned him a spot on the list "des récompensés" ("rewarded") or the students who performed well enough during the week who received the privilege of attending a soccer game at the local stadium on Saturday afternoon.<sup>97</sup>

Despite this instance of success, Khadra revealed that during his first few years as a cadet that he performed best in his Arabic classes and did very poorly in his French classes until he entered middle and high school at Koléa. There, no matter how well he did in his Arabic classes, his Arabic teachers took offense to the fact that a young boy attempted to produce traditional Arabic poetry. Khadra informed his readers that, in fact, he was a descendant of revered Algerian poets of old such as Sidi Abderrahmane Moulessehoul and Sidi Ahmed Moulessehoul.<sup>98</sup> In contrast, even though Khadra did not excel in his French classes, he received more encouragement from his French teachers. Khadra credited his eighth grade French teacher, M. Kouadri for solidifying French as Khadra's "writer's language."<sup>99</sup>

Even though he chose French as his language of composition, Khadra still felt a deep connection to the land of his ancestors, Algeria, and her people. In a particular passage, he romanticized the *souk* market he encountered while living with his mother in Petit Lac, a slum of Oran:

Since I was a little boy, I have always been drawn to markets. Their fairground atmosphere takes me back to my long-lost tribe, replenishes me in my authenticity. This is also another way for me to escape the blues. Every time I feel down, I head to a market—any market—and I experience lasting relief. In addition to its therapeutic virtues, the *souk* represents Algeria: profound, hardy and rough, bustling and stubborn, conscious of going adrift but not caring enough to prevent it.<sup>100</sup>

Khadra consistently confessed his admiration for the mystery and hidden beauty embedded in his ancestors and in his vast country. His country's cultural traditions—like the *souk*—soothed him and, in a way, helped to remind him of who he was and where he was from as he fought to find his place in the world.

Khadra continued to develop his Francophone literary talents, and even started a drama club at the academy—under the guidance of Algerian author and playwright Slimane Benaïssa—and he wrote and produced plays in both languages. Khadra regularly produced short stories and

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<sup>96</sup> Khadra, Y. (2001). *L'Écrivain* (p. 88-89). Paris, France: Julliard. (my translation)

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 89

<sup>98</sup> Khadra & Merahi, *Qui êtes-vous*, 20

<sup>99</sup> Khadra, *L'Écrivain*, 151

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 74-75 (my translation).

essays which one of his friends faithfully critiqued for him; another one of the cadets acted as Khadra's literary agent and sold his works to the benefit of both of them. Khadra earned the respect of his peers through his genius as a playwright, an actor, and as a storyteller. While at Koléa, Khadra's classmates highly anticipated his return from a visit home because he would satisfy their craving for excitement with funny and emotional stories. As soon as Khadra's silhouette became visible on as he approached the academy, someone would alert the others, "Hey, guys! Moulessehoul is coming" and the cadets would fill the dormitory as Khadra got closer, "the cadets would greet me, loudly and full of joy." Khadra did not bother to unpack before launching into his whimsical narratives.<sup>101</sup>

Khadra did not, in the end, resist the tough discipline of the military, and instead of losing himself, he suggested he found himself in this strict environment in his account of the painful separation from the father he loved. After his father left his mother and her seven children to be with another woman, Khadra lost respect for him and recognized that the academy was his true home. While the cadets spent their summer break at Port-aux-Poules, a summer camp fifty kilometers west of Oran, Khadra's father paid his son an impromptu visit:

His visit shook me, as though lightening zapped through me. But I stood my ground. Somewhere, I believe that he [Khadra's father] will always be the man I used to think could be God, I just lost faith in him. He was not alone... A little ways away, a pregnant woman was watching me... My attitude threw him off a bit. He was not sure how to interpret my behavior: I had saluted him militarily and stayed "at attention" ... For a long time we stared at each other in silence... a confused and crippling silence... I was not upset with him, no, I just felt like we did not have anything more to say to each other. This saddened me; I was much sadder than him, sadder than the entire world... For me, a universe had crumbled and an age had come to an end. Without giving him the chance to hold me back, I took a step back, brought my hand to my temple in an impeccable salute, turned around and returned to my instructors, to my *real* family... My heart had officially switched sides.<sup>102</sup>

At this point, Khadra accepted this military family as his "*real*" family. The challenge was to define himself as a French writer and as Cadet Matricule 129.

Khadra quickly learned that in the army, no one was supposed to stand out or be special; everyone must be on an equal plane so as not to jeopardize the established hierarchy of power. He uses the following story to convey the situation. At the academy, during Ramadan, some boys were late to the mess hall to eat the morning meal before the observation of the fast. When the supervisors did not let the tardy boys in, they began to kick at the doors and bang on the windows of the mess hall and their comrades eating inside the hall demanded that their peers be let in to eat. Chaos ensued, including a fight involving officials of the academy and students who demanded to speak to the commander in chief of the academy. Since such mutiny had no precedent, the administration was unsure of how to handle such behavior. During these events, Khadra had been sitting in a classroom working on a collection of short stories; he heard the commotion, but did not participate in the protests. Yet, he received the blame for the cadets' behavior because all of the cadets talk about him; he was too popular and the military will not

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<sup>101</sup> Khadra, *L'écrivain*, 187 (my translation)

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 92-93 (my translation).

tolerate “celebrities” or “superstars.” This marked his first encounter with military censorship and the reality that he cannot be who he truly is—or aspires to be—as long as the depersonalizing military confiscates his personal sense of self.

Unable to write freely as a soldier and wary of ostracism by the literary community because of his military past, Khadra sees himself as an outsider: “If I had to sum up my life in one word, I would choose the word ‘exclusion,’ I feel like that word was created for me.” Khadra himself rejects all labels but the one he ascribes to himself: *l’écrivain*, “to write is to be free.”<sup>103</sup>

### *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit (What the Day Owes the Night)*

One of Khadra’s best-selling novels, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, published in 2008, is significant to this study because it tells the story of Younes, who transformed from a poor, illiterate Arab boy from the countryside into “Jonas”—an assimilated, French-educated, young man from a well-to-do family living in a European-Algerian coastal town.<sup>104</sup> Younes—who is the protagonist and the narrator of the novel—embodied the idea of the divided self as he struggled with his identity as an Arab or as a “European through education and assimilation.”

Khadra decided to situate this novel in the years of the generation before him. This novel begins in the 1930s and chronicles the American forces’ entry into Algeria in the 1940s during World War II. The novel covers the 1950s and 1960s leading up to and during the Algerian War for Independence, stops in 1964, and resumes in 2008 in the final chapter. Khadra’s novel creates a character who is pressured to pick “sides”—the French or the Algerian side—but Younes chooses not to rebel with the Algerians. This is contrary to Fanon and Memmi’s view that rebellion is the only way for the colonized to satisfy his sense of justice and realize himself. In his sympathetic portrayal of Younes, Khadra demonstrates the difficulty of the choice between the two cultures and suggests that choosing not to fight can be an act of defining oneself just as meaningful as choosing to fight.

The first instances of Younes’ double nature can be found in the mixed marriage of his adoptive parents and his acquisition of a new name. Younes and his biological family relocated from the Algerian countryside to the slums of Oran when his father’s fields were destroyed in a fire; in the slums, his father was robbed by a notorious mugger and lost all of his savings. As a result of these misfortunes, Younes’ father entrusted the well-being of his only son to his brother, Mahi—an Arab—and his wife Germaine—a European. This mixed couple had no children of their own and ran a pharmacy together in the European part of Oran; their marriage represents the possible harmony between the Europeans and the Algerians. They treated Younes as their son and renamed him “Jonas;” initially confused, Younes came to accept this new name, which marked the beginning of his metamorphosis into an assimilated European man.

Younes’ struggle with identity formation also manifests itself during his education in Oran and in Río Salado. One day in elementary school, Younes witnessed the humiliation of one of his Arab classmates who, having forgotten his homework, was forced to stand in front of the class and attribute his absentmindedness to the supposed faineance of his race. Appalled and

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<sup>103</sup> Khadra & Merahi, *Qui êtes-vous*, 25, 27 (my translation).

<sup>104</sup> I will refer to the protagonist of the novel by his Arabic name, “Younes.”

embarrassed for his classmate, Younes came home angry from school and asked his uncle if Arabs are lazy. Mahi replied, “We are not lazy. We just take the time to live... for [the Europeans], time is money. For us, time has no price attached to it. A cup of tea is sufficient for our happiness, but for them, no happiness is enough.”<sup>105</sup> This embarrassment from elementary school contrasted with Younes’ later easier integration into a group of European boys in Río who treated him as an equal.

Even though Río Salado was a primarily a European town, Younes connected with its agrarian character because it reminded him of his own rural roots, or his identity before his assimilation to European culture. Mesmerized by his radiant, sun-bathed, coastal surroundings, Younes felt right at home:

Born and raised in the fields, I recovered my old points of reference, the smell of agriculture and the silence of the earth. I was reborn as a farmer, happy to discover that my city clothes had not corrupted my soul. If the city was an illusion, the countryside will be an ever-deepening emotion.<sup>106</sup>

The idyll of Río, however, proved to be superficial. Khadra illustrates Younes’ uncomfortable encounters with racism among his European friends in one scene at the beach, where Younes and his friends watched with mounting horror as André continued to send Jelloul—his Arab valet—on foot back and forth from the beach to the inland town on petty errands during a serious heat wave. The fourth time André sent Jelloul back to the village, Fabrice and José protested while Younes remained silent:

-It’s the only way to keep him awake, André said, putting his arms behind his head. If you let him alone one second, you’ll hear him snoring.

-It’s at least 37 degrees, Fabrice pleaded. The poor devil is skin and bones like you and me. He’s going to get sunstroke....

-This is none of your business José, you don’t have any valets... the Arabs are like octopi; you have to beat them into submission.

Realizing that I [Younes] was one of them, he rectified:

-Well... some Arabs.<sup>107</sup>

Once André moved out of earshot, Fabrice confronted Younes about his silence:

-You should have shut him up, Jonas.

-On what subject, I said, disgusted.

-The Arabs. What he said was unacceptable and I was waiting for you to put him in his place.

-He already is in his place, Fabrice. I don’t know mine.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Khadra, Y. (2008). *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*. (p.94) Paris, France: Julliard. (my translation).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 123 (my translation).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 145-146 (my translation).

Younes' last reply demonstrated the young man's uncertainty about his place in the colonial dynamic of dominance and his ambiguous place among his friends—should he have said something to André to defend his people? What kept him silent? This is evidence of Younes' internal division between “Jonas”—his assimilated European self—and “Younes,” his Arab self.

André's continued mistreatment of Jelloul became particularly painful for Younes because it forced him to confront his anomalous situation as an Arab among Europeans. Jelloul's character forced Younes to see himself as Arab and ultimately compels him to choose a “side” in the war for Independence. Younes and Jelloul had a number of different encounters and conversations. During the first of these, Younes got a glimpse of the circumstances of Jelloul's life. One evening, Jelloul came to Younes in need of money to feed his family for a few days because André had beat him up and sent him away without paying him. Jelloul conveyed his confidence to Younes that André would call him back to work for him sooner than later: “André can't do without me. He'll come get me before the end of the week. He won't find a better dog on the market.”<sup>109</sup>

When Younes asked Jelloul why he characterized himself in such a harsh manner, Jelloul offered this reply:

You, you can't understand. You are one of *us*, but you live *their* lifestyle... When you are the only breadwinner of a family composed of a half-crazy mother, a double-amputee father, six brothers and sisters, a grandmother, two disgraced aunts and their offspring, and an uncle who is sick year-round you stop being human... Between the dog and the jackal, the docile beast chooses to have a master.<sup>110</sup>

Younes, astounded by the violence in Jelloul's words, saw an impressive maturity in his peer.

After giving him more than enough money, Younes offered to take Jelloul back to his *douar* on the back of his bike, and there he saw the economic division between the two communities and his eyes were opened to the exploitation and misery of his people. Upon their arrival at the edge of the Arab village, Younes, repulsed by the overwhelming filth and stench emanating from the hamlet, watched in alarm as little boys played naked in the dust as flies buzzed noisily around the whole establishment. Sensing his companion's uneasiness, Jelloul smiled and said to Younes:

This is how our people live, Jonas. Our people who are also your people. Except that they remain stagnant while you're taking it easy... What's wrong? Why aren't you saying anything? You can't believe it, right? ... Now I hope you understand why I was talking to you about being a dog. Even animals would not accept to fall so low.<sup>111</sup>

Sick to his stomach with the misery and the foul odors before him, Younes tried not to vomit as Jelloul continued, “Take a good look at this hellhole. This is our place in this country, the country of our ancestors. Take a good look, Jonas. God has never passed through here.” Horrified, Younes mounted his bike and turned around to leave as Jelloul shouted after him,

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<sup>108</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 146 (my translation)

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 186 (my translation).

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. (my translation).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 188-189 (my translation).

“that’s right *Younes*. Turn your back on the truth about your people and run back to your friends... *Younes*... I hope that you still remember your name... Hey! *Younes*... The world is changing, haven’t you noticed?”<sup>112</sup>

Following his encounter with Jelloul’s village, Younes felt torn between loyalty to his European friends and solidarity with his people.<sup>113</sup> In his mid-twenties, with war on the horizon, Younes often returned to Oran by himself to get away from the drama of Río Salado. While alone, he questioned himself:

Who was I, in Río? Jonas or Younes? Why, when my friends laughed heartily, my laugh lagged behind theirs? Why did I always feel like I had to carve out a space for myself among my friends, and feel like I was guilty of something whenever Jelloul’s eyes met mine? Was I tolerated, integrated, subdued? What was stopping me from fully being *me*, to personify the world in which I evolved, to identify myself with that world while I turned my back on *my people*? A shadow. I was a shadow, indecisive and sensitive.<sup>114</sup>

Jelloul continued to challenge Younes’ ambivalence until the end of the novel; Khadra juxtaposed the two characters to show the extreme course of action Younes could have taken to fight for his country’s independence. Before the outbreak of the war in 1954, Jelloul, falsely accused of murdering Younes’ friend, José—André’s brother—was hauled off by the police to be executed. Unable to save her son, Jelloul’s mother came to Younes to beg him to convince José’s father to stop her son’s execution. An embarrassed Younes attempted to reason with the wealthy vineyard owner to no avail:

-Jelloul could be innocent.

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

-His [Jelloul’s] family came to see me...

-Jonas, my poor Jonas, he interrupted me, you have no idea what you’re talking about. Young man, you were well-brought up, you are integrated, and intelligent. Stay out of this hooligan business. You won’t be as confused.<sup>115</sup>

Even though Younes’ talk with José’s father led nowhere, Jelloul escaped en route to prison when one of the transport vehicle’s tires exploded and the vehicle plunged head first into a pit.

Jelloul joined the resistance movement and sought out Younes when one of his leaders was injured and a group of resistance fighters occupied Younes’ home. This is the occasion of

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<sup>112</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 189 (my translations).

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

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 284 (my translation).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 302 (my translation).

two significant exchanges between Younes and Jelloul. On the first night of his stay, Jelloul pushed Younes to join the fight on the resistance side:

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

-I don't like war.

-It's not about liking or disliking war. Our people are rising up. We are tired of suffering in silence. Of course, you with your butt between two chairs, you can maneuver at will. You can pick the side that benefits you.<sup>116</sup>

Jelloul mocked his noncombatant peer's concern only with saving his own skin, "the war claims hundreds of lives every day and doesn't affect you. I would shoot you like a dog if I wasn't indebted to you... Actually, can you explain why I have a hard time calling you Younes?"<sup>117</sup> With that last contemptuous question, Jelloul associated Younes' Arab name with his Arab identity and with the war effort. Because Younes refused to partake in the war at all—not even on his people's side—Jelloul had a hard time respecting Younes' "Arabness."

For Jelloul, to be a man is to hold a gun, and he demonstrated this belief when he put a fully-loaded revolver in Younes' hands—"the coolness of the metal sent chills down my spine." When Younes did not accept it, Jelloul disparaged him: "Frankly Younes, my heart bleeds for you. Only the lowest of the low would pass over a grand destiny," before taking the revolver back.<sup>118</sup>

Finally, Younes fought back—challenging Jelloul's association of the gun with manly character. At this moment, Younes took a stand and asserted his right to be independent:

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

-What do you know about cowardice, Jelloul? Who do you think embodies that characteristic? The unarmed man who has a gun to head or the one who threatens to blow out his brains?

He glared at me with disgust.

-I am not a coward, Jelloul. I am not deaf or blind, and I'm not made of concrete. If you must know, nothing on this earth matters to me. Not even the gun that allows you to treat

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<sup>116</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 337 (my translation).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 339 (my translation).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 341 (my translation).

others with contempt. Was it not humiliation that compelled you to carry a weapon? Why are you exercising this yourself today?<sup>119</sup>

Jelloul stopped confronting Younes after that day.

Younes chose not to take up arms, but helped the resistance by providing the medical supplies from his pharmacy needed to help the resistance's infirmary who sent him a list of what was needed in advance. When arrested for collaboration and tortured for the purpose of obtaining information about the resistance, Younes did not betray his people and reveal anyone's names. He was rescued from torture and further questioning by a notable European from Río Salado—Pépé Rucillio—who advocated for his release.

Younes' experience in the Algerian resistance terminated his ability to relate to Germaine. In helping the resistance, Younes became "an Algerian man" as per Jelloul's way of thinking and this estranged him from his European adoptive mother. Germaine's initial happiness to recover her son alive evaporated at the coldness of Younes' tone as he questioned her about how Pépé Rucillio was able to save him; hurt, Germaine became angry and resentful of her adopted son. Younes described their falling-out: "I understood that the rope that kept me attached to her had just been unraveled, that the woman who had been everything to me—my mother, my good fairy, my sister, my accomplice, my confidant and my friend—now only saw a stranger in me."<sup>120</sup>

Jelloul and Younes had one final encounter when the war ended in the spring of 1962 in which Jelloul repaid Younes for lending him money and taking him home years ago. Jelloul had moved up to the rank of lieutenant in the Algerian army and sent a car to Río to bring Younes to Oran to finally repay his debt. One of Younes' European friends—Jean-Christophe—was a militant in the *Organization de l'armée secrete*, a pro-colonialism French terrorist organization. Jelloul made sure that Younes' friend stayed alive so that Younes could be the one to set him free; Jelloul told Younes:

I have not forgotten the day when you gave me money and took me back to my village on your bike. For you, it was nothing. For me, it was a revelation: I had just discovered that the Arab, the fine Arab, the Arab dignified and generous was not an old myth, nor what the *colon* made of him... I am not learned enough to explain exactly what happened in my head that day, but it changed my life.<sup>121</sup>

The day that Younes took Jelloul home was significant for both individuals. Younes's eyes were opened to the misery of most Algerians and the divide between the colonizer and the colonized and Jelloul saw that Younes was not one of "them"—the Europeans—but an Arab. After freeing his old friend, Younes stayed in Río Salado—El Malah after independence—and continued to live there in the present day when the novel ends.

At the end of the novel, Younes appeared to be comfortable in his own skin. He chose to remain in Algeria and still maintained close ties with his European friends. They still accepted Younes for who he is, which points to the possible fraternity between the Algerian and the

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<sup>119</sup> Khadra, *Ce que le jour*, 343 (my translation).

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 352 (my translation).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 368 (my translation).



Europeans. The novel concludes with Younes and his European friends gathered in Aix-en-Provence to pay their respects to Émilie—one of their deceased friend's wife—who recently passed away. Younes and his friends talked about the Algeria that they knew, before independence and Younes updated everyone on the current state of affairs in Ríó/El Malah and in Algeria. Called over the intercom in the airport to report to his gate to catch his plane back to Oran as “Monsieur Mahieddine Younes,” the protagonist was at peace with his Algerian-ess as well as his ties to the European community.

In conclusion, in his masterpiece of French romance literature, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, Khadra commented on the divided self through the main character of the novel, Younes. Jelloul's character was particularly significant because through this character, Khadra brought attention to Younes' growing awareness of what it meant to be Arab or European in Algeria and his struggle to define himself. A series of oppositions—Arab father figure and European adoptive mother, “Younes” and “Jonas,” resistance fighter Jelloul and his European friends, the European town of Ríó Salado and the Arab countryside, noninvolvement and supporting the uprising of his people—deeply affected Younes as he tried to reconcile all of the components of his identity. These contradictions first served to point out Younes' dividedness, but Younes' character also showed that these opposing factors could exist in harmony with one another. Through Younes, Khadra demonstrated that one can be at peace with oneself through the nonpartisan emotion of love—love of family, love of country, love of friends.

### *Conclusion*

Two of Yasmina Khadra's works analyzed in this paper—*L'Écrivain* and *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*—deal with the concept of the divided self; Khadra is personally familiar with the difficulty of identity conflicts, having experienced exclusion from the military milieu because of his vocation to be a writer and rejection from the literary community as a result of this military past. *L'Écrivain*, Khadra's autobiography, discussed the impossibility of combining his compelling vocation to be a writer in the environment of the tough military academies. *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* is a romance novel whose protagonist, Younes/Jonas, was unsure of his feelings about his place among his friends, among his own people, and in the war for Algerian independence. Through the character Jelloul, Khadra emphasized the evolution of Younes' understanding of what it meant to be European or Arab in Algeria. Younes experienced this internal conflict in terms of various oppositions.

Khadra's own struggles with identity as a writer and as a military officer contributed to the realism and the honesty of his autobiography and transpire in the character of Younes/Jonas. Khadra's writings contain an overarching humanist message that cooperation between differing cultures—military and literary, and French and Arab—was and is possible through the universal emotion of love. Love for family—military for Khadra a mix of Arab and European parents for Younes; love for country—Algeria, and love of friends—European for Younes and fellow cadets for Khadra, provided relief for the discomfort of the divided self in Khadra's view.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Mouloud Feraoun and Yasmina Khadra each expressed their struggles with their identity in their novels and autobiographies and they rejected the notion put forth by Fanon and Memmi that one cannot be both culturally French and Algerian. The autobiographies of the authors explained their experience with their identity struggle, and in their novels, the authors ascribed their internal conflicts to a protagonist to illustrate the effects of and coping strategies for this identity conflict.

Living during colonization and dying days before its end, Feraoun wanted freedom for Algeria, but did not hide his disappointment in France for failing to uphold the admirable values he learned in school; Feraoun desired to see Algeria as an independent state, but he also desired fraternity between France and her former colony. He expressed these feelings toward France and Algeria in *Le Fils du pauvre* through the character of Fouroulou and his fellow Kabyles, and in *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War* where his introspective soliloquies revealed the extent to which Feraoun refused “to pick sides” and simply wished to remain seated in his own “chair.”

A member of the following generation of Algerians, Khadra lived in post-colonial Algeria. He desired acceptance from his new Algerian military “family,” but this clashed with his self-proclaimed destiny to become a French writer; now that his military career is over, instead of allowing people to pigeonhole him as one thing—a violent military officer—or another—an imposter—Khadra seeks to prove that two seemingly irreconcilable identities can exist in harmony. Khadra demonstrated this coming to terms with one’s differing identities through his own story about discovering his love for writing in French in *L’Écrivain*. Khadra’s novel, *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, takes place prior to and during the Algerian war, and through the character of Younes—who goes through the identity conflict of feeling pressured but unable to choose sides—Khadra shows that just as it is possible for Younes to make peace with the different facets of his identity, so Khadra also can be at peace with his identity.

Though each generation had different problems complicating the authors’ identity struggles, they both reject the impossibility of being both French and Algerian and envelope their opposition in an overarching positive message of intercultural fraternity and cooperation. In Feraoun’s generation, the primary concern was whether to support the French—who educated him—or to support the Algerian resistance and his people; this generation of Algerians also feared that their non-involvement in the war meant betrayal to their people, but involvement in the war meant betrayal to the French who had saved them from a life of poverty by educating them. Feraoun reconciled his internal conflict by asserting his comfort “sitting on his own” instead of being divided between two opposing sides. Khadra’s generation sought a firm declaration of Algerian-ness in the first few years following independence. Khadra experienced rejection from the military during his career and from the literary community following the end of his military career. Khadra, however, refused to be limited to one identity or the other. He finds peace in defining himself.

This research shows how despite Fanon and Memmi’s claims that the “native intellectual” cannot be French and Algerian, Feraoun and Khadra reject this notion. They defined themselves first and foremost as writers. Their autobiographies and novels are a testament to this justification for self-definition in the compartmentalized environment of colonial and post-

colonial Algeria. Their work argues for and is evidence of a more nuanced view of the cultural products of colonialism. They rejected simple dichotomies in defining individuals and culture and showed how francophone literature can be distinctively hybrid. Each man, writing in French, was informed by French (and even American) literary culture and models in addition to Arabic literary culture and models. They both wrote about subjects that are meaningful to them and that make sense of their experiences as men of more than one name and multiple identity facets.

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