

Divided Worlds, Distorted Selves: Coloniality and the Process of Identification in Yasmina Khadra's *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*

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Frantz Fanon argues that colonial societies, as a façade, are marked with an extreme demographic split within the social space (2002: 41). This division is achieved by maintaining a firm separation between the Colonizer/White world and that of the Colonized/Non-White (Fanon, 2002: 41). However, on the subsurface, echoing Homi Bhabha's notion of the process of identification (2010: 73–74), there lies an instituted channel generated due to the unavoidable interaction between the two sides — the locus where the process of identification and the constant negotiation of identities take place.

The division of space within colonial societies is conducted through a systemic process of seizure of land. This process signifies an aggression against the colonized and an attempt at erasing their collective identity. Fanon argues that for the colonized, 'la valeur la plus essentielle, parce que la plus concrète, c'est d'abord la terre: la terre qui doit assurer le pain et, bien sûr, la dignité' (2002: 47).¹ However, the value of land exceeds material well-being; its loss is not just the loss of physical territory, as Pramod Nayar argues, it is a loss of cultural space, 'the loss of tradition, ways of living and cultural memory because [...] these are all rooted in a sense of place' (2010: 154). For the colonizer, the acquired land becomes a source of identity formation. Controlling land allows the construction of a divided world that dictates the space that each collective identity occupies (Fanon, 2002: 42–43), thus preserving the differential relation that governs the process of identification.

¹ '[t]he value that is most essential, because the most concrete, is land: the land which will bring them bread and, most importantly, dignity'. All translations my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Algerian author Yasmina Khadra's *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* [What the Day Owes the Night] offers an insight into the process of identification in colonial societies. The novel establishes a link between native Algerians and their land as a means of constructing and sustaining a collective identity. First, Khadra employs multiple literary strategies to unpack how this link becomes a target for a French colonial project that seeks to erase Algerian collective identity through systemically dispossessing natives of their lands. Second, the novel dismantles the myth of an assimilating project that the colonizer seeks to introduce for native Algerians. These Algerians, dispossessed of land as a factor of their identity formation, regardless of how they react to the project, whether with acceptance or with rejection, are prevented from being integrated into the French model. Furthermore, this assimilating project proves to be a strategy that creates a fragmentation within the pre-existing collective identity that preceded colonial presence, rather than a project that seeks to fulfil the aims of the so-called civilizing mission.

In the historical context of French Algeria, especially during the latter half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, and faced with the continuous growth of Algerian nationalist movements, French colonial authorities implemented multiple tactics to dismantle any unified attempts at constructing a collective imaginary artefact of an Algerian nation that was distinctly non-French (Kanoun, 2012: 149). A united nationalist front would inevitably grow and become a source of contestation, necessitating the project of assimilation as a crucial strategy of prevention by French colonial authorities.

When analysing the situation of the colonized, Albert Memmi rightly points to the two paths put forward for the colonized, the first being total revolt (1973: 167), which goes against the desires of the colonial system. The second option is for the colonized to be assimilated — a process that is both illogical and unattainable, yet necessary for the sustainment of the colonial discourse (Memmi, 1973: 102; Bernasconi, 2011: 40). In its essence, this colonial project is

aimed at a superficial integration of multiple educated Algerians within a French-Algerian society. The end goal is not a socio-political project that maps a path for natives towards a real notion of citizenship. The politics of coloniality necessitates the presence of a reified collective identity of the colonized in order for the colonizer to be able to map their distinct image of totality (Fanon, 2001: 28). Therefore, a path for the colonized that would insinuate the abolition of the social borders that guarantee the maintenance of the differential relation that governs the process of identification threatens one of the main notions of the colonizer's identity formation. Contrarily, the end goal is the dismantling of what Fanon labels 'la zone de non-être' ['the zone of non-being'] (1952: 6) from national discourse and collective imagination. The undoing of this zone requires the creation of a social category that functions as an outlet for the accumulated frustration of the colonized.

Analysing *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* and its exploration of the project of assimilation in colonial Algeria contributes to the ongoing debate on the nostalgic outlook towards French colonial legacies and its revisionist endeavours. Such analysis highlights the risk of neglecting other means of subjugation implemented by French colonial authorities. Whereas the focus on the binary opposition of Colonizer/Colonized in colonial Algeria can easily translate to a discourse of condemnation of colonial atrocities, the project of assimilation under colonial occupation can be qualified, mistakenly, as a political attempt to reform the colonial system, or as an indicator of the positive role that French presence had in Algeria.

By the end of the Algerian Revolution (1954 — 1962), as Kate Marsh rightly argues, the expulsion 'of nearly one million so-called *pièds-noirs* from Algeria, and the arrival of *harkis* in the Hexagone, provided the ideal conditions for the creation of nostalgia' (2010: 15). The so-called exodus fostered an acute 'melancholic regret for birthplace or home, a feeling which in this instance is symbiotic with a belief in France's territorial loss' (Marsh, 2010: 15). The integration of these discourses in popular culture became a French state policy, especially

after *la loi du 23 février 2005*, in which ‘le rôle positif de présence française outre-mer en Afrique du nord’ was mandated in school curriculums.² This take on painful historical events goes beyond the mere attempt at imposing a specific version of history (Marsh, 2010: 15). It highlights that ‘la majorité de l’opinion, certains groupes activistes et une bonne partie des hommes politiques sont prêts à reprendre comme des vérités les illusions d’hier’ (Manceron, 2007: 33).³ More importantly, it accentuates the aforementioned argument that the colonial differential relation of identity formation, at the subsurface level of identity negotiation in colonial Algeria, continues to play an important role in the metropole. This colonial nostalgia, translated to absurd laws that seek to paint colonization with a positive brush, is a form of a cultural practice that preserves and normalizes a version of colonial violence.

Ce que le jour doit à la nuit reveals that any system of identity formation that constructs and sustains images of totality based on a differential relation is a system that is bound to produce flawed collective identities, once the colonial structure is subverted. In the case of the world of *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, the subversion is presented in the form of a literal transfer of land ownership from the European settlers back to native Algerians. The collective identities that the colonial system produced, however, continue to exist in a post-colonial world: the colonizers are expelled to France, yet their distorted form of French-Algerianness is replaced with the collective identity of *pieds-noirs*. Similarly, the Algerians who rejected the notion of a distinct and independent Algeria continue to be identified as *harkis* — a collective identity that remains tied to France rather than independent Algeria. Moreover, the assimilated Algerian, as portrayed by Younes/Jonas, an alienated social category during colonization, continues to struggle with its identity in a post-independent frame. Therefore, the novel forwards the thesis that the Algerian Revolution is a violent process of decolonization that

² For a more detailed analysis of this law and its socio-political implications, see Pierre Boilley (2005).

³ ‘Public opinion, certain activist groups and a significant number of political figures are willing to take the illusions of the past as truthful events’.

results in both repossession and dispossession, in disalienation and alienation where the power structure that governed the binary opposition of Colonizer/Colonized has been reverted. For natives to repossess and disalienate, *les pieds-noirs* must be dispossessed and alienated. The mechanism is not a reproduction of the same systems of injustices, it is solely an uprooting of an inhumane structure that does not accept any other alternatives.

The release of *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* during the debate around *la loi du 23 février 2005*, alongside the novel's depiction of *les pieds-noirs* as longing for a return to Algeria and the destruction of their property by Algerian freedom fighters, have fuelled an identity-based discussion in Algeria that blurred the lines between fiction and reality. The significance of the title of the novel has opened doors to many clashing interpretations. Among the notable misreadings often attributed to the title is the accusation that Khadra's text is an apologetic take on French colonization in which he implies that Algeria owes a debt to its colonizers.⁴ According to this logic, the Algerian work of fiction aligns with the aims of *la loi du 23 février 2005*.

From a different line of thought, in a much lighter tone, Fatima Zohra Bouchakour (2018) offers an elaborate analysis on the notion of space and identity that highlights the binary opposition of the Colonizer/Colonized. However, her analysis of space as an actor in the development of Younes/Jonas's identity risks echoing colonialist narratives. Bouchakour considers the *gourbie*, the original family home and precisely the field that surrounds it, as a factor of regression. She writes that the *gourbie* 'est, avant d'être un point de départ, une paralysie qui prive les personnages de vivre, un renfermement qui les contient en dehors de

⁴ Habri Fatimah Azzahra (2020) reads it as such. Additionally, Hocine Fillali, a novelist and professor of literature at the University of Algiers, follows a similar line of analysis in his piece *Al-Mubashsharūna Bi Al-Dhalāmi* الميشرُون بِالظلام ['To Whom Darkness Was Promised'] (2012), published in a prestigious cultural magazine in Algeria. The title is an interesting wordplay on the Islamic notion of *Al-Mubashsharūna Bi Al-Jannah*, a designated group of ten that have been promised heaven by Allah through a revelation to his prophet. When read in this context, this choice of title frames the article within an interesting dichotomy of heaven and hell, good and evil.

l'espace et de la vie, un inhibiteur qui les empêche d'avancer' (Bouchakour, 2018: 4).⁵

Therefore, she argues,

[afin] d'assurer une émancipation, il est essentiel de procéder à l'éradication de cet espace qui inhibe le récit. [...] Le départ est nécessaire dans l'intention de mettre fin à ce lieu clos, son rejet est donc essentiel pour la suite de la fiction, se débarrasser d'un tel endroit est une opportunité pour l'histoire et pour les personnages de muter en toute liberté en investissant d'autres lieux en mesure de leur garantir une mouvance et un épanouissement (Bouchakour, 2018: 4).⁶

When we take into consideration that what resides outside of this closed space is the world of the colonizer, Bouchakour's notion of emancipation and the integration into *l'espace de la vie* neglects the socio-historical setting of this fictional world. The *gourbie* as a closed space, in a time where native Algerians have been subjugated by the colonizer, represents the struggle of a colonized population denied agency. It is not the *gourbie* itself that prevents the characters from living or from moving forward; it is a reflection of the consequences of the division of space within colonial societies for the subjugated. The world of the colonized is policed, the space that they occupy is bordered (Fanon, 2002: 41), and the collective identity that they generate and sustain is reified (Bhabha, 2010: 74). This strategy is essential for colonial systems to operate. It ensures the constant exploitation of the colonized as a phenomenological point of differentiation from which the colonizer can construct and sustain their own collective identity.

The negligence of the socio-historical setting of this fictional world and its implications resurfaces when Bouchakour addresses the passage in which Younes moves to live with his uncle and Germaine. Bouchakour comments that the process, despite being 'un arrachement',

⁵ 'Before being a place of departure, [the *gourbie*] is a paralyzing space that prevents characters from living, a prison that confines them outside of the space of living, an inhibitor that prevents them from moving forward'.

⁶ 'In order to ensure emancipation, it is essential to move towards the eradication of this space that hinders the narrative. Departure is necessary in order to terminate this enclosed place, its rejection is crucial for the continuation of the novel, getting rid of such a place is an opportunity for the plot and the characters to evolve freely by investing in other places that guarantee them mobility and development'.

represents a step forward towards living, ‘un nouveau départ, il s’agit d’une nouvelle vie parée à se mettre sur les rails pour conquérir d’autres horizons. Pour sa part, enfant issu de famille pauvre ayant tout perdu, vivre chez son oncle est la solution pour prétendre à un avenir meilleur’ (Bouchakour, 2018: 5).⁷ This new life that marks his initial step towards assimilation, the new horizons that this different world offer, are only possible through the destruction of many other gorbies in Algeria.

When reading *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, we must be wary of the propagation of what Walter Mignolo labelled a ‘crooked rhetoric that naturalizes “modernity” as a universal global process and point of arrival’ (Mignolo, 2007: 450). It is a rhetoric that reproduces coloniality through the justification of direct and indirect forms of violence towards societies that have different structural and economic mechanisms (Mignolo, 2007: 450). Instead, what should be highlighted is the fact that in the fictional world of *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, for Germaine to adopt an Algerian child, another family of native Algerians had to be destroyed. Otherwise, this analytical erasure of an unpleasant side of a so-called modernity echoes what Marsh considers a French “national amnesia” (2013: 20). This amnesia is a long dated colonial practice that seeks to protect the image of a glorious imperial past. It even predates the colonial occupation of Algeria and can be traced to the Haitian Revolution and the “embarrassment” that was brought about by “the revolutionary overthrow of French imperial rule by slaves” (Marsh, 2013: 20).

Whereas recent studies have focused on demythologizing illusions of *une colonisation douce* (Marsh, 2013: 127), by analysing cultural and historical productions of French writers and scholars (Marsh, 2010; Strachan, 2010; Watt, 2010), and how *la fracture coloniale* that is caused by colonial nostalgia continues to play a significant role in contemporary French politics

⁷ ‘A new beginning, it consists of a new life ready to get on track in order to conquer new horizons. For him, a kid from a poor family that had lost everything, living with his uncle is the solution for a better future’.

(Marsh, 2013: 21), my analysis highlights the ‘continuities’ that bound the French ‘metropolitan representations and memories of empire’ (Marsh, 2010: 10) to Algeria. I argue that Khadra’s novel, published in the midst of the debate around the positive role of French colonialism, before *la loi du 23 février 2005* was abrogated, unravels, through the lens of an Algerian author, what the former *colons*’ nostalgia truly owes to the population it once subjugated. Contrarily to Magda-Roxana Brumă-Maillebauu (2020), I reject the use of terms such as ‘acculturation’ (2020: 189) to describe Younes/Jonas’ process of identity formation or the type of cultural change that was enforced under colonization. This term deliberately empties the process of its violent and inhumane dimension, suggesting a positive outcome of colonization, and thus falls within what Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang qualify as colonialist moves to innocence ‘which problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity’ (2012: 3).

When Brumă-Maillebauu refers to the character Krimo as a ‘*survivant de la guerre*’ (2020: 194), rather than a *harki*,⁸ she is making an interesting statement. To qualify his comments on the brutality of the Algerian civil war during the 1990s as ‘*des conclusions [...] très dures, mais [qui] reflète la réalité des gens qui contrôlent le pays*’ (Brumă-Maillebauu, 2020: 194)⁹ is a validation of colonialist discourse and nostalgia. These so-called conclusions that demand of Younes/Jonas why it is that since ‘*[les] Français sont partis. Les juifs et les gitans aussi. Vous n’êtes plus qu’entre vous. Alors pourquoi vous entre-dévorez-vous? [...] N’est-ce pas la preuve que vous n’êtes bons qu’à détruire et tuer?*’ (Khadra, 2008: 199)¹⁰ are not intended as a validation but rather an attempt by Khadra to embed the colonialist attitude towards the colonized as savage, violent, and incapable of governing themselves. Clearly, Krimo is not a product of acculturation. He is the result of a failed decolonization process that

⁸ An Algerian who fought with colonial authorities against the independence of Algeria.

⁹ ‘Conclusions that are harsh but [that] reflect the reality of the people who control the country’.

¹⁰ ‘The French are gone. The Jews and the gypsies as well. You’re only among yourselves. So why are you devouring each other? Isn’t this proof that you are only good for destruction and murder?’

deprived him from accessing the zone of nonbeing and rejecting the colonizer. In his insistence on addressing Younes/Jonas with the more distant and formal *vous*, and in reference to Algerians who fought for independence, Krimo is attempting to replicate the creation of the same borders that governed identity formation under colonization. It is only through these borders that Krimo is capable of sustaining his constructed identity, a distinct *nous* image of totality that he wishes to preserve.

The following sections of this chapter offer an analysis of how Younes/Jonas' conflicting identities capture the constant tension of being subjugated by the other.¹¹ This binary opposition allows Khadra to construct an imaginary world that simulates the Manichaean nature of colonial Algeria. Through Younes/Jonas, Khadra enforces Fanon's arguments concerning the divided nature of the colonial world (Fanon, 2002: 41). However, unlike Fanon who states that the borders that separate the two worlds are open only to 'l'interlocuteur valable et institutionnel' [the valid and institutional interlocutor] that is the colonial policeman and soldier (Fanon, 2002: 41), Khadra, as Bouchakour has demonstrated, creates a character that can roam the two worlds freely (2020: 544). Through this literary strategy, Khadra achieves two goals. First, he utilizes Younes as a literary tool through which we are afforded an insight into the native struggle to form a collective identity when dispossessed of land. Second, Younes' transition into Jonas, an identity that is meant to mask his Muslim origins, grants him access to the colonizer's world.¹²

Negating the Zone of Nonbeing

¹¹ Khadra's literary choice behind the two names alludes to the Quranic/Biblical prophet/figure, by recreating his entrapment and isolation in the darkest depths of the sea, after being swallowed by a whale. The story has a dedicated Surah (chapter 10) in Al Quran, entitled *Sūratū Yūnus* — سورة يونس.

¹² It is worth noting that the process behind masking of Younes' identity echoes Fanon's thesis in *Peau noire, masques blancs* in which he remarks that for the black individual/colonized, 'il n'y a qu'un destin. Et il est blanc' ['there is only one destiny. And it is white'] (Fanon, 1952: 8).

In *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, Khadra openly employs the characterization of the narrator Younes/Jonas to challenge the colonial project of assimilation by creating a character that is denied access to a zone of nonbeing. The novel traces a process of identification that is rooted in a colonial era yet whose effects heavily impact post-colonial Algeria and its continuous struggle for a sense of harmonious collective identity. This struggle for a harmonious collective identity extends to the other side of the Mediterranean, as many former French-Algerians — *les pieds-noirs* and *les harkis* — whose process of identity formation is rooted in a colonial past, had to adapt to a different post-colonial reality. Their French-Algerianness becomes a source of tension, as they remain torn between two irreconcilable worlds.

In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Fanon theorizes the interdependency between White and Black collective identities through a racialized lens. Although his analysis in this specific book is primarily concerned with the racialization of the Antillean society and how this affects the construction of black collective identity (Fanon, 1952: 14), his thesis extends to the study of the colonized collective identity in general (Fanon, 1952: 14). The reasons that Fanon provides for such racialization stem from the fact that the construction of collective White identity works in tandem with colonization. This line of thought is not strictly Fanonian; the core of Memmi's work in *Portrait du colonisé, précédé d'un Portrait du colonisateur* also associates racism with the underlying power dynamics that mark colonial societies (1973: 102).

When it comes to identity formation that is dependent on differential relations, under normal circumstances, the differential relation should function as a positive force for identity formation as long as the process embeds the notion of cultural and ethnic differences as part of human experience. Consciousness, the mental mechanism that allows individuals to grasp the notion of identity, 'est [une] activité de transcendance, nous devons savoir aussi que cette transcendance est hantée par le problème de l'amour et de la compréhension' (Fanon, 1952:

6).¹³ The unfixed borders between the self and the other are moulded and reshaped constantly where the notion of the self vis-à-vis the group to which it belongs, as well as its designated other, are regularly challenged and revised. Therefore, the consciousness of the individual ‘est un OUI vibrant aux harmonies cosmiques. Arraché, dispersé, confondu, condamné à voir se dissoudre les unes après les autres les vérités par lui élaborées, il doit cesser de projeter dans le monde une antinomie qui lui est coexistante’ (Fanon, 1952: 6).¹⁴ Processing this transition is facilitated through a mental capacity where the individual explores what Fanon labels ‘la zone de non-être’ [the zone of nonbeing] (Fanon, 1952: 6). This is a zone that allows the individual introspection and the ability to evaluate what they imagine to be their notion of self. Although this zone is ‘une région extraordinairement stérile et aride’ [‘a region that is extremely sterile and arid’], it remains necessary for the process of transcendence (Fanon, 1952: 6). Its necessity is instated because it is only from this place that ‘un authentique surgissement peut prendre naissance’ [an authentic upheaval can be born] (Fanon, 1952: 6).

However, under colonial conditions or in societies that function based on racist narratives, the mental mechanisms that help the individual process their identities are tainted with external circumstances that produce flawed results. Hence, these societies must be categorized as in a state of exceptionality. This exceptionality necessitates that the interdependency between the two collective identities of White/Black and Colonizer/Colonized as two opposed images of self and other cannot, to use Fanon’s words, *vibrate to cosmic harmonies* (Fanon, 1952: 6). The process is rather a violent one, where the collective identity of the oppressed, denied social agency, is moulded on their behalf.

¹³ ‘is a process of transcendence, additionally, we must be aware that this transcendence is haunted by the problems of love and understanding’.

¹⁴ ‘is an affirmation that vibrates with cosmic harmonies. Uprooted, scattered, confounded, doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths that the individual has worked out for themselves one after another, the individual has to abandon projecting onto the world an antinomy that coexists with them’.

When studying the exploration of assimilation in *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* as a project that is aimed at negating the zone of none being, it is important to take the narrative structure of the novel into consideration. The novel is divided into four sections. In each, Younes/Jonas recounts a specific phase of his life. This narrative structure, through the first-person point of view of Younes/Jonas, covers the changes that Algeria witnesses from 1930 to 2008. The novel offers a literary insight into the nation's transition from total colonial subjugation to the slow rise of an Algerian nationalist movement that culminates in a war of liberation. Finally, the plot jumps 50 years after independence and concludes with a 70-year-old Younes/Jonas' visit to France to meet some of the European settlers with whom he grew up.

This narrative strategy offers an imaginary space that constructs sociological organisms bound to a specific point in Algerian history. In each section of the novel, the political and historical conditions of the Algerian nation, embodied in land ownership, play a direct role in shaping the process of identification of Younes/Jonas, the Arabs that he meets during his early childhood, and the European settlers that he befriends. In the first two sections of the novel that cover Younes' pre-adulthood, land is under total control of European settlers. In contrast, the third section culminates in a total war of liberation waged by Algerians where land ownership is under armed dispute and the colonial structure is witnessing its final days. In the concluding section of the novel, Algeria is completely independent and European settlers are expelled from it and scattered throughout France, Spain, and Portugal. What is remarkable about Khadra's plot structure is the juxtaposition that it features. The novel begins as it ends, with a collective identity deprived of its established bond with the land it perceives as its nation. It depicts how land ownership has been obtained and controlled by the European settlers through violence, and how, similarly, it is liberated and restored to the control of native Algerians through

violence. Therefore, it echoes Fanon's thesis on the employment of violence in colonial societies in which he stated that

[l]a violence qui a présidé à l'arrangement du monde colonial, qui a rythmé inlassablement la destruction des formes sociales indigènes, démolit sans restrictions les systèmes de références de l'économie, les modes d'apparence, d'habillement, sera revendiquée et assumée par le colonisé au moment où, décidant d'être l'histoire en actes, la masse colonisée s'engouffrera dans les villes interdites' (Fanon, 2002: 44).¹⁵

Interestingly, Younes/Jonas does not take part in these acts of violence. The re-occupation of these once forbidden cities is a notion that the narrator simply relays to the readers. These cities have not been forbidden to him. His dual identity grants him access to this space in exchange for his subjugation. Younes/Jonas is a colonial artefact that plays a role in the structuring of the colonial world by serving as an outlet for the dissenting native. Additionally, it is an artefact whose construction is only possible by being denied access to the zone of none being.

Collective Identity and Land in *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*

The novel begins with Younes narrating the plight of his family. His father, Issa, is a hard-working farmer incapable of identifying or finding meaning anywhere else besides his land (Khadra, 2008: 7). The land is Issa's 'bled'; it is also Issa's way of living in 'baraka' (Khadra, 2008: 10).¹⁶ Struggling as a native living under the harsh economic conditions of 1930s colonial Algeria, Issa is forced to take a loan from the caïd of the village. The family ends up losing all crops just days before the harvest (Khadra, 2008: 8), thus losing all means of repaying their debts. Consequently, the family loses its land all together (Khadra, 2008: 9).

¹⁵ 'The violence that has presided over the structuring of the colonial world, which has tirelessly orchestrated the destruction of native social forms, unrestrictedly dismantled the systems of reference of the economy, modes of appearance, of dressing, that violence will be taken over by the colonised at the moment when, deciding to be history in action, the colonized masses will rush he forbidden cities'.

¹⁶ *Al-Barakah* (البركة), in Algerian culture, is a spiritual notion. It implies a connection with the essence of life through the blessing of Allah and the ancestors.

The notion of *barakah*, and the relationship between native characters and their ancestors through land, is used to mark a spiritual dimension that is characteristic of Algerian identity. By losing land, Issa and his family lose more than physical possessions. Younes comments:

Le temps s'était arrêté pour nous. Bien sûr, le jour continuait de se débiter devant la nuit, le soir de se substituer aux aurores, les rapaces de tournoyer dans le ciel mais, en ce qui nous concernait, c'était comme si les choses étaient arrivées au bout d'elles-mêmes. Une nouvelle page s'ouvrait, et nous n'y figurions pas (Khadra, 2008: 9).¹⁷

These lines insinuate a sense of rupture that the loss of land signifies. Younes is not expressing a mere rupture with a geographical location or a sense of place, but rather a rupture with the flow of time that the land has preserved for the family even when the country is under colonial occupation. For their land to be seized by the colonial authorities, the family is losing an important factor of their cultural preservation, their connection with their ancestors, on top of their source of income.

As an imagined community (Anderson, 2016: 7), a nation is perceived to be deeply rooted in history and believed to be everlasting. Deprived of land and its cultural significance, Younes becomes a literary artefact through which Khadra explores the process of forming a collective identity where the artefact's relationship to time is disrupted. The novel emphasizes that losing one's relationship with the ancestors does not solely entail losing a connection with one's past; it is also a severance of ties with the future. This emphasis becomes clearer when the *barakah*, which represents a spiritual force, affects the plotting of the novel. Throughout multiple incidents, the weather is not a mere motif that dictates the mood with the changing events of the story; it rather functions as an indicator of the ancestors' opinion and judgment

¹⁷ 'Time stood still for us. Of course, the day continued to unravel before the night, the evening to be replaced by the dawn, the birds to swirl in the sky, but when it came to us, it was as if things came to an end. A new page was opening, and we were not in it'.

on characters' choices. Furthermore, in certain instances, the weather serves as a means of communicating the fate of Algerians to their relatives — a notion that further solidifies the natives' relation with their land as a relation that goes beyond the material aspect.

By losing his land, Issa is seen crying for the first time in his life, something that, according to Younes, an Algerian man is never supposed to do (Khadra, 2008: 9). Crying openly marks Issa's first transgression against the ways of the ancestors; furthermore, it sparks his initial drift from the *barakah*. The transgression, which the loss of land triggers, continues when the family's loss of land forces them to leave the village and move to the city in the hope of finding a new way to make a living. At the city's outskirts, Issa shaves his beard completely and wears clothes which Younes describes as clothes he has never seen his father wearing (Khadra, 2008: 12). These clothes make Issa's look befitting of the city; however, he now looks like a completely different man (Khadra, 2008: 12). This act marks what Fanon has labelled the unrestricted dismantling of all native social forms that ranges from the destruction of systems of economy to modes of appearance and dressing (Fanon, 2002: 44). The aim is a total subjugation and alienation of the colonized.

Additionally, the novel highlights the paradoxical nature of colonial narratives and the civilizing mission they entail. The urban city, the epitome of the civilizing mission, as a space that embodies progress, becomes a place of dispossession, a place destined to natives that lost everything (Khadra, 2008: 10). The changing of clothes is conducted at the outskirts of the city. On the one hand, the act marks the erasure of a visual identifier that distinguishes native Algerian before being granted the right to access a space built by/for the colonizer — Khadra's further consolidation of the notion of land as a cultural generator. This act, conducted by Issa himself, signals his continued transgression against ancestral traditions. On the other hand, the choice of location is Khadra's strategy of turning the abstract boundaries that separate collective identities of colonizer and colonized into reified boundaries that actually affect the

reader's interaction with the text: primarily, the plot advances only after Issa is stripped of his traditional clothes. After that, bound to Issa's choices as the head of the family, the plot changes its setting from a rural space into an urban one, only when this condition is met.

The outskirts also mark the last interaction the family has with another Algerian native, a shepherd that conducts himself according to the ways of the ancestors as he offers them a place to stay (Khadra, 2008: 11). In contrast, once the family enters the city, they are forced to live in the slums of Jenane Jato, in a house of nine rooms occupied by other families who have experienced a similar fate (Khadra, 2008: 14). Unlike the vastness of the plains in the bled, its *barakah*, and the hospitality of the shepherd, this cramped place is owned by Bliss, a broker that specializes in profiting from the misfortune of people forced to leave the bled (Khadra, 2008: 14).

The loss of land which signifies the uncertainty of the future of Issa's family and their alienation from the ways of their ancestors, a fate destined for other natives living in this place as well, is replaced with their reliance on Batoul the clairvoyant. In his exploration of the anxiety of continuity and colonial trauma, among the psychological analyses that Fanon offers for the resort to such witchcraft and superstition is the individual's need to materialize what they fear into something tangible that they can exercise control over (2002: 56). By resorting to such practices, Issa's family continue to drift away from the *barakah* of the ancestors and the teachings of Islam that strictly forbid all forms of witchcraft. Nonetheless, the new community that they are part of is constructed out of necessity, where the rules of survival are dictated by an exterior force — the colonizer — that they cannot control.

Fanon argues that the occult sphere is a sphere of belonging (2002: 56). When dispossessed natives surrender themselves fully to such practices, they are capable of preserving a world that belongs to them. Fanon states that these magical and supernatural forces 'se révèlent être des forces étonnamment moïques. Les forces du colon sont infiniment

rapetissées, frappées d'extranéité. On n'a plus vraiment à lutter contre elles puisque aussi bien ce qui compte c'est l'effrayante adversité des structures mythiques' (2002: 57).¹⁸ Batoul and her clairvoyance soothes the trauma of the occupants of Jenane Jato and diverts their anxiety of landlessness towards far greater unknown threats. Consequently, Jenane Jato is not a mere refuge for dispossessed native Algerians; it symbolizes a place constructed by the colonizer to breed new cultural practices that ensure the continuous subjugation and alienation of the native.

Younes and the Distortion of Algerian Collective Identity

Younes/Jonas longs for belonging throughout the novel. During its early sections — the sections that precede his acquisition of a superficial French identity — we observe his continuous attempt to model himself so as to resemble his father. These attempts begin when Younes comes to understand that the politics of a traditionalist Algerian society expects a boy to be able to provide for his family as soon as he is physically capable of labour (Khadra, 2008: 21). His initial attempt to establish a connection with the land of his ancestors, the traditional source of providing for one's family, is illustrated through his companionship with his father during the harvest season (Khadra, 2008: 7). However, his usefulness is instantly called into question as his father does not take him into account when trying to hire workers to assist with the harvest (Khadra, 2008: 8). Younes is there solely to recount the hiring process. Additionally, when the tragic incident of their land burning occurs (Khadra, 2008: 8), Younes does not participate in putting out the fires. Fire is employed by Khadra as a motif of identity formation. It is a force majeure or an incident that marks a compulsory social transition in colonial societies from one social category to another. Therefore, the act of putting out the fires that his father engages in, fully aware that the fires cannot be stopped, symbolizes the

¹⁸ 'reveal themselves as completely personal. The powers of the colonizer are infinitely shrunken, hit with the fact that they are of alien origin. We are no longer required to fight against these forces since what counts the most is the frightening enemy created by mythical structures'.

traditionalist or native Algerian society's resistance to the forced change that they are about to undergo.

The employment of Younes' parents as a symbol that represents native resistance to change becomes even more apparent when his mother crosses the boundaries that stereotypically separate genders within traditionalist Algerian societies and participates in the attempts to put out the fires (Khadra, 2008: 8). Although the novel does not depict Younes' mother engaging the fire in the same manner as his father, she leaves the house for the fields, worried that her husband might not come out of the blaze (Khadra, 2008: 8). This literary choice puts a further emphasis on the symbolic resistance of Younes' parents to the fires and contrasts it with his own abstention. Furthermore, this plotting choice, when coupled with Khadra's decision to unfold the events of the novel through a linear structure in the form of Younes/Jonas recounting the events of his life as an old man, introduces an interesting paradox that is essential to Khadra's exploration of the project of assimilation. By presenting the novel as a form of a 'memoir' recounted by Younes/Jonas (Fandou, 2021: 1199), the events that are included or omitted reflect the narrator's choice of highlighting what he perceives as significant, worthy of remembering, or having played a crucial role in moulding the character of a man in his late seventies.

Having said that, the events themselves demonstrate his lack of agency. Younes/Jonas is a character that is extremely passive and indecisive. When we observe the fear of the unknown that the loss of the family's land entails and the need to combat the change that is brought about by colonisation, which his parents demonstrate, both seem to fail to evoke any specific reaction from him. The events are narrated as a painful memory that represents a loss for his parents:

Ce n'était pas juste.
A trois jours du début des moissons.

A deux doigts du salut.
A un souffle de la rédemption (Khadra, 2008: 8–9).¹⁹

The tone of these short sentences captures a severe feeling of defeat. This tone is communicated to the reader through an interesting juxtaposition that blends numbers and the words ‘moisson’ [‘harvest’], ‘salut’ [‘salvation’], and ‘rédemption’ [‘redemption’] as words that supposedly carry a positive value. The first line utters the sense of injustice that this incident represents, whereas the following lines begin with numbers that when read together mimic a countdown towards some form of ending. With each countdown, the loss of a specific positive outcome is highlighted.

In this passage, Younes/Jonas recounts how his family’s old way of living came to an end. Whereas his father is pictured to be openly sobbing, Younes/Jonas does not offer any introspection on how he as a child felt in that instance, nor does he offer any reflection from the perspective of Younes/Jonas the 70-year-old man. This narration takes the parents as its focus. Consequently, it hints at a looming end that would have a graver effect on them than on him.

Their new home, Jenane Jato, is more than ‘a literary condemnation created to put colonization and its false claims on trial’ (Boukhalifa, 2018: 601).²⁰ It represents the novel’s concrete representation of the ‘zone of nonbeing’ under colonial conditions. Whereas Fanon uses this expression in an abstract manner to describe the mental process that the individual resorts to willingly by rejecting societal discourses or value systems in order to construct an identity for themselves (2008: 2), Khadra crafts an actual zone of nonbeing to which native Algerians are forcefully relegated under colonial conditions.

¹⁹ ‘It was not fair.
Three days away from the harvest.
Two fingers away from salvation.
A breath away from redemption’.

²⁰ " خطاب إدانة أنشئ لمحاكمة الاستعمار والوقوف على زيف ادعاءاته".

In this context, Younes' continued attempt to model himself after his father fails yet again. As Younes accompanies his father when trying to find work, Issa accidentally loses him in one of the most dangerous sectors of the city, 'la pire des fosses aux vipères'[the worst pit of vipers] (Khadra, 2008: 17), an incident that contrasts with Issa's earlier attentiveness to Younes. The scene marks the initial change in the relationship between Younes and his father, a change that is forced by colonial circumstances. In the opening pages, when the family still had their land, the novel depicts the duo looking for workers with the notion of the new employees providing assistance (Khadra, 2008: 8). The relationship between the employer and the employee is presented as one of cooperation. Contrarily, in this new urban space, under the dehumanization of colonization that distorts native cultural norms and reshapes native social practices (Fanon, 2002: 44), his father along with other native Algerians, like 'des bêtes de somme' [beasts of burden] (Khadra, 2008: 16), are forced to compete violently with each other in order to secure whatever crumbs Europeans are willing to offer (Khadra, 2008: 20). Moreover, this incident highlights the condition of dispossessed native Algerians and their loss of a sense of community. It has become a den of vipers willing to devour one another in order to survive. This depiction is in stark contrast to the family's interaction with the native Algerian at this city's outskirts.

Younes/Jonas and French-Algerian Collective Identity

The novel's depiction of colonial violence and its influence on identity construction for native Algerians extends to Younes/Jonas' acquired 'French' identity. This is explored mainly through the influence of his uncle's European wife, Germaine. Interestingly, Fatima Ben Rabiai considers Germaine's marriage to Mahi as a successful model for coexistence and a 'cultural merger' (2019: 191). Ben Rabiai argues that each of the two characters manages to maintain their own distinctive sense of self (2019: 192).

However, when we observe that the relationship that Germaine has with Mahi does not threaten the strict division that colonial narratives maintain between collective identities, the analysis of this relationship divulges a different line of thought concerning the coexistence between the colonizer and the colonized. Part of Germaine's characterization relies on the fact that she is married to a native Algerian. Unlike Younes' father who clings to tradition until he is forced to leave his ancestral land, Mahi is a native Algerian that has long abandoned the traditionalist way of living and adopted the new model of an educated Algerian who aims at living with the colonizers. Mahi, to a certain extent, is another assimilated native.

It is implied that Germaine cannot have children, so she encourages Mahi, Younes' uncle, to adopt Younes. In a narrative that puts a significant emphasis on the idea of ancestral lineage and material continuity of collective identities through the relation between parents and their children, it is worth noting that Germaine is unable to have children of her own. This literary choice is Khadra's way of denying Germaine, a settler that is willing to co-exist with natives, a sense of belonging through adoption. As Tuck and Yang have remarked, settlers' adoption is a reaffirmation of the colonial project:

The adoption fantasy is the mythical trump card desired by critical settlers who feel remorse about settler colonialism, one that absolves them from the inheritance of settler crimes and that bequeaths a new inheritance of Native-ness and claims to land (2012: 14).

Through the act of adopting Younes and the acceptance of Mahi's nativeness, Germaine is forwarding a case for herself to be accepted in return by the people of this subjugated land. It is a move to 'alleviate the anxiety of settler un-belonging' (Tuck and Yang, 2012: 14). Moreover, Germaine's adoption of Younes symbolizes what the colonial desires for the native. Echoing Memmi's thesis on the portrait of the colonizer who refuses colonialism (1973: 49), although the colonial is sympathetic towards the colonized and does not adopt the colonialist

attitude towards the colony, they nevertheless profit from the system (1973: 39). Therefore, the wish to preserve such a status inevitably forces the colonial to turn into colonizer.

Germaine's indirect crossing to the category of the colonizer is depicted through her erasures of Younes' native identity along with the entirety of his past. In one of the few instances in the novel when Younes objects to something, namely changing his name, Germaine insists on repeatedly calling him Jonas against his wishes (Khadra, 2008: 37). The initial interaction between the two is instantly marked by her desire to mould him into something different; he is an artefact that requires 'être remédier' [remedy] (Khadra, 2008: 36). Her utterance captures the attitude that the colonial has towards the colonized. Despite the objection a colonial might possess towards the colonialist attitude, the notion of superiority that the colonial has vis-à-vis the culture of the colonized is indisputable as she perceives his appearance as something that requires treatment. Germaine asks Mahi to purchase new clothes for the child, and proceeds to strip the child of his *gandurah* (Khadra, 2008: 37) and the shoes that his father struggled to afford (Khadra, 2008: 33). The removal of the shoes is the most significant as it represents her contemplated severance of the ties that Younes had with the path of the ancestors in which his father had intended for him to walk. The new adoptive parents demonstrate their obsession with mapping a path for Younes through Mahi's purchase of multiple pairs of shoes that would fit him now and others for years to come (Khadra, 2008: 38). Additionally, the removal of the shoes replicates the same act of stripping the natives of their clothes that his father had to undergo before entering the city. When Younes is forced into the space of the colonizer, he must undergo the same process of cultural alienation. By portraying the subjugation of the father and the son, Khadra captures the generational transgression that native Algerians are bound to under colonialism.

Germaine is arguably the most influential character in the novel since she is the colonial that roots Younes/Jonas in this new world. For her, he is the artefact that she can mould while

simultaneously overlooking the inhumane conditions that the system she benefits from is built upon. The liberation of Algeria brings with it the partial extrication of Younes/Jonas from the colonial narrative/universe that Germaine rooted him in. Her dependency on the artefact of Younes/Jonas, as a point of differentiation, becomes apparent when the colonial narrative of hierarchy is subverted. Initially, when Germaine grants him his French identity, Younes is pictured as terrified and lost — a condition that allows Germaine to occupy the position of a mother that slowly teaches the child how to navigate this new world. Khadra mirrors the same event with the fall of colonial occupation: Germaine is pictured as trembling, lost, and weak (Khadra, 2008: 186). However, this time it is Younes who holds her in his arms and prepares himself to guide her as she navigates a world that she has long overlooked. This plotting choice puts into question the whole notion of motherhood that Germaine was able to enjoy at the expense of a native child. By reversing the roles, Khadra questions her motherhood and the identity that she constructed, which is a mere product of a paternalistic colonial power structure.

Conclusion

In *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit*, Khadra lays bare the farcical project of assimilation and challenges the nostalgic narratives that aim at revising the history of French Algeria as a positive outcome of colonization. Colonial Algeria was marked by a firm separation of space as a key generator of collective identities where controlling land entailed material and cultural subjugation of the colonized. Khadra's characterization of Younes/Jonas as an apparently successful model of assimilation highlights the project's failure to construct a social category that can be integrated into the social fabric of French Algeria. Instead, the duality of Younes/Jonas reveals that the aim behind the project is simple: preventing the possibility of what Fanon calls 'un authentique surschissement' [an authentic upheaval] (1952: 6), and

maintaining control over land by *les pieds-noirs*. Additionally, the process of transcendence that Younes/Jonas's dual identity promises results in an absolute failure of belonging to either collective identity. This dual identity does not offer a space through which Younes/Jonas can vibrate to cosmic harmonies (Fanon, 1952: 6). The construct rather functions in an opposite manner. The two collective identities are sustained by a narrative of division that does not accept any form of reconciliation. It leaves Younes/Jonas, and the European settlers with whom he grew up, with colonial scars that refuse to fade in a so-called post-colonial world.

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