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Space, place and spatial loss in North African and Canadian writing in French

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SPACE, PLACE AND SPATIAL LOSS IN NORTH AFRICAN AND CANADIAN WRITING IN FRENCH

JASMINA BOLFEK-RADOVANI

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Abstract

Assumptions about space, argues the feminist geographer Doreen Massey, are such an integral part of intellectual and everyday discourse that we are often not conscious of their existence and significance, and yet, they have profound consequences for how society is organised. However, these assumptions are not inherent to our thinking; they are socially constructed, produced and inherited through a number of hegemonic and Eurocentric discourses on space, leading to what Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre refer to as the “mystification” of space and spatiality. The main aim of this research is to investigate how the literary treatment of space and place shapes the representations of space, place and spatial loss in the writing of ten postcolonial Francophone authors from the Maghreb and Canada from a cross-cultural and cross-generational perspective. It asks whether these authors participate in the “demystification” (in the sense this concept is used by Edward Soja) or the unveiling of the hidden relationship between space and power contained in the Eurocentric discourse on space by creating counter-discourses and strategies that challenge dominant constructions about space, or whether they in fact reinforce this (these) discourse(s) on space despite their presumed postcoloniality.

The research presented critically evaluates the concepts and theories of space and place in human geography and applies these to the study of space, place and spatial loss in the postcolonial Francophone texts selected from the viewpoint of three main literary themes (imagination, memory and the border) and the potential that these three themes offer for a “demystification of space”. It combines a range of theoretical perspectives and, simultaneously, tests a method of close reading (semiotic analysis) in the analysis of the texts selected and the literary spaces they are seen to belong to in a more systematic way than previously attempted. It sets out to examine how a semiotic reading of the (Western and non-Western) postcolonial Francophone text engages with Massey’s and Soja’s socio-political understandings and theories on space and spatiality, and what limitations and advantages can be observed through the use of these theories in combination.

The research concludes that the postcolonial discourse on space and place in the texts selected is expressed through the values and strategies of ambiguity and ambivalence, not subversion as has been previously suggested. It shows that the themes of imagination, memory and the border play a significant role for the ways in which space and place are conceptualised in those texts, with the theme of the border offering the highest potential for challenging hegemonic assumptions about space. It shows that semiotics can become an effective tool in the unveiling of the values and value systems embedded in the Eurocentric discourse on space, when used in combination with other theoretical approaches. By debating the issue of the “demystification of spatiality” in the literary context, it ultimately raises the larger question of the status and relationship of literariness (or poetics) and political engagement (or politics) of the texts produced within the postcolonial Francophone context.

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Author's Declaration

I confirm the thesis is my own work and all references and sources are duly acknowledged.

Signature: Jasmina Bolfek-Radovani

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Abbreviations

FK: French Kiss: étreinte et exploration

LA: L'Amélanchier

LAF: L'Amour, la fantasia

LMT : La Mémoire tatouée

LTO: Les Terrasses d'Orsol

MMP: Mes mauvaises pensées

RT : Retour à Thyna

SLPN: Sept Lacs plus au Nord

VB: Volkswagen blues

WP: Whisky et paraboles

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INTRODUCTION

1. Research Aim, Objectives and Methodology

1.1. Research Aim

(Mis)conceptions and assumptions about space, argues the feminist geographer Doreen Massey, are such an integral part of intellectual and everyday discourse that we are often not conscious of their existence and significance, and yet, they have profound consequences for how society is organised.¹ However, these “implicit”, “hegemonic imaginations” of space are not an inherent part of our thinking and practice. Instead, they are inherited through a number of discourses on space that have permeated both intellectual and popular thinking in the West, and have led to the production of a Eurocentric conceptualisation and imagination of space.² Going further, it can be claimed that these hegemonic representations of space that are articulated from the position of power and disseminated through a number of socially produced discourses enable the production of mystificatory statements about space; they lead to the “mystification of space”, as argued by Henri Lefebvre in his theory on the social production of space.³ The notion of

¹ Massey, D., *For Space*, London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2005, p. 17.

² Language is full of stereotypical statements about spaces and places that we constantly use without thinking. Phrases in English such as “at the end of the world” or “in the middle of nowhere” used when describing or referring to unfamiliar or foreign places, participate in the creation of the hegemonic discourse on space and spatial imagination. The same can be said of expressions in French such as “perdre le Nord”.

³ Lefebvre, H. *La production de l'espace*, Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1974. The concept of mystification of space or of “mystifications de l'espace” used by Lefebvre has been most certainly derived from Karl Marx and his concept of the “mystification of capital” fully developed in *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy, Volume III*. Lefebvre refers sometimes also to the notion of fetishisation (“fétichisation de l'espace”) when he speaks of mystification; again, this notion can be referred back to Marx's discussion on fetishism and commodities in *Capital, Volume I* (see Chapter 1, Section 4, downloaded on 07/07/2013 from: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm>). Marx's definition of mystification of capital is one of the key concepts of his theory. According to Marx, the mystification of capital lies in the obscured relationship between capital, the production process, labour and profit (“surplus-value”), relationship that, within the capitalist system, is represented as being “objective”, as something existing apart from individuals, almost as being God-given, rather than socially constructed and produced. The main point here is that through the process of mystification, the alienating and exploitative aspects of capital become hidden or “mystified”. See Camatte, J., *Capital and Community, the results of immediate process of*

mystification of space, as used in this thesis, is to be understood as one that refers to hegemonic Eurocentric discourses on space, not just to stereotypes of space (which form part of these discourses), which implies the existence of a systematic and institutionalised view of certain representations of space and place that are socially constructed and emanate from the position of (sites of) power.⁴ Therefore, a critical social process of demystification of the hidden relationship between social relations and space, or spatiality, is necessary, as argued by Edward Soja, if one is to unveil or unmask the obscured relationship between space, social relations and power, that is, if one is to challenge hegemonic assumptions, conceptions and imaginations of space.⁵ Spatiality, a term used by human geographers, and as further defined on page 16, refers to the socio-political dimension of space, or to the interconnectedness between space and social relations. It is to be differentiated from the broader concept of space that can be used to refer to all of its aspects, mental, physical and social, as in the typology of space that is used by Lefebvre.⁶

production and the economic work of Marx, (translation by Brown, D.), downloaded from: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/camatte/capcom/ch05.htm>, 06/07/2013).

⁴ We all use stereotypes on space; however, we do not all speak from a position of power, and therefore it can be said that we are not all equally participant in the production of the mystification of space. Rather, we help in sustaining the process of mystification, as our own relationship to space as being socially constructed has become mystified. The main point about the mystification of space is that it hides its socially produced character emanating from the position of power held by the dominant classes or elites.

⁵ Soja, E., *Postmodern geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory*, London: Verso, 1989, p. 61. Soja defines the social critical process of the demystification of spatiality as one that is fundamental to unveiling the hidden relationship between space and power: “the demystification of spatiality and its veiled instrumentality of power is the key to making practical, political and theoretical sense of the contemporary era”. See also Lefebvre, *La Production de l'espace*, Paris: Anthropos, 1974 : “L'espace est signifiant? Certes. De quoi? De ce qu'il faut faire ou ne pas faire. Ce qui renvoie au pouvoir. Mais le message du pouvoir est toujours embrouillé, volontairement. Il se dissimule, l'espace ne dit pas tout. Il dit surtout l'interdit (l'inter-dit)”, p. 167. Soja's concept of demystification of spatiality is clearly inspired by Lefebvre's analysis of the social mechanisms and practices of the “mystifications de l'espace”, but it can also be (indirectly) traced back to the Marxist critical practice of demystification (although Soja does not acknowledge this link in his book).

⁶ It has to be noted that the notions of space and spatiality can acquire different interpretations and meanings depending on which critic uses them, something that contributes to the elusiveness and ambiguity of the notion of space. Doreen Massey uses the terms of space and spatiality sometimes interchangeably, and sometimes she makes a distinction between the two; although her understanding of space is socio-political (and therefore synonymous with spatiality), she does also use a broader definition of space. Edward Soja makes a clearer distinction between the two terms when using them (space can be abstract, physical and social, while as spatiality refers only to social space). In Hubbard's and Kitchin's encyclopedia on *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, the term “space” does not figure at all in the dictionary; only “spatiality” is listed.

The main aim of this research is to investigate how the literary treatment of space and place informs and shapes the representations, understandings and experience of space, place and spatial loss in the writing of ten postcolonial Francophone authors from the Maghreb and Canada by offering a contrapuntal reading of a number of texts from a cross-cultural and cross-generational perspective.⁷ It asks whether these authors participate in the demystification of the Eurocentric, hegemonic discourse on space (and spatial loss), thus creating discourses of resistance that challenge dominant assumptions about space, or whether they in fact reinforce this (these) discourse(s) on space despite their presumed postcoloniality. Theoretically speaking, the practice of “mystification” in the (post)colonial context can be best understood as a dialectic relationship in which both the coloniser and the colonised create myths, mythologies and counter-mythologies that conceal their socially constructed relationship, as described by Albert Memmi. In his work on the deconstruction of the coloniser’s “mystifying” attitudes towards the colonised, Memmi argues that these attitudes are supported directly by France’s colonial system and its propagation of colonial discourse on the colonised, but also point to a dialectic relationship of mystification practices between the colonised and the coloniser in which both the coloniser and the colonised are interlocked.⁸ If one transposes this definition to the production of discourses on space in the postcolonial context, it becomes possible to argue that literary form and literary discourse participate in the production of the mystification of space, whilst at the same time, they fulfill an important aesthetic and poetic function and play an important role in the collective imagination of a nation through the production of narratives or myths on the space of the nation (disseminated by the nation-state), whose function is ultimately the

⁷ Said, E., *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage, 1994 (1st ed. 1993). Henri Lefebvre predominantly uses the term space (“l’espace”) in his space theory and by that he means spatiality (or “l’espace social”); spatiality (“la spatialité”) seems to be used to refer to abstract space (la spatialité abstraite). See footnote 15 of this thesis on differences between the use of the term in English and French.

⁸ Memmi, A., *Portrait du colonisé, précède de Portrait du colonisateur*, Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1957. See : “Être mystifié, c’est déjà, peu ou prou, avaliser le mythe et y conformer sa conduite, c’est-à-dire en être agi. Or ce mythe-là, est, de plus, solidement étayé sur une organisation bien réelle, une administration et une juridiction; alimenté, renouvelé par les exigences historiques, économiques et culturelles du colonisateur” (p. 112). See also: “En définitive, nous allons nous trouver en face d’une contre-mythologie. Au mythe négatif imposé par le colonisateur succède un mythe positif de lui-même, proposé par le colonisé. Comme il existe, semble-t-il, un mythe positif du prolétaire opposé à son négatif” (p. 153).

control that space.⁹ It is therefore posited in this thesis that the study of the mechanisms and practices of the (de)mystification of space in the postcolonial Francophone context are crucial not only for a further understanding of spatial loss in that context, but also for an investigation into the larger questions of the status and relationship of literariness and political engagement of the texts produced within that context. As will be argued, there exists a fundamental tension expressed as ambiguity or ambivalence between the poetic and political dimensions of space in all of the texts analysed that makes the practice of challenging hegemonic assumptions about space in the literary context a complex one to study.

It is argued throughout the thesis that the question of the demystification of spatiality, as defined by Soja, is highly relevant for the further understanding of relationships between space, place and power at the centre of (post)colonial discourse. As already indicated, the practice of demystification of spatiality is understood here as a social critical process that involves the unveiling of the hidden, repressed quality of space as a social instrument or agency of power through the examination and deconstruction of the practices of “mystifications de l’espace”.¹⁰ It demands a socio-political engagement with and an imagination of space and place that sees both of these notions as relational and dynamic, or as “spheres of multiplicity”. This kind of engagement with and imagination of space allow in Massey’s terms for a “relational politics of the spatial”. So, such a demystification necessarily involves a critique of the practices of mystification of space that conceal its obscured relationship to power; it requires, as advanced in this thesis, a systematic analysis of the representations of space and place in the postcolonial context.

⁹ The terms poetic / poetics and political / politics are used in this thesis to refer to the dimension of literariness and that of the political engagement of the texts analysed, and the tension that results between the two.

¹⁰ References to the “mystifications de l’espace” can be found in the following passages of *La Production de l’espace*: “...si les espaces ne relèvent ni de l’image mythique d’une transparence pure, ni du mythe inverse, l’opacité naturelle – s’ils dissimulent ce qu’ils contiennent sous des significations, des insignifiances ou des sur-signifiances, – si parfois ils mentent comme des choses, bien qu’ils ne soient pas des choses, la critique de l’espace a un sens”, p. 111; “A propos de la ville et de ses extensions (banlieues, périphéries) on a parfois rencontré des expressions: « maladie de l’espace », « espaces malades ». Ce qui généraliserait des représentations particulièrement mystificatrices: la ville moderne ne résulte pas de la société capitaliste (ou néo-capitaliste) mais d’une maladie de la société”, p. 119. Lefebvre, H. *La Production de l’espace*, 1974.

One main point of originality of this thesis is that it systematically and critically evaluates the concepts and theories of space and place in human geography and applies these to the study of representations of space and place in postcolonial theory and the postcolonial Francophone text. Using semiotic analysis in combination with a number of other theoretical perspectives, the study conducted here will show that a systematic analysis of the literary treatment and representation of space, place and spatial loss in the texts of two geographically and culturally distinct areas offers an original contribution to the further understanding of the relationship between the Francophone postcolonial text and the production of (post)colonial discourses on space in France and its ex-colonies, something that the analysis of a single geographic area would not be able to address systematically.

The key concepts of space and place, as they are used in this thesis, are defined as dynamic, relational concepts; they are to be understood in the way the human geographer and feminist theorist Doreen Massey conceptualises them, and as is discussed in detail in the second part of this introduction. The relational and dynamic character of space is something that is also of seminal importance to Lefebvre's definition of the social production of space, as his work shows, and as will be discussed in detail later in this introduction.¹¹ Historically speaking, Lefebvre's seminal work on the social production of space has been fundamental for the definition of the notions of space and place in human geography.¹² Developing his theory on the social production of space from his investigation of the "cultural construction of stereotypical notions of cities, of nature and of regions" and "his critique of alienation as being obscured by the mystifications of consumerism", Lefebvre's thinking on space as (social) product influenced much of late twentieth-century Anglo-American human geography.¹³ Although his theories are not often explicitly acknowledged in the work of critics such as Massey or Soja, he has undoubtedly been,

¹¹ Massey, D., *Space, Place and Gender*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003 (1st ed. 1994); Lefebvre, H., *op. cit.*, 1974.

¹² Lefebvre, H., *op. cit.*, 1974.

¹³ Hubbard, P., & Kitchin, R. (eds), *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington: Sage, 2011 (2nd ed.), pp. 279-285.

together with Foucault, crucial to contemporary intellectual debates on spatial thinking, and can be said to have pioneered a theory of space that triggered the “spatial turn” or the conceptual shift from the time to the space paradigm as part of a much larger and diverse cultural and political shift from modernity to post-modernity. Indeed, both Lefebvre’s and Foucault’s contributions to space theory still inform contemporary debates on space and the significance of spatial theory for an understanding of contemporary globality.¹⁴

When used in the thesis, the term “spatiality” is to be understood in the way it is defined in human geography; as a social and relational concept that points to the interconnectedness between space and social relations, as argued by Massey, Soja and Lefebvre. It is to be taken as a concept that incorporates Edward Soja’s idea of space as a “hidden instrumentality of power”, as discussed above. As noted already, the concept of spatiality is therefore closely linked to the notion of space as it is defined in human geography; in fact, the two terms are made out of each other.¹⁵ As Soja argues, it is precisely the subordination of space (in relation to time) in the era of modernity that led to its increasing mystification until the arrival of the spatial turn in the eighties.¹⁶ He speaks of two modes or paradigms of thinking about space that have dominated Western thinking and have led to two main misrepresentations about space, the “illusion of opaqueness” and the “illusion of transparency”; misrepresentations that have largely influenced the way in which space is experienced, perceived and conceptualised: either as a dead and fixed object of the “study of the Cartesian cartography of spatial science” (dualistically opposed to

¹⁴ Only recently, this question has been analysed by the American critic Verena Conley; her study *Spatial Ecologies* undertakes the analysis of the role that space theory and the French critical and cultural thought of the seventies had on this important paradigm shift. Conley, V. A., *Spatial Ecologies, Urban Sites, State and World-Space in French Cultural Theory*, Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2012.

¹⁵ Differences should be noted in the way the concepts of *space and spatiality* in English and those of *l’espace* in French and *spatialité* in French are used and interpreted. If one can make a distinction between *space* and *spatiality* in English, this is less clear in French. Lefebvre’s concept of *l’espace* in French is best translated into English as “spatialisation” or “spatiality”, and not as “space”.

¹⁶ See “History, Geography, Modernity”, in Soja, E., *Postmodern Geographies: the reassertion of space in critical social theory*, 1989, pp. 10-43.

time) or as an idealised, abstract notion that reduces space to representation and sees it only as a “mental construct”.¹⁷

The notion of spatial loss in this thesis is to be understood in its broadest sense, not only as loss of territory or geography (or what can be referred to as geographic loss), but as loss of “sense of place” that incorporates the loss of physical, social and mental spaces.¹⁸ Indeed, it became clear very early in the research process that spatial loss cannot be studied in separation from the systematic study of space and place and the study of the unpacking of hegemonic and stereotypical notions about space when considering postcolonial texts. The hypothesis of this thesis is that the conceptualisation of spatial loss in the postcolonial Francophone context is closely linked not only to how space and place are experienced, represented and conceptualised in these writings, but also to how stereotypical notions or assumptions about space (whether it is urban, rural, regional or national) are constructed; these socially produced views on space influence the way in which not only space but also spatial loss are represented, treated and experienced in literary writings. Therefore, the critical social process of unmasking the obscured relationship between space, social relations and power should also have consequences for the way in which spatial loss is (re)conceptualised. Numerous examples of the mystification of space have been identified in the texts selected, cutting across cultural, generational and gender differences, and these will be analysed in detail in Chapters 2 to 5. One of the main questions of the thesis will therefore be to investigate what function/s the discourses, ideologies or mystifications of space fulfill in the text by studying what types of spaces and places are represented in these texts, and with what values they are

¹⁷ Soja, E., *op. cit.*, 1989, p. 7 & pp. 122-126. Lefebvre speaks of “l’illusion de la transparence et celle de l’opacité” in his critique of mystification of space, something that Soja has most certainly been directly inspired by, although he does not acknowledge Lefebvre’s reference in his work. See Lefebvre, H., *op. cit.*, 1974, pp. 36-39.

¹⁸ Hubbard, P., & Kitchin, R. (eds), *op. cit.*, 2011. See their definition of the sense of place, p. 499: “a central concept in humanistic geography, intended to describe the particular ways in which human beings invest their surroundings with meaning. Sense of place is seen as an elusive concept, yet human geographers seek to find its traces in a variety of texts and representations, including paintings, poetry, prose and cinema.” The division into physical, social and mental spaces used is borrowed from Lefebvre’s division of main space types; see Lefebvre, H., *op.cit.*, p. 29.

attributed. But the thesis will also aim to evaluate how semiotic and literary representations of space engage with a conceptualisation of space and place as defined in human geography, and how they articulate a theory of spatial loss in the postcolonial Francophone context. Ultimately, the question will be asked whether spatial loss should be defined as a dynamic and relational concept in the same way as space is defined, and not perceived as absolute or as a lack.¹⁹

Importantly, this thesis will make use of another spatially constructed or imagined concept, that of the notion of the border. It will interrogate Walter D. Mignolo's concept of "border-thinking",²⁰ defined both as "threshold" and "liminality".²¹ By using the notion of the border as both a metaphor and a conceptual tool, the thesis will ask the question of whether border-thinking can be an effective tool in the unpacking of hegemonic assumptions and imaginations about space in the literary context. However, the notion of the border will also be used as a method. By applying a comparative approach to the reading of literatures of two socio-culturally distinct areas whereby the texts selected are organised around a number of literary themes – imagination, memory and the border – rather than grouped geographically, one is able to work both outside the literary and ideological borders of traditionally conceived literatures or cultural zones. The critic is forced to re-think the concept not only of the border but also of maps and mapping. This need to rethink the border geographically, culturally or theoretically seems to have come to the centre of a number of theoretical debates within socio-political, cultural and postcolonial studies in recent years; these ideas generate a variety of debates from researchers within a number of different disciplines, as will be referred to in Chapter 4 on Space and the Border. The decision to try and work outside geographically defined literary spaces has therefore been very much informed by the argument around the production of Eurocentric hegemonic statements about the "natural" relationship between one territory, culture and

¹⁹ See Massey, D., *Space, Place and Gender*, 2003 (1st ed. 1994), p. 261: "Space is not absolute, it is relational".

²⁰ Mignolo, W., *Local Histories, Global Designs, Coloniality. Subaltern Knowledge and Border Thinking*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000.

²¹ Mignolo, W., *op.cit.*, p. 308.

identity. The three literary themes identified, themes whose choice and relevance will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow, have been tested to enquire to what extent they participate in or enable the production of these and other types of mystifications of space in the literary postcolonial context. If literary production (and the themes it generates) belongs to the spaces of representation (“les espaces de représentation”), as indicated by Lefebvre, these spaces are nonetheless socially produced and reproduced, as can be said of physical spaces. They are part of the process of the social production of space and they influence and are influenced by the social construction of space.

Some key “non-spatial” concepts are also used in the thesis and require further clarification. The key concept of discourse is to be understood in the way it is defined by Michel Foucault²² and used by Edward Said.²³ Although Foucault is himself ambivalent in his position towards geography and space, and the role that they play, in his theory on knowledge and power, his definition of discourse is one that explicitly assumes a spatialised or relational view of processes, events and subjectivities within Western society. In Foucault’s terms, discourse is understood to be an institutionalised field of interrelated statements or discursive formations, systems of dispersion or enunciative modalities that participate in the production of knowledge and power. The value of these statements is dependent on the identity, the right to speak and the status of the uttering subject that all account for the various positions of subjectivity within a certain field. The concept of Eurocentric discourse on space referred to in this thesis has been derived from this definition. Equally, Said’s study of the interrelationship between culture and imperialism in the British and French context and his insistence on the instrumental role that space and geography played in the production of imperial discourse in France and Britain informed the understanding of the concept of discourse in the postcolonial context. Finally, a concept closely related to discourse as Foucault defines it is that of myth. Myth, in the context of this thesis, is taken to mean a

²² Foucault, M., *Archéologie du savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

²³ Said, E., *op. cit.*, 1994.

language or system of signs (as a system of representations) determined not by its content, but how this content is communicated, within what frame of reference and from what speaking position, as argued by Roland Barthes.²⁴ This last point about the speaking position from which content is communicated reintroduces the notion of (sites of) power as being instrumental in the production of myths. The mythologisation of space can therefore be understood as one of the central aspects of ideologies of space or mystification of space, and it is in this sense that both the notions of myth and mythologisation have been used in the thesis.

1.2. Research Objectives

As already stated, it has been an assumption of the research conducted from the beginning that a study of spatial loss in the postcolonial Francophone context cannot be undertaken separately from a study of representations of space and place. These representations include not only collective practices on how the spatial is mediated through meaning, but also how the individual subject relates to spatial realities in different cultural contexts. A preliminary analysis of the writings on space and spatial loss in the Maghrebian and Canadian postcolonial Francophone context revealed that a number of cross-cultural themes appear to be recurrent in relation to space and how this space is represented, treated or experienced. These themes were identified at the preliminary level of analysis through a close textual reading of a larger number of texts and authors and a systematic overview of the critical reception of these texts. The stage of preliminary analysis of these texts and the identification of a number of themes was

²⁴ Barthes, R., *Mythologies*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957, pp. 181-183. See: “Le mythe relève d’une science générale extensive à la linguistique, et qui est *la sémiologie*” (italics in original). Barthes argues that the myth can be identified not by the content of the message it relates, but by how this message is uttered: “le mythe (...) c’est un mode de signification, c’est une forme (...) puisque le mythe est une parole, tout peut être mythe, qui est justifiable d’un discours. Le mythe ne se définit pas par l’objet de son message, mais par la façon dont il le profère.”

followed by a stage of rationalisation of the corpus and of the themes and as explained further in section 1.3. on the justification of the corpus and corpus selection. The argument about the relationship of space, place and spatial loss in the (post)colonial context of Francophone North Africa and Canada presented in this thesis has therefore been developed within the critical paradigms of three literary “meta-themes”: imagination, memory and the border.²⁵ The choice of these themes was not preconceived; instead, it is the result of a critical overview of a larger number of texts from primary and secondary sources in the two areas studied.

The recurrent nature and relevance of these themes for the notions of space and place in the two literary and cultural areas studied prompted the question to what extent these themes participate in the practices and mechanisms of the demystification of Eurocentric discourse on space and spatial loss. This investigation runs throughout the four chapters presented in the textual analysis of Chapters 2 to 5 of this thesis and represents a unifying link for the analysis of the ten texts selected.

It has to be said that the selection of writers and texts presented is by no means exhaustive or definitive. While each of the texts selected can be analysed from the point of view of a number of variables set at the selection stage (geopolitical, gender and generational variables) to ensure a degree of diversity and relevance of the corpus to the literatures to which it belongs, each text has been analysed as an independent unit and as the product of a singular or specific postcolonial experience.²⁶

²⁵ This is not to refute the relevance of other themes such as, for example, the theme of the trace or irony. The relevance of these themes has been observed in the analysis of the literatures and texts reviewed, although to a lesser extent than the ones that were chosen in this thesis.

²⁶ Hallward, P., *Absolutely Postcolonial, Writing Between the Singular and the Specific*, Manchester / New York: Manchester University Press, 2001. Hallward’s book analyses four authors belonging to four different areas: Edouard Glissant (Caribbean), Charles Johnson (African-American), Severo Sarduy (Cuban) and Mohammed Dib (Algerian). In the context of testing the value of the application of the semiotic method to the corpus of postcolonial texts chosen in this thesis, Hallward’s criticism of postcolonial theory was found to be illuminating. Hallward positions his thinking on postcolonial theory against mainstream postcolonial thinking in that, among other things, he does not believe that the concepts of “generalisation”, “universalism” and the “category” – as he himself explains

Another important argument that runs through the thesis, is that of supposed resistance or subversiveness of the literatures presented. As will be advanced further on, it is assumed by a number of critics using postcolonial theory that resistance or subversiveness is somehow immanent to the condition and status of the postcolonial text, something that has been put to the test in this thesis. It has therefore been an important question of this research to try and understand to what extent the (Western) discourse on national space (and spatial loss) that is propagated by the modern nation-state – a discourse that participates in the mystification of space – is embedded in the writings selected. Although each of the texts selected show their own specificities, it can be concluded that in all of these texts there exists an underlying dynamics giving rise to an aesthetics and a poetics of writing on spatial loss that is in tension with the political. Both of these two main axes of writing contribute to the creation of a literary discourse on space and participate in the rewriting of postcolonial geographic imaginations.²⁷ The analysis conducted here points to the fact that the writer is first and foremost a storyteller, something that both allows and prevents the demystification of spatiality to be fully realised in the literary context.

From the questions and discussion presented above, the main objectives of the thesis have been formulated as follows:

- To analyse, through the method of close textual reading, a chosen set of Francophone texts belonging to the Maghreb and Canada from both male and female authors of different generations in order to study systematically the representations of space and place and uncover the poetics

– should be discarded as theoretical tools (these terms are most often associated with a Eurocentric approach according to postcolonial theorists). See Preface, p. xii: “As used in this book, the words singular and specific designate two abstract poles of distinction, i.e. two fundamentally divergent conceptions of individualisation and differentiation... *The specific is relational, the singular is non-relational...* My argument will be that postcolonial discourse, despite certain thematic first impressions, is best interpreted as an essentially singular or aspecific enterprise.” Interestingly, he is not interested in the postcolonial debate around the notions of binaries and difference. See Preface, p. xv: “Rather than echo the facile denunciation of binaries, I will seek to distinguish between ‘specific’ and ‘specified’ conceptions of difference.”

²⁷ Gregory, D., *Geographical Imaginations*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994.

and politics of spatial loss in the writings studied, taking into account the historical, socio-cultural and political context of the areas selected within which the works in questions have been produced. Rather than offering an analysis that compares the literary areas based on a geographic criterion, a choice of three cross-cultural literary themes – imagination, memory and border – has been made in order to test their significance for the main question studied, that of the relationship between space, place and spatial loss, and the related question of the demystification of spatiality. The study of the texts chosen has been undertaken both diachronically and synchronically, offering a contrapuntal reading in order to try and study the interconnectedness of these texts both between themselves and in relation to metropolitan France.

- To test and apply semiotic analysis as a rigorous method of the study of Western and non-Western narratives that enables the identification of fundamental values attributed to space and place and the uncovering of the discourse on space. Through the application of this method, any significant correlations and differences can be identified at the deep level of meaning of the text at which fundamental values are being communicated; these values are related to the surface and textual levels of the literary discourse at which the concepts of place and space can be said to be contextualised. The significance of the application of semiotic analysis to both Western and non-Western texts is therefore to be closely studied and discussed. But equally importantly, the objective has been to point to the limitations of the application of the semiotic method to the texts selected and to examine critically and discuss how semiotic theory of space engages with other space theories such as Massey's theory on space and place, as well as with Soja's argument of the demystification of spatiality.
- To give a critical reading of the notions of periphery, centrality and marginality, as well as those of the local and the global within postcolonial Francophone studies and postcolonial theory in the

context of Massey's theory. Ultimately, this reading should lead to the re-examination of processes of and available tools for a demystification of the discourse on space in the areas studied.

1.3. Justification of Corpus and Corpus Selection

As outlined in the research's aim and objectives, the research that is being undertaken here postulates that a systematic analysis of loss conducted on both the Western and the non-Western text would contribute to a further understanding the extent to which postcolonial Francophone authors from the areas of Maghreb and Canada are challenging or, on the contrary, reinforcing the Western interpretations of loss and loss theory in their writing. A number of questions emerge from such a perspective and analysis. For instance, would male and female writers from the Maghreb and Canada display significant differences in the way spatial loss is articulated in their texts, thus indicating that the experience of loss is gender- and/or culture-specific? Furthermore, if the experience of loss is dependent on specific geopolitical and historical factors, what could be concluded from an analysis of texts by Francophone authors originating from different countries of the Maghreb and Canada, or of texts by the first- and second-generation immigrant writers in France? Finally, would a comparative analysis between authors from different Francophone areas instigate a construction of (post)colonial discourse on spatial loss that remains grounded in the discourse on postcolonial national identity and territory? This line of questioning shows that a comparative study of authors from two different Francophone literary areas, each with their specificities emerging from their own (post)colonial histories, can significantly contribute to the investigation into how representations of spatial loss operate in the postcolonial context and define the texts and literatures that have emerged both outside the zone of metropolitan France and within its borders.

The inclusion of the area of the Maghreb is a result of a long-term research interest in this area and a case-study²⁸ of the question of poetics of loss in Algerian Francophone writing. At the time this thesis was first conceived, the choice of the Canadian Francophone corpus was a much less obvious one from the position of spatial and geographic loss in a postcolonial context. There are several reasons why this may have been true; these reasons will be discussed in more detail both further on in the introduction to the second part of this thesis and throughout the thesis. Suffice it to say here that Francophone Canada's specific colonial history and its complex relation to the question of both British and American colonial domination and its specific postcolonial position within that paradigm has made it less obvious until recently to argue for an inclusion of the Canadian Francophone corpus and studies within Francophone Postcolonial Studies. However, the surge of activity and interest in recent years for the area of Québécois studies in particular and for Transatlantic studies in general in Great Britain, as well as the most recent inclusion of a study of the Québécois case in the newly published volume on *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World*²⁹ are signs providing strong evidence that Canadian Francophone, or at least, Québécois studies are now definitely on the "postcolonial map". Québécois literature's particular status (compared to other Francophone literatures) has been discussed by the literary critic and writer Lise Gauvin who has studied widely the question of reception of Québécois literature in France and its position of peripherality in the postcolonial context. Gauvin argues that Québécois literature is little known to the general public in France because of the geopolitical position "off the centre" that Québec occupies in the Francophone world but also because very little attention to this literature has been generated by the media, despite the consistent rise in literary production by Québécois authors since 1945.³⁰ Lise Gauvin's analysis of the under-representation of Québécois literature can be compared with studies into the

²⁸ Bolfek-Radovani, J., *Le blanc et le noir de l'écriture: éléments pour une analyse de la poétique de la perte chez Assia Djebar, Hélène Cixous et Maïssa Bey*, published on www.limag.com. This preliminary case-study is both methodologically and theoretically distinct from the present thesis.

²⁹ Forsdick, C., and Murphy, D. (eds.), *Postcolonial Thought in the French-speaking World*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009.

³⁰ Gauvin, L., *Ecrivains contemporains du Québec, Anthologie*, Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1989, pp. 9-10.

question of mediatisation, status and representation in the French media of a number of Maghrebian or African authors.³¹ This comparative analysis highlights the differences between the status of these two literatures and the position that the authors and texts of these literatures occupy in the public consciousness and the “horizon d’attente” of readers of metropolitan France.

Two main approaches were taken into consideration when deciding how to analyse and present the corpus. The first approach consisted of dividing the corpus into two geographically separate areas, with a chapter on North Africa and another chapter on Canada, and results could have been presented for each area. A comparison of the results obtained could have then been presented in the conclusion with the aim of addressing key differences and similarities in the texts of the two areas studied in relation to the questions posed in the thesis. The second approach was to work across cultural and geographic borders and across space and time simultaneously, making connections between authors and texts that would otherwise have remained hidden. While this approach revealed itself to be more challenging, it was also central to the idea of unravelling the notion of national literatures, something that runs at the centre of the discussion in this thesis. The idea of organizing the texts along a number of common themes emerged progressively from the preliminary and final analysis conducted on the texts, authors and areas studied. These themes or questions were finally grouped into a number of “meta-themes”. So, the themes of exile, the city and wandering were identified at the first stage and later regrouped into the meta-theme of the border, as the number of selected texts under those themes was rationalised. Equally, the themes of the imaginary and of contemporaneity were reframed into the theme of the imagination I and II.

As already indicated, the process of corpus selection and delimitation was conducted carefully for both the Maghreb and Canada. A preliminary analysis of a number of authors and texts from each of the areas

³¹ On the subject of the condition and status of Maghrebian Francophone authors, see *Expressions Maghrébines, Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur maghrébin?*, vol. 1., n° 1, summer 2002.

that were seen to deal with the question of space, place and spatial loss was undertaken in the preliminary phase of corpus selection.³² At that stage, a number of relevant texts dealing with space were identified and grouped according to a number of literary themes. In the final stage of selection, a process of rationalisation of the corpus was completed; it can be said that the elimination of a number of texts has been at times a particularly painful one, requiring challenging choices to be made concerning the corpus selected. Nevertheless, three variables or criteria were followed to make a final selection of the corpus:

- 1) Geographic/Geopolitical variable
- 2) Generational variable
- 3) Gender variable

A further explanation should be given here regarding the use of the term “Francophone”. Although the term “Francophone” is inevitably used from time to time to designate the linguistic idiom in which these writers create their work, it is done so for stylistic rather than conceptual reasons and wherever possible the denomination “Francophone authors” has been avoided, as the use of the term is seen to be problematic for the analysis presented in this thesis, which aims at deconstructing the dualistic pairing of centre / periphery.³³

On the side of the Maghrebian corpus, five authors born in / living in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria were chosen to account for the specificity of each of the Francophone literatures, the cultural diversity of the Maghreb and different migratory histories: Mohammed Dib, Assia Djebar, Hédi Bouraoui, Abdelkébir

³² 17 authors from Francophone Canada and 16 authors from North Africa were reviewed and a number of texts dealing with the issues of space were identified. The earliest text reviewed on the Maghrebian side dated from 1952: Mammeri, M., *La Colline oubliée*, Paris: Gallimard, 1952. The earliest text reviewed in the Canadian corpus dates from 1916: Hémon, L., *Maria Chapdelaine; récit du Canada français*, Montréal: J.-A. LeFebvre, 1916 (first serialised in 1914 in Paris). The final list of preliminary primary sources is included in the bibliography.

³³ Reference may be made here to the same line of argument already used by Kelly, D., *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French*, p. 2. A positive use of the term “Francophone” in conjunction with “postcolonial” has been argued in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: a Critical Introduction* (eds Murphy, D. and Forsdick, Ch.), London: Arnold, 2003.

Khatibi and Nina Bouraoui. Among the authors that would have been highly relevant for the questions discussed, but who have had to be excluded in the final stages because of corpus rationalisation are Mahmoud Mammeri, Nabil Farès and Salim Bachi. One feature that the five authors selected share is that they have all produced works in the post-independence era; this has been regarded as an important chronological delimitation if the question of the relationship of the writer to the space of the modern nation-state is to be studied. In that context, the cases of the Tunisian-born writer Hédi Bouraoui and Franco-Algerian writer Nina Bouraoui were particularly interesting and their inclusion in the Maghrebian corpus problematic. The important issue of inclusion or exclusion of the writer in the Maghrebian Francophone literary space will be covered in Chapter 1.

When following the geographic / geopolitical criterion, those authors and texts have been chosen that deal with important aspects of space and spatiality in the Maghrebian Francophone context: deterritorialisation (Djebar, Khatibi, H. Bouraoui, Dib), counter-memory (Djebar), identity (Khatibi), exile (H. Bouraoui) and migration (N. Bouraoui). The conditions of (forced or self-imposed) exile and migration, subjects that are central to the constitution of the postcolonial experience of space and place for the Maghrebian writer living in the Maghreb and/or France, have been covered in a large number of critical works, whereas issues such as the move towards deterritorialisation that can be noted in the writings of a number of Maghrebian authors (as listed above) and the reasons that lie behind such a move have been given less attention. As for the discourses of counter-memory and identity, these issues have been mainly addressed within the theoretical postcolonial framework of resistance, something that the research in this thesis aims to test.

Generationally speaking, the authors selected broadly belong to two categories: a) those who were born before 1945 and whose main corpus of texts was created after 1960 (M. Dib, A. Djebar, A. Khatibi, H. Bouraoui), and b) those who were born after 1945 and whose main corpus of work was created after 1980

(N. Bouraoui). By introducing a generational difference within the corpus, the aim was to capture the diachronic dimension of the representations of space, place and spatial loss, but also to account for the arrival of postmodernist and contemporary ideas in the cultural, artistic and intellectual spheres of activity that have led to the redefinition of history, progress, the Self and the phenomenon of space-time compression brought in by globalisation; all of these major changes that started to take place at the end of the 1980s, and that culminated in the arrival of the post-digital era, can be seen to have greatly reframed the way in which space and place are perceived, experienced and conceived.³⁴ The hypothesis that is being tested in this thesis is whether generational differences do play a role in the perceptions of subjectivity and the reshaping of the geographic imagination in the larger contemporary and global context. This accounts for the difference established between Chapters 2 and 5; it also accounts for the role that processes of globalisation can be said to play in the shaping of these notions.

As for the gender variable, a number of feminist cultural theorists, both Western and non-Western, have studied the socio-cultural, gendered dimension of spatiality and the division of space in Islamic society.³⁵ Maghrebian society, like all Islamic societies, can be viewed as a society based on social architecture in which space is clearly regulated and codified through the strict division of the private and public sphere and determines the status and the role of the individual in that society.³⁶ When selecting the Maghrebian corpus, the aim was therefore to test the hypothesis that the gender criterion is significant for the way in which male and female writers from the Maghreb represent and experience place and space in their writing and approach the notions of territory and geography, not least because of the specific socio-

³⁴ The term postdigital or post-digital is part of the contemporary discourse of artistic digital practice. It is commonly used to designate contemporary practices that are concerned with the human, rather than with the digital, in times of high technological change and changing attitudes to digital technologies.

³⁵ See, for example Mernissi, F., *Sultanes oubliées, femmes chefs d'état en Islam*, Paris : Albin Michel, 1990; Ahmed, L., *Women and Gender in Islam*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992; Michel-Mansour, T., *La Portée esthétique du signe dans le texte maghrébin*, Paris: Editions Publisud, 1994.

³⁶ Michel-Mansour, *op.cit.*, p.65. Michel-Mansour offers a semantic analysis of the representation of the sacred, intimate and forbidden spaces in a number of Maghrebian texts.

cultural, religious and political context within which gender is defined in Islamic society. However, this hypothesis does not support an essentialist reading of differences between male and female writers within the same area, or those across the two cultural areas, with regard to the way they approach the question of place, space, exile and loss.

As far as the Canadian corpus is concerned, the corpus of texts in this thesis predominantly includes texts from Québécois authors, as the production of texts in French in that area is by far the highest. Québec has been the political space and centre within which the nationalist project of the *Parti Québécois* was designed and conceived and from which the idea of the Québécois national identity, based on the identity of the French language, history and culture, emanated in the sixties. What sets Québécois authors apart from their Maghrebian or African counterparts is both their past colonial status of settler colony and their long colonial relationship to the French metropole, as well as their present in the sense that Québec has never been independent. This specific context determines the way in which Québécois national identity is constructed: an identity that, despite the appearance of a discourse of liberation and decolonisation of the nation of Québec, still could not liberate itself from the traditionalist, nostalgic idea of the lost origins and lost territory that were prevalent in the old values of the French Catholic Church during the time of the British invasion, before which time they were to all intents and purposes themselves colonisers (settlers, trappers, explorers of the Northern territories). These specific geographic/geopolitical conditions do not make them immediately comparable to the Maghrebian case (although their literatures and histories present some important similarities too, as will be demonstrated in the course of the thesis). The analysis presented has therefore attempted to evaluate critically the way in which the authors selected have tried to negotiate a French Canadian and Québécois identity in their texts against the backdrop of a tradition of a strong national identity discourse, as well as that of an institutionalised multiculturalism that was developed in the 1980s.

Five authors from Québec were finally chosen in the last selection stage: Jacques Ferron, Jacques Poulin, Robert Lalonde, Nicole Brossard and Roxanne Bouchard. The corpus includes authors who are either bilingual or possess a competent knowledge of English and who have chosen French as their main or sole language of expression. Hédi Bouraoui, the Tunisian-born author from Ontario, has been selected to represent the Maghrebian corpus; however, his position in relation to the space of Canadian Francophone literatures remains highly relevant and unique.³⁷ Although the question of representation of space, place and spatial loss in the writing of the Manitoban author Gabrielle Roy (and her text *Détresse et Enchantement*³⁸) was also highly relevant to the questions studied in this thesis, in the context of British colonisation and the inferior position of its French-speaking population, she has had to be excluded from the analysis in the final process of rationalisation of the corpus, as was the case for the Parisian-born Jewish-Polish author Régine Robin, who represents the multicultural space of Montréal, and her experimental text *La Québécoise*.³⁹ Instead, the work of the Métis author Robert Lalonde was chosen to examine the question of Amerindian memory in the context of dual White-Amerindian heritage. In contrast to their Maghrebian counterparts, the spatial imagination and collective imaginary of the Canadian authors selected is primarily linked to North American space; both rural space and the space of the city hold a particular significance for the authors selected.

Generationally speaking, the authors in the Canadian corpus selected belong to two categories: a) those who were born before 1945 and whose main corpus of texts has been created from 1960 (Ferron, Brossard, Poulin) and b) those who were born after 1945 and whose main corpus of work was created after 1980 (Lalonde, Bouchard). In the context of Québec, the dates 1960-1966 and the 1980s are

³⁷ The Tunisian-born author Hédi Bouraoui living in Toronto could equally well have been included in the Canadian corpus. A choice was made here to include him in the Maghrebian corpus in order to address the question of migration and distance. It is clear that the status of this author remains highly problematic; in the issue of *Expressions Maghrébines* on Tunisia (vol.5, no.1, summer 2006), he has been included in the Tunisian corpus.

³⁸ Roy, G., *La Détresse et l'enchantement*, Paris: Arléa, 1984.

³⁹ Robin, R., *La Québécoise*, Montréal: Typo, 1993.

important markers of social and cultural change, as the former designates the era of the Quiet Revolution where the themes of construction of national space and identity predominate in the field of literature and in the field of intellectual production in general, while the 1980s mark the beginning of more individual experimentation with writing and the construction of the Self that is no longer directly linked to national and historical narratives.

Finally, contrary to Maghrebian female writers who represent a relative minority in relation to their male counterparts (because of the specific socio-cultural conditions of Islamic societies described earlier), the production of female authors within the Canadian Francophone corpus is as significant as that of the male writers, partly because of the influence and development of feminist ideas (both from the American and European continent) that permeated the 1960s and 1970s in Québec, and partly due to the official politics of the institutionalisation of both Canadian and Québécois literature. In that context the aim was to examine whether female authors display a specific relationship to space, place and spatiality that separates them from both their female and male Maghrebian counterparts.

1.4. The Application of Semiotic Analysis to the Corpus

An innovative aspect of the methodological approach taken in this thesis is that the method of close textual reading has been applied to the postcolonial text in combination with semiotic analysis as established by the Paris School of Semiotics and the work of Algirdas-Julien Greimas and Denis Bertrand. Indeed, Bertrand's hypothesis that space not only participates in the process of narrativisation, but also controls the organisation of the narrative at different levels of meaning, including the most elementary one (the deep level of meaning),⁴⁰ is viewed to be particularly important in the context of the

⁴⁰ Bertrand, D., *L'Espace et le sens: Germinal d'Emile Zola*, Paris: Editions Hadès-Benjamins, 1985, p. 54.

study of two socio-culturally distinct areas where spatiality is closely related to their cultural, political and historical specificities. However, while semiotic analysis is systematically tested on the corpus selected, the methodological perspectives and theories used for the analysis are very interdisciplinary; as has been argued in the presentation of the aim and objectives of this research, they draw on a range of theories of space, but they are also informed by a range of theories, from psychoanalysis, social theory, anthropology, cultural studies to postcolonial theory. As the introduction to each of the chapters on textual analysis will indicate, they also draw on a number of literary and cultural readings and theories on the main literary themes that are studied in the corpus. These perspectives, methods and theoretical readings on the relationship between space and memory, border and the imagination are constituted by two main axes: the poetic axis and the political axis. Together with semiotic analysis, these two main axes underpin the reading and analysis of the works presented.

Semiotic analysis presents the critic with a consistent and rigorous approach to the interpretation of texts that allows for an application of the same methodological matrix to a number of texts, subjecting these texts to the same process of analysis. Although a very productive young discipline, it has remained surprisingly little understood by a number of researchers who are either still equating it with the discipline of semiology (a study of all sign systems) or with structuralism, an approach that has been widely criticised in post-structuralist and deconstructionist thought, although it can be implicitly found in a number of theories.⁴¹ It is therefore not surprising to see that very few critics within Francophone postcolonial studies have been ready to use semiotic analysis and test its potential application to the literary interpretation of Francophone postcolonial texts. For these critics, semiotics is almost certainly

⁴¹ See for example, Foucault's relational theory on discourse as discursive formations. Methodologically speaking, a number of theories on space within human geography can be viewed as structuralist in the larger sense; the process of "spatialisation" that is at the centre of Soja's or Massey's theory necessarily includes a synchronic, relational study of space. Equally, Said's concept of "contrapuntal reading" central to his theory of the interconnectedness between culture production and imperialism, presumes a reading of narrative viewed structurally.

seen to give exclusive significance to an internal reading of the text that does not account for the significance of the role of the context and its external factors (be they social, cultural, political, historical or economic).⁴² The view that these factors do not deserve to be studied is not held here; just the contrary. It is thought, however, that the most interesting results always emerge from the application of a combination of approaches, theories and methods. Within the borders of interdisciplinarity, postcolonial theory and semiotics can become productive, powerful tools of literary analysis in a comparative context, if used responsibly in combination. More importantly, and this is a serious ideological point that needs to be addressed, both semiotics and structuralism are automatically discarded as methods within postcolonial theory because of their presumed universalism and inherent dualism and binarism, which are not commensurable with the locatedness and specificity of the postcolonial text. As will be shown in the analysis presented, dualistic thinking cannot be posited as a feature uniquely associated with the Western thought, nor can binarism simply be defined as a construction of Western universalist narrative. The ideological filter about these issues that is so prevalent in orthodox postcolonial theory hinders an open and informed debate on the applicability of semiotic analysis. Indeed, it has been the experience so far from talking to a number of researchers that the reasoning of those who do not seem to want to engage with semiotic analysis is principally based on the assumption that the application of semiotics necessarily supports a Western grid of reading (developed within that same system), as it fails to account for the subject's colonial or cultural experience, presupposes the existence of "universal" structures or principles, and ultimately perpetuates the same power structure from which it has emanated, preventing an adequate or meaningful reading of non-Western texts. Whilst the analysis that has been conducted here on the non-

⁴² A quick keyword search on www.limag.com conducted in 2009 has shown that a relatively small number of books, theses and articles produced by Maghrebian scholars on Maghrebian texts apply semiotic analysis and semiotics theory to their analysis. 52 references to books and theses and 16 references to articles in this category were found. Studies on the analysis of Moroccan texts (folktales, novels) seem to dominate in this particular area of research. According to the same database, the number of studies that use the postcolonial perspective is 152, which also seems relatively low compared to the total number of references with the keyword "Maghreb" (over 2000 references). In the field of Canadian Francophone literary studies, semiotic analysis can be said to be well established and used by a number of authors and critics. See the site <http://www.signosemio.com/index-en.asp> (consulted on 22/08/2012).

Western Francophone texts found this to be true to a certain extent, the process of signification (generation of meaning) in these texts is by no means one that can be said to be reduced to either an exclusively Western or exclusively non-Western paradigm of reading. As will be demonstrated, it was possible to apply the Greimassian model of analysis successfully to the great majority of the texts selected (all except one). One interesting question here has been to try and determine the factors of the text, both internal and external, that explain such a result. Such an explanation is given fully in the conclusion to this thesis. Briefly, the analysis conducted here has shown that Khatibi's call for an "intersémiotique transversale" to the interpretation of Maghrebian Francophone text points to the irreducibility of this text to an exclusively Western grid of reading. However, the use of the French language installs a semiotic and semantic tension at the centre of the text. Equally, the universal character and structure of storytelling that can be traced back to the tradition of orality present in all cultures defies cultural difference; this narrative process should not and cannot be overlooked. To conclude, the relative lack of evidence that would either prove or disprove the validity and relevance of semiotic theory to Francophone postcolonial literary studies, however strong the theoretical and practical arguments may be, has prompted a critical engagement with this method. The testing of the applicability (its advantages and its limitations) of semiotic analysis to the corpus selected has been conducted in order to produce concrete evidence of its potential value to a further understanding of processes of signification in the postcolonial Francophone text, both Western and non-Western. After all, semiotics is a study of meaning that, at its base, incorporates a critique of all discourse and as such it can truly become a critique of power, an idea that should be fundamental to the postcolonial critic's engagement. What now follows is a presentation of some of the main methodological tools and concepts in semiotics as laid out by the Paris School of Semiotics, serving to explain the procedure of textual analysis used on the corpus.

In semiotic analysis – as practised by the Paris School of Semiotics – the critic works through a text by positing different levels of analysis of meaning. The examination of the main levels of analysis starts with

the so-called surface level of meaning or the figurative level, followed by the narrative level of meaning until the deep level of meaning also known as the thematic level of analysis is reached and uncovered. It is at this level, semioticians believe, that fundamental values contained in all discourse are unveiled. This process inevitably brings to the fore the question of the role that universality and universal structures play for the interpretation of meaning of a text. As Martin and Ringham explain in their *Introduction to the Dictionary of Semiotics*:

The Paris School is concerned primarily with the relationship between signs, and the manner in which they produce meaning within a given text or discourse (...) Being concerned with structures however does not mean that semiotics is synonymous with structuralism, a theory concerned solely with the perception and description of structures (...) Semiotics, in fact, has a much wider aim: the theory purports to explore the generation of signification, any signification, not only that of the written word (...) Semiotics thus covers all disciplines and signifying systems as well as social practices and signifying procedures.⁴³

The analysis of the narrative level of meaning was based on the concept of narrativity and narrative structures influenced by the work of the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp and his 1928 study of the morphology or narrative functions of the folktale.⁴⁴ Propp's findings of a set of thirty-one functions or archetypes on which narrative structures in the folktales studied are based were further developed and systematised by Greimas. This gave rise to the conceptualisation of a set of underlying narrative structures that, according to Greimas, can be divided into two main narrative principles: the so-called actantial and canonical narrative schema. These two main narrative principles reflect "the structure of the quest" or "the global narrative programme of the quest".⁴⁵ Thus, the narrative level of meaning represents "the level of the story syntax or surface narrative syntax, a structure that according to the Paris School underpins all discourse, be it scientific, sociological, artistic etc".⁴⁶ The establishment of a "narrative grammar" by Greimas is an important development, as it enabled the study of the deep level of meaning

⁴³ Martin, B. and Ringham, F., *Dictionary of Semiotics*, London and New York: Cassell, 2000, p. 1-2.

⁴⁴ Propp, V., *Morphology of the Folktale*, Bloomington: Research Center, Indiana University, 1958 (first translation; originally published in Russian in 1928).

⁴⁵ Martin, B. and Ringham, F., *op.cit.*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Martin, B. and Ringham, F., *op.cit.*, p. 9.

at which, according to Paris School semioticians, fundamental values which generate the text are articulated.⁴⁷ These structures can be identified and visually represented in the form of the semiotic square. In the later phases of development of the Paris School semiotic theory, attention turned more specifically to the figurative or the discursive level of analysis at which the “aspectualities” of the text or the temporal, spatial and actorial components of the text were examined. This led Greimas and his collaborators to ask themselves the question “How does a being, an object, a time or a place assume value?”⁴⁸ This can be said to have produced a shift of the subject of analysis from levels of meaning within language structure to the assumption that the meaning of a text (or discourse) was generated through the articulation of a socially predetermined system of values or an ideology. The *system of valuation* and the axiology of meaning therefore became the focal point of semiotic theory in its later phase of development; it includes the study of questions such as how classical values like “good and evil”, “truth” or “beauty” are articulated in language. The study of the thymic category of meaning (euphoria/phoria/dysphoria) that is mediated by the body of the epistemological subject is placed at the centre of this investigation of an “épistémologie des passions”.⁴⁹

The analysis of space in literary discourse presented in this thesis can be seen as a particular case of a semiotics of space that presents challenges for the semiotician. In their *Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, Greimas and Courtés explain that the concept of space should be used with care within semiotic theory because of the multitude of angles or approaches from which this concept can be analyzed, be it from a mathematical, psycho-physiological or socio-cultural point of view or a multitude

⁴⁷ Martin, B. and Ringham, F, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

⁴⁸ Martin, B. and Ringham, F, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

⁴⁹ See Greimas A. J, Fontanille, J., 1991, *Sémiotique des passions, Des États des choses aux états d'âme*, Paris: Seuil, 1991: “ les figures du monde ne puissent “faire sens” qu’au prix de la sensibilisation que leur impose la médiatisation du corps (...) le sujet épistémologique (...) rencontre obligatoirement une phase de sensibilisation thymique”, p. 13. A full definition of the concept of thymic category is given in the textual analysis presented in Chapter 2, p.82. All other semiotic terms referred to in this introduction are also given a full definition as they appear in the textual analysis in Chapters 2 to 5.

of “metaphorical” uses that such a concept calls for. As Greimas and Courtés point out, the semiotics of space distinguishes itself from a semiotics of the natural world (“sémiotique du monde naturel”) in that it tries to explain the transformations that take place in the process of signification after human intervention has taken place or after a process of valorisation has been completed between the subject and the object. Thus, Greimas and Courtés are well aware of the external factors that can affect meaning in language, as they are conscious of the limitations that the semiotics of space can pose:

La sémiotique de l’espace éprouve la même difficulté à distinguer l’espace “bâti” de l’espace “naturel”: le paysage naturel est évidemment un concept culturel et n’a de sens que par rapport à l’espace informé par l’homme.⁵⁰

To conclude this summary presentation, while it is true that for Greimas and Courtés language is the object of study of the so called “semiotics of the natural world”, they argue that it is difficult to make a distinction between language as an inherited instrument of communication in the natural world and language as metaphorical expression in literary discourse. This immediately brings to the fore the question of definition and identification of the semiotic units of meaning of space and place (semes, sememes and isotopies) in the literary text. A productive tension lies at the centre of a semiotic explanation of space, a tension that is particularly relevant for the understanding of the postcolonial Francophone text, as has been implied previously. But it also points to the importance of study of spatial representations that are socially, politically and culturally mediated by colonial and postcolonial discourses on space and place.

⁵⁰ Greimas, A.J., Courtés, J., *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, Paris: Hachette, 1993, p. 133.

2. Research Context and Key Theoretical Perspectives

2.1. (Post)colonial Discourses and Theories on Space

As already indicated, the study of space that gained critical and theoretical momentum in France during the seventies has had a considerable impact on contemporary Anglo-American human geography; it can be said to have been instrumental in the formulation of a postcolonial discourse on space. Whereas postcolonial thinkers such as Said, Bhabha and Spivak have been recognised by human geographers as giving a postcolonial inflection to issues of space and place,⁵¹ Abdelkébir Khatibi's, Hédi Bouraoui's or Assia Djebar's treatment of space in the Maghrebian Francophone context has not been systematically studied, as this thesis attempts to do.

Of particular relevance for the analysis undertaken in this thesis is the work of Doreen Massey. Two fundamental questions define discourse on space according to Massey. The first relates to the question of the conceptualisation of space, place and gender and the interconnectedness between these notions. The second looks at the "politics of space/time" and the question of postcolonial practice, globalisation and the discourse on modernity. These questions will be discussed in detail below.

2.1.1. Conceptualisation of Space, Place and Gender: Disorienting Spaces, Disorienting Places

As will be demonstrated in the course of this thesis, the conceptualisation of the terms place and space (and the debate on the interrelationship of the local and global) has been fundamental not only to render a nuanced interpretation of the writings of the authors from the two areas selected for the corpus, but also to

⁵¹ Hubbard, P., & Kitchin, R., *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, 2010.

rethink the notions of locality, place and space in the contemporary context. Massey's work on this subject can be said to be primarily concerned with a redefinition of these notions in the context of globalisation or "time-space compression" and the way in which they are tied up with gender in Western societies. Arguing that in the Western mode of dualistic thinking, space is defined by the absence of temporality, Massey links the discourse on space-time to the discourse on gender:

It is, moreover, time which is typically coded masculine and space, being absence or lack, as feminine (...) It is time which is aligned with history, progress, civilisation, politics and transcendence and coded masculine. And it is the opposites of these things, which have, in the tradition of western thought, been coded feminine.⁵²

Thus, the necessity for an anti-essentialist definition of gender relations in the context of a rethinking of space and place comes out clearly in Massey's theory; her reconceptualisation of space and place bypasses the dualistic paradigm masculine–feminine and defies the culturally masculine definition of identity posited in the security of boundaries. The dualism that is inherent to the traditional Western interpretations of the notions of space and time is formulated in the dualistic positioning of the pair space–place. While place is often defined with epithets such as "local, specific, concrete, descriptive", space is characterised as "general, universal, theoretical/abstract/conceptual". The gender connotations related to these concepts therefore deserve to be both unpacked and deconstructed and this unpacking should, argues Massey, start by problematising the distinction between the local and global. Although Massey acknowledges that the association between the feminine and the local "probably does have some symbolic force", she warns against the dangers of generalisation of such a relationship as she remarks that "some culturally specific symbolic association of women/Woman/local does persist".⁵³ A gender-biased reading of the terms place/local/feminine can be noted in two connotations that the concept of place has acquired within this paradigm of thinking: the first one relates to place and "Home" and the second one "imbues place with inevitable characteristics of nostalgia", thus forging certain kinds of unproblematic

⁵² Massey, D., *Space, Place and Gender*, 2003, pp. 6-7.

⁵³ Massey, D., *op.cit.*, p. 10.

identities. Whether it is the longing for or the romanticisation of the place that is at work here, Massey warns against similar interpretations of place as an “un-problematical home” and remarks that these too are “tied up with gender”:

[In that place that is called home], Woman stands as metaphor for Nature (in another characteristic dualism), for what that has been lost (left behind) (...) This is a view of place which searches after a non-existent lost authenticity, which lends itself to reactionary politics, and which is utterly bound up with a particular cultural reading of something called Woman. And it is this view of place which is contested here.⁵⁴

It is not difficult to understand now how the European discourses on nature, locality and gender can all interconnect to create a series of sets of discursive formations within a culture that can effectively be propagated in various contexts and by various means. Indeed, a number of Western critics, according to Massey, have argued that the social, political and economic mechanisms that have led to the movements of globalisation have created a profound feeling of disorientation and “a loss, in its deepest meaning, of the sense of space” and that the “reorganisations of capital, the formation of a new global space (...) have undermined an older sense of a place-called-home, and left us placeless and disoriented”.⁵⁵ However, to what extent is the feeling of dislocation and “reverse invasion” by which “the periphery” and the Other have “infiltrated the colonial core”; “predominantly a white/First World take on things”? As Massey rightly answers her own question, the process of globalisation is by no means a new phenomenon; globalisation as a social, economic and political process was set in motion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a result of the mainly British and French imperial expansion and colonisation of the African, Asian and North American continent. The link between globalisation and colonialism is thus firmly established, as will be shown in the next section.

⁵⁴ Massey, D., *op.cit.*, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Massey, D., *op.cit.*, p. 163.

2.1.2. Thinking Globalisation Spatially? Postcolonial Practice, Globalisation and the Spatialisation of Theories on Modernity

In the first chapter,⁵⁶ entitled “Imagining globalisation: power-geometries of space-time”,⁵⁷ Massey discusses ways in which to conceptualise globalisation. What is interesting in Massey’s discussion about this concept is her differentiation of two kinds of conceptualisations of the term that divide scholars in cultural and social studies. While the first one belongs to the set of theories related to postcolonial theory and its conception of globalisation as a spatialisation or decentring of the story of modernity, the second set understands (the) globalisation (process) as being primarily governed by the rules of technology (the technologies of the internet), the rules of economics and of the capitalist free market (global economy and economic globalisation). The two conceptualisations of globalisation differ fundamentally in the way they treat spatiality. The first one can be said to account for a geography of power that operates in “space-time”, whereas the second one conceives of space that although “glorying in its recognition of the spatial” contributes to its annihilation for a number of mutually related reasons. It originates in the idea of the non-contested acceptance of economic globalisation that supports the existence of a grand narrative; globalisation becomes “like modernity’s story of progress”.

Following on from Stuart Hall’s argument on postcolonial theory and its reframing of modernity,⁵⁸ Massey states that a reading of globalisation within the framework of postcolonial theory has therefore profound significance for the way in which the story of modernity is constructed; it allows for an unveiling of power relations that underlie the telling of this story. This “postcolonial project of

⁵⁶ Massey, D., *Power-Geometries and the Politics of Space-Time*, Heidelberg: Department of Geography, University of Heidelberg, 1999.

⁵⁷ This is a reprint of Massey’s paper published in the *British Sociological Association* edited volume *Future Worlds: Migration, Environment and Globalisation* (ed. by Brah, A., Hickman, M. and Mac an Ghail, M., London: Macmillan Publishers, 1999).

⁵⁸ Hall, S., “When Was the Post-colonial? Thinking at the Limit” in: Ian Chambers and Linda Curti (eds.), *The Post-colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 242-260.

spatialisation” allows for an understanding and imagining of globalisation as spatialisation of the story of modernity and the demystification of the Eurocentric discourse on space as a re-examination of the notion of the border:

It is through that Euro-centric discourse of the history of modernity that the (in fact particular and highly political) project of the generalisation across the globe of the nation-state form could be legitimised as progress, as “natural” (...) “Places” came to be seen as bounded, with their own internally generated authenticities, as defined by their difference from other places which lay outside, beyond their borders.⁵⁹

As argued previously, the notion of the national border emerges here as one that is fundamental to the construction of the Western discourse and Western imagination of space. The relationship between the border and the production of the narrative of the nation-state is fully disclosed here as an artificially constructed relationship. A discourse of/on universality is produced from a particular enunciative position of power as one of the direct consequences of the discourse of modernity:

...one of the effects of modernity was the establishment of a particular power/knowledge relation which was mirrored in a geography, which was also a geography of power (the colonial powers/the colonised spaces). And in the post-colonial moment it is that which has come home to roost. For exposing that geography – by the raising of voices located outside of the accepted speaking-space of modernity – has helped also to expose and undermine the power/knowledge relation.⁶⁰

Massey’s last point about the assumed subversive character of postcolonial practice is particularly important for the hypothesis tested in this thesis. This thesis asks to what extent the texts produced within the literary postcolonial Francophone spaces of North Africa and Canada participate in the demystification of the (Eurocentric) discourse on spatiality. Thus, the question of the subversion of the discourse on space must be examined from the position of the debate on the geographies of power, the narrative of modernity and the geographic imagination. To rethink space, place and the spatial is fundamental for the question posed in this thesis, as to rethink the spatial is also to deconstruct the

⁵⁹ Massey, D., *Power-Geometrics and the Politics of Space-Time*, 1999, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Massey, D., *op.cit.*, 1999, p. 13.

Eurocentric narrative of modernity that allows for the creation of spatial differences or units as temporal differences.⁶¹ To think spatially in other terms, is to think of the “temporal coexistence of distinct narratives”.⁶² Interestingly, this notion is not dissimilar to what Said calls the practice of “contrapuntal reading” already mentioned earlier in the introduction.

In conclusion, the particular type of neo-liberal globalisation that Massey criticises in her text reinforces the Western discourse of modernity in which the spatial is not *spatialised*. Instead, it allows for the construction of privileged (geographic) speaking positions where the terms of any conversation are preset, installing a particular framework of thought or reference “as (though it were) a universal”.⁶³ This produces what she calls power-geometries of space-time or a “highly particular geography of power/knowledge”.⁶⁴

Massey’s notion of geography of power/knowledge that is embedded in Eurocentric discourse on space is highly relevant for the study the representations of space, place and spatial loss in the postcolonial Francophone texts that are covered in this thesis. Attention will therefore now turn to the contextualisation of the emergence of European discourses and narratives on spatial loss.

2.2. European Discourses and Narratives on (Spatial) Loss

⁶¹ This view complements Mezzadra’s and Neilson’s own concept of “temporal borders” and the principle of *differential inclusion*. See Mezzadra, S., & Neilson, “Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor”, in: *Transversal / EIPCP* multilingual journal, 2008 (accessed on 10/06/2011 at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/mezzadraneilson/en>).

⁶² Massey, D., *Power-Geometries and the Politics of Space-Time*, 1999, p. 13.

⁶³ Massey, D., *op.cit.*, 1999, p. 21.

⁶⁴ Massey, D., *op.cit.*, 1999, p. 21.

The importance of socio-cultural factors in the construction of spatial loss theory in the postcolonial Francophone context can be highlighted if the parameters used to analyse critically and interpret the notion and functionality of loss in modern Western narratives are examined. A number of contemporary Western scholars who have attempted to analyse the notion and functionality of loss in Western critical thought and literary production from a historical perspective have done so within the context of culturally predetermined phenomena such as “mourning”, “death” and “decadence”, notions which have either acquired negative connotations within Western society (death, decadence) or which can play a prominent role in the cultural memory of a nation (the practice of mourning).⁶⁵ For example, Watkins points to the fact that the ancient origins of Western literature, and especially poetry, are characterised by a literature of loss; the themes of loss and absence are present in elegy, “one of the oldest Western poetic genres”, according to Watkin:⁶⁶

It is not just that elegy is one of the oldest of our poetic genres revealing an ancient relationship between literature and loss, although this is an important and often forgotten point. Rather, it is that the problems of elegy remain those of language itself and its impact on the subject and the community.⁶⁷

The practices of remembrance and mourning in Western cultural tradition are therefore very much part of the Western discourse and narrative of loss:

Whatever period of western cultural forms of memorialisation one considers, the poetics of mourning is still marked by language’s magical powers of saving, preserving, honouring prolonging and having.⁶⁸

The importance of the theme of exile and loss in the Greek tradition is given by the American scholar Nancy Sultan in her analysis of the gendered discourse on exile and loss in that tradition. Sultan offers a

⁶⁵ See Dollimore, J., *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, London: Allan Lane, The Penguin Press, 1998; Ziegler, R., *Beauty Raises the Dead: Literature and Loss in the Fin de Siècle*, Newark/London: University of Delaware Press/Associated University Press, 2002; Watkin, W., *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

⁶⁶ Watkin, W., *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature*, 2004, p.3.

⁶⁷ Watkin, W., *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature*, 2004, p.6.

⁶⁸ Watkin, W., *On Mourning: Theories of Loss in Modern Literature*, 2004, p.10.

close textual reading of the theme of heroic exile and return in Greek poetic tradition and compares it to contemporary/modern Greek folk poetry and song.⁶⁹ She claims that the discourse on exile and loss in the Greek tradition is gender-specific by looking at the notion of *ponos* (“pain”) and how it is treated in male and female interactive verbal expressions in the narratives of loss in Greek poetry and song, and comparing these to the Greek poetic tradition. The discourse of *ponos* that Greek men and women use, according to Sultan, is highly codified; it is “socially and politically constructed” and it varies in relation to “narrative context, space and time”.⁷⁰ Interestingly, *ponos* is expressed as pain of separation and loss, but also as something positive that is constitutive of the construction of masculinity through honor and integration in the context of heroic exile as a self-imposed experience of wandering. So, the positive value attributed to loss and exile is linked in the Greek traditions to certain kinds and notions of masculinity in that context.

It is possible to establish a connection between modern Western narratives on (spatial) loss and the discourse on nostalgia perpetuated within colonial discourse on loss and colonial nostalgia.⁷¹ It has been argued elsewhere that in the context of France’s colonial history, the concept of France’s geographic loss is a socio-political construct that can be seen as part of France’s colonial discourse on spatial loss.⁷² Melancholia, on the other hand, is part of the postcolonial discourse that could be either defined as a

⁶⁹ Sultan, N., *Exile and the Poetics of Loss in Greek Tradition*, Lanham / Boulder/ New York / Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1999.

⁷⁰ Sultan, N. *Exile and the Poetics of Loss in Greek Tradition*, p. 33.

⁷¹ An insight and analysis into the concepts of hospitality, foreign-ness and nostalgia is given in Barbara Cassin’s essay, *La nostalgie, quand est-on chez soi?* (2013). As Cassin notes in her interpretation of nostalgia, although the term is etymologically of Greek origin – *nostos* (“retour”) and *algos* (“douleur”) – it is not used in any ancient Greek text (it cannot be found in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*). It was first used in the 17th century by Swiss Germans to refer to the medical condition of homesickness (German: *Heimweh*) that Swiss mercenaries fighting in Louis XIV’s army were suffering from, a condition leading to high levels of desertion. Nostalgia and the return home were used to apprise these soldiers of their sickness.

⁷² See the edited volume of conference proceedings, Marsh, K., and Frith, N. (eds), *France’s Lost Empires: Fragmentation, Nostalgia and la fracture coloniale*, Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010.

“nostalgia of nostalgia” or explained as a state of dystopia characteristic of and reflecting the disappointment and disillusion in the postcolonial nationalist project.⁷³

One of the most typical and perhaps most enduring European discourses on spatial loss underpinning the mystifications of space that are under examination in this thesis is one that relates to European discourses on nature and the link established between the loss of the idealised images of land, home and locality and the loss of the space of nature. Indeed, this observation calls for an analysis of the Western discourse on nature that emanated in the era of Enlightenment and Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century. As the anthropologist Paul Rabinow observes, the complex and the paradoxical relationship between the spheres of *anthropos*, *bios* and *logos* is the object of a recurring discussion in the contemporary context.⁷⁴ Indeed, in a short section entitled “Nature” in which he discusses questions of bio-ethics, humanism and the relationship of nature and technology, he cites an article from 1976 entitled “Nature dénaturée et nature naturante” by the French philosopher Georges Canguilhem. As Rabinow argues, the question of “denaturation of human life” is a recurring question in Western history that has produced a variety of ideological underpinnings and discourses on the relationship between Nature and man and on man’s loss of an immediate relationship with nature:

The common denominator of all such protests has been the affect of regret, a deploring of loss of an imagined, unmediated contact with “cette sorte d’absolue imaginaire, de référence indépassable, dont il est rêvé sous le nom de Nature”.⁷⁵

⁷³ See Corinne François-Denève’s paper, “Mélancolie(s) postcoloniale(s)?” presented at the conference Loss, Nostalgia and *la fracture coloniale: Contextualising l’Inde perdue*, 2-4 July 2008, Liverpool. See also paper by Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, “The afterlives of the national: Mediterranean melancholia in the contemporary Algerian novel, panel on “Post-imperial melancholia”, presented at the 2010 *SFPS* conference Between Utopia and Dystopia: The Afterlives of Empire, 19-20 November 2010, London.

⁷⁴ Rabinow, P., *Marking Time: on the Anthropology of the Contemporary*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007

⁷⁵ Rabinow, P., *Marking Time: on the Anthropology of the Contemporary*. The text within brackets is from Canguilhem’s article “Nature dénaturée et nature naturante” in: *Savoir, faire, espérer: les limites de la raison*, Bruxelles: Publications des Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, p. 71.

Rabinow's debate on the Western essentialist discourse on Nature is very useful if one is to contextualise the ideological and socio-cultural spaces within which the texts presented in this thesis have emerged. One can draw a series of connections between the ideological discourse on Nature and the idealised image of home, origin and the (native) land that emerges at the end of the eighteenth, and especially during the nineteenth century in Europe. This finds its full expression in the era of Romanticism and the rise of various European nationalistic movements and the parallel emergence of a Western imperial discourse on native space that is very much bound up with the same ideas of home, authenticity, origin or local culture. The rise of different Western nationalisms described by Anderson directly influenced the production of the Eurocentric discourse on native space and the formation of nation-state.

Like the examination of the emergence of European discourses on spatial loss and narratives on loss in Western literature, the study of the history of cartography provides some important insights into the question of the development of Eurocentric discourse on space and the postcolonial critique of such discourse.⁷⁶ The birth of modern cartography began when the use of *Mappa Mundi* or medieval European maps of the world that was prevalent until 1569 was replaced with the so-called Mercator projection introduced by the Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator on his world map.⁷⁷ The Mercator projection is viewed to mark the beginning of modern geography, as it represents a fundamental shift in space-time representation through the use of straight lines and the "correction" of space for navigation purposes in the era of European expansion. As a key instrument of power and imperial instrument of European

⁷⁶ *Mappa mundi* is the general term used to describe Medieval European maps of the world that follow a Ptolomean world view. It is a fascinating fact that the World Map entitled *Tabula Rogeriana* (*The Book of Roger*) by the Moroccan geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi from 1154 is the most famous example of pre-Mercatorial representation of space. On the map, the South is located at the top and the North is located at the bottom, an orientation system that was reversed after the arrival of the so-called Mercator projection. The contemporary Moroccan painter Farid Belkahia paid tribute to the Moroccan geographer in a series of paintings entitled *La Dérive des continents*, 2004.

⁷⁷ See Appendixes 3 and 4 in this thesis for two early modern maps of Nouvelle France and Africa by the French royal geographer Nicolas Sanson and by Sanson le Fils.

expansion in the early modern and modern era, modern cartography can be seen to underpin all Eurocentric discourse on space and place.

As Borges's short story "On the Exactitude of Science" warns, cartography or the practice of mapping is not just a story about scientific abstraction, it is a key imperial tool that participates in the practice of discourse on space, and as such it is invested with ideological values. In other words, it is an important element of the mystification of space.⁷⁸ Thus, the method and practice of mapping can be said to have the potential to participate in the discourse and practices of the mystification of space. It brings to the fore the question of representation, space and power, a question that lies at the centre of the postcolonial critique of Eurocentric discourse on space.

3. Chapter Overview

The formulation of the main research aim and objectives, the conceptualisation of key terms used in the research, the justification of the selection of the Maghreb and Canadian Francophone corpus and the presentation of selection criteria, as well as the justification of the use of semiotic analysis have been presented and argued in the introduction. As previously laid out, the main aim of this research is to investigate how the experience and treatment of space and place inform and shape the representations and understandings of spatial loss in the writing of ten postcolonial Francophone authors from the Maghreb and Canada by offering a contrapuntal reading of a number of texts from a cross-cultural and cross-generational perspective. It asks whether these authors participate in what is called here the demystification of spatiality and the Eurocentric discourse on space, thus creating discourses of resistance, or whether they in fact reinforce the dominant traditionalist discourse(s) on space and spatial

⁷⁸ Borges, J. L., "On Exactitude of Science" in: *Collected Fictions* (translated by Andrew Harvey), London / New York: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1999.

loss despite their assumed postcoloniality. This question is believed to be highly relevant for the further understanding of relationships between space, place and power at the centre of (post)colonial discourse. The practice of demystification of spatiality is understood here as a social critical process that involves the unveiling of the hidden, repressed quality of space as an instrument or agency of power through the examination and deconstruction of the practices of “mystifications de l’espace”. It demands an engagement with and imaginary of space and place that sees both of these notions as relational and dynamic, and as “spheres of multiplicity”. This kind of engagement with and imagination of space allow, in Massey’s terms, for a “relational politics of the spatial”. Equally, the notion of mystification of space has been defined in the postcolonial context as one that refers to consolidated attitudes, references and representations of space embedded in the Eurocentric discourse on space and place. It can be seen to take place in the dialectic relationship between the coloniser and the colonised and the creation of myths that give rise to mystifications of the Other and the production of “counter-mythologies”. In the second part of the introduction, the notions of European discourses and narratives of loss were presented and discussed in order to contextualise the significance of European discourse on space for the conceptualisation of spatial loss in the Western context. This is followed by a critical evaluation of postcolonial discourses and theories of space through an examination of the usefulness of Doreen Massey’s theory of space, place and gender and her concepts of space-time and the spatialisation of globalisation as a critique of Eurocentric discourse on space.

Chapter 1, “Literary Spaces and Spaces of Literature – Postcolonial Francophone Literary Spaces as Overlapping Spaces of Resistance?” questions the assumed position of postcoloniality of the texts selected in the corpus and their authors’ presumed use of strategies of subversion that challenge the Eurocentric discourse on space and potentially allow for a demystification of spatiality to take place. It evaluates critically the positions of the two Francophone literatures studied as spaces of resistance and proposes a characterisation of these spaces as “zones of instability” reflected in their status of double

marginality (Maghreb) and peripherality (Canada) and leading to a discourse of ambivalence on spatial loss and lack in these literatures.

Chapter 2, “Imaginary Geographies: Space and the Imagination I” examines the relationship between space and the imaginary in the texts of Jacques Ferron (*L’Amélanhier*, 1970) and Mohammed Dib (*Les Terrasses d’Orsol*, 1985) and asks how imaginary spaces are deployed in these two texts. The notion of the “imaginary” is defined here as an individual act of expression that is to be differentiated from the notion of imagination as described in Chapter 5 that deals with two contemporary texts. Chapter 2 demonstrates that the spatial opposition inside–outside can be identified at the deep level of meaning in both texts, supporting Sami-Ali’s theory on imaginary space, and suggesting that the fundamental experience of space crosses cultural boundaries. It also shows, however, that a different treatment of space is at work. It will be demonstrated that whilst a dynamics of “re-orientation” of space and place and a technique of localisation are present in Ferron’s text, Dib’s move towards deterritorialisation installs a dynamics of presence–absence of meaning inscribed as a culturally determined opposition inside–outside, giving rise to a critique of the discourse of exclusion and enabling the deconstruction of the Western discourse on space. It concludes that while a demystification of spatiality is at work in Dib, in Ferron’s text there is a constant movement between the demystification and mystification of spatiality through the insertion of locality and re-orientation that installs a paradigm of ambivalence.

Chapter 3, “Geographies of Memory: Space and Memory” interrogates the relationship between space and memory. It posits a dynamic and relational quality of space that is closely linked to temporality, as argued by Doreen Massey, and evaluates critically the notion of textual memory as developed by John Frow. Acknowledging the wide use of memory as a “travelling” concept studied from many different perspectives and theories both within and outside the field of memory studies, it focuses on the study of cultural memory and forgetting in texts by Assia Djebar (*L’Amour, la fantasia*, 1985), Jacques Poulin

(*Volkswagen blues*, 1984) and Robert Lalonde (*Sept Lacs plus au Nord*, 1993) in order to study the treatment of spatial loss and account for the presence of Western and non-Western discourses on memory. It shows that both Djébar and Poulin use counter-memory as their main strategy in order to challenge official colonial memories and histories expressed through the textual and narrative devices of memory appropriation and negotiation. It demonstrates how Lalonde's appropriation of sensory memory in the Amerindian context challenges the notion of transculturalism and, at the same time, contributes to the demystification of spatiality in Québec's context. Although different strategies are at work, it concludes that all three texts show that a discourse of ambivalence, rather than a discourse of subversion on spatiality, is at play, highlighting again a tension between a poetics and a politics of space and memory.

Chapter 4, "Border Geographies: Space and the Border" examines the relationship between postcolonial spaces and the notion of the border in three texts by Abdelkébir Khatibi (*La Mémoire tatouée*, 1971), Hédi Bouraoui (*Retour à Thyna*, 1994) and Nicole Brossard (*French Kiss: étreinte et exploration*, 1974) from the theoretical perspective of Walter D. Mignolo's concept of border-thinking or and that allows for the possibility of both challenging and thinking beyond the idea of "hegemonic Western conceptualisation". Border-thinking, as it is used in this thesis, is both a concept and a metaphor that allows the critic to move and think beyond the borders of the ideological discourses of the "left" and "right" and makes it possible to contest exclusive and excluding interpretations of identity, territory or culture. It can be used as a concept with which one can demystify and deconstruct any (socially constructed and produced) discourses on space and spatiality. Chapter 4 begins by examining the function of the cultural trace and its inscription in the geo/graphy of the (post)colonial space of the Moroccan and European city in Khatibi's text, and shows that the city is constructed both as a site of discursivity and a mythical space of desire. This spatial duality installs a discourse of ambivalence at the centre of Khatibi's text reflected in the binary pair Maghreb–France and calls into question the applicability of an "intersémiotique transversale" to the Maghrebian Francophone text. It proceeds with the analysis of Bouraoui's text and suggests that the

spaces of the native city of Sfax / Taparura and of the ancient city of Thyna are constructed as a (post)colonial dystopia–utopia expressed through the opposition tradition–modernity and deconstructed through the trope of the door or gate as a trope of passage. Finally, it shows how Brossard uses the inscription of the female body on the urban space of Montréal and applies the strategy of translation as both an ontological and a textual device that subverts the dominant discourse on space and language as instruments of power. It concludes that while Khatibi’s and Bouraoui’s texts only partly participate in the demystification of spatiality, Brossard’s text fully manages to do so, something that is demonstrated in the semiotic analysis conducted on these texts.

Finally, Chapter 5, “Contemporary Geographies: Space and the Imagination II” examines the relationship between space and imagination in the contemporary context. Introducing Appadurai’s concept of imagination as social practice in the era of globalisation, it argues that a new kind of imagination can be said to have emerged in the contemporary world in which it is required to make sense of place again. It shows how Roxanne Bouchard’s text (*Whisky et paraboles*, 2005) is a micro-geography in which the concept of locality is expressed as a discourse of a return to nature in the context of Québec’s cultural memory and in which the need for an intertextual identity creates a paradigm of continuity and rupture leading to an ambiguity at the centre of the text. It then proceeds to analyse Nina Bouraoui’s text (*Mes mauvaises pensées*, 2005) through her representation of lost Algeria in the context of the discourse on dual Franco-Algerian culture, showing how a reconciliation between the opposing dominated spaces of the South and the dominant spaces of the North in the Franco-Algerian context can only pass through the appropriation of the space of Paris as both a site of production of colonial discourse and a symbol of urban, cosmopolitan, contemporary identity.

CHAPTER 1. LITERARY SPACES AND SPACES OF LITERATURE
– POSTCOLONIAL FRANCOPHONE LITERARY SPACES AS
OVERLAPPING SPACES OF RESISTANCE?

Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from struggle over geography.

Edward W. Said

1.1. Introduction

One of the challenges of comparative research and textual analysis of large, historically and geographically distinct areas such as the Francophone Maghreb and Canada lies in its necessity constantly to apply the perspectives of both “zooming out” and “zooming in”. The presentation in Chapter 1 will be an attempt at a “zooming out” or an overview of the two literatures presented, followed by a “zooming in” to the territories of the texts chosen presented in Chapters 2 to 5. The literary spaces portrayed in Chapter 1 will necessarily remain “sketched” territories, as they will be subjected to the investigative process related to the thesis’ main questions. Can the demystification of spatiality in the postcolonial literary Francophone context implied in the process of decolonisation and the assertion of postcolonial identity and space, be both assumed and attributed to the texts and authors selected here? And if yes, would these texts unveil a discourse of resistance and subversion or would they unveil a discourse of complicity and ambivalence? Can both ambivalence and subversion be regarded as particular types of postcolonial strategies of resistance? While subversion as one of the postcolonial strategies of resistance has been often implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) attributed to the Maghrebian postcolonial Francophone text, the status of ambivalence of the same text has received relatively little systematic attention in Maghrebian literary studies in French and English.⁷⁹ As for the postcolonial status of the Canadian Francophone text, this has become a centre of attention relatively recently, especially in the context of Québécois literature. A “peripheral” position on the spectrum of postcoloniality of this literature can be said to have been assumed by a number of critics, both from Québec⁸⁰ and outside

⁷⁹ A preliminary search on the limag.org site (conducted on 11/09/2012) showed 9 articles and 1 thesis dealing with the subject of ambivalence in works of Maghrebian writers. The list of works in English dealing with the issue of ambivalence in the Maghrebian Francophone text from a postcolonial perspective is more substantive., However, it concentrates on a few authors such as Assia Djebar or Tahar Ben Jelloun. For an explanation of Bhabha’s postcolonial concept of ambivalence, see Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H., *Postcolonial Studies, The Key Concepts*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000. The theory of ambivalence of colonial discourse is discussed in Bhabha, H. K., “Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse”, *October* 28 (Spring), 1984; later included in *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1995.

⁸⁰ See the views of Lise Gauvin on this subject and her concept of “péricolonialisme”. Gauvin, L., “Post ou péricolonialisme: l’étrange modèle québécois”: *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 10:3, p. 433-438.

(Europe, America), something that is also a sign of its ambivalent status. How do Canadian and Maghrebien Francophone authors relate to the concept of the nation and of national literature? How one is to define and conceive of practices of cultural resistance becomes therefore central to the discussion. The study of challenging assumptions concerning space in the postcolonial Francophone literary context should therefore involve unravelling the notions of national literature and national identity, as both of these two cultural constructs participate in the elaboration of the discourse of the modern nation-state and ultimately act as means of control used by the State. The hidden instrumentality of power that is assigned to spatiality in Soja's interpretation can therefore be unveiled if one seeks to unravel these two notions.⁸¹

As argued in Said's analysis of decolonising narratives, cultural resistance can be expressed through the writing practices of reinscription, reversal and revision of colonial territory, history and memory, as well as in the various inflections of "nativism" as nationalist liberation practice.⁸² Rather than a straightforward anti-colonial negation, these strategies of reclaiming and appropriating the imperial imagination and an integrated Self are the consequence of the existence of what Said calls "overlapping territories", that account for the fact that coloniser and colonised "fought over the same terrain, contested the same history": "we should acknowledge that, at both ends of the redrawn map, opposition and resistance to imperialism are articulated together on a largely common although disputed terrain provided

⁸¹ The claim made here goes beyond Lefebvre's definition of the role that literature can play in unveiling the instrumental character of (social) space. Although reference to space can be found everywhere in (French or English) literary discourse, according to Lefebvre, textual analysis taken on its own cannot offer an adequate theory on space: "Dès que l'analyse cherche l'espace dans les textes littéraires, elle le découvre partout et de tous parts: inclus, décrit, projeté, rêvé, spéculé. De quels textes considérés comme privilégiés pourrait partir une analyse "textuelle"? (p. 22). Indeed, Lefebvre sees in the fragmentation of discourses between "l'espace mental", "l'espace physique" and "l'espace social" or between "l'espace idéal" and "l'espace réel", the principal reason why it is difficult to find a unified theory of space that would unveil its hidden instrumentality of power, to use Soja's expression. Lefebvre does however offer a reading of surrealism and of its use of the unconscious not just as a literary practice of subversion, but also as a socio-political practice that is capable of bridging the gap between ideal and real space: "Les principaux surréalistes tentèrent le décryptage de l'espace intérieur et s'efforcèrent d'éclairer le passage de cet espace subjectif à la matière, corps et monde extérieur, ainsi qu'à la vie sociale" (p.26). As stated previously, Soja's theory of space is directly inspired by Lefebvre theory on production of (social) space and his definition of (social) space as a (social) product.

⁸² The movement of *négritude* is one possible inflection of this practice.

by culture”.⁸³ What Said argues convincingly is that cultural resistance is a continuing cultural, social and political process that goes way beyond the physical repossession of territory, the affirmation of national territory and the constitution of an independent, national identity.

The differences in the local histories and territories that characterise the literary spaces of the Francophone Maghreb and Canada are as significant as they are numerous. However, the quest for the constitution of the independent nation and postcolonial identity, and their colonial past, connect the territories within which these two literatures are inscribed. They can both be regarded as sites of contention and “zones of instability”, as Imre Szeman calls them.⁸⁴ He defines these zones as decolonising spaces within which “contradictory discourses and practices” can be seen to operate and within which the discourse of the nation is created through the production of a national, cultural and political enclosed space. Seen as “a sign of independence”, the nation is constructed as “an enclosed space (geographically, politically, culturally)” within which a discourse of modernity cannot easily operate.⁸⁵ At the same time, the space of the postcolonial nation is the product of the discourses on modernity that lie at the centre of the creation of the modern European nation-state and the formation of national identities or imagined communities.⁸⁶ What can be taken from Szeman’s critique of postcolonial theory is its concentration on the questions of power relations, ethnicity, gender, race and identity that have been the predominant themes of postcolonial theory, while the “importance of the question of the space and nation has been neglected”.⁸⁷ Indeed, as the texts and authors studied in this thesis have shown, the relationship between the writer and the nation and that of the space/s of literature and the space/s of the nation in the decolonising context is fundamental for the way in which postcolonial identity is imagined and

⁸³ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 241.

⁸⁴ Szeman, I., *Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism and the Nation*, Baltimore / London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

⁸⁵ Szeman, I., *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1991.

⁸⁷ Szeman, I., *Zones of Instability*, p. 18.

constructed, leading to a position and a discourse of ambiguity and ambivalence of the writer and its text, something that can be seen to be true for all the authors and texts studied here; this relationship installs a dynamics of tension between the poetics and politics of writing. Szeman's call for a "conceptual return of the nation problematic into postcolonial studies" and his conceptualisation of the notion of postcolonial "zones of instability" are therefore instrumental for the questions that are debated in this thesis.

The paradox that is at the heart of the complex relationship between the writer and the national narratives at work has been exposed in an interesting way by the Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges, of Spanish, English and (remotely) Portuguese Jewish origin. In his essay entitled "The Argentine writer and tradition", Borges discusses the notion of what in a national literature can be seen as part of the quintessentially native experience and the role that literary tradition plays in the national literary canon. Looking back at the history of the Argentinian writing tradition, Borges calls into question the statement that the "vocabulary, devices and themes of gauchesque poetry should guide the contemporary writer and are a point of departure and perhaps an archetype" and concludes: "the idea that Argentine poetry should abound in differential Argentine traits and Argentine local colour seems to me a mistake". Affirming that the writer is dealing with a pseudo rather than a real problem, Borges cites the example of quintessentially "native" work like the *Koran*:

Some days past I have found a curious confirmation of the fact that what is truly native can and often does dispense with local colour; I found this confirmation in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Gibbon observes that in the Arabian book par excellence, in the Koran, there are no camels; I believe if there were any doubt as to the authenticity of the Koran, this absence of camels would be sufficient to prove it is an Arabian work. It was written by Mohammed, and Mohammed, as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were especially Arabian; for him they were a part of reality, he had no reason to emphasise them; on the other hand, the first thing a falsifier, a tourist, an Arab nationalist would do is have a surfeit of camels, caravans of camels, on every page; but Mohammed, an Arab, was unconcerned: he knew he could be an Arab without camels. I think we Argentines can emulate Mohammed, can believe in the possibility of being Argentine without abounding in local colour.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978 (Ed. by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby).

Borges's line of argument, which claims that a text that is "truly" native does not necessarily call for an open display of local features, seems particularly appropriate in the context of both Maghrebian and Canadian Francophone texts produced, as it has been noted that all authors make explicit or implicit reference to their native culture or place, display local features or paint local landscapes and places in their writing.⁸⁹ This raises the question of what values are attributed to the native and the local in these texts. Whether the writer consciously uses native and local features in his/her writings as a strategy of appropriation of imagined or real national territory, as a strategy of subversion of dominant national discourses and discourses of exoticism, or whether she/he uses the notion of the non-Western native to play into the imagination of the non-native Western reader, Borges's implied criticism of the writer who falsifies the "native" experience seems to be an important question here. It points to the question of the nature and function of the literary space and literariness, especially when analysed in the context of decolonising or postcolonial nations; it brings into the centre the issue of their relationship to discourses of national space that are bound with certain perceptions of identities, memories and histories. As will be shown in Chapters 2 – 5, the use of locality can be interpreted both as a symptom of the writer's uncertainty about native space or as a tool and technique of subversion of and distance from native space.

1.2. The Space of Maghrebian Literatures in French: Loss and Double Marginality

⁸⁹ The preliminary analysis of the chosen corpus conducted within this thesis points to several examples of this type of writing; see for example the work of the Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun in contrast to the work of the Algerian writer Mohammed Dib (especially in the later phase of his writing).

In a Maghrebian poetry evening event held in London in 2011 entitled *Poet in the City – The Maghreb: History and Pan-Arabism*,⁹⁰ the Tunisian-Canadian writer Hédi Bouraoui read a selection of his poems from the bilingual anthology *Echosmos* in French.⁹¹ Before Bouraoui’s reading, the convenor of the event remarked in his introduction that Maghrebians “are not really Arabs” and he pointed to some important differences in recent history between the Middle East and Egypt on one side, and the Maghreb on the other side. He concluded by saying that “the concept of the Arab awakening does not really relate to Maghrebians” and that the specificities of the different cultures in the Maghreb – Jewish, Amazigh and Arab – also needed to be taken into account. The fact that the two poets invited, Bouraoui and Elkhassar, read their work in French and “modern” Arabic, and that no classical Arab poetry was represented, induced some strong reactions from the public. Three members of the public expressed their regret that no “Arab poetry” was represented in the poetry reading although the Arabs were the dominant population in the Maghreb. To them, it seemed only fair and natural that “Arab poetry” would be represented. It did not seem to matter that Elkhassar was reading his poetry in modern Arabic. Nor did it seem to make a difference to these participants that Bouraoui clearly questioned the notions of fixed origins and identities in his poetry and when he explained that he defined himself as being a “Tunisian from Sfax, a Maghrebian, and also, an African”.⁹² In short, it seemed that both the convenor and the two poets were “crucified” by the audience, to use the image of Bouraoui’s poem “Crucifié”. The exchange of ideas that took place during the event was particularly revealing for at least three reasons. Firstly, it illustrated that there is no common understanding of what it means to be “Tunisian”, “Moroccan”, “Maghrebian” or “Arab” today and that all these identities will need to be renegotiated in the context of the recent socio-

⁹⁰ The evening (21 July 2011) was convened by Professor Mohammed Ben-Madani, editor of the London-based *Maghreb Review* journal. The *Poet in the City* event was the first one in the *Poetry from the Arab Spring* series, forming part of the Shubbak series, and held in partnership with Hay Festival and Beirut 39. The other poet invited was Abderrahim Elkhassar, a young Moroccan poet of Amazigh origin. He read a poem entitled “Amazigh” in modern Arabic.

⁹¹ Bouraoui, H., *Echosmos*, Toronto: Mosaic Press, 1986. Bouraoui read out his poems “Crucifié”, “Carthage” and “Racines”.

⁹² As will be noted, after completing his doctorate in the United States, Bouraoui moved to Canada where he has been living, working and publishing ever since.

political changes that have taken place in Tunisia and Egypt, as well as other in countries of the Arab world. Secondly, it demonstrated the durability of the artificially constructed relationship and connection between “one territory, one language and one culture” and highlighted the theoretical importance of understanding the questions of collective and individual identity, as well as those of the politics and poetics of writing, not only in the Maghreb, but in general. Finally, it brought to the fore some of the paradoxes of the contemporary societies in the Maghreb arising from an intricate relationship between colonial past and postcolonial present. Last but not least, it illustrated perfectly the unusual position in which the Maghrebian writer finds herself/himself whilst having to negotiate her/his identity between the multiplicity of spaces and places that she/he inhabits.

Historically, one of the main factors that differentiates the spaces of the Maghreb that are covered here – Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia – is their specific colonial histories and the profound effect these have had on the linguistic realities and policies and the position and status of the French language in these spaces before and after independence. In Tunisia, the teaching of Arabic continued in Tunisian schools during the colonisation period; Arabic was taught alongside the introduction of French educational structures, and some schools maintained Arabic only.⁹³ The decline of the French language in the public spaces of Tunisia since Independence is related to the specific linguistic and colonial history of Tunisia and its application of policies of bilingualism; the French language in Tunisia did not fully penetrate all the spheres of the cultural imagination, as it did in Algeria (and, to a lesser extent, in Morocco), where there was a prolonged process of acculturation. However, it can be argued that a symbolic loss (at the level of language), occurred in all three Maghrebian spaces, as the result of the French colonial experience and as

⁹³ Jack, B., *Francophone Literatures: An Introductory Survey*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 197.

the French language entered the colonised subject's imagination, to a larger or lesser extent, but also because of the competing presence of different varieties of Arabic, both written and oral.⁹⁴

It can be argued that despite their originality and continued level of production, Maghrebian Francophone literatures remain today doubly marginal. The institutionalisation of these literatures is impossible because of their liminal status in both France and the Maghreb. At the same time, the critical literary reception of Francophone Maghrebian texts by researchers of Maghrebian literature needs to be re-examined. Their reading of these texts still seems to be predominantly a reductive social, anthropological and ethnographical type of reading, and a number of researchers resist embracing different critical models and tools, as indicated in a 2005 issue of *Expressions Maghrébines*.⁹⁵ The status of Maghrebian Francophone authors is no less problematic, both because of restricted market opportunities in their countries of origin, and because of the publishing agendas of French publishers;⁹⁶ namely, most works in French are still published in France. Nevertheless, the concept of Maghrebian literatures remains a viable concept to work with for those critics⁹⁷ who aim to analyse the texts produced within these literary spaces.

One of the few critics to adopt a psychoanalytical interpretation of the Maghrebian Francophone text is Charles Bonn. Bonn concentrates on the conditions of the emergence of the Maghrebian Francophone

⁹⁴ The Maghrebian spaces are characterised by the diglossia or a type of language inequality in which the native or local spoken variety is opposed, through situational context and social status, to both classical and standard varieties of Arabic and French. In the Canadian Francophone context, this diglossia can be noted in the unequal position of *joual* (the spoken language of Montreal) in relation to Canadian French and metropolitan French, but also to Canadian English (as is the case of Quebec) and the inferior position of French in relation to English (as is the case in Manitoba and its French-speaking population).

⁹⁵ *Les Littératures maghrébines face à la critique* (dossier coordinated by Isabelle L'Arrivée), *Expressions Maghrébines*, vol. 4, n° 1, summer 2005, Revue semestrielle de la Coordination Internationale de Chercheurs sur les Littératures maghrébines (CICLIM).

⁹⁶ As mentioned previously, for an insight into the problems of the condition of the Maghrebian writer and the position of Maghrebian literature, see the issue of *Expressions Maghrébines*, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur maghrébin?", vol. 1., no.1, summer 2002, and "Littérature Maghrébine face à la critique", vol. 4, no. 1, summer 2005.

⁹⁷ Chikhi, B., *Maghreb en textes: Ecriture, histoire, savoirs et symboliques*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996; Mortimer, M. (ed.), *Maghrebian Mosaic, A Literature in Transition*, Boulder / Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.

literature and explores the concept of the tragic and its sacrificial dimension, rather than its postcolonial condition and enunciative position or “scénographie postcoloniale”, as argued by Jean-Marc Moura.⁹⁸ Pointing to the in-between language and cultural space in which the Maghrebian text in French is inscribed, Bonn speaks of the emergence of the Maghrebian “roman familial” in which both the Mother and the Father have to be sacrificed. The thematic of the “sacrifice of the mother” that Bonn observes in the early texts of Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, Driss Chraïbi or Kateb Yacine puts the loss of origin and the loss of place at the centre of Maghrebian Francophone literature:

La dynamique tragique de la perte devient ainsi la tension fondatrice répétitive dans laquelle s’inscrit l’émergence de cette littérature, et le sacrifice de la mère en est une dimension constitutive.⁹⁹

However, Bonn argues, the writing ritual of the sacrifice of the Mother inscribed within the Maghrebian text also instigates the symbolic killing of the Father, even though this act occurs, paradoxically, in the language of the Other (that itself provoked the killing of the Discourse of the Father). The figure of the Father, concludes Bonn, re-emerges in later texts of writers like Tahar Ben Jelloun and Driss Chraïbi and in those of the authors of the so-called “Beur” generation. However, the figure of the Father in these texts is most often portrayed as a victim; so the sacrifice of the Father replaces the sacrifice of the Mother.

This theme of a double loss of the Mother and the Father is a constant in the writing of the Moroccan writer and critic, Abdelkébir Khatibi. His text *L’Amour bilingue* can be regarded as a textbook case on the condition of bilingualism in postcolonial literature and the postcolonial theory of loss in the Maghrebian context. His position and the concept of *bi-langue* are discussed in the following extract:

Oui, ma langue maternelle m’a perdu. Perdu? Mais quoi, ne parlais-je pas, n’écrivais-je pas dans ma langue maternelle avec une grande jouissance? Et la bi-langue n’était-elle pas ma chance d’exorcisme? (...) Ma mère était illettrée (...) Diglossie natale qui m’avait voué peut-être à l’écriture, entre le livre et mon Dieu et ma langue étrangère, par de secondes douleurs

⁹⁸ Moura, J.-P., *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale*, Paris : PUF, 1999.

⁹⁹ Bonn Ch., “Le tragique de l’émergence littéraire maghrébine entre deux langues, ou le roman familial”, paper presented in June 2006 at the Congress of the CIEF, Sinaïa, Roumania, 2006.

obstétricales, au-delà de toute mère, une et unique (...) Fils de la langue, je perdis ma mère, fils de la double langue, je perdis mon père, ma lignée.¹⁰⁰

From a theoretical perspective, Abdelkébir Khatibi, still regarded as one of the most original Maghrebian critics who influenced both the European and the Maghrebian Francophone intellectual elites of the sixties and seventies, was the first one to define systematically the literary and political space of Maghrebian literature/s.¹⁰¹ In his text *Le Maghreb pluriel* (1983), that has long remained under the radar of orthodox postcolonial theory, he debates the question of the condition and status of literature written in the language of the Other and reflects on the situation of bilingualism.¹⁰² What is of particular interest to the questions discussed in this thesis is his concept of “sémiotique transversale” or “intersémiotique” that appears in one of his early and most cryptic theoretical texts, *La Blessure du nom propre*. Khatibi’s concept will be discussed in Chapter 4 on Space and the Border, in which Khatibi’s *La Mémoire tatouée* is analysed. It can be observed here that Khatibi refers in this text to the symbolic “wounding” affecting the speaking postcolonial subject and the scriptural body of the polysemic Arabic text:

dans le mot d’origine *blecier* il y a la notion de meurtrir; (...) Dans la blessure, entre la blessure et le Nom propre, ce qui se joue, c’est bien l’inscription du corps orphique, déchiqueté, mais évaporé en son être musical, livré à la démesure, mais démesure se voilant elle-même dans une réconciliation cruelle avec la nature.¹⁰³

Khatibi uses the two terms mentioned above to refer to the multiplicity and interconnectedness of the different semiotic systems inherent to Arabic culture, and more specifically those belonging to Moroccan popular culture. Arguing that no text can be analysed within one single semiotic system, he speaks of “intersemiotics” as the method of reading capable of capturing migratory signs and meanings that travel

¹⁰⁰ Khatibi, A., *Amour bilingue*, in: *Œuvres de Abdelkébir Khatibi, I. Romans et récits*, Paris: Éditions de la différence, 2008 (originally published in Montpellier: Fatamorgana, 1983), pp. 248-249.

¹⁰¹ In 1968 Khatibi published *Le Roman maghrébin*. This text that was Khatibi’s doctoral research (under the supervision of Albert Memmi) became one of the founding texts on Maghrebian literature where Khatibi not only gives a systematic analysis of the novel in North Africa but also speaks about the position of the Maghrebian writer who wants to publish his work in France.

¹⁰² A. Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel*, Paris: Denoël, 1983, pp. 179-207.

¹⁰³ A Khatibi, *La Blessure du nom propre*, Paris: Denoël, 1974, pp. 13-14. Italics in original.

between the different systems of Arab calligraphy, the Moroccan practice of tattooing and Moroccan proverbial speech. This method of reading subverts, according to Khatibi, a linear reading of the text; it is an oblique approach of reading that bypasses the “binarisme métaphysique” and “logocentrisme Occidental” at the heart of structuralist discourse in order to unveil the historically repressed semiologic systems. This raises the question of the applicability of Khatibi’s intersemiotics to the Maghrebien Francophone text, something that will be critically evaluated and tested in Chapter 4. The semiotic analysis of his text, used to investigate to what extent Khatibi’s *La Mémoire tatouée* subverts or reinforces the text’s binary discourse on identity and cultural difference, shows that Khatibi’s concept of “intersémiotique” problematises the status of the Maghrebien Francophone text, as being able to subvert this binary discourse fully. The definition of a stable identity and meaning is made impossible by the refractory nature of different semiotic systems in the Arabic text, while the status of the Maghrebien Francophone text remains ambiguous, as a site of co-existence of both French and Arabic semiotic systems and of the production of ambivalence or undecidability of meaning.

One author who has spoken most suggestively about the question of language, identity and loss, and the specificities of the (post)colonial feminine experience of spatiality in the Algerian context is Assia Djebar. Her work will be analysed in detail in Chapter 3 on Space and Memory, but it should be pointed out here that Djebar is one of the writers of the older generation, whose concern for the question of the poetics and politics of writing, particularly pronounced in the works of the eighties and nineties, can be seen as quintessential to the Algerian postcolonial feminine experience in the Maghrebien and French context. This experience was succinctly expressed in the following affirmation that she gave in an interview in 1997:

Au fond tout mon travail de vingt à quarante ans, a été de rechercher cette ombre perdue dans la langue française. Il y a deux sortes de pertes : il y a la perte qui vous hante et la perte que vous oubliez, l’oubli de la perte (...) Le terrible, c’est l’oubli de la perte. Vous avez oublié que vous

n'avez pas. Donc, vous avez l'ombre de ce que vous avez perdu. C'est cette ombre-là que vous amenez dans la chair de la langue.¹⁰⁴

Djebar's circularity of argument in the narrative of the experience that is perceived both as universal (poetic) and particular (political) illustrates particularly well the intertwining of the poetical and political aspects of loss in the Algerian context that characterise the experience of dual loss. As will be advanced by the example of textual analysis of *L'Amour, la fantasia* in Chapter 3 on Space and Memory, Djebar does not seem to be able to break out of this writing position of duality and ambivalence, as the two levels of the experience of loss on the poetical and political axes produce circular narratives, something that is particularly visible in her later and most revealing text on loss, *Vaste est la prison*.¹⁰⁵

To conclude, although the young generation of authors such as the Algerian writer Salim Bachi continue to produce original works in this area, the future of Maghrebian Francophone literatures remains highly uncertain, especially in the light of socio-political changes that have swept through the countries of the Arab world, changes that, interestingly, started in Tunisia. Khatibi's prediction that Maghrebian literature in French would "naturally" disappear in North Africa after independence had been gained in Algeria, Tunis and Morocco, could be closer to the truth than previously believed, although it has taken much longer than anticipated.

1.3. The Space of Canadian Literature in French: Lack and Spaces of Peripherality

¹⁰⁴ Djebar, A., "Territoire des langues" in: Gauvin, Lise, *Écrivains francophones à la croisée des langues, Entretiens*, Paris: Karthala, 1997, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ Djebar, A., *Vaste est la prison*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1995.

While the field of study in Canadian Francophone literature (especially Québec) is well developed, the attention it has received from researchers within postcolonial Francophone studies both within and outside Canada is a relatively new phenomenon, as indicated previously.¹⁰⁶ The *Québécois Studies*' 2003 special issue on *Québec and postcolonialism* is indicative in that sense; the place of Québécois literature and history within postcolonial theory is discussed by a number of Québécois researchers who critically examine the validity of the thesis of Québécois literature's postcolonial status.¹⁰⁷ The conceptual difficulties that researchers encounter when trying to place Canada within the paradigm of postcolonial studies can be situated within the larger discussion about Canada and its peripheral status, views illustrated in Diana Brydon's article:¹⁰⁸

The self-evident complexity of the application of postcolonial theory to the Francophone population of Canada arises from their position variously as agents and objects of colonisation (...) Other forms of economic and cultural domination can be understood in terms of postcolonial debates, from the extension of US domination to the enduring influence of British and French cultural forms and practices. This multilayered set of colonial relationships forms the necessary context of any discussion of the cultural products of Quebec.¹⁰⁹

Significant in that sense is the 2005 annual conference of the Society for Postcolonial Francophone Studies on the theme of the *French Atlantic*.¹¹⁰ In his keynote address entitled "Pour une vision postcoloniale et postnationale de l'histoire du Québec", Jocelyn Létourneau, a Canadian historian and

¹⁰⁶ Some French scholars have also argued for a postcolonial status of Québécois literature: Moura, J.-M., *Littératures francophones et théorie postcoloniale*, Paris: PUF, 1999.

¹⁰⁷ See articles of the special dossier on Québec and Postcolonialism in *Québec Studies*, 35, Spring/Summer 2003. See, in particular, Desroches, V., "Présentation: En quoi la littérature québécoise est-elle postcoloniale?", Chanady, A., "Rereading Quebecois literature in a postcolonial context", Hobbs, S., "De l'Opposition à l'ambivalence: la théorie postcoloniale et l'écriture de la résistance au Québec" or Roberts, K., "Francophone... but not like the others: notes on Quebec studies in the United States".

¹⁰⁸ Brydon, D., "Reading Postcoloniality, Reading Canada" in: *Testing the Limits: Postcolonial Theories and Canadian Literature* (special issue), *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 56, Special issue on 1995, p. 1-19.

¹⁰⁹ Chapman, R., "Writing of/from the Fourth World: Gabrielle Roy and Ungava", in: *Québec Studies*, 35, spring/summer 2003 (accessed on 20/07/ 2007 from http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-9716744_ITM).

¹¹⁰ The Society for Postcolonial Studies Annual Conference: The French Atlantic, 2-3 December 2005, The French Institute, London, UK.

critic, gave an overview of the intellectual climate of Québec in the 20th century and remarked that a lot of the research conducted within Québec is still inscribed within what he calls “le paradigme du manque” or “d’*échec*”, despite efforts of intellectuals and writers of Québec since the Quiet Revolution (1961-1966) to redefine their cultural and national identity and negotiate a position within Canadian history. These notions of lack, failure and defeat are, according to Létourneau, symptomatic of a “colonised thought” or “colonised experience” that the Québécois subject has been subjugated to throughout its history. As Létourneau observes, a number of Québécois scholars and intellectuals within the institutional establishment are still governed by a research principle that implies that “l’histoire précède la méthode”. So, “la difficulté pour les Québécois de sortir du paradigme national(itaire) représente un poids considérable au renouvellement des visions portant sur l’expérience historique québécoise”, Létourneau concludes.¹¹¹ The reconstruction of the Québécois identity and agency from a postcolonial perspective can therefore pass only through the resolution of the national question and the reintegration of the Other.¹¹² Lack, in the postcolonial context of Québec as it is understood here, refers to the Québécois’ hyperconsciousness about the lack of a constituted national space and identity. National space and identity within the paradigm of lack can only be thought of in terms of absence, failure and lack of both the space (of the nation) and time (or history). In turn, this way of thinking about national space can be directly linked to a conceptualisation of space that is only defined as lack and absence, something that lies at the centre of Massey’s critique and theory on space. Although both lack and loss are to be understood as separate concepts in the Maghrebian and the Canadian corpus, the two paradigms identified here help to shed light on the position of the writer in these two areas. Without wanting to overgeneralise, the Maghrebian writer can be seen to assume a marginal position within the national spaces of France and the Maghreb that can lead to an “extreme” experience of spatial loss in all its dimensions. On the other hand,

¹¹¹ Quotations are from notes taken at the conference.

¹¹² In the Canadian Anglophone context, Imre Szeman analyses the process of construction of Canadian identity and the establishing of a new, unified space “infused with Canadianness” as a reaction to the rise of Americanisation after the 2nd World War.

the Québécois writer assumes a peripheral position in relation to the cultural spaces of France and America, often interiorising the collective narrative of lack and failure, whilst also being asked to play a constitutive role in the production of the Québécois national myth and mythology of the return to origins.

As the analysis of a number of critics of Québécois literature shows, the question of the relationship between literature and the dominant discourses of institutionalisation (often conflicting in practice) can be seen to occupy a central position in defining the “scénographie” in which the Canadian Francophone writer speaks. In his book *Le Roman Québécois de 1960 à 1975, idéologie et représentation littéraire*, Kwaterko points to an exceptional autonomous development of literary activity in Québec since the sixties and the parallel institutionalisation of its status, a situation that favoured both the originality of its literature and its ambiguous position in the context of nationalist discourse. As Kwaterko explains, it is the ideological dimension of the Québécois literary institution that deserves to be studied, and that is closely intertwined with Québécois literary production seen as a “médiation idéologique”:

Plus exactement il s’agirait d’interroger l’idéologie comme code et comme discours spécifiques *instituant* la littérature québécoise, c’est-à-dire instaurant leur propre système de valeurs et un ensemble de normes et de contraintes par rapport auxquelles cette littérature s’élabore, se définit et fixe ces propres conditions de lisibilité.¹¹³

The mystification or ideologisation of the space of literary production in Québec is particularly important here, as it points to the reasons that prevent the Québécois writer from assuming a position of resistance and subversiveness, especially in the phase of the affirmation of Québec’s national project. The dissenting voices, such as those of Hubert Aquin,¹¹⁴ can only be fully understood in the context of the larger climate

¹¹³ Kwaterko, J., *Le Roman Québécois de 1960 à 1975, idéologie et représentation littéraire*, Montreal: Balzac Editions, 1989, p.15.

¹¹⁴ Hubert Aquin has written extensively on the problematic/tragic condition of the Québécois writer in the context of colonisation of the Québécois subject (“dominé”) and ideological discourses that are being produced in that context. See, for example, Aquin, H., “Profession: écrivain”, in: *Parti Pris*, n° 4, January 1964, Montréal: Éditions Parti Pris, p. 23-30. As Aquin observes when talking about his own condition as a writer writing in the land of the dominated: “N’a-t-on pas constaté que dans les pays colonisés se manifestait invariablement une surproduction

or constitution of the “projet national” of the sixties and the arrival of the Quiet Revolution. This larger socio-cultural and political context should be studied when trying to understand the role that the Québécois writer as an actively engaged intellectual will be called on to assume. Contrary to the Maghrebian Francophone writer assuming a doubly marginal position within the national spaces of France and the spaces of the Maghreb, in the context of Québec the writer is principally called to become an essential actor of the process of institutionalisation; s/he will be expected to participate in the production of both Québécois national space and national identity. The concretisation of this process, as Kwaterko notes, is notable in the appearance of themes of the collective myth of the nation or “le pays”, mythology of the return to the origins or “mythologie de l’origine, de l’enracinement et de la fondation du territoire”. The story and history of the origins of the “Je me souviens” motto of the Province is a very good illustration of the creation of such an ideological discourse on the history of the nation.¹¹⁵ The discourse on the mythologisation of space as a type of mystification of space in the Québécois context finds its clearest expression in the Québécois’ collective imagination and imaginary. The specificity or the tragic dimension of Québécois literature lies in its ambivalent position or the impossibility of referring to a historical reality and national space; it can only speak and think of its History as imaginary presence. This position facilitates the creation of the collective myth of the “land” and of an imagined collective and individual identity. This point is also made by Kwaterko when he refers to the mythical dimension of Québec’s unactualised History and independence:

C’est la réalité et l’Histoire qui font défaut: l’indépendance, la libération collective sont l’avenir souhaité du Québec, mais “le pays” comme entité mythique, ayant un sens comme “univers” précisément, reste cet espace-temps privilégié où la projection individuelle et le sentiment de

littéraire... Faire la révolution, c’est sortir du dialogue dominé-dominateur, à proprement parler, c’est divaguer”, (Aquin, p. 26-27).

¹¹⁵ “Je me souviens” with and without the compliment is still very much present in the collective consciousness of the Québécois nation. A number of debates appeared in the media since the nineties as to the correct interpretation of the full version of the motto as in “*Je me souviens que né sous le lys, je crois sous la rose*” and in “*Je me souviens que né sous le lys, je crois sous la rose*” that could imply either the co-existence or the separate existence of France and England. The history and origins of these rumours and urban myths about the motto’s meaning and significance are discussed by the historian Gaston Deschênes in: “La devise – Je me souviens” (downloaded from <http://www.vigile.net/article6429.html> on 20/07/2005).

l'identité collective peuvent établir des rapports de complicité, s'assimiler, se convoquer et s'incarner mutuellement.¹¹⁶

Following the strong phase of institutionalisation and ideologisation of Québécois literature that characterised its nationalist phase from its emergence until the eighties, the so called post-nationalist phase in Québécois literary history was marked, according to some critics, by more pronounced poetic preoccupations and by the affirmation of feminist and migrant writing. The writers subscribing to ideas of the post-nationalist project such as Nicole Brossard, Jacques Poulin, Régine Robin, Robert Lalonde or Danny Laferrière produce texts that are characterised by an interrogation of the dominant narratives of history and ambivalence towards discourses of national space and identity. In particular, the entry of the so-called “écritures néo-québécoises” into Québécois literature since the middle of the nineties represented an important intellectual and cultural shift that called for a remapping of the Québécois literary space, but also for a redefinition of Québécois cultural and national identity.¹¹⁷ It offered a social, cultural and political context in which a unitary vision of national space and local place could be redefined, and the potential for the demystification of the discourse on national space and identity in the context of Québec. However, *l'écriture migrante* in Québec can be said to have become a “packaged” concept that could be successfully marketed to both national and international audiences, as is the case for the successful and highly mediatised writer Danny Laferrière, something that the writer himself exploits.¹¹⁸ In contrast to the mediatisation of migrant literature in Québec, Amerindian literature in French in Québec remains a peripheral space and literature within Québec's contemporary discourse on identity and memory; in this sense it occupies a similar position to that of the Francophone literatures of Acadia and Ontario. The notion of Amerindianity will be discussed at length in Chapter 3 on Space and

¹¹⁶ Kwaterko, J., *op.cit.*, p. 59.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Ertler, K.-D., “Les écritures migrantes ou néo-québécoises dans le système littéraire contemporain du Québec: Sergio Kokis et *L'amour du lointain*”, in: *Parcours Québécois, Introduction à la littérature du Québec*, (ed. Morel, P.), Bucarest: Cartier, 2007, pp.72-80.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Laferrière, D., *Je suis un auteur japonais*, Paris: Grasset, 2008. In the book, the writer plays with the notion of national stereotypes and clichés and representations of foreignness.

Memory, in the example of Lalonde's text *Sept Lacs plus au Nord*. More recently, a number of contemporary young Québécois authors feel the need for a return to traditional themes of Québécois literature, as will be shown in Chapter 5 on Space and the Imagination II in the work of the young Québécois writer Roxanne Bouchard. One can reflect therefore on the following question here – why is it important to a contemporary young female writer from Québec to explore the question of the rural that is usually associated with traditional and conformist values, compared to the progressive and cosmopolitan values assigned to contemporary urban spaces? In her interview, Bouchard explained that she liked exploring the spaces of rural Québec as they allow for an insertion of “larger than life characters” and the deployment of individual imagination.¹¹⁹ But, ultimately, the reason for her exploration of the rural could be by re-appropriating the space of rural Québec, Bouchard ultimately seeks to re-appropriate both the individual and collective past and cultural memory of Québec in order to forge a new Québécois identity able to fully embrace and assume both its past and present; her writing could be regarded as a quest for a new humanism in the contemporary context.

1.4. Conclusion

The presentation of some of the main issues related to the emergence, status and enunciative position of Canadian and Maghrebian Francophone spaces of literatures has been attempted with the aim of trying to widen the debate and enquiry into the understanding of the postcolonial status of the texts studied in relation to their presumed position and discourse of subversion vs. ambivalence. Very broadly defined, the practice of subversion in the postcolonial context can be understood as the one that takes the message of the coloniser and subverts its meaning by using the coloniser's own language and frame of reference. It is very dependent on the enunciative position of the sender (in this case the postcolonial subject) and

¹¹⁹ See the interview conducted with the author included in Annex 2 to this thesis.

his/her assumed position of marginality in relation to the centre (of power) that she or he aims to subvert. The position or the discourse of ambivalence in the postcolonial context, on the other hand, can be defined as one that never fully subverts the coloniser's message because of its ambivalent values; it never fully manages to disrupt the coloniser's position of power. While the Maghrebian Francophone writer remains doubly marginal in relation to the spaces of both France and the Maghreb, thus assuming an ambiguous position that is defined by this double marginality, the Québécois writer, producing his work within a highly institutionalised and "ideologised" space of Québécois national(ist) discourse, occupies a contradictory position, assuming at once a central position in relation to other Francophone Canadian literatures and a peripheral position in relation to Anglophone Canada, America and France. It can be concluded that both literary spaces studied here share a commonality: they are inscribed within the decolonising "zones of instability" where a range of contradictory and competing discourses on space, the nation, culture / literature and identity are formed and produced. The status of subversion vs. ambivalence of the texts that are classified as belonging to the Maghrebian and Canadian Francophone literatures and their representations of space, place and spatial loss should therefore be closely examined; this has been attempted in the presentation of the analysis of the texts selected in Chapters 2-5 and through the comparative engagement with several methods of reading.

CHAPTER 2. IMAGINARY GEOGRAPHIES: SPACE AND THE IMAGINATION I

À la question d'inspiration gnostique: Où sommes-nous lorsque nous sommes dans le monde?, on peut apporter une réponse contemporaine et compétente. Nous sommes dans un extérieur qui porte des mondes intérieurs.

Peter Sloterdijk

2.1 Introduction

In the second chapter of this thesis, the relationship between space and the imagination is presented from the viewpoint of the question of the “imaginary” space. The analysis presented in this chapter has been conducted with the main aim of identifying to what extent the imaginary space of the nation and the two selected authors that use this space contribute to the demystification of spatiality in the postcolonial Francophone context. It will be shown that while a dynamics of re-orientation of space and place installing an opposition between internal and external spaces dominates in Ferron’s text, a dynamics of presence–absence of meaning at the surface level lies inscribed as a culturally determined opposition inside-outside at the fundamental level of Dib’s text, creating a critique of the discourse of exclusion and enabling the deconstruction of the Western discourse on space. These two main writing strategies, in turn, will determine the way in which spatial loss as loss of native space is perceived, treated and represented in both texts. The concept of the “imaginaire” will be used here to analyse the mythical dimension of space and its symbolic value/s. The question that will be posed is how imaginary spaces as spaces of the imagination are represented in the writings of authors belonging to two distinct socio-cultural areas. Will the two texts chosen reveal a treatment of space and place that is distinctively different in the Arabic and Islamic imaginary and the North American imaginary? Or can one speak of imaginary archetypes of space and place that would cut across cultures? When looking at the imaginary dimension of space, the differentiation between external and internal space and the space of inside / outside in the two texts selected will be discussed based on Sami-Ali’s psychoanalytical theory of internal-external space. Ultimately, the interrelationship between loss and recovery of the subjects’ space raises the question of the relationship between the Self, identity and alterity¹²⁰ and between the individual and the society; these notions can be reshaped on the playground of the imaginary giving rise to a new, emerging space where it is possible to redefine both *identity* and *alterity*. Finally, the question will be asked as to what role the

¹²⁰ For an overview of the different definitions of the term *alterity* in postcolonial theory see Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., and Tiffin, H., *Post-colonial Studies, The Key Concepts*, 2000 (1st ed. 1998), pp. 11-12.

mystifications of space can play in the construction of the writer's and the reader's imaginary. Finally, what new insights can be gained by comparing the semiotic reading of the opposition internal-external space with that of the feminist critique of the categories of "internality" and externality" (that can be seen to be assigned to time vs. space and as argued in Chapter 3) and the Western conceptualisations of space and time? As set out in the introduction, the engagement with Massey's theory of space is one of the thesis' main objectives and runs through all of the chapters.¹²¹

According to the Egyptian-born psychoanalyst Mahmoud Sami-Ali, imaginary space can be defined by the fundamental spatial opposition "dedans–dehors".¹²² In *L'espace imaginaire*, the author postulates the pre-existence of the fundamental spatial structure "extérieur–intérieur" and the more primitive structure "dedans–dehors".¹²³ It should be noted here that Sami-Ali applies psychoanalysis (and the Western conception of the Self) to his clinical studies with Egyptian subjects (both children and adults). This methodology is particularly interesting in the context of this thesis, as the existence of fundamental structures (such as exterior–interior) is being tested both on the Western and non-Western text. Interestingly, Sami-Ali's clinical and theoretical work shows that the production of real and imaginary space and the existence of fundamental structures such as *exterior–interior* and *inside–outside* appear to be culture-independent, and that they precede socio-cultural processes leading to the production of difference. Indeed, Sami-Ali argues that the role that the body plays in the creation and configuration of imaginary space is fundamental; the categories of the relation "top–bottom", "in front–behind" or "inside–outside" stop being objective and instead become invested with the subjective, imaginary values of corporeal space or the "spatialité du *Moi corporel*". The relationship dominating all the others is that of the inside–outside ("l'intérieur–l'extérieur"). It becomes fundamental to the construction of the body and

¹²¹ The terms "internality" and "externality" that will be discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are those used by Massey, who cites Elisabeth Grosz and her work *Space, time, and perversion: essays on the politics of the body* (1995).

¹²² Sami-Ali, M., *L'Espace imaginaire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1974.

¹²³ Sami-Ali is of Egyptian origin and pursued his education in France (Ecole Normale Supérieure). He taught psychology at the University of Alexandria and is a member of the Société Psychanalytique de Paris.

the Self; it instigates a symbolic equivalence between the body and space and defines imaginary space and the body's relationship to the real. As the author concludes on the fundamental importance of the experience of space:

J'ajouterais en guise d'extrapolation *que l'expérience de l'espace sous-tend toutes ces perceptions parce qu'elles sont pourvues d'une configuration spatiale* (...) Nous nous trouvons là au point de départ d'une compréhension de l'espace et du corps dont la pleine justification relève d'une théorie générale de l'espace imaginaire.¹²⁴

The limits of (real and imaginary) spaces are constantly shifting, as Sami-Ali explains; they are governed by the body, uniquely capable of transforming the "imaginary" into the "real"¹²⁵ and the "real" into the "imaginary" space. This is therefore a theory that is based on an interpretation of the notions of "externality" and "internality" that are dynamic; the borders of internal and external space are open and fluctuating, they are entirely defined by subjectivity. Sami-Ali defines the imaginary space of the "dedans" as the primordial space of the womb. It can be attributed the positive or negative value of maternal space which, in turn, can be equated with that of the native space.¹²⁶

If one accepts Sami-Ali's theory about the fundamental character of the spatial relationship internal-external as one that cuts across cultures, a comparative analysis of representations of space and place in Ferron's and Dib's work reveals some striking results regarding Ferron's and Dib's specific writing strategies and the way in which they treat and construct space and spatial loss. They can be seen as two opposing yet complementary aspects of the question of how the migrant and non-migrant writer can deal with the native space and the space of the nation-state; as decolonising strategies of resistance that either celebrate a nativist view (Ferron) or problematise the postcolonial space of the nation (Dib). In the case of

¹²⁴ Sami-Ali, M., *op.cit.*, p. 23.

¹²⁵ "Real" space is being defined here by Sami-Ali as "the space of perception". Sami-Ali makes the distinction between internal and external perceptions of space ("perceptions internes et externes").

¹²⁶ The maternal space (or the space of the womb) can become invested with the value of repressive space as in the case of claustrophobia. It can be explained as the case in which the space of the *inside* becomes a closed space that generates strong feelings of anxiety. As Sami-Ali explains, "la claustrophobie est l'angoisse d'être enfermée à l'intérieur du corps maternel devenu menaçant" (Sami-Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 18).

Ferron, one can speak of the practice of “localisation” and “re-orientation” of space through the use of the fairytale genre, while Dib’s move towards deterritorialisation and the development of the space of the North should be understood as the deployment of “non-place” in which the loss of place is expressed as a loss of meaning. These two strategies – localisation and deterritorialisation – although fundamentally different, are particularly important for the main question that is debated in this thesis; not only do they reveal something significant about the larger socio-political contexts within which these writers create their work, but they also place the question of the writer and his/her poetics of writing at the centre of the debate on the mystifications of space. As will be seen in the analysis that follows, Ferron’s use of fairytale and space re-orientation is aimed at reconstructing the collective myth and the imaginary space of the nation, while Dib’s deployment of “non-place” as a space of the imaginary is constitutive of the writer’s deep concern for the question of alterity and communicability of meaning in the Algerian and French, but also in the global context.

2.2. Reorienting Spaces, Reorienting Places in Jacques Ferron’s

L’Amélanchier

*Un pays, c’est plus qu’un pays et beaucoup moins,
c’est le secret de la première enfance.*¹²⁷

Jacques Ferron

Jacques Ferron was born in Louiseville (the province of Maskinongé, Québec), in 1921. No longer alive, he remains one of the most important Québécois writers today. A doctor by profession, he began his

¹²⁷ Ferron, J., *L’Amélanchier*, Montréal: Editions Typo, 1992, p. 148.

writing career in the theatre. In 1962, his first major work, *Contes du pays incertain*,¹²⁸ a collection of short story-tales, was published, for which he later received the prestigious *Governor General Award*. This was followed by the publication of *Contes anglais et autres* in 1964, *La Nuit* in 1965 (later re-written by the author and published as *Les Confitures de coings*,¹²⁹ 1972) and *Le Ciel du Québec*,¹³⁰ 1969.¹³¹ A year later, Ferron wrote what was to be, according to a number of critics, his most accomplished text – *L'Amélanchier*.¹³² Beside his literary and medical interest, Ferron was also very active politically. In 1960 he participated in the founding of the *Action socialiste pour l'indépendance du Québec* and in 1963 he formed his own independent party, *Parti Rhinocéros*, and remained its candidate during several federal elections.¹³³ Although Ferron's *œuvre* includes theatrical pieces, novels and short stories, Ferron's "signature" or writing style is most often associated with the subversion of the traditional storytelling genre. The Canadian critic Pierre L'Hérault speaks of the important phenomenon of the "repiquage du conte"¹³⁴ in his analysis of Ferron's work. This process of "repiquage" to which Ferron himself refers to when speaking about Québécois folktales fulfills a unique function for the writer, that of the transformation of space from an unfamiliar to a familiar one, through which the process of "localisation" takes place. These marks of "localisation" have the function of enabling the storyteller (and the reader) to translate the unfamiliar world of uncertainty into one that is familiar, thus opening up a new space of collective identity and consciousness. Indeed, it is through the use of folktale that Ferron interrogates his relationship to the space of the nation-state and explores the collective myth of the return to the origin or

¹²⁸ Ferron, J., *Contes (Contes du pays incertain, Contes anglais, Contes inédits)*, Montréal: Bibliothèque québécoise, 1993 (1st ed. Hurtubise HMH, 1968). Translated in 1972 as *Tales from the Uncertain Country*.

¹²⁹ Ferron, J., *Les Confitures de coings*, Montréal: L'Hexagone, 1990 (1st ed: Éditions Parti Pris, 1972).

¹³⁰ Ferron, J., *Le Ciel de Québec*, Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 1979 (1st ed. 1969, Éditions du Jour).

¹³¹ That same year Jacques Ferron joined the Parti Québécois.

¹³² Ferron, J., *L'Amélanchier*, Montréal: Éditions Typo, 1992 (1st ed. Les Éditions du Jour, 1970).

¹³³ The source for this summary is: L'Hérault, P., *Jacques Ferron, Cartographe de l'imaginaire*, Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1980.

¹³⁴ L'Hérault, P., *op. cit.*, p. 22.

land that figures so prominently in the Québécois imaginary.¹³⁵ As L'Hérault observes when speaking about Ferron's text *Contes*¹³⁶ and the function played by the imagined space of the Gaspésie region (in which most of the stories are located):

Loin donc d'être un refuge et déboucher sur le mythe, l'imaginaire québécois de la légende est un moyen de s'approprier la réalité (...) Et le pays cesse d'être un lieu de peur pour devenir un lieu habitable, grâce à la force de l'imaginaire.¹³⁷

The recreation of historicity as deployment of "l'image matricielle" in Ferron's work, argues L'Hérault, passes through imaginary space as a space of collective memory. Thus, Ferron's practice of localisation in the space of the imaginary allows him to recreate the individual and collective space of the imagined nation-state; it allows him to recreate an imagined community in the sense Benedict Anderson gives it.

It can be argued of course that the use of the traditional folktale by Ferron in which the rural, local and folklore features of Québec and Québécois life figure so prominently, creates discourses that are reactionary and conservative; such a practice can be seen to reinforce imaginations of space that are grounded in the Eurocentric discourse on space, something that lies at the centre of Massey's critique. From a human geographic perspective, Ferron's notion of the local as pure, authentic and unchangeable stands in direct contradiction of Massey's definition of place as a relational and dynamic concept. However, some critics argue that a revolutionary function can be attributed to Ferron's folktale writing. He challenges the traditional conception of the village as propagated by the conservative discourse of the Catholic Church at the time and rewrites Québécois collective and individual identity, creating the model

¹³⁵ Sing, P., *Les Villages imaginaires: Edouard Montpetit, Jacques Ferron et Jacques Poulin*, Montréal: Éditions Fides, 1995. According to Sing, the evocation of "mythic time" that stands in opposition to "historic time" is a constant theme in Québécois literature, especially before and during the Quiet Revolution; the idea of the origin and the search for that lost origin are important themes in the context of a non-actualised national space.

¹³⁶ Ferron, J., *Contes*, Montréal, 1993.

¹³⁷ L'Hérault, P., *Jacques Ferron, Cartographe de l'imaginaire*, 1980, p. 23.

of “le village moderne dressé à l’image de la Révolution tranquille”.¹³⁸ In his vision, the space of the village is subverted or demystified for the reader.¹³⁹ Ferron’s subversion of the idea of the pure, authentic, traditional village has a socio-political dimension that can be seen to participate in the demystification of spatiality, as both Massey and Soja understand it. Ferron’s writing practice of localisation and re-orientation of space is used as a strategy aimed at reversing the existing power order and the hegemonic American narrative, deconstructing what Massey would call geographies of power. However, Ferron’s use of the practice of localisation can be interpreted as an expression of the writer’s anxiety in relation to Québec as a viable or actualised national space, as well as an expression of the sense of *dépaysement* that is characteristic of a number of Québécois writers in the period of nationalistic Québec that follows the Quiet Revolution.¹⁴⁰

2.2.1. The Concept of “Re-orientation” of Space: the Search for Identity as a Quest for Origin in *L’Amélanchier*

*L’Amélanchier*¹⁴¹ is an autobiographical novel narrated by a child and, later, a young woman called Tinamer de Portenqueu who, crossing into adulthood, realises that she has been living in a state of

¹³⁸ Sing uses Ferron’s text *Le ciel de Québec* to illustrate her argument. Ferron, J., *Le Ciel de Québec*, Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 1979 (1st ed. 1969, Éditions du Jour).

¹³⁹ As Sing explains, the strong presence of the village and the village community as factors preserving French identity are deeply rooted in Canadian Francophone imagery since the time of the *Conquest* in 1763. In opposition to this idealised image of the village and village community, the city and its migrant (Anglophone) population are often perceived in the Canadian imaginary as bearers of negative values such as decadence or depravity. This opposition is at the centre of Ferron’s text *L’Amélanchier*. Interestingly, it is also one that generates the discourse on nature that will be analysed in Roxanne Bouchard’s contemporary text *Whisky et paraboles* presented in Chapter 5 on Space and Imagination II.

¹⁴⁰ See “Gaston Miron et le pays rapaillé” by Zoppi, S., in: *Les Mots de la terre. Géographies et littératures Francophones* (ed. Antonella Emina), Rome: Bulzone Editore, 1998. Miron’s collection of poems *L’Homme rapaillé* (Miron, G., *L’Homme rapaillé*, Montréal: P.U. de Montréal, 1970) was published in 1970, the same year that Ferron published *L’Amélanchier*. Among other things, Zoppi argues that Miron’s poems can be seen as an attempt to transform the abstract and unfamiliar space of Québec into the habitable, familiar place of his native Gaspésie through a variety of textual strategies.

¹⁴¹ The abbreviation *LA* will be used every time the text *L’Amélanchier* is referred to in the following analysis.

“dérive” at the same time as she has already become a writer. It is at that moment of “turning back” and recounting one’s memories, a moment that occurs in parallel to one’s sudden realisation of passing of time and of a loss of innocence, that the story begins. *LA* is a book about identity, the importance of individual and collective memory and the meaning and importance of space and place in relation to one’s origin:

Je me nomme Tinamer de Portenqueu. Je ne suis pas fille de nomades ou de rabouins. Mon enfance fut fantasque mais sédentaire de sorte qu’elle subsiste autant par ma mémoire que par la topographie des lieux où je l’ai passée, en moi et hors de moi. Je ne saurai me dissocier de ces lieux sans perdre une part de moi-même (...) Mon enfance je décrirai pour le plaisir de me la rappeler, tel un conte devenu réalité, encore incertaine entre les deux. Je le ferai aussi pour mon orientation, étant donné que je dois vivre, que je suis déjà en dérive et que dans la vie comme dans le monde, on ne dispose que d’une étoile fixe, c’est le point d’origine, seul repère du voyageur. (27)

As shown in the above quotation of the opening paragraph of the book, Tinamer’s identity quest is a quest for origin stemming from her need to recreate the place of her childhood through storytelling and imagination in order to “re-orientate” herself. The place of origin is therefore seen as a stable and constant space that allows Tinamer, the “traveller”, to orientate herself on the voyage of life. This idea of the importance of one’s remembrance of lost space (and time!) for the construction of one’s identity resonates again in the last chapter of the book:

Alors dans mes ténèbres intimes, j’ai eu l’impression d’être recouverte par l’ombre de l’arbre de la mort, malgré le fil de ma vie qui me tirait de l’avant, hors de moi (...) alors j’ai eu peur, et malgré le fil tendu, je me suis retournée (...) Qu’ai-je aperçu? Le bois enchanté et bavard, en arrière de la maison, au mois de mai, avant la feuillaison (...) Je me suis retrouvée à la lisière crépusculaire de mes premières années. (153)

But, while this is a text about the constitution of identity as a result of the processes of memory and forgetting – a question that will be discussed at length in Chapter 3 – it is also one that reflects on the question of identity as concept that is constructed and defined by the societal context.¹⁴² Tinamer’s

¹⁴² The Canadian critic Jean-Pierre Boucher in his analysis of the text speaks about an “*éclatement du je*” creating frequent changes in narrative perspective (Tinamer as a child and Tinamer as a young woman writing her own story,

realisation of the multiplicity of identity is crucial for Tinamer’s sense of “orientation”, as Jean-Pierre Boucher argues. That is why, according to Boucher, the “orientation domocentrique” is at the centre of Tinamer’s quest. Indeed, Tinamer herself refers to the writings of the French writer Pierre Jaccard when reflecting about the human and animal instinct of return (to the place of origin) that he names “orientation domocentrique”.¹⁴³

From a semiotic point of view, the narrative structure plays an important role in the process of signification or generation of meaning, something that has been found to be the case for *LA*. If one tries to identify the actantial narrative schema, the main actors can be presented as follows in Diagram 1:¹⁴⁴

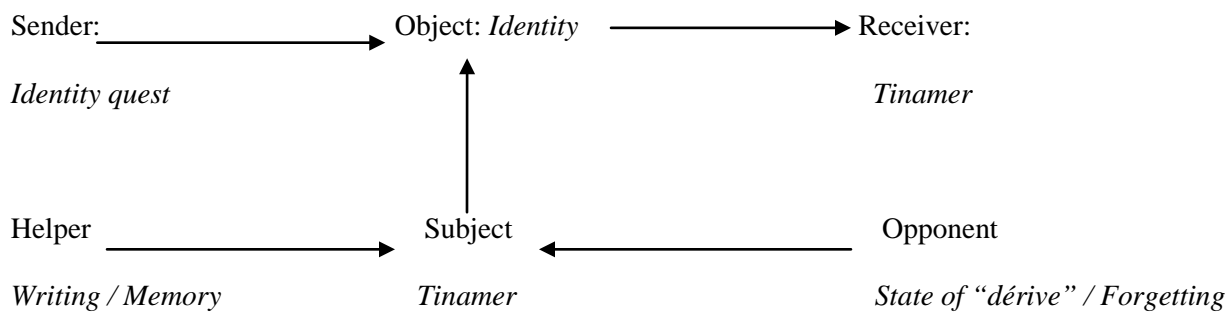


Diagram 1: Actantial narrative schema in *L’Amélanchier*

As one can see from the above diagram and the semiotic reading of the narrative undertaken, the act of writing has been identified as the “helper”, allowing the subject to pursue the object of its quest (or its

for example) and calling for a use of different narrative voices. The “paralysing unity of the Self” and the linearity of the narrative prevent the subject from recovering individual and collective consciousness. Boucher, J.-P., *Jacques Ferron au pays des amélanchiers*, Montréal: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1973.

¹⁴³ Jaccard, P., *Le Sens de la direction et l’orientation lointaine chez l’homme*, Paris: Payot, 1932.

¹⁴⁴ According to semiotic theory, the actantial narrative schema is “the fundamental universal narrative structure that underlies all texts”. It is characterised by six main actantial roles that occupy a function in all narrative and that are expressed through the following oppositions: subject/object, helper/opponent, sender/receiver. Martin, B. and Ringham, F., *Key Terms in Semiotics*, London / New York: Continuum, 2006, pp. 19-20.

search for identity). The act of writing stands in opposition to forgetting or to the state of “dérive” in which Tinamer, the subject, finds herself before she starts writing her memoirs. Thus, writing becomes a strategy of “re-orientation” of space. From the point of view of the construction of the narrative, *LA* represents an interesting challenge for the semiotician; the text generates a circular narrative within the realm of the imagined space of subjectivity and introspection.¹⁴⁵ In *LA*, the linear progression of the story starting with Tinamer’s “initial” state, childhood, and ending with her “final” state, adulthood, is intertwined with the initial and final states of the narrator, that of Tinamer’s fictionalisation of her past and present or of her internal memory. Viewed as a sign of a fractured identity and memory that seems often embedded in postcolonial Francophone autobiographical discourse, the strategy of narrative circularity can pose a complication for the identification of the final and the initial state from the point of view of the semiotic analysis of the narrative.¹⁴⁶ The semiotic analysis of the narrative level of meaning in *LA* reveals an inherent internal tension within the text that resists a textbook application of the semiotic analysis of the narrative structure and level of meaning. At the primary level of reading, events from Tinamer’s life can be followed in chronological order from her childhood to the present time of adulthood.¹⁴⁷ At the second, more interesting level, Tinamer’s story becomes an identity quest and a discourse on identity, a discourse that is revealed in the penultimate chapter (Chapter 12), and that functions as the secondary starting point of the narrative; it is through the process of rewriting life as

¹⁴⁵ Martin, B., *Semiotics and Storytelling*, Dublin: Philomel Productions Ltd, 1997. According to Martin, the analysis of the narrative level of meaning starts with the examination of the global structure of the text and the identification of the initial and final states of the story that, according to semiotic theory of narrative, must be in opposition. The stages taking place between the final and the initial state are identified through the location of the main transformations in the story of the text. Opposition and transformation are, according to semioticians, two fundamental features of the narrative. Spaces or places where a narrative transformation occurs are known as topic spaces (in opposition to “heterotopic spaces” that designate spaces that precede or follow the narrative transformation).

¹⁴⁶ For example, narrative circularity can be noted in Assia Djebar’s first autobiographical text *Vaste est la prison*. It can also be attributed to Nina Bouraoui’s text *Mes mauvaises pensées* that is analysed in chapter 5. Khatibi’s text *La Mémoire tatouée* can also be viewed as a narrative of circularity, although the complexity of the text makes it more difficult to argue this point.

¹⁴⁷ The initial state of the story begins with the description of Tinamer’s childhood and her native space (from paragraph 3 in chapter 1 of the book), ending with the chronological present that is also the starting point of the writing of her memoirs (recounted in the first two paragraphs of chapter 1 of the book). See quotations given on page 82 of this thesis.

memory that Tinamer takes possession of her own past. Following this interpretation, Chapter 13 can be identified as the final state of the story. Marking the time of the mythological present, it signifies the point at which Tinamer's writing of her memoirs has already been completed. The real and narrated or imagined time and space find themselves compressed into a single moment of the space-time matrix, as indicated in the passage of Ferron's book cited previously (on page 82 of this thesis). So, the different levels of reading reality and memory install a narrative circularity or ambiguity at the centre of Ferron's text that function as a meta-discourse on the processes of autobiographical memory and writing, but also on the processes of production of discourse on identity.

2.2.2. The Representation of Natural and Social Spaces as Spaces of the Imaginary in *L'Amélanhier*

As shown in Table 1, an analysis of the main spatial isotopies in *LA* has been conducted at the surface or figurative level of meaning in order to determine what type of spaces and places feature most prominently in the text.¹⁴⁸ In conducting such an analysis, the aim was not only to map out the representation of main spaces and places in the text, but also to try and gain an understanding of how space and place are perceived and constructed in Ferron's text, what function they play and what are the values or the thymic category associated with the notions of space and place that underpin the literary representation of space and spatial loss.¹⁴⁹ Reference will be made here to the construction of an imaginary, literary space in

¹⁴⁸ The term isotopy (*pl.* isotopies; French: isotopie, *pl.* isotopies) is being used in this thesis to refer to "recurring semic categories whose presence ensures sustained meaning in the flow of the text" (Martin, B., & Ringham, F., *Key Terms in Semiotics*, 2006, p.109). This definition is based on the assumption that repetition creates meaning. Isotopies are identified at the figurative level of the text and participate in the identification of fundamental values revealed at the deep level of meaning. According to Greimas & Courtés, the four terms of the semiotic square are called *isotopies* (Greimas & Courtés, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, 1993, p.197).

¹⁴⁹ According to Martin, B. & Ringham, F., the thymic category (French: la catégorie thymique) is one of the fundamental concepts in Greimassian semiotic theory. It relates to the positive and negative feelings of euphoria vs.

opposition to “real” or geographic and socio-political space, as should become apparent during the presentation of this analysis. This, in turn, is important for the investigation of the presence / absence of demystification of spatiality in the texts selected in this thesis and the role that imaginary space plays in this process.

Isotopy/ Semes ¹⁵⁰	Frequency of sememes ¹⁵¹	Sememes	Opposition
Nature	138	/bois/, /arbre/, /jardin/, /clairière/, /fôret/	Nature–City
Native	54	/comté (de Maskinongé)/, /domaine/, /pays/, /maison/, /origine/, /lieu/, /village/	Native–Foreign Internal–External Inside–Outside
Urban Space	53	/école/, /cité/, /hôpital/, /institution/, /orphelinat/, /maison psychiatrique/, /prison/, /rue/, /quartier de Montréal/, /ville/, /labyrinthe/, /building/ /fleuve/, /égout/, /trottoir/, /automobile/, /habitation/, /piste/, /quai/, /quartier/, /route/	Nature–City
Local	20	/village (de Québec)/, /province (de Québec)/, other = municipalité, rive, faubourg, paroisse, pays, île	Local–Global
National	4	/pays/	National–Global
Global	3	/monde/	Local–Global
Foreign	5	/espace inconnu/, /les pays hauts des Sauvages/, /ville (de France)/	Native–Foreign

Table 1: The presentation of spatial isotopies in *L’Amélanhier*.

dysphoria giving rise to “an axiological system – a characteristic of all discourse” (Martin, B. & Ringham, F., pp. 199-200). Greimas and Courtés give the following definition: “la catégorie thymique sert à articuler le sémantisme directement lié à la perception qu’a l’homme de son propre corps... La catégorie thymique s’articule, à son tour, en euphorie/dysphorie (avec aphorie comme terme neutre) et joue un rôle fondamental dans la transformation des micro-univers sémantiques en axiologies: en connotant comme euphorique une deixis du carré sémiotique, et comme dysphorique la deixis opposée, elle provoque la valorisation positive et/ou négative de chacun des termes de la structure élémentaire de la signification” (Greimas, A. J., and Courtés, J., *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, 1993).

¹⁵⁰ The seme is the smallest unit of meaning or “the smallest common denominator within a unit of meaning” (Martin, B., & Ringham, F., *Key Terms in Semiotics*, 2006, p. 172).

¹⁵¹ The sememe is the actualised occurrence of the seme in the text (Martin, B., & Ringham, F., *op. cit.*, p. 172).

An important question to be posed here is to what extent the identification of main spatial isotopies or spaces in the novel presented in Table 1 allows for a comparison with Massey's critique and reconceptualisation of space and place. Whereas a semiotic reading allows for the identification of the types of spaces represented in Table 1, a social critical reading of space and place such as one argued for by Massey would examine the spaces identified in the text in the context of the relationship local-global, and in relation to gender and time. Interestingly, in *LA* the mother represents all that is bad – she represents the deprived urban spaces of progress and industrialisation and globalisation. The father, on the other hand, represents all that is good; he represents the idealised a-temporality of natural, native spaces. Thus, the distinction upheld between the natural and the urban spaces in Ferron's text, and the positive vs. negative values attributed to these spaces, can be interpreted as a typical example of mystifications of space that Lefebvre refers to in his analysis of the representation of space. The negative values attributed to urban space in *LA* that are identified as threatening spaces of American progress and modernity support the feminists' analysis of urban spaces as gendered spaces that are perceived as threats to traditional masculinity. This might be the reason why, as Massey argues, the appropriation of urban spaces is typically embraced by women as a mode of liberation from male domination. This certainly seems to be true in the case of Nicole Brossard's text *French Kiss* (analysed in Chapter 3) and her mapping of the feminine body and desire onto the gendered, bilingual and bicultural space of Montréal.

In *LA*, as in the case of Roxanne Bouchard's text *Whisky et paraboles* analysed in Chapter 4, the types of spaces that appear to dominate are spaces that relate to nature, as indicated in Table 1. The sememes that dominate within the category of natural spaces are those of /bois/, /forêt/ and /arbre/.¹⁵² Interestingly, the

¹⁵² They constitute 57% of the total number (138) of sememes of space in this category.

trope of the forest also occupies an important, symbolic place in Bouchard's analysis, as will be shown in Chapter 5. Contrary to the role that locality can be expected to play in other works by Ferron, the narrator's (and Ferron's) native space, the "comté of Maskingongé", appears less frequently in *LA* than other types of spaces (i.e. natural spaces). According to L'Hérault, the abundance of toponyms of Québec in relation to the sparse occurrence of toponyms of Canada in Ferron's work, shows that Ferron's representation of space is firmly anchored in the Québécois spatial imaginary whereby Québec becomes an "image signifiante", a mythic place.¹⁵³ It is therefore not surprising to find that the "comté of Maskingongé", although less frequent than other types of spaces, is given a central place in *LA* through Léon de Portenqueu's recounting of the story of the "bible of the Maskingongé" and of the de Portenqueu family, in which the county of Maskinongé becomes both a place of symbolic rupture and a place of origin or of beginning of a history that is distinct from both French and British histories, and in which the idea of *métissage* and of the First Nations' cultural heritage plays a pivotal role,¹⁵⁴ something that will be discussed in connection with Robert Lalonde's and Roxanne Bouchard's texts presented in Chapters 3 and 5. On the other hand, the prevalence of the domestic, native space actualised in the figure of "maison" in the same space category (native space) and positive values that are associated with it are a reflection of Ferron's propensity towards the exploration of the internal spaces of the Self that stand in opposition to the "external", objective memory of spaces such as the native space of the homeland or the socially constructed spaces of the city:

¹⁵³ As L'Hérault noted, the image of the *Pays* in Ferron's work is often expressed through the following four ideas / places: Maskinongé, Gaspé, Jacques-Cartier, Québec. See: L'Hérault, P., *Jacques Ferron, cartographe de l'imaginaire*, Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, p. 45.

¹⁵⁴ The names of Québec, Canada, Gaspé or Kamouraska (to name just a few) are all of Indian origin. It has been argued elsewhere that both spatial and geographic loss in Québec are inscribed in the history of the name. In her article "Les noms incertains du pays", Elisabeth Nardout-Lafarge advances the interesting idea (such as in the case with toponymes or with proper names) that the name in Québec unveils the presence of a succession of symbolic and real ruptures or losses, giving rise to translations and superimpositions in the history, geography and cultural memory of Québec that can also be identified in other (French or British) colonies. Nardout-Lafarge, E., "Les Noms Incertains du Pays" in: *Les Mots de la terre, géographie et littératures francophones* (ed. Antonella Emina), Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1998, p. 48-59.

au-dehors de cet en dedans, à l'extérieur d'une maison dont l'intérieur représentait des espaces infinis, telle une galaxie, une incroyable municipalité s'étendait dans les champs, qui n'avait pas d'aqueduc, d'égouts, de rues pavées ni de trottoirs. C'était le Farouest dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent. (36)

The importance of the fundamental opposition between external and internal space in Ferron's text will be discussed in the last section of the analysis. Attention will first turn to the analysis of a number of significant tropes identified along the paradigmatic relationship of the space of nature vs. the space of society/urban space.

2.2.2.1. Natural Spaces: The Forest as the Symbol of Rootedness, Space of the Unconscious

The sememes /bois/, /forêt/ and /arbre/, sememes with the highest occurrence relating to the space of nature, often appear in the text in connection with the evocation of an imaginary space, which is also the space of Tinamer's childhood memories. One could presume that the space of the forest, as an imaginary space perceived positively in her memories, would be exclusively associated with a positive feeling of euphoria. As is characteristic for fairytales, however, the forest is endowed with ambivalent values of both an enchanting and a strange, daunting place in which extraordinary characters make their appearance.¹⁵⁵ The following description in *LA* gives a sense of the space of the forest:

¹⁵⁵ A series of characters appear in *LA* such as Monsieur Northrop, an Englishman carrying a compass that was once a rabbit and who is always in a hurry, or the priest Messire Hubert Robson who a century ago lost a girl called Marie Mahon and who has been searching for her in the Canadian forests ever since. As stated by Boucher, J.P., (implicit references to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* are numerous both at the level of characterisation and of the narrative. See André Lamontagne's article on "poetics of intertextuality" in *L'Amélanchier* in "Relire l'enfance: le fantasme intertextuel dans *L'Amélanchier*", in: *Voix et images*, vol. 25, n° 1 (73) 1999, pp. 126-243 (accessed on 21/11/ 2008 at <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/201465ar>). As Lamontagne argues, the fact that Tinamer explicitly cites authors of French / Francophone (such as Pierre Jaccard, Jacques Cazotte and the abbé Charles-Edouard Milhot) and not British origin (only a few references are made to authors such as Northrop Frye or Daniel Defoe) could be interpreted as Ferron's statement of opposition to the colonising WASP discourse. However, the text's infusion with numerous British imperial and literary references can be read as a sign of Ferron's appreciation of the Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage, as well as a sign of his ambiguous relationship to British and American cultural and economic domination (see his work *Les Confitures de coings*, 1972, referred to later in this analysis).

Il y avait par derrière la maison, à l'extrémité du jardin, un bois de repoussis, parsemé de petites clairières, à mi-chemin entre la futaie et le taillis, qui s'étendait sur toute une longueur de terre et quatre ou cinq arpents de largeur; aéré, bavard et enchanté, il le demeura aussi longtemps que j'ignorai ses limites et les miennes. Seule, je ne m'y aventurais guère. (27-28)

The ambivalent trope of the forest as an imaginary, limitless space stands in opposition to the symbol of the juneberry tree or *amélanchier*; the tree's singularity and the short flowering period can be seen as expressions of the golden age of childhood and innocence, as well as that of a genuine but precarious identity. The uniqueness and the precariousness of the *amélanchier* are both evoked in the following way by Tinamer:

Le plus extraordinaire de tous était l'amélanchier. Dès le premier printemps, avant toute feuillaison, même la sienne, il tendait une échelle aux fleurs blanches du sous-bois, à elles seulement (...) Durant une petite semaine, on ne voyait ni n'entendait que l'amélanchier, puis il s'éteignait dans la verdure, plus un son, parti l'arbre solo, phare devenu inutile.(29)

So, beyond the obvious context of the geographic realities of the native space in which Ferron situates his story, the analysis conducted indicates that the space of the forest is not only invested with the values of nature, but also with those of the collective imagination, limitlessness and deepness.¹⁵⁶ If the forest represents the space of the collective unconscious, its values are highly ambivalent. Interestingly, the Algerian-born writer Mohammed Dib, the second author being analysed in this chapter, repeatedly uses the images of the forest and the tree in his later texts, which he chooses to situate in the imaginary, foreign space of the North. Faïna in *Le sommeil d'Eve* expresses the idea of the limitlessness but also a Dantean image of death when she says:

Si jamais je mettais fin à ma vie, ce serait en un jour pareil, dans une forêt envahie par la neige éclatante. J'irai me donner à la neige, me laisser couvrir par elle.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ According to the governmental site *Resources naturelles et Faune Québec*, almost half of the territory of Québec (750,300 km²) is covered in forests. See <http://www.mrnf.gouv.qc.ca/accueil.jsp> (accessed on 25/12/2008).

¹⁵⁷ Dib, M., *Le Sommeil d'Eve*, Paris: Sindbad, 1989, p. 13.

The symbol of the tree as an expression of the root, the origin or of family lineage and territorial belonging is evoked later again in the same chapter where Faïna explains the symbolic meaning that the trees *sapin* and *bouleau* have for Finnish culture (and that they contain the common root of the Finnish word *koti* or “maison”). Whilst the first one symbolises stability and security, the second one is a metaphor of the perennality and the human potential for dreaming and imagination. Indeed, similar images related to trees also appear in Ferron’s *LA*, as discussed in the case of the symbol of the juneberry.

In the context of the discussion held in this chapter that aims to analyse the representation and function of native space as space of the imaginary, the prevalence of the imaginary space of the forest that features prominently in *LA* deserves closer attention. According to Richard Harrison’s analysis of the place of the forest in the cultural imagination of the West, the space of the forest has acquired many different meanings in Western culture; it functions as a symbol of lost nature and as the space of the unconscious, with its impulses that cannot be controlled.¹⁵⁸ In all cases, the space of the forest is defined as an ambivalent space that can signify both enchantment and dark danger. Indeed, one encounters the dark space of the forest both in traditional fairytales (*Hansel and Gretel* or *Little Red Riding Hood*) and in classic works of European literature, such as in Dante’s *Inferno*. At the beginning of the poem, that marks the beginning of Dante’s journey, the poet finds himself lost in the dark wood. The “Dark Wood”, that can be seen as the space symbolising sin, is filled with characters that have committed violent crimes such as suicide and whose souls are transformed into trunks; it features in the Seventh Circle of Hell, Ring II, Canto 13 and is infested with harpies, malign mythological beings,¹⁵⁹ as shown in the following opening lines: “We entered a forest, where no track of steps had worn a way (...) These [brute Harpies] sit and wail

¹⁵⁸ Harrison, R., *Forests: The Shadow of Civilisation*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992. (French trans. *Forêts: essai sur l’imaginaire occidental*, Paris: Flammarion, 1992).

¹⁵⁹ A famous illustration of this scene was made by William Blake: *The Wood of the Self-Murderers: The Harpies and the Suicide*, Tate, London.

on drear mystic wood”.¹⁶⁰ Most interestingly, however, the symbol of the forest holds a special significance for the French symbolists; as Harrison argues, the forest can be said to represent the “symbol of symbolism”. Both Baudelaire and Mallarmé use the symbol of the forest in their works to speak about the relationship between art and nature.¹⁶¹ Such is the use of Baudelaire’s image “forêts de symboles” in his poem “Correspondances” in which nature is defined as a temple of symbols.¹⁶²

A different, phenomenological reading of the forest as the imaginary space of Western culture as a transgression of the discourse of the Self is offered by Gaston Bachelard; there, the space of the forest is seen as transcending the Self and as being inhabited by the images of immensity and infinity. In the chapter of *La poétique de l’espace* in which Bachelard examines the phenomenology of the image of *immensity* (based on a corpus of French literary works, it has to be said), which he defines as “un des caractères dynamiques de la rêverie tranquille”, he links the imaginary of the forest to primitive and archetypal ideas of infinity, boundlessness, but also to those of deepness and ancestry. As Bachelard argues, in opposition to the images of the open spaces of the meadow or the countryside, the images of the forest invoke the idea of a “non-moi” as an “avant moi”.¹⁶³ In *LA*, the space of the forest is constructed as a primordial space of Québécois’ collective consciousness that is to be preserved and rescued from the socially constructed spaces of the city. It is to be compared with the space of the garden as another natural space in the text, a space that Foucault defines as a heterotopia; for him the garden

¹⁶⁰ Dante, A., *Inferno* (trans. by H. F. Cary), London: Wordsworth Editions, 1998.

¹⁶¹ *Œuvres*, Mallarmé, S., (textes établis avec chronologie, introductions, notes, choix de variantes et bibliographie par Yves-Alain Favre), Paris: Bordas, 1992; Baudelaire, C., *Les Fleurs du mal*, Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964 (1st ed. 1857).

¹⁶² Baudelaire, Ch., “Correspondances”, in: *Les Fleurs du mal*, Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964 (1st ed. 1857).

¹⁶³ Bachelard, G., *La Poétique de l’espace*, Paris: Quadriga/PUF, 1957: “Dans le vaste monde du non-moi, le non-moi des champs n’est pas le même que le non-moi des forêts. La forêt est un avant-moi, un avant-nous... Mais la forêt règne dans l’antécédent. Dans tel bois que je sais, mon grand-père s’est perdu. On me l’a conté, je ne l’ai pas oublié” (p. 172).

contains a superposition of contrasting or contradicting discourses on that space.¹⁶⁴ However, as will be shown in the next chapter, the space of the forest cannot be reduced to representing the primordial space of Western culture. It is also to be viewed as an important space of the imagination in non-Western culture and a founding trope of the Amerindian imagination that permeates the spatial imaginary in the North American context.

2.2.2.2. Urban Spaces: the Street, the Labyrinth and the Psychiatric Hospital of Mont-Thabor

As mentioned previously, according to the analysis shown in Table 1, it is the isotopies of nature and the city that are seen to be the most prominent ones in Ferron's text, as the values of euphoria / dysphoria assigned to these two categories of space are mirrored in the opposition between the positively / negatively characterised spaces of "good" and "bad". Contrary to the feeling of euphoria (or later phoria) associated with natural spaces, the social, urban spaces of the school, the street, the city or the psychiatric hospital are invested with a strong feeling of dysphoria in *LA*.¹⁶⁵ One of the most important transformations at the level of the narrative occurs when Tinamer enters school, as it is at that moment that the distinction between "good" and "bad" becomes blurred in the narrative until these two spaces eventually switch sides. The negative characteristics assigned to the spaces of the street and the city of

¹⁶⁴ Foucault, M., "Des espaces autres", in: *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, vol. 5, 1984. The analysis of the preliminary and final corpus presented here showed that the garden appears in a number of texts with various attributions of meaning and emotional values, something that confirms Foucault's definition. While the trope of the French garden as a space of Western culture is represented negatively in Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée* and in Bouraoui's *Mes mauvaises pensées*, the garden is presented positively in Régine Robin's *La Québécoise* and in Ferron's *L'Amélanchier*. Most interestingly, an ambiguous value is assigned to the space of the garden as the space of the Self in Dib's *L'Infante maure* (that represents a continuation of his "Nordic trilogy"); it appears there both as a space of meditation and a place of loneliness and estrangement in the eyes of the mixed-race child, Lylli Bell, the main character of the novel.

¹⁶⁵ Phoria is a value that belongs to the thymic category (like those of euphoria/dysphoria and aphoria explained on page 86). It is considered as a compound value (in the same way as aphoria is) that is used in semiotic analysis to explain the state of ambivalence (both positive and negative) of the subject in relation to a certain object. The thymic category is mapped out in the semiotic square (see definition given on page 96). See Louis Hébert, "Thymic Analysis", in Hébert, L. (ed.), *Signo* [online], Quebec: Rimouski, 2006 <http://www.signosemio.com/greimas/thymic-analysis.asp> (accessed on 15/07/2013).

Montréal in particular, spaces that designate technological progress and the process of Americanisation, can be noted in numerous passages of the book. The negative connotations attributed to the urban and social street and the city of Montréal (designated metonymically by the working quarter of Hochelaga) can be noted in the following passage:

Par devant la maison, du mauvais côté des choses, passait la rue comme ailleurs, rivière grise et morte d'asphalte refroidi dont la coulée remontait à l'ère tertiaire, époque où ma pauvre mère avait été fillette dans le quartier Hochelaga. (44)

Equally, a negative meaning assigned to the space of the labyrinth as a space of urbanisation and technological progress brought in by American culture expressed in the image of "Papa Boss" can be seen in the following extracts:

La rue devant la maison portait le nom de Bellerive, une des centaines et des milliers d'alias du labyrinthe, un faux nom pour compliquer le dédale urbain, suburbain et multimunicipal. (45)

Ç'avait été mon prodigieux domaine, ce n'était plus grand-chose; on l'avait en partie déboisé, non pas pour renouer avec les anciens travaux, redonner son prix à une longue peine perdue, pour semer le nouveau blé, le mile et la gaudriole, mais pour y faire passer l'égout, préparer le sous-sol à une nouvelle moisson de cottages, de duplex, de bungalows et de split-levels, pour parfaire le labyrinthe américain et faire monter, très haut, le naseau du Papa Boss, de nouvelles émanations de la civilisation pétrolière. (120)

Here, the figure of the labyrinth is reduced to the urban space of American culture evaluated dysphorically; this negative evaluation contrasts with the positive value attributed to the nomadic, Maghrebian space of the labyrinth represented in Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée*, a text that is analysed in Chapter 4.

If Tinamer's father, Léon Portenqueu, can be seen as a positive figure or as one that both restores the symbolic order in the narrative and one that symbolises the primordial space of nature as a space of Québécois' collective consciousness, Etna, Tinamer's mother is seen as a negative figure associated with

the images of the desolate space of the Hochelaga quarter in which she was born.¹⁶⁶ However, no other social space in Ferron's text seems to personify values of alienation and identity loss in the societal context better than the psychiatric institution of Mont-Thabor; the symbol of this alienation is personified in the figure of Jean-Louis Maurice or Coco, a young blind boy, who is locked up in the Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes hall situated on the floor of the building dedicated to severely mentally disabled children. The following extract illustrates the extreme negative values that the narrator and the author attribute to the topic space of the psychiatric hospital of Mont-Thabor:¹⁶⁷

Lieu d'exclusion, pourtant inclus au cœur de la cité comme un chancre secret, comme une plainte, un cri étouffé, comme le malheur refoulé pour qu'à la télévision domestique continuent de triompher la blancheur des babines retroussées, les sourires à dentiers et l'évangile Colgate et Palmolive, le Mont-Thabor était une institution spécialisée, un hôpital *psychiatrique* de la psychiatrie à bibi, d'importation étasunienne, où les débiles, les presque normaux étaient privilégiés, logés dans des salles princières et tous psychiatisés, c'est-à-dire déclarés schizophrènes, où les autres, entassés comme on l'a vu, faisaient les frais de ce diagnostic universel et obligatoire. (138-139)

The socially constructed repressive space of the mental institution is produced by the space and discourse of Americanisation that destabilises other culturally and socially constructed discourses of Québec. Similar to the place of *la fosse* located at the confines of the city of Jarbher in Dib's *Les Terrasses d'Orsol*, populated by crawling men-like creatures, that will be analysed in the second half of this chapter, the place of Mont-Thabor symbolises the place of exclusion, the place of the repressed or suppressed *Other*.

2.2.3. Internal vs. External Space: the Fundamental Opposition Underlying *L'Amélanchier*

¹⁶⁶ The Hochelaga quarter was once a working-class quarter of the city of Montréal.

¹⁶⁷ The term topic space refers to "the place where a narrative transformation occurs, i.e. where the principal subject undergoes a change of state". It can be divided further into paratopic and utopic space. The term heterotopic space "designates those places whose mention in the story precedes or follows the narrative transformation". See Martin, B., & Ringham, F., *Key Terms in Semiotics*, 2006, p. 98 and p. 202.

The oppositional relationships identified between the natural and social spaces in Ferron’s *LA* at the surface or figurative level of meaning and the positive vs. negative values associated with these two types of spaces are expressed at the so-called deep level of meaning in the relationship internal–external where the so-called fundamental values of discourse are deployed. This is visually represented in Diagram 2 showing the semiotic square and the fundamental opposition between internal (subjective) and external (socio-political and socially constructed) space.¹⁶⁸

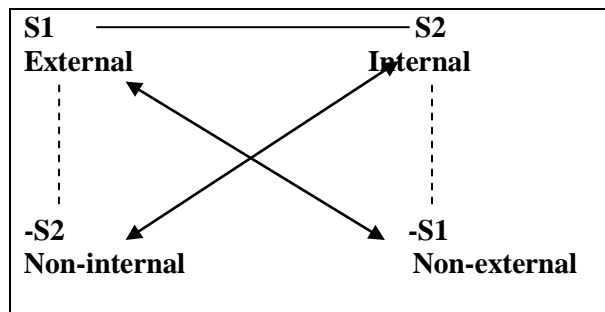


Diagram 2: Representation of the *semiotic square* and the isotopies of external and internal space in *L'Amélanchier*

In *LA*, external space (actualised in the figures of the street, the school and the psychiatric hospital) functions as the space of socially constructed memory that is invested with values of “non-identity” and “non-memory” and the absence of subjectivity seen as individuality. It has the characteristics of a space in which objects of the external world are recorded through the sensory experience without being conceptualised, appropriated and internalised. It also functions as the space of the foreign, in opposition to

¹⁶⁸ The semiotic square (French: carré sémiotique, n.m.) is one of the key terms in semiotics. It is related to the notion of semantic category and is defined as the elementary structure (of the process) of signification in language. It is defined by a number of logical relations (complementarity, contradiction, contrariety) existing between two or more terms, postulating the relational nature of meaning in language. According to Greimas and Courtés, the semiotic square can be interpreted as follows: “la structure élémentaire de la signification quand elle est définie – dans un premier temps – comme une relation entre aux moins deux termes, ne repose que sur une distinction d’opposition qui caractérise l’axe paradigmatique du langage composé de *n* termes, mais elle ne permet pas pour autant de distinguer, à l’intérieur de ce paradigme, des catégories sémantiques fondées sur l’isotopie (“la parenté”) des traits distinctifs qui peuvent y être reconnus”. They point out, however, that the binary relationship between two terms in the semiotic square was contested by the Danish linguist Viggo Brøndal; he postulates the existence of multipolar elementary structures including up to six terms. As Greimas and Courtés show in their brief analysis of the term, a definitive understanding of the semiotic square that offers a strictly logical-mathematical interpretation remains as complex as it is dangerous; they acknowledge that “les discours mythiques, sacrés et poétiques manifestent une prédilection particulière pour l’utilisation des termes catégoriels complexes” (Greimas and Courtés, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné*, pp. 29 -32).

internalised, native space that functions as the space of the imaginary. Interestingly, this internalisation of the passage from external to internal space or from (external) space to (internal) memory in the narrative occurs in the space of the night (a seme that could be represented by –S1 in the semiotic square above). Indeed, it is in their dreams and during the night that both Léon and Tinamer experience life-changing events. The night (perceived here both as a spatial and a temporal category) is assigned an ambivalent or phoric value in the text, as it can signify both annihilation and oblivion or transformation and re-birth. In semiotic terms, it can also be seen as the main space of transformation or the “topic” space in the narrative in *LA*.¹⁶⁹ This interpretation of the figure of the night in Ferron’s work supports Pierre L’Hérault’s analysis.¹⁷⁰ He argues that the theme of the night is a recurring theme in Ferron’s work that has great symbolic significance for the author and that is expressed as the space of deepness in the oppositional pair surface vs. deepness.¹⁷¹ But more importantly for L’Hérault, it can also express the dimension of dreaming as *déracinement*: “Car parler du rapport de la Nuit et du Jour, du rêve et de la réalité, c’est poser le problème de l’enracinement, comme parler de la folie, c’est parler de déracinement”). Thus, the passage from external to internal space through the figure of the night viewed as a marker of *déracinement* or unrooting, might be interpreted in *LA* as a move from territorial to non-territorial thinking about space. This semiotic interpretation of the opposition internal–external can be compared with Massey’s theory of space-time and her critique of the separation of these categories. Contrary to what one might expect from a semiotic reading, this conceptual move to non-territorial thinking would seem to support a feminist critique of the binary relationship internal–external defined by

¹⁶⁹ The term topic space (French: espace topique, n.m.) refers to the space where “the narrative transformation takes place” and where “the principal subject undergoes a change of state”. It stands in opposition to heterotopic space (French: espace hétéropique) that precedes or follows this narrative transformation (Martin & Ringham, *Key Terms in Semiotics*, 2006, p. 202).

¹⁷⁰ L’Hérault, P., *Jacques Ferron, cartographe de l’imaginaire*, see section “La nuit: surface et profondeur”, pp. 175-199.

¹⁷¹ The space of the night as a topic space of internal voyage and self-recovery can also be found in Ferron’s *Les Confitures de coings*, 1990 (1st ed. 1972). In the book, the main character, François Ménard, a bank director living in Montréal, poisons his alter-ego Frank Archibald Campbell by giving him a home-made jar of *confiture de coing*; the whole action of the story takes place in Montréal in the space of one night.

the dichotomy between “internality” and “externality” as one that is based on a gendered, Western tradition of (mis)reading of the notions of space and time. As will be discussed in more details in the introduction to Chapter 3, in the binary relationship space–time, Massey argues, space is subordinated to time as it is viewed as feminine and external to subjectivity, whereas time (or history) is perceived as masculine and as constitutive of subjectivity.¹⁷²

To conclude, Ferron’s *LA* can be viewed as a text on the theme of loss and recovery of identity in the Québécois context and the return to one’s origin; in that sense it can be understood as an identity quest. At the surface level of meaning, the imaginary, native, natural spaces are opposed in the text to socially constructed spaces, as spaces of urbanisation and industrialisation are defined by a number of conflicting and opposing discourses on the socio-political and cultural spaces of Québec that are the result of the process of Americanisation. However, it can also be read as a demystification of the division of “internality” of time and “externality” of space. A semiotic reading has shown that both natural and social spaces can be identified at the fundamental level of meaning as constitutive of the relationship “internal–external” and whose function would be to reinstall the “re-orientation” between the past and present of Québec and between the internal spaces of the imaginary and external, socially constructed spaces of the “real” through the act of writing. In line with one of this thesis’ main objectives, this conception of the relationship of internal–external was later compared to that of a feminist reading on the notions of “internality” and “externality”, pointing to the gendered visions of time and space in relation to the category of subjectivity prevalent in Western thinking tradition. Thus, by using the technique of localisation and “re-orientation”, Ferron’s text generates traditional representations of native space and place that remain mystified for the reader (a process that is necessary for the construction of discourse of

¹⁷² Massey, D. *For Space*, p. 57. Massey refers to Grosz’s critique of conceptualisations of space and time in Western intellectual thinking. Grosz, explains Massey, refers to Irigay’s work and the connection made between the principles of interiority and exteriority in relation to how subjectivity is defined in Western thinking. According to Irigay, argues Grosz, time is perceived as masculine as it operates on the mode of internality and subjectivity, whereas space is defined as external to this subjectivity and is coded as feminine.

national space and identity and “imagined communities”), whilst at the same time it allows, within this traditionalist discourse, the idea of a non-territorial thinking about space, a thinking that participates in the demystification of spatiality and the relationship space–time, as Massey would understand it.

2.3. Writing “Non-Place”: Space and Meaning in Mohammed Dib’s *Les Terrasses d’Orsol*¹⁷³

*Et les nuits, la grandeur de ces nuits lessivées de lune
sur les blanches et tranquilles terrasses d’Orsol!*¹⁷⁴

Mohammed Dib

In the first chapter, *Les lieux de l’écriture*, of Mohammed Dib’s text *Tlemcen, ou les lieux de l’écriture*, published in collaboration with the photographer Philip Bordas, the author writes as follows:

AU COMMENCEMENT EST LE PAYSAGE, – s’entend comme cadre où l’être vient à la vie, puis à la conscience.
A la fin aussi.
Et de même, dans l’entre-deux.
Avant que la conscience n’ouvre les yeux sur le paysage, déjà sa relation avec lui est établie. Elle a déjà fait maintes découvertes et s’en est nourrie.
Les yeux grands ouverts ensuite, elle continuera. Secret travail d’identification et d’assimilation où conscience et paysage se renvoient leur image, où s’élaborant, la relation ne cesse de se modifier, de s’enrichir; où le dehors s’introvertit en dedans pour devenir objet de l’imaginaire, substrat de la référence, orée de la nostalgie...
“ Suis-je mon paysage?” Pour ne l’avoir pas posée, je n’ai jamais reçu de réponse à ma question. En aurais-je même reçu une? Et qu’en aurais-je fait? Je vais jusqu’à penser qu’elle ne m’aurait pas servi à grand-chose. Bien plus: il me semble qu’on n’a aucun intérêt à se poser une telle question. Le paysage, lui, quelque nom qu’il lui importe de prendre, se demanderait-il jamais: “Suis-je Untel?”
Si loin que nous nous éloignons l’un de l’autre, nous ne nous quittons pas, c’est ma seule certitude dans cette vie.
Je me comporte, pense, écris dans cette certitude.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Dib, M., *Les Terrasses d’Orsol*, Paris: Collections SNELA La Différence, 2002 (1st ed: 1985).

¹⁷⁴ Dib, M., *Les Terrasses d’Orsol*, 2002, p. 87.

¹⁷⁵ Dib, M., *Tlemcen ou les lieux de l’écriture*, Paris: Editions Revue Noire, 1994, pp. 43-44.

The quotation above illustrates the importance of the relationship that is established between the writer, the native landscape and the creative process of writing. The native landscape has been internalised and has become an object of the writer's imagination; this interrelation between the external and internal space or between the image, spatial memory and the process of writing seems to be of paramount importance for Dib as a writer. However, while the primordial image of the Algerian native landscape is always present in Dib's writing, the space of the North has come to occupy an important space in his imagination. In an interview from 2003 in which he speaks about the significance that Finland came to play in his later texts, Dib explains his fascination with the place of the North, describing it both as the space of the other and the space of fairytales.¹⁷⁶ Dib's seemingly exotic statements on the space of the North point to more serious questions of identity, alterity and the impossibility of understanding and conceiving the Other from the position of a single culture; these are questions that preoccupy the author consistently throughout his work and that he reflects on in his discussion on the concept of frame of reference and linguistic mis/understanding in the context of exile.¹⁷⁷ However, the place that not only Finland but, equally importantly, California and the city of Los Angeles occupy in Dib's imagination are worth analysing as they further open up Dib's native space, firmly rooted in the Arabic and Islamic imagination, to the multiplicity of other spaces. For Dib, the native space is capable of resonating with North American space, a space and country for which Dib had great sympathy.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ See interview with the author: "La réaction d'une langue" in: *Le Magazine Littéraire*, Janvier 2003, no. 416, pp. 65-66 (propos cueillis par Nadine Sautel).

¹⁷⁷ Dib, M., *L'Arbre à dire*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1998, & Dib, M., *Simorgh*, Paris: Albin Michel, 2003.

¹⁷⁸ Dib, M., *L'Arbre à dire*, 1998, pp. 178-179. See also Vangelisti, P., "Recalling our invisible city" in: *Expressions Maghrébines, Mohammed Dib Poète*, vol. 4, n° 2, Winter 2005. Vangelisti recounts that Dib visited California in 1974. The poet was contacted much later by Dib to translate his "poème en prose" *L. A. Trip* (Paris: La Différence, 2003) into English. Dib explains elsewhere that he tried to publicise the bilingual version of *L. A. trip* in France, but that he was refused the publication of the bilingual manuscript. The French version of *L. A. Trip* was translated into English by Vangelisti and published in America in its bilingual English-French version after Dib's death (Vangelisti, P., *L. A. Trip: A Novel in Verse*, Copenhagen/Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2003).

A number of critics, both Western and non-Western, have concentrated on the poetics, politics and aesthetics of Mohammed Dib's later texts that form part of the so called "Nordic cycle" and its significance for the development of his writing.¹⁷⁹ Although the answers offered by these critics differ – logically – depending on which approach they have taken and what sort of insight they have gained into Dib's work, it can be observed that these critics consider the "Nordic cycle" chronologically, that is, as an end product of a natural progression.¹⁸⁰ The early phase (lasting between 1952 and 1957) of what is known as Dib's Algerian trilogy is assigned characteristics of realistic writing.¹⁸¹ In his Algerian trilogy, the writer can be said to have engaged with the question of local identity and acculturation (his stories take place in or around the town of Tlemcen, the author's native town situated in the north west of Algeria), as well as that of a gradual awakening of national consciousness experienced by the local population in the situation of colonialism.¹⁸² Following the logic of these interpretations, Dib's "Nordic cycle" is classified as belonging to his later work (the Algerian cycle is followed by a phase of fantasy writing and a later return to realism) under the theme of the "cycle of exile" and a mystical search for meaning. However, as Charles Bonn explains, from his conversation with the author, Dib had written half of *Les Terrasses d'Orsol* in the forties (that is, before the "Algerian cycle"), but he stopped writing it, as

¹⁷⁹ Reference to the "Nordic cycle" is made by a number of critics when analysing Dib's inclusion of the space of the North in his later work. These works include: *Les Terrasses d'Orsol* (1985), *Le Sommeil d'Eve* (1989), *Neiges de marbre* (1990) and *L'Infante maure* (1994). According to Charles Bonn, Dib's earlier text *Habel* (1977) can also be included. See Bonn, Ch., "La Steppe, le désert, la neige: fonctions de l'absence", in: Khadda, N. (ed.), *Mohammed Dib. 50 ans d'écriture*. Montpellier: Centre d'étude du XXe siècle, Université Montpellier 3, 2002, pp. 277-300.

¹⁸⁰ See Déjeux, Jean, *Mohammed Dib, écrivain algérien*, Sherbrooke: Éditions Naaman, 1977. Naget Khadda also adopts a chronological reading of Dib's texts: Khadda, Naget, "Mohammed Dib" in: Bonn, Ch., Khadda, N., and Mdarhri-Alaoui, A. (eds.), *Littérature maghrébine d'expression française*, Paris: EDICEF/AUPELF, 1996, p. 50-63 (accessed on 12/03/09 at <http://www.limag.com/Textes/Manuref/DIB.htm>). A number of presentations in the volume *Itinéraires et Contacts de Cultures* (1995) also largely adopt a chronological and externally motivated approach to reading of Dib's texts. See: *Itinéraires et Contacts de Cultures, Mohammed Dib*, volume 21 – 22 (eds. Bonn, Ch. & Joubert, J.-L.), Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995 (consulted 12/03/09 on <http://www.limag.refer.org/Textes/Iti21/Itinéraires21-22Dib.htm>).

¹⁸¹ Dib, M., *La Grande Maison*, Paris: Seuil, 1952; *L'Incendie*, Paris: Seuil, 1954; *Le Métier à tisser*, Paris: Seuil, 1957.

¹⁸² Representatives of the local urban and rural population of the area of Tlemcen – Mohammed Dib's native town – are taken as characters of the stories making up Dib's Algerian trilogy.

he felt the reader was not ready for this text.¹⁸³ This tendency to label the Francophone postcolonial writer and assign to him/her a tragic condition of “exile” can be said to be typical of French media discourse; it contrasts with Dib’s own perception of the condition and position from which he writes. His distancing of himself from the position of the writer who is suffering from exile can be noted in the interview already mentioned, in which he also discussed his experience of a “douloureuse parole d’exil”.¹⁸⁴ Thus, Dib’s propensity towards deterritorialisation that is visible in his exploration of the imaginary spaces of the North (but also in his exploration of the imaginary of North American spaces) does not follow a linear, gradual and temporal progression. Rather, it can be read as a fundamental mark of Dib’s writing and concern with the interconnectedness between space and power and a constant preoccupation with the space of the postcolonial Algerian nation-state. However, as a writer in exile his work also speaks of the writer’s unbroken connection with the native space and his problematisation of the issues of cross-cultural communicability and “système de références”.¹⁸⁵ Choosing the example of the desert and its significance for the Maghrebian imagination, Dib defines the system of reference as a matrix that organises and governs the coding and decoding of the meaning created within a coherent landscape that is common to both the sender and the receiver of the message.¹⁸⁶ What happens to the communication of meaning when it is to be coded and decoded outside of one’s original frame of reference and as part of a culturally different frame of reference acquired as a result of colonisation and / or exile – a situation that is

¹⁸³ Bonn, Ch., *Lecture présente de Mohammed Dib*, Alger: ENAL, 1988 (accessed on 12/03/2009 at: <http://www.limag.com/Textes/Bonn/DibENAL/DibENAL.htm>)

¹⁸⁴ Dib was forced to leave Algeria in 1959 after he was expelled by the colonial authorities and was “permitted” to stay in France. See “La réaction d’une langue” in: *Le Magazine Littéraire*, Janvier 2003, n° 416.

¹⁸⁵ See Dib, M., *L’Arbre à dire*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1998. In *L’Arbre à dire*, Dib discusses the ideas of cultural and linguistic translatability in the context of the relationship between Algeria and France, and poses the question of the frame or system of reference: “Je dirais pour ma part qu’un système de références est une grille qui organise et commande l’expression et la lecture à l’intérieur et dans la cohérence d’un paysage commun au producteur et au destinataire de l’expression, ce qui implique, bien entendu que, de part et d’autre, on dispose de la même grille”, p. 17.

¹⁸⁶ “Empire de l’éternel, le désert est au même titre empire de l’éphémère. Cela, cet abîme de l’essence, l’Algérien le porte en lui, son imaginaire, sinon sa conscience éveillée, en porte l’estampille. Cela, sans mémoire dont on ne saurait perdre la mémoire”. Dib, M., *L’Arbre à dire*, 1998, p.18.

characteristic of Algerian migrants living in France – is a question that essentially preoccupies this Algerian writer.

2.3.1. Between Presence and Absence of Meaning: The Space of Perception, Spatial Oppositions and Spatial Internalisation in *Les Terrasses d’Orsol*

If one takes into account the assumption made within semiotic theory according to which repetition (of semes and sememes) creates meaning, one can note that this seems to be more true in the case of *L’Amélanhier* than *Les Terrasses d’Orsol*.¹⁸⁷ The variation of spaces and places being greater in *LTO*, there is also greater instability of meaning at the surface level, producing and produced by a destabilisation of the “space of perception”.

An important result of the semiotic analysis conducted on the text has been the identification of the production of the absence of meaning at the surface level of meaning of *LTO*. The production of the absence of meaning that can also be read as a loss of meaning can be deduced from the relative absence of certain semantic oppositions (see Table 2) in the text; this observation concurs with what Charles Bonn has remarked elsewhere about the significance of the function of absence in Dib’s writing. Interestingly enough, this production of absence or loss of meaning in relation to certain semantic pairs at the surface level that belong to the realm of the “space of perception” seems to generate new meanings or oppositions at all levels of meaning. The presence of a number of spatial isotopies in *LTO* such as nature–city, above–under, native–foreign, Orsol–Jarbher, island–Jarbher, or inside–outside, was notable. Contrary to the first

¹⁸⁷ The abbreviation *LTO* will be used each time reference is made to *Les Terrasses d’Orsol* in this analysis.

group of non-oppositional figures belonging to the space of perception, the oppositional pairs and spatial isotopies listed above refer to the spaces of imagination; they are represented as the spaces of the symbolic. The imaginary city of the South – Orsol, the narrator’s native city – could be a reference to the city of Algiers, while the silence and indifference of the *Etat* is almost definitely a reference to the state of Algeria that Dib was forced to leave in 1959. The polysemy of meaning contained in the toponym “Orsol” is interesting, as it can be seen as referring to its homophone “hors-sol”, a spatial reference both to “non-place”, as well as to the new city above ground that emerges from the underground ruins of the (colonial) past and that is the main subject of Dib’s early text, already mentioned, *Qui se souvient de la mer*, published in the year of Algerian independence.¹⁸⁸ As will be shown later in this section, the opposition between the space of the “above” and “under” contributes to the construction of the relation between space and meaning. This relation can be seen to have great significance for the way in which imaginary space is being constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in Dib’s text. Secondly, in the toponym “Orsol” there is also a possible reference to the word “soleil” or to the author’s native space. The relationship between the cities of Orsol and Jarbher that can be seen as mirroring opposites will be discussed in more detail in the following sections. It will be shown that images of a magnificent and glorious city of Jarbher that represents progress, modern living and industrialisation (that all come at a high cost), are contrasted with a nostalgic tone and poetic images evoking memories of the lost city of Orsol that emerge intermittently throughout the text, as does the narrator’s progressive realisation of the impossibility of return. In the end, the city of Jarbher appears as a symbol of the space of the void, or a space void of memory.

To illustrate the points made, an analysis of the main spatial isotopies in *LTO* is given as follows:

¹⁸⁸ Dib, M., *Qui se souvient de la mer*, Paris: Seuil, 1962.

Isotopies of space / Semes	Total occurrence of sememes	Thymic category	Topic space	Opposition
nature	76	62% dysphoria		Nature–City
urbanity	61	57% dysphoria		Nature–City
under, underground	45	98% dysphoria	x	Under–Above
above	93	51% dysphoria 27% phoria 15% euphoria		Under–Above
native	28 ¹⁸⁹	89% dysphoria		Native–Foreign
foreign	95 ¹⁹⁰	51% dysphoria 27% phoria 15% euphoria		Native–Foreign
(city of) Orsol	27	93% dysphoria		Orsol–Jarbher
(city of) Jarbher	84	49% dysphoria 26% phoria 14% euphoria	x	Orsol–Jarbher Island–Jarbher
island	23	48% dysphoria 22% euphoria	x	Island–Jarbher
inside	16	88% dysphoria		/
outside	9	78% dysphoria		/
public	41	39% dysphoria 49% aphoria		Public–Private
private	13	88% dysphoria		Public–Private
day	7	86% dysphoria		/
night	42	92% dysphoria	x	/
light	19	79% dysphoria		/
darkness	13	92% dysphoria		/

Table 2: The presentation of spatial isotopies in *Les Terrasses d’Orsol*.

¹⁸⁹ These numbers include the occurrence of the sememe /Orsol/.

¹⁹⁰ These numbers include the occurrence of the sememe /Jarbher/.

The first two columns of Table 2 represent an analysis of the categories of space and place in the text together with their total occurrence in the text. The third column is important in so far as it shows the main values associated with the spaces and places analysed through the thymic category of a positive / negative / ambivalent evaluation towards the object. The fifth column is related to column three in so far as it shows the presence of oppositions at the surface level of meaning in relation to the thymic category. Finally, the fourth column identifies the specific spaces where narrative transformations are seen to occur. These topic places have therefore a particular significance for the structure of the narrative or for the way in which the narrative of the novel unfolds and further transformations take place.

2.3.1.1. Deconstruction of the Space of Perception and the Production of Absence of Meaning

The analysis of dominant spatial isotopies at the surface level of meaning of *LTO* has revealed some significant results in the context of the analysis of imaginary space undertaken in this chapter. As was mentioned earlier, the findings about the production of absence of meaning concur with Bonn's observations. Bonn argues that, contrary to what other critics have observed, Dib's poetics and aesthetics of writing can be best explained by the presence of the function of absence of meaning that is captured through the recurring figures of *désert*, *neige* and *steppe* as they do not only signify the reverse of or the absence of the city (and civilisation), but also generate, more importantly, a destabilisation of the process of signification that leads to the loss of meaning. Bonn writes as follows about the significance of the trope of the desert in Dib's work:

Située, ainsi, à la limite du dicible et de l'indicible (...) l'œuvre romanesque de Dib va nous montrer dès ses débuts, mais avec une radicalisation d'un texte à l'autre, une mise en spectacle plutôt qu'un dire explicite du désertique comme figure majeure des limites, de l'impuissance de la parole, et de l'impossibilité de trouver un sens.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Bonn, Ch., "La steppe, le désert, la neige: fonctions de l'absence", in: Khadda, N. (ed.), *Mohammed Dib. 50 ans d'écriture*, Montpellier: Publications de l'Université Montpellier 3, p. 277.

Bonn refers to “la pensée du désert de la parole” in Dib’s later work to designate the author’s radical consciousness about the incommunicability of meaning through language and one that goes beyond the mystical quest for meaning. Therefore, the theme of silence is fundamental to the narrative of *LTO*; it can be seen to engender the increasing sense of alienation experienced by Eïd, a *chargé de mission* who has been sent to Jarbher by his government (“État”) in Orsol without exactly understanding what his mission is. After Eïd starts writing weekly reports on the caves and the abyss located at the borders of Jarbher he receives no acknowledgement or further instructions from his native government. The absurdity of his position and the indifference of his government are expressed in the following passage towards the end of the novel:

je pense: là-bas, à Orsol, ma ville, mes messages ont été envoyés et perdus et c’est ici, dans cette ville, après bien des mois, voire des années, qu’ils se retrouvent, porteurs de tant de significations et d’obscurités acquises durant leur long voyage, en plus des anciennes, qu’ils peuvent que me juger et me condamner. (190)

If one returns now to the presentation of results in fifth column of Table 2, one can observe that there is an absence of opposition at the surface level of meaning for the semantic pair *jour–nuit*. The textual analysis conducted shows that this absence of opposition is realised through the attribution of the material and transcendental quality of “whiteness” and “light” to both of its comprising elements. There are numerous occurrences in the text in which the sememes /blanc/, /blancheur/ participate in the annihilation of the binary relationship day–night. The whiteness of night is referred to in the following syntagm:

Le ciel est clair, encore blanc, presque bleu maintenant que la nuit est tombée, mais il redeviendra plus clair et il le restera uniformément jusqu’au matin. (152)

The same absence of meaning is characteristic of the semantic pair light–darkness or lumière–ténèbres. The sememe /lumière/ in particular is invested with the material quality of blindness and liquidity as in the syntagm: “Mais c’est que toute la lumière est là, liquéfiée.” (13). It has to be noted that the semantic pairs “light–darkness” and “day–night” have been assigned a spatial character in the analysis, as the main character, Eïd, experiences these categories primarily spatially rather than temporally. In fact, the spatio-

temporal relationship that is characteristic of linear discourse or narrative is progressively destabilised by a variety of narrative devices such as the switching between pronouns “je” and “il” or the intermittent repetition of Quranic lines that are being recited by what seems to be a second narrating voice or the narrator’s alter-ego. The deconstruction of time and space that finds its expression in the chapters on Eïd’s stay on the island and on his return to the city marks the start of his progressive sinking into madness. It is interesting to note here that the Maghrebian critic Bachir Adjil explains this non-distinction between figures of night and day as a sign of a multiple temporality in which the present and the future co-exist and that seems to be typical for Arab classical literature:

Cette temporalité [multiple] témoigne de l’enchevêtrement de deux pôles: il est ainsi fait explicitement mention de la dualité contradictoire du jour et de la nuit, qui ne font plus qu’un (...) Cet oxymore du clair-obscur appartient au schème coranique¹⁹² de la création des deux entités temporelles que sont le jour et la nuit. Ce sémantisme imaginaire, que définit G. Genette n’appartient pas, à proprement parler, à la langue française moderne,¹⁹³ mais fait fonction de thème dominant dans la littérature arabe classique.¹⁹⁴

The symbol of *lumière* already mentioned is also being invested with a mystical but deeply threatening quality. This is visible from the choice of syntagms “lumière intérieure” et “lumière extérieure” that appear on the first pages of the book and that are both perceived and experienced by the narrator as sources of the same *malédiction* that induces a feeling of uneasiness, discomfort in the reader, as it surfaces intermittently as a variation (graphically marked) of the same obsessive refrain:

Il était partagé entre ce qu’il voyait dehors, cette lumière, cette malédiction et ce qu’il voyait en dedans, la même lumière, la même malédiction. (13)

Thus, the double meaning that the trope of light has in Dib’s text annihilates the existence of the opposition light–darkness and further destabilises the meaning of the French text.

¹⁹² As part of this quotation, Adjil refers to the sura of the L’Ascension: n° 17 verse 12.

¹⁹³ As part of this quotation, Adjil refers to Genette’s article “Transtextualités” in: *Magazine littéraire*, n° 192, 1983.

¹⁹⁴ Adjil, B., *L’Espace et l’écriture chez Mohammed Dib: la trilogie nordique*, Paris: L’Harmattan/ Awal, 1999.

To conclude, the absence of a number of oppositions at the surface level of the text seems to indicate that a deconstruction of the space of perception is taking place, a deconstruction that generates new meanings, as will be shown in the following sections.

2.3.1.2. The Opposition Above–Under: the Construction of the Space of the Repressed “Other”

The problematic of the spatial opposition “above–under” in Dib’s text can be explained in the context of the relationship between space construction and the processes of signification as they have been analysed by Denis Bertrand in Emile Zola’s text *Germinal* and his analysis of two symmetrically opposed spaces – “le haut” and “le bas” – that can be seen to engender main transformations in the text through the process of “germination”.¹⁹⁵ Without going into a detailed presentation of the highly theoretical approach and intricate application of Bertrand’s analysis of the structure of *Germinal*, it seems important to say here that Bertrand’s semiotic analysis relies on a set of basic principles related to the relationship between space and meaning, the most important ones being the investment of the subject in the category of space and the co-existence and interdependence of the processes of axiology and of space construction.

The analysis conducted on the text showed that the most significant opposition at the surface level of the meaning of *LTO* is the spatial dimension of an “above” and of an “under” that oppose the space of the city of Jarbher to those of the caves and the abyss situated at its borders and next to the ocean. The abyss as a place of not only physical but also spiritual darkness can be inferred from the following passage of the text:

¹⁹⁵ Bertrand, D., *L’Espace et le sens, Germinal d’Emile Zola*, Paris-Amsterdam: Éditions Hadès-Benjamin, 1985.

La même énorme excavation aux parois à pic baille avidement à mes pieds, les mêmes flots rudes de granit s'abîment à une vertigineuse profondeur dans les flots, l'espèce de gouffre ainsi formé est défendu par le même goulet contre la haute mer. (14)

If one now returns to Table 2, the space of the “under” has been assigned the function of a topic space in the narrative, as it engenders the most important transformation located at the beginning of the text, that of Eïd's sighting of monstrous creatures lying on the rocks close to the abyss and living in the caves under the city. The type and frequency of the figures chosen to refer to this space capture the imagination of the reader through their characteristics of an infinite, ever-falling, dark hole and the terrifying presence of evil or the discovery of the unknown: “fosse” (14); “gouffre” (2); “grotte” (2), “trou” (2), “crypte” (2), “cave d'enfer” (1), “repaire du diable” (1), “endroit” (8), “là-bas” (6), “là-dessous” (1); “lieux”, “lieu” (6).¹⁹⁶ This horror of looking at and seeing that which is unnamable and un-describable is intensified at the level of the narrative by the accumulation of a series of “Kafkaesque” passages of Eïd's repeated return to the damned place of the abyss and his sighting of the horrid creatures that display features of both animality and humanity. The following passage illustrates this point:

Ce sont bien elles, ça vient de ces invraisemblables créatures et ça s'exhale de là-dessous et à présent quelques-unes s'avisent même de lever les yeux sur moi. Elles ne tardent pas toutefois à me montrer de nouveau leur nuque (...) leurs têtes disparaissent dans une sorte d'étaupe en broussaille, blanche ici, grise ailleurs – une barbe si j'ose dire. (43)

Thus, the space of the caves under the city populated with animal creatures that can be seen to have been humans once, can be seen as a metaphor for the repressed (collective) unconscious that stands in opposition to the space of the organised Western society that strives to control, censor and govern human drives and emotions. The display of denial and indifference on the part of Jarbher's inhabitants every time Eïd questions them about his experiences and their authenticity reinforces the fundamental distinction that

¹⁹⁶ The values in brackets refer to the occurrence of each sememe in the text.

Dib establishes in the novel between the normalizing forces of Western society propagated by the values of bourgeois life, and the assumed abnormality of the repressed spaces of the unconscious.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, the opposition above–under in *LTO* can be explained as a result of processes of repression. As explained by Evans in his introductory dictionary on Lacanian psychoanalysis on the subject of the so-called act of “secondary repression”, the “signifier is elided from the signifying chain”, always causing “the return of the repressed” whereby the repressed signifier can appear in various unconscious forms (symptoms, dreams, paradoxes or jokes).¹⁹⁷ The social and psychological dimensions of this underground space are fully expressed in a dialogue much later in the book between Eïd and a nameless fellow-immigrant who can be seen as the narrator’s alter-ego. In the dialogue that takes place on the bridge over the Slän River the two men exchange ideas about Western civilisation and its values and reflect on the meaning of “Çadaqa”.¹⁹⁸ At one point, the immigrant exclaims: “Ils ont fait disparaître tous leurs pauvres!” and it is at that point that the symbolic meaning of the *fosse* and its creatures finally becomes clear to Eïd. Both the reflexive and mystical tone of the conversation, in which many references are made to Islam, and the presence of the figure of the fellow-immigrant, can be read as a thematic device serving to recreate the recurring theme of the mirroring double or the representation of a possible Self existing in a different spatio-temporal location. The following passage can be seen to illustrate this point:

il est le ressortissant d’un autre monde, un monde où rutilé un autre soleil et il paraît si exilé sous celui de Jarbher qu’il ne peut éviter d’en recevoir un lambeau sur les épaules, précisément le morceau de nuit et de mort dont je le vois enveloppé en cet instant, doublé pour faire bon poids de l’ombre renforcée que je reporte, que je projette sur lui et qu’il va emmener à son insu comme une maladie inconnue (...) il m’est tellement étranger dans sa familiarité même, dans sa fraternité, que le regard de l’âme avec lequel il me considère, je ne le trouve nulle part en moi, il ne vient de nulle part et ne me fait aucune place, si proches que nous soyons, lui de moi et moi de lui.(183)

¹⁹⁷ Evans, D., *An Introductory Dictionary to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, Hove / New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003.

¹⁹⁸ This is the Arabic word for “charity”, one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam.

In addition, the allusion in the quotation above to the image of the other as a mirror of the Self could be linked to Islamic philosophy and religion. According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, the theme of the mirror is a recurring theme in the philosophy and religion of Sufism. As the authors explain, for Sufis, the entire universe is constituted by mirrors in which the infinite Essence is reflected in its multiplicity.¹⁹⁹ The purifying aspect of the reflection or the mirroring, explain the authors, is another important theme in Sufi literature; the purer the soul, the more accurate its reflection of the world around it.

2.3.1.3. The Opposition Island–Jarbher and Orsol–Jarbher: the Construction of “Non-Place”

It can be said that an imaginary of water or of “liquefied light” supports the meaning of *LTO*; as such it stands far from the landscapes of the native spaces of the desert and the steppe that are prevalent in Dib’s earlier texts.²⁰⁰ A systematic analysis of the main figures of space and elements in Dib’s work still remains to be done. However, this progressive movement from an imaginary of fire and earth to an imaginary or a poetics of water, seems to be yet another expression of the spatial and cultural shift that leads to deterritorialisation in Dib’s writing and that was discussed in the first part of the analysis. In the early text *Qui se souvient de la mer*, the image of the sea can be said to be metaphorically located at the centre of the space of the Arabic and Islamic city; in *LTO*, the element of water appears exclusively in the context of the space of nature and not that of the city, something that, according to urban historians, is traditionally characteristic of Islamic literature on the city and in which the image of paradise is directly linked to images of abundance of water and vegetation in the urban context and which, in turn, has its

¹⁹⁹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles. Mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes, figures, couleurs, nombres*, Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, S.A. and Jupiter Éditions, 1982, p. 639.

²⁰⁰ See *Dieu en barbarie*, 1970, *Le Maître de chasse*, 1973, and *L’Incendie*, 1974.

origins in the Quran and its presentations of paradise.²⁰¹ Indeed, the image of the city is extremely rich in connections and transformations, both imaginary and real, which have traversed both Western and non-Western culture since the early Middle Ages as a consequence of the ascension and expansion of Islamic culture and its not always acknowledged influence on the development and organisation of the Mediterranean or South European city since the 7th century. In classical Arab literature, the idea of the city provides an abundance of images of the city as a vision of paradise, as in the case of the cities of Baghdad, Damascus, Aleppo or Valencia. It is only with the arrival of Western industrialisation and urbanisation that the city becomes the space of decadence or deprivation corrupting the utopian space of the countryside, an idea that could be seen to be characteristic of much of modern Western fiction and one that underpins the Eurocentric discourse on space. These stereotypical representations of urban space are, according to Lefebvre, viewed as “des représentations particulièrement mystificatrices” as they conceal the relationship between space and power and hide the fact that these modern urban spaces are produced by the capitalist system.²⁰² In the literary context, this shift from modernism to postmodernism in the urban (American and European) novel can be seen as an “attempt to rescue the city from the rationalising and totalising forces of modernity” in which the liminal, marginal and repressed spaces of the big cities become externalised spaces that can be deconstructed and reconstructed again symbolically through the act of walking and wandering.²⁰³

In the context of what has been said above, *LTO* seems to function as a text on the border of modernist and postmodernist writing that tries to install a postmodernist vision of the repressed spaces of the city through the critique of progress. Two oppositions seem to be significant for the way in which space and meaning interact in the text, those of the semantic pairs island–Jarbher and Jarbher–Orsol.

²⁰¹ Guidoni, E., “Les villes islamiques” in: *La Ville européenne, formation et signification du quatrième au onzième siècle*, Bruxelles: Pierre Mardaga Editeur, 1981 (1st ed. 1978), pp. 54-91.

²⁰² See passage by Lefebvre already cited in this thesis on p. 14.

²⁰³ Middleton, P., Woods, T., *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Post-War Writing*, 2000, pp. 278-303.

The opposition between the space of the island and the Northern city of Jarbher is significant in the sense that it marks a moment of important transformation in the cognitive and emotional state of the narrator. The voyage by boat towards the island marks the entry into the space of the mythical and of the dream, a space that symbolically announces Eid's later fall first into a state of isolation, and then madness. While the space of the island is a space of temporary peace, it is also the space that signifies the loss of contact with reality. The following description announces this change:

Nous voguons, annoncés ou plutôt dénoncés à l'immensité marine par le tacotement de notre moteur. Mon attention est restée tout ce temps fixée sur la ville qui, déployée frontalement en sombres jeux d'orgue du moment du départ, mais lâchant pied, et reculant peu à peu a d'abord perdu poids et consistance puis, château de brume, s'est mise à pâlir. Quelques minutes encore cette fumée c'est maintenue au ras des vagues et à présent elle fond, et comme elle fond la terre fond avec elle (...) Reflets, reflets à perte de vue, frissons, jeux de lumière, notre embarcation taille son chemin à travers une aveuglante solitude, un jour abandonnée à son délire. (127, 132)

As the space of the individual Self, the island is the space in which Eid encounters Aëlle, a young woman who becomes his lover. This dream-like, remote space of the island does not invade the urban spaces of Jarbher, a symbolic lack which is being translated at the level of the narrative as the impossibility of realisation of romantic love between Aëlle and Eid. The topic space of the island symbolises an important turn in the narrative also because it precedes two important narrative points: that of the dialogue between Eid and the immigrant already referred to, and that of Eid's dream. In the first part of his dream, Eid is condemned by Aëlle and a group of characters (whom he encountered on the island) to the abyss for having revealed the "secret" of the caves in his reports to Orsol. After this scene, the dream becomes a series of repetitive passages through the spaces of the city; endless apartments, doors, halls, doors, squares, in which Eid searches for Aëlle. However, the labyrinthine space leads nowhere but to another door that signifies absence and loss:

Je défonce chaque porte à présent, porte après porte: avec une force démesurée, de monstre, que je ne soupçonnais pas, je défonce les portes d'un étage, puis je monte au suivant, j'en défonce les portes, j'arrive au dernier, je défonce la dernière porte. Le parfum est là, mais pas la présence, je

me poste devant une baie, je contemple l'atmosphère de demi-ténèbres où la ville baigne, l'ambiance n'en a pas changé, elle ne changera sans doute jamais. (194)

Contrary to the natural spaces of the island, the urban space of Jarbher signifies only a space of ghosts and traces of images of strange yet familiar places that reveal an ambivalent feeling towards the space of the modern Western city. Indeed, both a euphoric and dysphoric value is attributed to the city of Jarbher. The following passages taken from the beginning and end of the book illustrate both the euphoric and dysphoric values attributed to the city, described at the beginning of the novel as a labyrinthine space in which the main character feels disoriented:

Comme toujours en traversant la ville j'étais ému par l'impérissable lumière de paix dans laquelle j'allais.(69)

Et il essaye de faire demi-tour, ou de se rappeler, il s'élançe (en pensée), et ce sont les même rues, les mêmes passages, sûr de pouvoir remonter ainsi le cours de ses souvenirs, mais rien ne se produit, il n'y parvient pas, et ce sera une autre nuit. (197)

In opposition to a relatively high occurrence of the sememes /Jarbher/, the sememe /Orsol/ has a low occurrence in the text and appears only as a reflection of a place living in the narrator's memory. In contrast to the ambivalent feelings associated with Jarbher, feelings of first nostalgia, then melancholia are experienced by the main character in exile towards his "cité insaisissable":

je souhaite aussi revoir Orsol, qu'on me rende ma ville, que je puisse étudier des visages qui me parlent, des visages dont je puisse faire le tour, comme on fait chez nous pour le plaisir de la promenade le tour des remparts, comme on boit du thé à l'ombre des platanes, comme on court au-devant de la mer (...) Torturantes minutes où je me mets alors à surveiller l'océan comme si à travers ses brumes j'allais discerner l'étincelant chatolement d'Orsol. (88)

Orsol hante de plus en plus mes pensées. Rayonnante de blancheur immaculée ainsi que telle cité de légende dans toute sa présence remémorée, ma bonne ville ne me semble pourtant pas pouvoir être plus lointaine. Elle me manque. (97)

To conclude this section, the space of the city in *LTO* is represented and experienced both as the anonymous, labyrinthine space of Jarbher made out of a multiplicity of empty spaces void of meaning and as the nostalgic, native space of Orsol as a lost space of memory. It is constructed in the space of

difference between the West and the East, and between the North and the South as principal imaginations of space. The absence of reference to any “real” space allows for the construction of the imaginary space of the city as an elsewhere or a “non-lieu”.²⁰⁴ More importantly, the space of the “non-lieu” in *LTO* allows for the demystification of spatiality to take place through the destabilisation of the space of perception and the annihilation of spatial oppositions inscribed within the imaginary space of the city, leading to the production of absence of meaning. For Dib, the process of the demystification of spatiality must pass through the processes of deconstruction of language and meaning. Spatial loss, in this context, is determined by and represented in the loss of meaning.

2.3.1.4. The Fundamental Opposition Inside–Outside: Critique of the Discourse of Exclusion

The production of the absence of meaning at the textual and surface levels of the text that was analysed at the beginning of the section on Dib’s analysis can be said to be generated through a more fundamental opposition – *dedans–dehors* – a semantic opposition that has a particular significance for the semiotic interpretation of the text that is being analysed in this chapter. As already discussed in the introductory part on the analysis on Dib, in the opposition *dedans–dehors* objective qualities of the closed and open space become perceived by the subject as oppressive, threatening spaces.

One can find in *LTO* that a critique of a discourse of space based on the societal principles of inclusion–exclusion is deeply embedded in Dib’s text. The “apparent” absence of opposition of meaning in the spatial pair inside–outside or *dedans–dehors* that is being generated at the surface level of meaning

²⁰⁴ Bonn, Ch., *Lecture présente de Mohammed Dib*, Alger: ENAL, 1988.

through Eïd's increasing sense of the equally foreign, alienating spaces of the inside such as the space of the hotel room in which Eïd resides whilst in Jarbher, or his bedroom in the house on the island; and of the outside, such as the street and square and other public spaces of the city, inverts itself and produces new meaning at the level of the narrative and the deep level. The clear-cut distinction between the private and the public spheres or spaces, a distinction that is fundamental to Islamic culture, is no longer possible in the Western context, a situation that exacerbates the alienation and isolation that Eïd is experiencing. Eïd wanders through the urban spaces of Jarbher without being able to integrate himself in the social life of the city and its circles, a feeling which, in the end, most probably leads to madness. His progressive feeling of exclusion or alienation, as has already been shown, is triggered by his visit to the abyss and the humanoid, rampant "creatures" that he sees there, an event that is met with denial or indifference by the inhabitants of Jarbher and with silence by his own government, which does not acknowledge any of his reports. Thus, the production of meaning of the alienated subject at the level of the narrative and the deep level re-inscribes itself at the surface level and generates or produces an absence of meaning at the level of the space of perception – that of no distinction between external and internal space. The "internal" space of the subject invades the external space or the space of the perception and becomes re-inscribed as imaginary space at the textual level. There is therefore an interesting dynamics here between meaning and absence of meaning that can be observed in the textual analysis conducted, and that circulates between the surface and deep levels by producing a circularity of meaning that is embedded in the process of signification. This circular dynamics presents a challenge for the linear "top to bottom" analysis of meaning to which semiotic method aspires. Dib's text can be interpreted as a rupture of or a resistance to the Western-based processes of signification in order to produce a non-Western paradigm of these processes. Namely, as Khatibi remarks in his short introduction on the impossibility of application of formal textual analysis to the theory of the sign in Arab culture, it is necessary to develop the concept of an "intersémiotique transversale" for an appropriate reading of Maghrebian texts:

c'est toute la question du signe qui se joue; d'une sémiotique positiviste à une intersémiotique transversale, c'est encore le concept d'écriture qu'il faudra investir dans le corps en le confrontant au texte coranique et à la langue arabe (...) Car le Coran – et c'est là son extrême originalité – se conçoit comme une théorie radicale du signe, de la Parole et de l'Écriture; *al-qur'ân*: lecture, déchiffrement et récitation du signe révélé.²⁰⁵

2.4. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the analysis presented in Chapter 2 has been conducted with the main aim of identifying to what extent the imaginary space of the nation and the conceptualisation of internal and external space in the texts of Ferron and Dib, and their representation of spatial loss, contribute to the demystification of spatiality. It can be concluded that, while the strategy of localisation dominates in *LA* at the surface level of meaning of the text, the separation between external and internal space is brought into question at the fundamental level of meaning through the act of writing. In *LTO*, a dynamics of presence–absence of meaning at the surface level lies inscribed as a culturally determined opposition inside–outside at the fundamental level of *LTO*, creating a critique of the discourse of exclusion and enabling the deconstruction of the Western discourse on space. It can be claimed that whilst the process of the demystification of spatiality is clearly at work in Dib's *LTO*, in Ferron's *LA* there exists a movement between the mystification of space through the ideologisation of local spaces and places that are part of the discourse on national identity and the need for demystification or for a socio-political critique of space; this movement installs a discourse of ambivalence in Ferron's text.

The semiotic analysis conducted allowed for a larger question to be asked: are the similarities observed in *LA* and *LTO* in relation to how the space of the forest is constructed and represented, attributable to the universality of a number of archetypes shared across cultures? Can a similar value attributed to the forest

²⁰⁵ Khatibi, A., *La Blessure du nom propre*, 1974, pp. 16-17.

be the result of the shared oral practice of storytelling and narrative structure that, according to semiotic theory, is common to all cultures? Or are these similarities inscribed within the frame of reference of the French language that these two authors use? In other words, is the appearance of the space of the forest in Ferron's and Dib's writing the result of an assumed shared archetypal imaginary that is independent of the culture that Dib and Ferron belong to? Can they be seen to share the same "système de références"?²⁰⁶ Or is this observable commonality between the two authors a by-product of similar storytelling practices in which the mythical dimension of the North is explored? There is no simple answer to these questions. It is, however, reasonable to assume that the processes of decoding and encoding behind the usage of tropes belonging to the Northern imaginary in Dib's later writing are of a different order from those that govern the usage of these images in Ferron's writing. One could argue that in Dib's writing, the processes of cultural and linguistic *translation* play an important role for the way meaning is encoded and decoded by the author (but also by the reading public); contrary to this, it can be assumed that in Ferron's case, one is dealing primarily with processes of cultural and linguistic *identification* that presume that the author and the public share the same frame of reference in the sense Dib gives it.

Following the thesis' aim of an investigation into the representations of space, place and spatial loss in the postcolonial Francophone context, Chapter 2 examined the relationship between space, place and memory, and what consequences it has for how spatial loss is conceived or defined in these writings. It examined whether the literary themes, the strategies used and the fundamental values attributed to space and place enable a demystification of spatiality to take place, something that also has consequences for how spatial loss is defined. In contrast to Chapter 2's examination of the relationship between space, place and the notions of individual memory and subjectivity and how these are related to categories of space and time, Chapter 3 will study another aspect of memory, that of cultural memory, and its

²⁰⁶ Dib, M., *L'Arbre à dire*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1998, p. 17.

interrelationship with space. It will compare three texts produced in the Western and non-Western cultural contexts and how these relate to the concepts and discourses of countermemory and sensory memory.

CHAPTER 3. GEOGRAPHIES OF MEMORY: SPACE AND MEMORY

J'ai à moi seul plus de souvenirs que n'en peuvent avoir eu tous les hommes depuis que le monde est monde.

Jorge Luis Borges

3.1. Introduction

As already argued in the introduction to this thesis, the concept of space is to be understood here in the way Massey defines it, that is, as a relational and dynamic concept that cannot be conceptualised outside the notion of time, a claim that forms the basis of Massey's theory on space and place and her understanding of the concept of space-time.²⁰⁷ Developing her theory from Lefebvre's ideas on the interdependence of time and space, Massey argues that space cannot be defined in opposition to time and temporality (itself defined as dislocation or rupture).²⁰⁸ As can be deduced from Massey's analysis of this concept, space is a socio-political concept which not only participates in social relations, but also actively shapes them; it is implicated in the production of history and memory. Importantly for the definition and understanding of the notion of memory, a "travelling" concept that has been studied from many different perspectives and theories both within and outside the field of memory studies, a focused approach has been taken here to address the question of spatial loss in a comparative context and account for the presence of Western and non-Western discourses on memory.

The particular aspect of memory that will be closely examined in the current chapter is that of cultural memory. Cultural memory is to be interpreted as defined by Paul Connerton, as an "act of transfer" by groups or individuals in which identities of the present are being shaped and defined based on a set of

²⁰⁷ The debate about space and time can be traced back to Immanuel Kant in his work *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, I., *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Guyer, P. and Wood, A., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See Janiak, A., "Kant's Views on Space and Time" in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition), Zalta, E.N. (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/kant-spacetime/> (downloaded on 07/05/2013) citing Kant: "Space is not something objective and real, nor a substance, nor an accident, nor a relation; instead, it is subjective and ideal, and originates from the mind's nature in accord with a stable law as a scheme, as it were, for coordinating everything sensed externally" (Ak 2: 403). Put very simply, the basis for a number of modern and contemporary theories about space being viewed as both abstract (in relation to place) and as external (in relation to time) can be found in this sentence from Kant.

²⁰⁸ Massey, D., "Politics and space/time" in: *Place, space and gender*, 2003 (1st ed.1994). Massey mainly discusses here Ernest Laclau's book *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London, 1990) and his definition of space and time. According to Laclau, it is because spatiality is a closed and self-determining system that it is opposed to temporality, explains Massey, and that it cannot be politicised.

shared common practices of the past.²⁰⁹ Such a definition particularly highlights the problematic of cultural memory when studied in the (post)colonial (Francophone) context and where the (post)colonial experience can be said to be essentially constituted by the multifaceted experience of loss, but also gain. It therefore becomes crucial to examine how postcolonial subjectivity in the Francophone context can be defined in relation to this experience and understanding of loss. As the three authors, Djébar, Poulin and Lalonde, and their texts analysed in this chapter show, the examination of the process of appropriation (Djébar), negotiation (Poulin) and recovery of individual memory (Lalonde) must pass through an examination of discourse of space and the inter-related field of contested spatialities and memories. This is not to say that the analysis presented has only accounted for the political and social dimensions; both the poetic and the political dimensions of memory and space have been addressed. The presence and significance of discourses of counter-memory in the case of two very different postcolonial Francophone experiences (Djébar and Poulin) and the importance of corporeal memory for a full understanding of the condition of the (post)colonial subject and the real and perceived loss of place will be examined to account for the spatial character of memory and the close connection between memory and place. How are space, place and spatial loss treated, perceived and experienced in the context of the formation of individual and collective identity shaped by opposing cultural memories? What role can official forgetting play in the creation of the narrative on individual and collective identity, but also in the repression of memories of marginalised cultural spaces and identities, and how is forgetting related to power? How does sensory memory affect and shape the construction of cultural memory and individual identity in the context of dual culture? Does gender play a role in the conceptualisation of space and place, as argued by Massey? These are the questions that will be addressed in the texts considered in this chapter. As will be demonstrated, two particular types of cultural memory will be analysed. The narratives in Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Poulin's *Volkswagen blues* will be examined within the theoretical perspective

²⁰⁹ Connerton, P., *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

of countermemory that was developed within feminist theory during the eighties and that essentially addresses the question of the politics of memory. The main question that will be asked in those two texts is to what extent discourses of countermemory are ultimately inscribed within a Western paradigm of memory as they seek to contest their validity, and what factors might contribute to such a position. On the other hand, Lalonde's *Sept Lacs plus au Nord* will be examined in the context and from the point of view of the notion of sensory memory; this notion preoccupied a number of anthropologists and ethnographers in the nineties in the context of the study of an anthropology of the senses that arose as a result of their critique of European modernity and materiality in the study of culture. It will be demonstrated that sensory memory viewed as a material cultural practice and an embodied spatial experience participates in the reframing of individual consciousness and enables the full restoration of marginalised mechanisms of corporeal memory that are repressed by official discourses on cultural memory and history. Indeed, the issue of official or institutional forgetting is seen to be at the centre of an unveiling of the link between space and power; more precisely, it shapes and defines the very processes and discourses of memory and counter-memory. More importantly, however, it also shapes public discourses on loss, as argued by the anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis.

If, as Massey claims, space cannot be conceived of, represented and experienced in separation from time, it is not just time ("internality"), but also space ("externality") that determine our memory, subjectivity and identity. Memory, in turn, cannot be studied in separation from forgetting. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the re-examination of space and the development of theories on space that have preoccupied a number of critics since the 1980s and whereby modernist ideas of progress and the idea of History are brought into question, occurred in parallel with the emergence of memory studies and a re-evaluation of the concept of forgetting, a notion that Nietzsche reflects on in his text "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life". In his text, a discussion on the question of happiness and the necessity of forgetting, Nietzsche presents the reader with a thought experiment in which a man who does not

possess the power of forgetting is condemned to see everywhere “a state of becoming”. Such a man, concludes Nietzsche, would lose any sense of identity; he “would lose himself in this stream of becoming”.²¹⁰ Underlying the importance of a historical understanding of the concept of memory and reflecting on the possible reasons for a lack of a historical approach to memory in memory studies, the social theorist Anne Whitehead argues for the need to take account of the history of the Western concept of memory. In her introduction to *Memory*, which tracks the development of the principal theories and understandings of memory in Western thought and gives an overview of the current interpretations of memory, she remarks that “memory studies have proved remarkably forgetful of their own (pre)history” and advances that a historical study of the term of memory is important for an understanding of the “current memory boom as simply the last of a series of preoccupations with memory which have punctuated Western culture”.²¹¹ What comes clearly out of Whitehead’s presentation of the history of memory as it developed in Western thought is the relationship between an introspective, nostalgic definition of memory and the Self and the parallel rise of European colonialism. Whitehead’s study of memory history in the Western context shows that the break or the fundamental redefinition of memory occurs during the period of Enlightenment and Romanticism and the rise of individual memory as remembrance of one’s own past that begins to be associated with the self and identity; memory, in other words, becomes a tool of self-knowledge. As a social theorist, Whitehead does not explicitly make the link between the modern Western conceptualisation of memory and the parallel rise and expansion of imperial European powers; however, it is evident from reading her presentation of memory history that the formation of a discourse of memory that took place during the period of the Enlightenment and Romanticism can be seen to have occurred in parallel with the era of European colonial expansion that culminated in the nineteenth century with a period of “memory crisis” and the rise of “parallel discourses

²¹⁰ Quotation taken from the extract of “On the uses and disadvantages of history for life” in *Theories of Memory: a Reader* (eds. Rossington, M. and Whitehead, A.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. Also see Jorge Luis Borges’s short story on memory and forgetting “Funès, ou la mémoire” in: *Fictions*, Paris : Gallimard, 1965.

²¹¹ Whitehead, A., *Memory*, London/New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 3.

of history and memory”.²¹² Therefore, it can be claimed that the formation of the Western discourse of memory as it developed in Europe goes hand-in-hand with the rise and expansion of European imperialism and the constitution of the Eurocentric discourse on space and place, as is, for example, the case of France and of contemporary France’s colonial memory.²¹³ As both Massey and Said show in their critical analyses from their own theoretical perspectives, a connection can be established between Western imperialist thought and the development of an essentialist discourse on space and place.²¹⁴

3.2. Discourses of Countermemory: Re-writing Space and Memory in Assia

Djebar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia* and Jacques Poulin’s *Volkswagen blues*

The concept of spatial memory that is referred to explicitly or implicitly in Djebar’s, Poulin’s and Lalonde’s analysis is derived from the assumption made of the interdependence between space and time or memory and of the importance of official memory in the production of the official discourse/s on

²¹² Whitehead, A., *Memory*, p. 8.

²¹³ As Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire argue in the introduction to *La Fracture coloniale: La société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial*, the year 2005 (and the preceding years) saw an unprecedented level of “politicisation of memory” around the question of colonial history. The high number of studies on colonial history coming from the intellectual elites and university circles, the flourishing interest for this question in the printed and broadcasting media, as well as the 2005 French colonialism law known as “la loi du 23 février 2005” and the ensuing protests and debates were not coincidental; instead, they should be viewed as a sign of France’s institutionalised colonial discourse and “nostalgie coloniale”, and as symptoms of a “retour du refoulé” that are a consequence of the country’s occultation of its own colonial past. Indeed, this “institutionalised forgetting” of colonial history has not only resulted in the formation and confrontation of competing and contesting memories, it has also shaped France’s collective identity and the way in which it constructs its narrative on national history. Indeed, this “institutionalised forgetting” of colonial history has not only resulted in the formation and confrontation of competing and contesting memories, it has also shaped France’s collective identity and the way in which it constructs its narrative on national history. See Blanchard, P., Bancel, N., Lemaire, S., *La Fracture coloniale: La Société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial*, Paris: La Découverte / Poche, 2006 (1st ed. 2005).

²¹⁴ It can be inferred that Orientalism as one of the paradigms of Western thought participates in the recreation and dissemination of Eurocentric discourse on space and place. As a particularly successful and resilient system of imperial attitudes, references and statements or mystifications of the space of the Orient in the nineteenth and twentieth century, it has given rise to “European imaginative geography” on the space of the Orient. Said, E.W., *Orientalism*, London: Penguin Group, 1995, p. 57.

spatial loss. Massey's theoretical perspectives on space-time have therefore informed the analysis presented in this chapter, as well as her theory on space, place and gender. Instead of offering a semiotic analysis of the spatial isotopies represented in the three texts selected, the analysis in this chapter has concentrated primarily on the narrative level of meaning and the study of the production of narratives of counter-memory and sensory memory. Although the initial intention was to present a semiotic analysis of the isotopies of space and memory at the surface level of meaning in the three texts presented, the results obtained from the preliminary analysis of these texts showed that it was difficult to present the isotopies of memory at the surface level of meaning in the same way as was possible for the isotopies of space and place. A preliminary conclusion that one might draw is that whilst space seems to lend itself to semiotic analysis particularly well, memory remains more difficult to analyse by using the method of semiotic analysis. A parallel study of these two types of isotopies in the texts selected allowed for some interesting conclusions to be drawn on how discourses on space and memory relate to each other.²¹⁵

In her text *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*,²¹⁶ Assia Djebar writes that in 1982, when she first visited Canada to give a presentation at a conference on French literature in Ottawa, she had suddenly realised (on the morning of giving her speech) that in her early writing she had been using the French language as a veil that would help her to hide her individual and physical self, as well as her own personal voice. This early attitude to writing and the French language could be best illustrated, Djebar thought, by a scene from her early childhood that Djebar evoked in her speech:

Et j'avais évoqué (l'effort d'anamnèse se déclenchant, ce matin-là à Ottawa) mon expérience de petite fille sortant dans la rue avec une dame (ma mère), citadine enveloppée de son voile de soie blanc, une voilette de gaze brodée sur le visage, et moi, fillette à la main accrochée au pan rêche de la soie immaculée, prenant conscience des regards voyeurs des villageois sur cette citadine voilée qui se rendait, chaque jeudi, au hammam.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ The preliminary analysis conducted consisted of the identification of the types of spaces and places represented in parallel with the identification of the types of memory appearing in the texts selected. For example, in Djebar's text, the main types of memory identified were autobiographical memory, individual or personal memory, official memory and collective memory.

²¹⁶ Djebar, A., *Ces Voix qui m'assiègent*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1999.

²¹⁷ Djebar, A., *op. cit.*, p. 43.

As Djébar explains further in her text, her own re-examination of the French language and the use of this symbolic veiling in her early writing triggered a series of questions related to the relationship between identity and language and raised the question of the significance of the “Langue de l’autre” for her as a writer. Published three years after Djébar’s first visit to Canada, the first sentence in *L’Amour, la fantasia*²¹⁸ could be seen as a direct response to her identity questioning related to the use of the French language introduced to her by her father, but also as a statement about gendered space (and memory), and the significance of transgression of that space for her as a child.²¹⁹ Very interestingly, the memory of her as a child accompanying her veiled mother to the hammam is recorded much later in Djébar’s latest novel, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (2007): “Dans la rue, la dame blanche marchera, regard fixé au sol, ses cils palpitant sous l’effort: moi, je ne me sens pas seulement sa suivante, mais l’accompagnatrice qui veille sur ses pas”. Not only is the genderisation of space in Islamic-Arabic society in Djébar’s writing clearly significant for her writing process, but her memory is itself gendered and is also spatially constructed. It could be claimed that the spatial memory of her veiled mother sprang into her mind as she found herself in a position of distance, not only geographic, cultural and mental, but also temporal from her place of residence (Paris/Algiers).

Jacques Poulin was born in 1937 in Saint-Gédéon-de-Beauce and currently lives in Québec city after having spent ten years in Paris. Poulin is one of the most respected and widely read Francophone writers in Québec and has been awarded many literary prizes, the last one being the prestigious Québécois award, the Prix Gilles Corbeil, awarded in 2008. The exploration and juxtaposition of the cultural identity

²¹⁸ The abbreviation *LAF* will be used in the following analysis each time *L’Amour, la fantasia* is referred to.

²¹⁹ *L’Amour, la fantasia* begins with the following sentence: “Fillette arabe allant pour la première fois à l’école, un matin d’automne, main dans la main du père” (p. 11).

concepts of *américanité* and *francité*²²⁰ in Jacques Poulin's work that define the scenography or the cultural and literary frame of reference within which his texts are inscribed, read and interpreted can be said to be one of the main preoccupations for this Québécois writer. As in the case of Assia Djebar, although in a less extreme form, issues of identity questioning coupled with an ambivalent relationship to language and cultural memory are central to his working project.

In *Volkswagen blues*,²²¹ the “trigger” of the process of anamnesis or the “meta-memory” is an object – the postcard – that Jack Waterman, the main protagonist and a writer, searches for and finds in a book where he stored it fifteen years ago after receiving it from his older brother Théo, who mysteriously stopped sending postcards and has since disappeared. It is after a moment of self-doubt and identity crisis that Jack's memory of his brother is suddenly triggered and that he decides to embark on a spatial and memorial journey that takes him from Gaspé to San Francisco in the search for his lost brother. Théo represents here a symbol of Québec's cultural memory and a metaphor for lost origin; he is the symbol of the search for brotherhood underpinning the collective memory of Québec. Indeed, one of the characters that Jack encounters on his journey through North America is the (Montréal-born) writer Saul Bellow who when learning that Jack is looking for his brother remarks: “Quand vous cherchez votre frère, vous cherchez tout le monde!” (119)

²²⁰ In an interview with the Québécois writer and poet Jean Royer published in 1991 (Royer, J. *Romanciers québécois, entretiens, essais*, Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1991, pp. 268-277), Poulin reveals his affinity with and preference for American literature and the American novel, in opposition to French literature and its excluding, elitist literary tradition. Explaining that it is very difficult for Québécois authors to get published in France, due to the impenetrability of the French literary establishment and the still prevailing editors' clichés of regarding Québécois literature as nothing more than a product of exoticism or folklore, and due to the no less complex relationship between Canadian Francophone and Anglophone literary spaces, Poulin affirms that he feels much more at ease in America and is more interested in the exploration of cultural similarities between the Québécois and American literatures and spaces, a sign of the authors of his generation who write within a post-nationalist era and cultural Québécois space.

²²¹ The abbreviation *VB* will be used in the following analysis each time *Volkswagen blues* is referred to.

3.2.1. Remapping Space and Memory: the Narrative Structure in *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Volkswagen blues*

The question that will be discussed here is whether the literary remapping of space and memory by the individual (postcolonial Francophone) subject can lead to the re-appropriation of colonised space and memory in the Canadian and Algerian context. This in turn has direct implications for how spatial loss is experienced, perceived and defined in these two texts. The analysis of the narrative level of meaning of the two texts presented (see Diagrams 3 and 4) shows that both texts share a similar underlying narrative structure; the actantial narrative schema is represented in Diagrams 3 and 4. Differences between the two texts were identified, however, in the analysis of the canonical narrative schema.²²²

A semiotic analysis of the narrative of both texts shows that an initial state of disjunction exists between the subject and the object. This state of disjunction creates narratives of the quest; in case of *LAF* and *VB* this quest takes on the character of an “identity quest” through both an individual and a collective memorial and historical journey founded in the author-narrator’s desire to re-write space and memory and reframe consciousness about personal and historic events of the past and present. In effect, it is through the deconstruction of the official narratives on their respective countries’ colonial histories that both Poulin and Djébar attempt to access their individual identity and re-appropriate their individual and collective cultural past. Djébar’s *LAF* has been analysed extensively from this perspective; one such

²²² The analysis of the narrative level of meaning can consist of two types of analysis of the narrative: the actantial narrative schema (French: le modèle actantiel) or the canonical narrative schema (French: le schéma narratif canonique). For an explanation of the actantial narrative schema see footnote 144, page 83. The canonical narrative schema “presents the universal prototype for the narrative structure”. It consists of three main narrative stages or tests – the qualifying, the decisive and the glorifying test – that “mirror the fundamental logic of human action”. These tests are preceded by what is called the “stage of manipulation or contract” or the fiduciary contract (French: le contrat fiduciaire) in which a contract is established between the sender and the receiver. See Martin, B., & Ringham, F., *Key Terms in Semiotics*, 2006, pp.38-39. Greimas and Courtés explain the notion of the fiduciary contract in the following way: “le contrat fiduciaire est un contrat énonciatif (ou contrat de véridiction) qui garantit le discours-énoncé”. See Greimas, A. J. & Courtés, J., *Semiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, 1993, p.146.

example of the author’s subversion of the narrative on France’s colonial history and memory is Djébar’s re-appropriation of Algerian memory through the deconstruction of the event of the suffocation of the tribe of Ouled Riah ordered by of the French general Jean Jacques Pélissier on the 18 June 1845. The narrator-author Djébar juxtaposes Pélissier’s written report and account with her own autobiographical voice and recounting of the story and the testimonies of two other witnesses. Similarly, in Poulin’s *VB*, Poulin deconstructs colonial American colonial history through Pitsémine’s retelling of the legend of the Starved Rock (*Le Rocher de la Famine*) and the clash between several native tribes after the arrival of European colonisers and the expansion of European settlements that led to the disappearance (through starvation) of a whole native Indian tribe called the Illini.

Another common feature at the narrative level has been identified. The narratives and main actants in *LAF* and *VB* are characterised by a state of ambiguity. This ambiguity appears at both the narrative and the deep level of meaning of the text (where the values of the text are being expressed) because of the ambiguous position that the subject, the “helper” and the “opponent” can be seen to occupy and which accentuate the subject’s state of disjunction with the object.

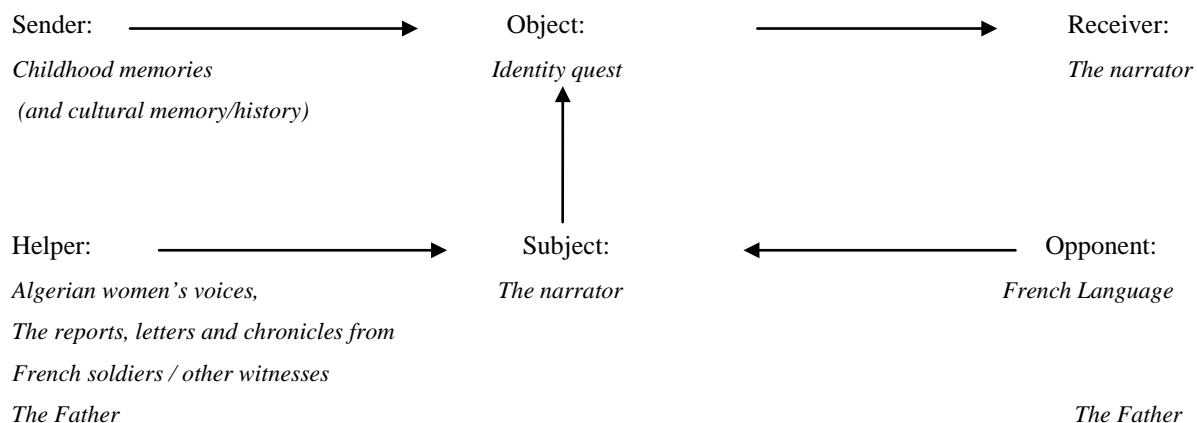


Diagram 3: Actantial narrative schema in *L’Amour, la fantasia*

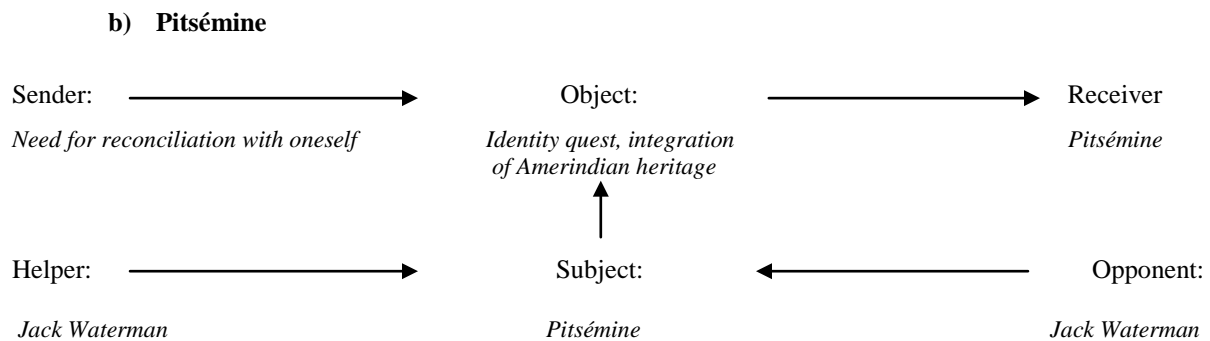
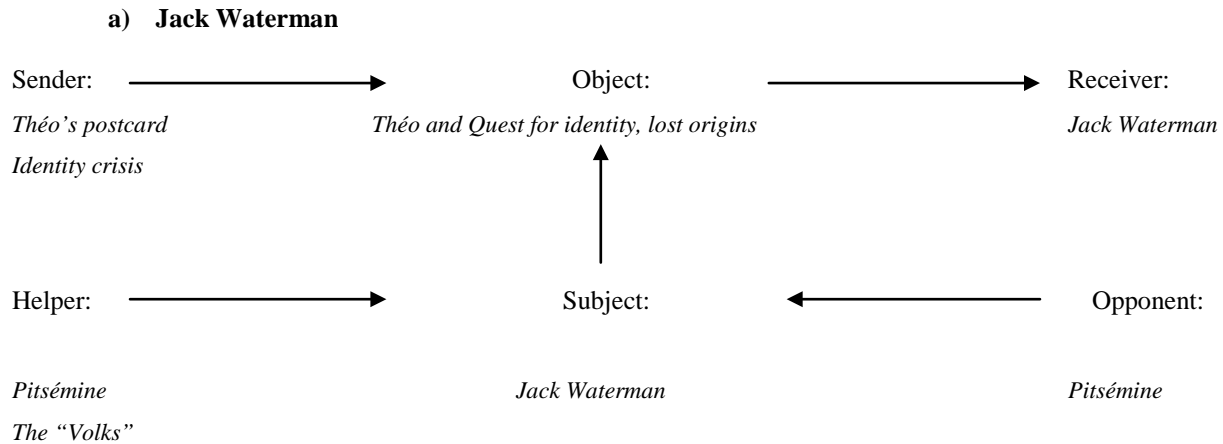


Diagram 4: Actantial narrative schema (from the perspective of Jack and Pitsémine) in *Volkswagen blues*

As can be seen, in Djébar's *LAF*, the French language fulfils, at one and the same time, the role of the helper, through its potential for the elucidation and deconstruction of French colonial history and the appropriation of Algerian memory, and that of the opponent to the subject's or author-narrator's quest, because of the impossibility of accessing these memories through the use of the native language and dialect. It symbolises the French colonial link and heritage that makes it impossible for the subject to fully realise her identity quest through autobiographical writing in French. Similarly in *VB*, Pitsémine assumes both the role of the helper and opponent, as she helps Jacques Waterman in search for his lost brother Theo, but prevents him from reclaiming his French-Canadian identity through the subversion of the French-Canadian mythical, heroic past and the use of the minority discourse of the Métis.

As already mentioned, according to the definition given by Martin, the canonical and actantial narrative schemata represent “fundamental narrative models” that together form “the narrative programme of the quest”.²²³ Not unexpectedly, the analysis of the canonical narrative schema of the two texts selected revealed that there exist some important differences or distinctive characteristics between the two texts that can be attributed to each of the writer’s own individual narrative voices and enunciative positions. The stage of the contract, a stage at which the “sender” establishes a contract with the “receiver” that becomes the subject of the narrative, presents two very different situations or cases in the two texts analysed and reveals an ambiguity at the centre of the structure of *LAF*’s narrative.

In the case of *LAF*, it is a matter of (semi-) autobiographical discourse, whose identification or explicitness remains in itself problematic for the author / narrator throughout the book; this creates a situation where the sender (in the case of *LAF*, the sender can be identified as the insurgence of the idea of childhood memories and cultural memory/history) initiates the establishment of a contract that is never fully concluded and where there is an initial ambivalence on the part of the “enunciative subject” (the author) to fully engage in such a contract. Therefore, this type of ambivalence makes this contract or fiduciary agreement highly problematic. The contract can be said to be only partly established and fulfilled in *LAF*, as an ambivalence is incorporated in the enunciative stage of the narration, at the level of the author’s desire to write and her questioning of that desire by debating whether an autobiography in (French) should or should not be written. This ambivalence in turn generates further ambivalence or a fracture at the level of the narrative subject, as can be noted in the intermittent switching between the first-person and third-person narrative in *LAF*. The following passage, often cited by critics, well

²²³ Martin, B., “Introduction to semiotic analysis”, in: *La Chouette, Sémiotique et Interprétation*, n° 27, 1996 (published by Birkbeck College, London), p. 10.

illustrates the type of questioning and torment that preoccupy the author as she feels compelled to write her autobiography (in French):

L'autobiographie pratiquée dans la langue adverse se tisse comme fiction, du moins tant que l'oubli des morts charriés par l'écriture n'opère pas son anesthésie. Croyant "me parcourir", je ne fais que choisir un autre voile. Voulant, à chaque pas, parvenir à la transparence, je m'engloutis d'avantage dans l'anonymat des aïeules! (302)

Also, although in *LAF* the qualifying and the decisive tests of the narrative can be said to have been accomplished, the inherent ambivalence at the stage of the contract that is argued above has as a consequence that the final stage of the narrative, the stage of sanction or the glorifying test, remains open or uncertain, as it is not possible (and quite understandably so) to ascertain whether the object of the quest has been found and the quest completed by the author / the narrator.²²⁴ What seems certain is that a (symbolic) fracture persists at the level of the subject's identity, as can be observed in the last pages of the book, in the italicised passage "*Soliloque*":

Ma fiction est cette autobiographie qui s'esquisse, alourdie par l'héritage qui m'encombre. Vais-je succomber? (...) Mais la légende tribale zigzague dans les béances et c'est dans le silence des mots d'amour, jamais proférés, de la langue maternelle non écrite, transportée comme un bavardage d'une mime inconnue et hagarde, c'est dans cette nuit-là que l'imagination, mendiant des rues, s'accroupit. (304)

In contrast to the explicit ambivalence and fracture that is embedded both at the linguistic and the enunciative level in *LAF*, the enunciative contract between the sender²²⁵ and the receiver in *VB* can be said to be established successfully through the receiver's / subject's desire and obligation to act in response to the ideas incorporated in the sender's message. The enunciative subject (the author) uses the

²²⁴ The qualifying test presupposes that "the subject must acquire the necessary competence needed to carry out the planned action or mission". The decisive test "represents the principal event or action...it is the point where the object of the quest is at stake". The glorifying test is "the stage of sanction, that is, the stage at which the outcome of an event is revealed". See Martin, B., "Introduction to semiotic analysis", in: *La Chouette, Sémiotique et Interprétation*, n° 27, 1996, p. 13.

²²⁵ As can be seen in Diagram 4 of the actantial narrative model, an internal sender has been identified in the case of both Jack and Pitsémine.

genre of the *road novel*;²²⁶ the receiver becomes the (narrative) dual subject (Pitsémine and Jack). The search for the object of the quest is acted upon, in the case of the dual subject, by way of an interrogation of Québécois (but also American) memory and space through the instrument of the journey. So, from the start, the duality of the Québécois subject is embedded in Poulin's narrative; this ambivalence or tension between individual and collective memory is embedded implicitly in the sender, and in the ideas of "identity crisis" and "need for reconciliation with one's past" that characterise both characters of the novel in the larger context of Québécois, Canadian and American contemporary society.

Equally, in contrast to the stage of the contract and the qualifying test that seem to be explicitly prevalent in *LAF*, the stages of the qualifying, decisive and glorifying tests all have their own specific role in *VB* and can be identified. The qualifying test seems to occupy a particular place or importance in *VB*, as the question of the subjects' competence or knowledge in relation to the collective memories and histories of the American, Canadian-French and Amerindian past, and their spatial knowledge of the places and spaces they visit, have a direct impact on their ability to search for and find Théo. The stage of the decisive test is played out in San Francisco through the final scene of Jack's encounter with his brother, who has lost his memory and does not recognise him. This scene gives rise to the final confrontation of the subject (Jack, Pitsémine) and the anti-subject (Theo). This final confrontation enables Jack to realise that his search for the nostalgic part of his identity and his past has been completed and allows both him and Pitsémine to transform the object of their search and move forward in a symbolic exchange of places and through the final, gradual emergence of a space of consensus where different histories, memories and identities can be negotiated. This symbolic exchange of places between Jack and Pitsémine is

²²⁶ Compare with the novel by the American writer Jack Kerouac *On the Road*, a central influence for Poulin's "road novel". Jack Kerouac was born to Québécois parents who emigrated to Lowell, Massachusetts. He had both Mohawk and Caughnawaga blood and his first language was the spoken French of Eastern Montréal. Kerouac wanted to become a French-Canadian writer and first started to write the novel in French, but abandoned his project (see: <http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/livres/155613/les-50-ans-d-on-the-road-kerouac-voulait-ecrire-en-francais>, accessed on 23/05/2012). Kerouac, J., *On the Road*, New York: Viking Press, 1957.

accomplished by Jack leaving the Volks to Pitsémine after he has found his brother, recognising that he had idealised his brother since he disappeared, and realising that he is ready to go home. On the other hand, Pitsémine finds her place symbolically in San Francisco, when she describes it as follows: “cette ville, où les races semblaient vivre en harmonie, était un bon endroit pour essayer de faire l’unité et de se réconcilier avec elle-même”.

Finally, and interestingly, the identity quest in both texts is governed by a number of detection strategies or searching of clues that are there to help the subject in his/her search for knowledge and self-knowledge. In both *LAF* and *VB*, the principle of investigation or of the uncovering of clues is what principally drives the narrative forward and enables the story to be recounted, told and re-written. In *VB*, this investigation occurs at the level of the story itself as the reader follows the gradual uncovering of clues to Théo’s whereabouts that the main characters, Jack and Pitsémine (also nicknamed La Grande Sauterelle) discover and solve on their journey between Québec and San Francisco in search of him. In *LAF*, this investigation can be said to occur at the meta-level of the narrative or at the level of the process of enunciation or writing. The attempt to re-write both personal and collective history and memory and the conscious destabilisation of the symbolic process of signification in *LAF* through the inclusion of semiotic markers or fragments in the (French) language takes on the character of a painstaking, forensic, speleological search that the author / narrator must conduct in order to uncover the lost traces of the buried Algerian past and history and restore her own identity.²²⁷ As already observed, this search that can only be conducted on the basis of written French official history and memory recorded in the reports, letters and personal accounts of the French soldiers and the artistic and intellectual figures at the time of the French conquest of Algeria, reinforces an inherent ambiguity and tension in Djébar’s text, as it is only through

²²⁷ For an insightful analysis of the symbolic and semiotic language in *LAF*, see Ringrose, P., *Assia Djébar, In Dialogue with Feminisms*, Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2006.

these accounts that she can access and revive the lost and oppressed histories and memories of the Franco-Algerian past, as well as reconstruct and make sense of her own past and memories.

3.2.2. The Westernising Discourse on Memory and the Orientalising Discourse on Space in *L'Amour, la fantasia*

The intermittent occurrence of the narrators' personal and intimate memories in *LAF* (from childhood up to adulthood) and those of the marginalised collective voices and stories of Algerian women during the French conquest and the Algerian War of Independence (voices that come to be fully expressed in the third part of the novel, "Les Voix ensevelies") act as counter-memories to both French and Algerian official memory and produce multiple vocal harmonies embedded within both the structure and the title of the novel. The concept of counter-memory made its appearance at the end of the eighties within Women's Studies and for Feminist theorists who wanted to address the need for a systematic study of the questions of cultural memory and gender, questions that were not properly investigated in the field of memory studies.²²⁸ In *LAF* and *VB*, this particular (textual) discursive strategy has been used as a narrative device that aims to contest the validity of official discourses on history and memory, but also on colonial discourses on space, and to subvert these Western male-dominated discourses through the inclusion of the feminine, marginalised and silenced voices. This gives rise to a conception of space that seeks to be dynamic and transgressive rather than static and flat, as Massey understands it.

One of the most effective devices of counter-memory in *LAF* is that of the image of the severed hand of an anonymous Algerian woman that the nineteenth-century painter and writer Eugène Fromentin lends to the narrator, which, in her words, is "[la] main de la mutilation et du souvenir" (176), a hand that Fromentin

²²⁸ Hirsch M., and Smith, V., "Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction" in: *Signs*, vol. 28, n° 1, *Gender and Cultural Memory*, (eds. Hirsch, M. & Smith, V.), Autumn 2002, p. 1-19.

has found, picked up and discarded on the battlefield of Laghouat.²²⁹ The narrator seizes on this hand and brings it the *qalam*.²³⁰ This highly symbolic gesture of a women's mutilated hand carries a double meaning, representing both the re-appropriation of the act of writing and the condition of Algerian women "amputated from their desire to write or express themselves".²³¹ However, the rewriting and inclusion of different types of individual and collective Algerian memories²³² in *LAF* whose function is both to subvert and complement the official history of the reports and archives from French officers, chroniclers and witnesses, leads to the production of an apparent duality between the Orientalising discourse on space and a Westernising discourse on memory. The identification and examination of isotopies of space and memory in *LAF* showed that an Orientalising discourse on space can be located in Djébar's specific treatment of the native space: the occurrence of frequent references to a gendered space (through the division of public/male and private/female space), the theatricalisation of the French conquest on the Algerian territory, the emphatic descriptions and personifications of the city of Algiers, as well as Djébar's reframing of Franco-Algérien memories or "lieux de mémoire". The Orientalising discourse on native space can be found in Djébar's descriptions of the city of Algiers as a "Ville Impénétrable" with its "rôle d'Orientale immobilisée en son mystère" that appear in the first and second paragraph of the novel announcing the arrival of the French from the sea on 13 June 1830:

Devant l'imposante flotte qui déchire l'horizon, la Ville Imprenable se dévoile, blancheur fantomatique, à travers un poudroisement de bleus et de gris mêlés. (14)

The image of the captured, subjugated city is mirrored again in the last lines of the novel in the fragment entitled "Air de Ney", in which the narrator's own gaze on the native space blurs in with that of the gaze of the French painter Eugène Fromentin:

²²⁹ Tageldin, S., "Which *Qualam* for Algeria? Colonialism, Liberation, and Language in Djébar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Mustaghanimi's *Dhakirat Al-Jasad*", in: *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 46, n° 3, Pennsylvania State University, 2009.

²³⁰ A type of pen used to write Quranic verses on tablets in the Quranic school.

²³¹ Marx-Scouras, D., "Muffled Screams/Stifled Voices", in: *Yale French Studies*, 83, *Post/Colonial Conditions*, (eds. Lionnet, F., & Scharfman, R.), 1993, p. 176.

²³² Connerton, P., "Seven Types of Forgetting", in: *Memory Studies* 2008, Vol 1(1), pp. 59–71.

Inlassablement, j'ai erré aux quatre coins de ma région natale – entre la Ville prise et les ruines de Césarée, elle s'étend au pied du mont de Chenoua, à l'ombre du pic de la Mouzaïa, plaine alanguie mais aux plaies encore ouvertes. (313)

Although Djébar transgresses the gendered, male, Islamic space of the public domain, she uses an Orientalising discourse on Algerian space, as can be noticed in the first part of the novel (“La prise de la ville”) in which historical and autobiographical scenes alternate and in which the city of Algiers is equated with the passive female body waiting to be conquered. In the autobiographical section entitled “Trois jeunes filles cloîtrées” the narrator casts her own inverted gaze on Islamic society and the gendered separation of the private and public space:

Trois jeunes filles sont cloîtrées dans une maison claire, au milieu d'un hameau de Sahel que cernent d'immenses vignobles. (18)

The presence of the opposing masculine-feminine perspective on public and private space in Islamic society problematises Massey's argument about geographic variations in the construction of gender relations and the division of public and private space seen as a “joint control of spatiality and identity” in the West.²³³ Although Massey acknowledges that the distinction between private and public space and how it ties in with the construction of gender is culturally dependent, her analysis does not seem to go beyond the Western experience; she examines the relationship between spatiality and the social control of identity and gender in the West, without discussing how space and gender might interrelate in non-Western societies and what consequences this cultural comparative insight may have for her theory on the conceptualisation of space and place.²³⁴ Whereas in a Western construction of the idea of home as a woman's place, home is viewed as a “source of stability, reliability and authenticity” imbued with the “nostalgia for something lost” and “coded female”, the same argument on such a view of the place of

²³³ “One of the most evident aspects of this joint control of spatiality and identity has been in the West related to the culturally specific distinction between public and private”. Identity is defined here “in terms of an articulation of the social relations in which a person/group is involved”. Massey, D., *Space, place and gender*, pp. 178-179.

²³⁴ Alluding to non-Western contexts, Massey simply notes: “The limitation of women's mobility, in terms both of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a means of subordination” (p. 179).

home becomes problematic when applied to the context of Islamic-Arabic society because of the different social and symbolic meanings that both the private space of the home and the feminine have acquired in that society.²³⁵ On the other hand, Djébar's representation of the French invasion of the Algerian space imagined as a passive female body fully supports Massey's critique of the Western assumptions about space as a passive surface to be crossed and conquered. It ties in well with Massey's argument about space-time and her critique of the imaginations about space that conceive of it as being without history and a way of "taming the challenge that the inherent spatiality of the world represents".²³⁶

LAF's Orientalising discourse on the social and cultural spaces of Algerian society functions in parallel with a Westernising discourse on memory. Djébar's fictionalisation of Algerian-French colonial history and her recovery of lost Algerian history and memory and the multiplicity of repressed, female voices have most often been analysed by critics to categorise Djébar's writing project as one that privileges the voices and histories of the collective Algerian past. Indeed, Djébar manages to use the counter-memory of the female voice as a device that should ultimately lead to a repossession of knowledge. But, equally importantly, she also uses Western autobiographical and historical discourse for the attainment of self-knowledge and identity recovery, as argued by Debra Kelly.²³⁷ The identity fracture that lies at the centre of her writing, and her failed attempt to write an autobiography, show that this writing remains problematic. As she herself writes in the passage "*Biffure...*" that closes the first part of the novel:

Hors du puits des siècles d'hier, comment affronter les sons du passé?(...) Quel amour se cherche, quel avenir s'esquisse malgré l'appel des morts, et mon corps tintinnabule du long éboulement des générations-aïeules. (69)

²³⁵ Thérèse Michel-Mansour speaks of the "idéologie de la femme-fitna" to refer to the ideological discourse that underlines the subordination and repression of women in Islamic societies. "Fitna" in Arabic signifies both the art of female seduction and the subversion of social order or social status quo that is associated with the power of female sexuality. See Michel-Mansour's discussion in *La portée esthétique du signe dans le texte maghrébin*, 1994, pp. 127-129.

²³⁶ Massey, D., *For Space*, p.7.

²³⁷ Kelly, D., "Assia Djébar: History, Selfhood and the Possession of Knowledge", in: *op.cit.*, 2005, p. 251.

To conclude, although Djébar manages to subvert the dominant discourse on Franco-Algerian memory and history through the careful act of forensic re-examination of French soldiers' and chroniclers' accounts of the events of the beginning of the French conquest, and the retrieval of available but non-accessible female oral memories, she remains conscious of the ambivalent position of the act of writing in French and is not able to bypass fully the dangers of the recreation of (French) colonising discourse on Algerian space and memory within the context of the production of written memory. The line between reinforcing the colonising discourse on Algerian memory and re-writing history is critical, as Djébar is well aware. There is, therefore, in Djébar's writing a particularly interesting tension between the *individual* and the *collective* and between an affirmation and refusal of a fixed cultural identity, something that lies at the centre of her autobiographical project. As she writes elsewhere in the text: "je n'aspire qu'à une écriture de transhumance, tandis que, voyageuse, je remplis mes outres d'un silence inépuisable" (93). These reflections reveal her propensity to write outside the borders of national (Algerian) space, something that she achieves in her book *Les nuits de Strasbourg*.²³⁸ Her latest autobiographical text, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*,²³⁹ written as a mirror-book to *LAF*, in which she recounts her childhood and teenage memories during the time of French colonisation, shows a much greater unity of autobiographical voice. Could this signify that Djébar has reconciled her fractured Algerian identity within herself? And recovered from her double sense of loss?

²³⁸ Djébar, A., *Les Nuits de Strasbourg*, Arles: Actes Sud, 1997.

²³⁹ Djébar, A., *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père*, Paris: Fayard, 2007.

3.2.3. The Negotiation of Francophone, Anglophone and Amerindian Space and Memory in *Volkswagen blues*

As Rosemary Chapman²⁴⁰ notes, questions of mapping, territoriality and space are central to Poulin's novel. However, *VB* is not only a novel about space, but also a novel about memory and forgetting, and the accessibility and availability of individual and collective memories. It is a novel about the assumed "externality" of space and "internality" of memory, and how these two concepts actually interconnect.

The wild, natural, open spaces of the Canadian and North American landscape are contrasted to the intimate, domesticated space of Jack Waterman's "vieux Volks" symbolising the soul, individual memory and the importance of one's individual past. In his camper van, he is accompanied by the second main character of the story, Pitsémine, a Métis and young female mechanic, whose presence and actions allow for a re-examination and juxtaposition of competing Anglophone, Francophone and Amerindian cultural memories and histories. Pitsémine's character embodies the discourse of Amerindian memory; she breaks the linear narrative of Jack's physical and spiritual journey by constant spatial and temporal diversions and allows for an opening of a space of negotiation through debate. A semiotic analysis of spatial isotopies in the text shows that the isotopies of local, natural and urban spaces dominate. From references to local, natural spaces in the first part of Poulin's novel such as la baie de Gaspé, Gaspésie, Mont-Tremblant, littoral du golfe Saint-Laurent, L'Anse Pleureuse, Vieux-Québec (with Toronto signifying the border between Canadian and American spaces), a gradual move occurs towards the multiplicity of American spaces and sites (among others, Detroit, Chicago, Mississippi river, Saint-Louis, Kansas City, Chimney Rock, Rocky Mountains, South Pass, Fort Hall, and San Francisco) that the characters pass through or stay in on their journey:

²⁴⁰ Chapman, R., *Siting the Quebec Novel: the Representation of Space in Francophone Writing in Quebec*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000.

Ils étaient partis de Gaspé, où Jacques Cartier avait découvert le Canada, et ils avaient suivi le fleuve Saint-Laurent et les Grands Lacs, et ensuite le Vieux Mississippi, le Père des Eaux, jusqu'à Saint-Louis, et puis ils avaient emprunté la Piste de l'Oregon et, sur la trace des émigrants du XIX siècle qui avaient formé des caravanes pour se mettre à la recherche du Paradis Perdu avec leurs chariots tirés par les bœufs, ils avaient parcouru les grandes plaines, franchi la ligne de partage des eaux et les montagnes Rocheuses, traversé les rivières et le désert et encore d'autres montagnes, et voilà qu'ils arrivèrent à San Francisco. (280)

As this passage illustrates, Massey's argument on space-time can be fully applied to Poulin's work: space is not perceived here simply as a flat surface to be traversed, instead it can be actively reimagined and reconstructed through an engagement with the past and the desire to re-write history. Indeed, Jack and Pitsémine visit numerous sites of memory and places of official history (such as museums and libraries) and make use of a variety of cultural and geographic objects such as books and maps and discuss historical figures and events from the Québécois and French-Canadian, but also the American past, on their road journey from Gaspé (where the first French explorer Jacques Cartier landed in 1534) to San Francisco.²⁴¹ The character's discussions about the historic and mythical events from their respective pasts, and their discussions about the mythical and real characters as well as cultural objects from the Francophone, Anglophone and Amerindian past, participate in the deconstruction of competing discourses on space and memory in the Francophone, Anglophone and Amerindian context. So, in *VB* (as in *LAF*), the acts of remembering and forgetting are not conceived as automatic acts of storage and retrieval, but as the acts of re-writing memory and forgetting. The crucial moment of the realisation of accessibility and availability of memory can be identified in the passage at the beginning of book on Jack's retrieval of a forgotten postcard that he received from his brother Théo.²⁴² It is precisely this

²⁴¹ Jack refers to North American mythical figures (such as David Boone, Davy Crocket, Wild Bill Hickok or Buffalo Bill), mythical sites (the Mississippi River) or founding myths (references to books: *The Golden Dream*, or *The Oregon Trail Revisited*), all of which constitute the North American collective imaginary. He also refers to key figures in the French-Canadian imagination such as the French *coureur de bois* Etienne Brulé, whilst also incorporating artistic figures such as Jack Kerouac, Saul Bellow and Sam Peckinpah, with mythical status, in his novel; writers who have been appropriated as either American or Anglophone. A central influence for Poulin's "road novel", Jack Kerouac was born to Québécois parents who emigrated to Lowell, Massachusetts. He had both Mohawk and Caughnawaga blood and his first language was the spoken French of Eastern Montréal.

²⁴² Singer, J. & Conway, M., "Should We Forget Forgetting" in: *Memory Studies* 2008, vol. 1, n° 3, pp. 279-285.

moment of the retrieval of an available but non-accessible memory that sets the narrative into motion and initiates Jack's and Pitsémine's identity quest. Jack's quest for his lost brother that is also his quest for his French-Canadian origins and past is symbolised in the figure of the French explorer Jacques Cartier and the central place he is given in the narrative.

The figure of Jacques Cartier undoubtedly plays a central part in the formation of the Québécois collective imagination and the construction of Québécois national discourse.²⁴³ As an important figure of the national narrative, the Jacques Cartier reference in *VB* can be viewed to function as an empty signifier or an empty place of signification capable of functioning without its signified.²⁴⁴ The mythical figure of Cartier is reduced in *VB* to a colonial symbol and an ancient textual trace of French-Canadian memory; the extract from Cartier's original text from 1534 is reproduced on the back of Théo's postcard, yet Jack does not recognise its meaning and significance until he reaches a moment of identity crisis and rediscovers the postcard fifteen years later. At the beginning of the novel Jack finds the forgotten postcard in Chapman's book *The Golden Dream* after his realisation of the desire to search for his lost brother Théo, and as he explains later to Pitsémine:²⁴⁵

J'avais mis la carte dans un livre et je l'avais oubliée. Je veux dire: je ne me souvenais plus dans quel livre elle était...
- J'ai eu quarante ans la semaine dernière et...
- Mais non, ce n'est pas une question d'âge... Il y a des jours où vous avez l'impression que tout s'écoule... en vous et autour de vous... Alors vous vous demandez à quoi vous allez pouvoir vous raccrocher. (p. 12)

Theo's postcard with the image of Gaspé at the front and Cartier's inscription in Old French at the back is a key object of space and memory in the novel.²⁴⁶ As an object of travel and an everyday tourist object,

²⁴³ Poulin's book is published only five years after the 1980 referendum in Québec that proposed the province's secession from Canada.

²⁴⁴ Laclau, E, "Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?", in: *Emancipation(s)*, London: Verso, 1996.

²⁴⁵ Chapman, W., *The Golden Dream: The Seekers of Eldorado*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967.

²⁴⁶ The postcard as an object also appears in one of the autobiographical sections in Djébar's *LAF*, yet in a different context and with a different symbolic meaning. The postcard, with its open message in French from Djébar's father

the tourist postcard presumes “a unity of space and culture”, but also “the immobility of both in relation to a fixed, cartographically ordered space”.²⁴⁷ It symbolises an authentic place, but refers to cultures only “as places to visit and come back from”.

While linguistic, cultural and mythical traces of the French-Canadian presence such as Jacques Cartier and Etienne Brûlé function as one type of the counter-memory discourse in relation to American past and present, another set of counter-memories disrupts both these discourses further; this type is represented in the female character of Pitsémine and her dual identity as a Métis. Pitsémine’s evocations of her Amerindian ancestors to whom she cannot really relate and her marginalised condition as a Métis often take the free, imaginary form of dreams, tales, songs or ritualised acts that are all part of her desire to be reconciled with her Amerindian past (as, for example, is her act of sleeping in a cemetery next to an old Indian chief, Thayendanegea, in order to try and reconnect with her ancestors and his spirit). Pitsémine’s fractured identity is expressed in following passage, as she finds herself contemplating house lights on a small island opposite the camping site:

- Je trouve que la nature est plus belle quand il n’y a rien, je veux dire quand elle est restée comme elle était au début, mais j’aime aussi les lumières. Je suis partagée entre les deux et je sais que ça va durer toujours. (p.59)

Pitsémine’s dual nature disrupts both national and gendered narratives; however, she is also portrayed as a voracious reader and Jack’s “helper”. She is seen to possess a detective mind capable of decoding different kinds of signs and symbols related to Théo’s tracks, and as an experienced “navigator”, an obvious reference to her Amerindian origins. Through her frequent interruptions and diversions to the

to her mother, subverts the socially-defined division of gendered private vs. public space; it provokes a cultural shock in the narrator’s younger Self and acts as a provocative act of unveiling of the private, intimate / female sphere in the public / male sphere of communication.

²⁴⁷ Lury, C., “The objects of travel”, in: *Touring cultures: transformations of travel and theory* (ed. Rojek, C., & Urry, J.), London/NY: Routledge, 1997, p. 75.

places and sites that seem to be “off the map”, she repeatedly invites Jack to leave his pre-appointed route and follow her on the journey of self-discovery.

The symbolic exchangeability of Jack’s and Pitsémine’s places in the city of San Francisco after they find Théo wandering in a park, having lost his memory, marks both the end of the novel and the final transformation in the narrative. Jack decides to leave his camper van to Pitsémine, and returns home, while Pitsémine decides to stay in San Francisco for a while, having finally found a home and a place where she belongs. Spatial loss is closely linked to memorial loss; the loss of memory signifies the loss of identity. The recovery of space and memory must therefore pass in the first instance through the investigation of one’s origins and, potentially, a return to the notion of homeliness. While Djébar’s notion of spatial loss is closely connected to loss of orality, Poulin’s novel asks whether the negotiation of North American, French-Canadian and Amerindian cultural memories and histories can be realised in the space of counter-memory or whether it can be achieved by transcending these memories and histories to allow for the theoretical opening up and contestation of negatively constructed notions of identity, memory and space.

To conclude the comparative analysis on Djébar and Poulin, it can be said that both authors apply the textual strategy of counter-discourse on space and memory as a device for the transformation of colonial and cultural space and memory, with the aim of subverting dominant colonial and postcolonial discourses generated within their particular socio-cultural and political contexts. Massey’s concept of space-time geographies can be applied to both narratives, which would indicate that both of these texts participate in the demystification of the Eurocentric discourse on space, as they seek to deconstruct the sites of generation of discourse on power. However, while Djébar’s writing project seems to lead to the reinforcement of the dualistic discourses that she is trying to dismantle, Poulin’s text is able to transcend the initial state of dualistic values and positions embodied in his characters through the gradual

emergence of a consensual space within which different identities, memories and histories can be negotiated.

3.3. From a Politics to a Poetics of Memory: Fracture, Return and Renewal in

Robert Lalonde's *Sept Lacs plus au Nord*

*Le pas de l'Indien est léger
Son empreinte est ineffaçable*²⁴⁸

Jean Sioui

The question of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada in the context of their colonial history and their postcolonial present is a complex one, be it from the socio-cultural, political or constitutional point of view, and is something that cannot be analysed at length in this thesis.²⁴⁹ In the context of Canada's constitutional history, the recognition of the ancestral territorial rights and the status of Aboriginal peoples in Québec appears even more complex, as their rights and status traditionally came under the jurisdiction of the federal government of Canada, which meant that Québec regarded Aboriginal peoples as federal citizens. As a consequence of Québec's unique political, socio-cultural and constitutional history and position, not all Aboriginal nations within Québec have historically enjoyed equal status and rights in the province.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Sioui, J., *Le Pas de l'Indien, Pensées wendates*, Québec: Le Loup de Gouttière, 1997 (from: Gatti, M., *Littérature amérindienne du Québec, Écrits de langue française*, Montréal: Editions Hurtubise, 2004).

²⁴⁹ The term "Aboriginal peoples" will be used to refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people and as defined in the 1982 Constitution Act. When speaking about the literary production of Aboriginal people in the Francophone context, the preferred term of use will be "Amerindian", "Amerindian literature" (as in the French term "littérature Amérindienne") instead of the term "Aboriginal literature". The nouns and adjectives "Native" and "Indian" will only be used when this seems necessary from the context.

²⁵⁰ A useful overview on the territorial question of Aboriginal peoples in Québec can be found in: Gourdeau, E., "Le Québec et la question autochtone", in: Gagnon, Alain-G., *Québec, Etat et Société*, Editions Québec / Amérique, Montréal, pp. 329-355. As the author of this article explains, different Québécois and Canadian governments have shown different levels of commitment and understanding for the question of territorial claims made by the different

Gérard Bouchard, a Québécois historian and sociologist who has extensively studied the concepts of the collective imagination and of the emergence of figures and myths in the societies of the New World, notes in his essay *Génèse des Nations et Cultures du Nouveau Monde* when analysing the socio-cultural context of the Québécois society in the 1990s that followed the Oka crisis: “L’Autochtone a été admis dans la citoyenneté, mais non dans l’appartenance”.²⁵¹ As Bouchard observes, Aboriginal peoples still remain excluded today from the official history of Québec and the narrative on the origin of the Québécois’ nation, something that Bouchard calls “symbolic exclusion”. This attitude of a “repli sur soi”, that still seem to characterise certain parts of Québec society today, can be explained, according to Bouchard, by Québec’s (and French-Canadian) obsession with the idea of an independent nation based on the principles of a single ethnicity and its need to mark its distinctiveness or difference in relation to America and Anglophone culture. The obsession with nation-building has generated an obsession with difference and has led, after the mid-20th century, to the production of “fausses identités” based on a series of silences, historical and cultural distortions of French-Canadian and Québécois past and collective memory, and the creation of false representations of the self.²⁵²

Pour revenir au Québec (ou au Canada français), l’insistance qu’on a mise jusqu’au milieu du XX siècle à construire la nation sur l’ethnicité a engendré une préoccupation identitaire envahissante et une sorte d’obsession de la différence. En conséquence, le visage de l’altérité y a été en quelque sorte déduit ou posé a priori, sinon tout simplement inventé.²⁵³

Aboriginal nations. A famous example of the Québec government’s poor management and refusal to finance such initiatives was that of the territorial claims made by the Mohawk community of Oka that were never properly addressed, a problem that directly contributed to the eruption of the Oka crisis in the summer of 1990. Although the Oka crisis galvanised Canadians’ and Québécois’ preoccupation with the question of the status of the Aboriginal peoples, it has also had some longstanding consequences on the types of collective memory formed within both the Mohawks and the Québécois communities.

²⁵¹ Bouchard, G., *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde, Essai d’histoire comparée*, Montreal: Boréal, 2000, p. 179.

²⁵² Bouchard, G., *op. cit.*, p. 146.

²⁵³ Bouchard, G., *op.cit.*, p. 53.

Underpinned by “l’idéologie de la survivance” that characterised the French-Canadian colonial past, the theme of survival still remains central to Québec’s contemporary self-image and identity, something that can be found in contemporary writers such as the young female writer Roxanne Bouchard and as will be shown in Chapter 5.

The study of Métis authors within the Québécois literary corpus presents an interesting case-study for the exploration of the question of cultural memory and space, and how memory is affected by the loss of space or place. It has to be noted here that the term *Métis* is subject to various interpretations that make it difficult to adequately define this particular group or category of belonging in Canada.²⁵⁴ For example, the Métis National Council aims for a definition of the Métis that includes not only a distinctive cultural and historical, but also a political dimension and the introduction of the democratic concepts of political representation, self-governance and citizenship: “Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation”.²⁵⁵ The question that will be posed in the analysis that follows is how spatial loss regarded as an essential component of cultural memory operates in the context of dual White and Amerindian heritage. What are the mechanisms that enable its preservation or transgression? Is the transgression of dual cultural heritage even necessary? And if so, what is the relationship of dual cultural memory to local place?

²⁵⁴ As defined in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, the term Métis has different meanings according to the legal context in which it is used and according to the group or individual using the term, largely describing “everyone of mixed native/non-native blood”. Depending on which definition is used and through how many generations it is extended, estimates of the Métis population range from 100 000 to one million. Downloaded from: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/metis> (accessed on 03/08/2010). In some contexts, however, Métis refers more to a single (and Amerindian) identity, than a “mixed” identity. This can be seen in references to Métis authors as Amérindian authors or as authors representing Amerindian literature.

²⁵⁵ Downloaded from <http://metisnation.ca/who/definition.html> (accessed on 03/08/2010).

3.3.1. Duality and the Discourse on Alterity in the Work of Robert Lalonde

The Italian critic Maurizio Gatti observes in the introduction to his anthology *Littérature amérindienne au Québec, Écrits de langue française*,²⁵⁶ in which he discusses the status, definition and context of the emergence of Amerindian²⁵⁷ Francophone writing in Québec, that Métis writers are often accused of their lack of *indianité*. This attitude indicates that the image of the Aboriginal or Amerindian writer in today's Québec is being marketed in order to promote an exotic, diluted and acceptable image to its public, an image that does not allow for the presence of any sort of ambiguity or contradictions that follow from assuming a mixed identity and heritage. Thus, the problem of identity questioning can be seen as central to the auto-definition and perception of Amerindian authors in today's Québec. Defining Amerindian literature as postcolonial, Gatti points to the question of the geographic confinement of Aboriginal peoples on reserves that has led to a "mise en réserve identitaire" that defines their marginalised status and promotes an ideological discourse of assimilation. In this context, *la littérature amérindienne* aspires to gain independent status within the space of Francophone literature and is being marketed as such:

Plutôt qu'une branche de celle-ci, la littérature amérindienne aspire à un statut autonome au sein des littératures francophones: l'affirmation de la figure de l'auteur amérindien, le développement d'un marché, la création des prix littéraires, la promotion et l'enseignement des œuvres, l'attention et l'intérêt de la critique en sont les étapes essentielles. Le lectorat amérindien est pourtant encore faible et ne favorise pas le débat sur les œuvres. La littérature amérindienne subit

²⁵⁶ Gatti, M., *Littérature amérindienne du Québec, Écrits de langue française*, Montréal: Editions Hurtubise, 2004. The anthology contains a selection of texts (folktales, legends, poems, novels, plays, narratives and testimonies) from approximately 50 authors who identify themselves as "Amérindiens".

²⁵⁷The term "Amerindian literature" is used here in the sense the Italian critic Maurizio Gatti gives it when he speaks of "littérature amérindienne", that is, to designate literature produced in French by Métis, Inuit and Native Indian peoples. The Anglophone equivalent to this term is "Aboriginal literature", "Aboriginal writing". As the Australian critic Penny van Toorn explains, she uses "the general term 'Aboriginal' to refer to Native Indian, Métis and Inuit peoples". Terms such as "Native" and "Indian" are being less and less used today as they are seen to "perpetuate colonial racial perceptions". Sometimes the term "First Nations" is used in the same way as "Aboriginal"; however, according to van Toorn, there are various legal implications to using this term. Section 35 (2) of the Canadian Constitution Act (1982), defines the term "Aboriginal Peoples" as one that "includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis" peoples. See: van Toorn, P., "Aboriginal Writing" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* (ed. Kröller, E.-M.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

et imite encore les paradigmes littéraires des colonisateurs sans réussir pleinement à choisir et à créer les siens.²⁵⁸

The case of the Métis author and actor Robert Lalonde, who does not specifically identify himself as being Métis and positions himself as a Québécois author, has particular significance for the issue of cultural memory and how writers with a bilingual/bicultural heritage might explore this question.

A quarter Métis, Robert Lalonde was born in the town of Oka in 1947 and graduated from the Montréal Conservatory of Arts and Drama in 1970. An acclaimed writer, actor, playwright and academic, he published his first novel *La Belle Epouvante* in 1981. Having written over twenty texts comprising novels, short stories, plays and poems, his latest novel, *Un jour le vieux hangar sera remporté par la débâcle* (2012),²⁵⁹ is a lyrical exploration of universal themes such as personal identity quest, love, loss and temporality. If his work can be said to alternate between the particular and the universal, the semi-autobiographical text *Sept Lacs plus au Nord*²⁶⁰ that is the object of the analysis presented here belongs within the suite of texts that can be called an exploration of the theme of *indianité*²⁶¹ in which Lalonde explores questions of loss and recovery of Amerindian memory and collective imaginary and reflects on his own Amerindian family heritage.²⁶²

Contrary to those authors who define themselves as Amerindian and see their writing (in French) as an instrument of cultural expression of their own heritage, Robert Lalonde does not make use of his Mohawk

²⁵⁸ Gatti, M., *Littérature amérindienne du Québec*, p. 23.

²⁵⁹ Lalonde, R., *Un Jour le vieux hangar sera remporté par la débâcle*, Montréal: Boréal, 2012.

²⁶⁰ Lalonde, R., *Sept Lacs plus au Nord*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1993.

²⁶¹ Among these texts are: *Le Dernier Eté des Indiens*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982; *Le Fou du père*, Montréal: Editions du Boréal, 1988; *Iotékha*, Montréal: Editions du Boréal, 2004.

²⁶² Lalonde's father is a Métis of Mohawk lineage. The Mohawk are a tribe of the Iroquois confederacy (consisting of five tribes) and are mainly located in Southwest Québec and South Ontario. Their native language is Kanien'kéha (Latin script is used) and it belongs to the Iroquian group of Amerindian languages.

cultural heritage to assert his artistic identity.²⁶³ As Gatti remarks about Lalonde, although the theme of nature that is central to Amerindian identity is also fundamental to Lalonde's writing, Lalonde "vit et exprime son identité Mohawk sans ressentir le besoin de l'extérioriser et de la revendiquer ouvertement".²⁶⁴ Lalonde's insistence on the poetics rather than politics of identity is evident when he speaks of himself as a writer who fully assumes his dual identity and cultural heritage:

je suis né au confluent de deux façons d'être, de vivre, de deux façons de voir la vie, dans lesquelles je suis encore, c'est-à-dire, cette façon de voir qui appartient plus à la communauté amérindienne qui est de vivre, d'être imprégné par ce qui est autour de nous et la façon blanche qui est un peu de conquérir, d'acquérir un territoire, de développer, de défricher, avec tout ce que ça comporte de violence (...) Freud disait la névrose c'est l'incapacité de supporter l'ambiguïté. Moi, je suis né dans l'ambiguïté, non seulement je la supporte, mais je l'encourage et je la fais vivre, parce que je pense qu'on est bâti comme ça.²⁶⁵

Lalonde's preoccupation with duality and ambiguity is inscribed within a discourse on alterity, a discourse that often seems to be explored by authors of mixed background who find themselves projected into a dual linguistic, geographic, cultural and memorial space of identity. Lalonde's writing project, as he himself explains, can be best defined as his quest for a space in which the reconciliation (and not opposition) of his "deux façons de vivre" or "deux façons d'être" is possible. However, while, according to Tremblay²⁶⁶ and Vautier,²⁶⁷ Lalonde's writing can be seen as belonging within the postcolonial paradigm of a (Francophone) discourse of alterity as transculturalism, a discourse that seems to be characteristic of contemporary Québécois post-nationalist writing, reading Lalonde's texts solely within

²⁶³ His writing project and literary path is very different from that of another Métis author and comedian, Bernard Assiniwi, who was politically and publicly engaged in questions of Aboriginal peoples' rights and status both in Québec and Canada. Assiniwi was the first Amerindian author writing in French to have been widely distributed in Québec and his epic novel *La Saga des Béothuks* was awarded the France-Québec Jean-Hamelin literary prize in 1997.

²⁶⁴ Gatti, M., *Littérature amérindienne du Québec*, p. 37.

²⁶⁵ *Radio-France Canada*, interview with Robert Lalonde on 20 August 2006, from: <http://www.radio-canada.ca/radio/emissions/document.asp?docnumero=24696&numero=1826> (accessed on 31/07/2010)

²⁶⁶ Tremblay, E., "Une identité frontalière. Altérité et désir métis chez Robert Lalonde et Louis Hamelin", in: *Études françaises*, 41:1, 2005, pp. 107-124 (accessed from: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/010849ar>).

²⁶⁷ Vautier, M., "Transculturalism, postcolonial identities, religiosity in Lalonde's *Sept Lacs plus au Nord* and Tostevin's *Frog Moon*", in: *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 9:3, 2006, pp. 365-381.

the postcolonial discourse of alterity, transculturalism or ambivalence,²⁶⁸ cannot fully account for the role or function that themes of Amerindian space and memory play in *Sept Lacs plus au Nord*, nor can it explain the internal processes of signification that are embedded within it. In the analysis that follows, it will be shown that the reconciliation of the two opposing poles of identity and the recovery of identity loss that define the theme of Lalonde's text, can only be achieved through the return to the original place of trauma or *fracture* and a gradual recovery and re-writing of individual memory through the sensory processes of remembrance or the embodied re-experience of the place that has been lost. As Lalonde explains in one of his more recent interviews: "Je crois qu'on peut sortir d'un malaise, en retournant géographiquement sur les lieux où la souffrance est née".²⁶⁹

3.3.2. Tropes of Amerindian Space and Memory in *Sept Lacs plus au Nord*

*Sept Lacs plus au Nord*²⁷⁰ is a semi-autobiographical story of Michel du Bria, a Métis writer living in Montréal, who returns to his native town of Oka a year after the eruption of the Oka crisis and undertakes a voyage with Angèle, his mother, up North. The setting off by car of the two protagonists marks the beginning of Michel's internal spiritual voyage on a path of family and ancestral re-membrance that culminates with their arrival at their final destination, Lake Camachigama, situated in the region of Abitibi-Temiscamingue, where Michel's teenage friend and lover, named only as "the Indian", awaits him.

The Oka crisis that forms the political backdrop of *SLPN* is a site of contested memories and identities that still resonates in the collective consciousness and memory of both the Québécois and the Canadian

²⁶⁸ Hobbs, S., "L'Autochtone dans *Le dernier été des Indiens* de Robert Lalonde: ou comment passer de la grande à la petite noirceur", in: *International Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue internationale d'études canadiennes*, 41:1, 2010, p. 231-252 (accessed from: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/044169ar>).

²⁶⁹ "Nouvelles étonnantes", interview with Sylvie Saint-Jacques, *La Presse*, 15 April 2007.

²⁷⁰ The abbreviation *SLPN* will be used in the analysis that follows each time reference to *Sept Lacs plus au Nord* is made.

population.²⁷¹ While the events of the Oka crisis can be said to have galvanised the Canadian's and the Québécois' preoccupation with the question of the status of the Aboriginal people, they also had some longstanding consequences on the types of collective memory generated within the Mohawk and the White communities in Québec. This has led to the production of an excess of meaning and memory that can be observed in the articles that the Québécois press devoted to the analysis of the conflict surrounding the Oka crisis on the eve of its twentieth anniversary (11 July 2010) and the comments posted by its readers on the newspaper's website.²⁷²

Interestingly, although Oka represents the main *topic space* in *SLPN*, Lalonde only occasionally refers to the events of the Oka crisis in the course of the novel. While this absence can be interpreted as the author's need for assertion of a poetics rather than a politics of identity, it can also be seen as a sign of fragmentation of personal and collective memory or as a sign of a "fragmented reception of the past"²⁷³ and the author-narrator's impossibility to make full sense of the events that took place during the crisis. As Lalonde explains in another interview given to the newspaper *Le Devoir* when talking about the book and relaying his own experience of the crisis:

C'est un *road-book* où j'aborde de biais la crise d'Oka. Cette crise m'a stupéfié tout le temps qu'elle a duré. Tout le monde était à la fois d'un côté et de l'autre et on me disait: s'il y a quelqu'un qui peut dire quelque chose là-dessus c'est toi. Mais, moi, je n'en pensais rien, j'étais bouleversé, mais sans arriver à faire la part des choses.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Anglophone Aboriginal authors have also covered the Oka crisis. See Lee Marade's *Sundogs*, 1992, Jeannette Armstrong's poem "Indian Summer" or Beth Cuthand's monologue series "Seven Songs for Uncle Louis" (Kröller, E.-M., ed., *Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*, p. 39).

²⁷² Tremblay, O., "Alanis Obomsawin, de l'autre côté des barricades, à jamais", *Le Devoir*, at: <http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/cinema/194473/alanis-obomsawin-de-l-autre-cote-des-barricades-a-jamais> (accessed on 27/07/2010); Trudel, P., "Oka, 20 ans plus tard – Les dessous d'un conflit historique", *Le Devoir*, at: <http://www.ledevoir.com/societe/actualites-en-societe/292328/oka-20-ans-plus-tard-les-dessous-d-un-conflit-historique> (accessed on 27/07/2010).

²⁷³ Trigg, D., "The Place of Trauma: Memory, Hauntings, and the Temporality of Ruins", in: *Memory Studies 2 (1)*, Los Angeles/ London/ New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC: Sage Publications, 2009, pp. 87-101.

²⁷⁴ "De mère en fils, en passant par Oka " in: *Le Devoir*, interview with Marie-Claire Girard, 16 January 1993.

The progressive appropriation by the main character, Michel, of his native Amerindian space and the reconciliation of Amerindian and non-Amerindian memory that is brought into being through the sensory processes of re-membrance and renewal constitute the main dynamics of the narrative of *SLPN*. At the thematic or deep level of meaning, the novel can be said to be constituted by a number of themes that are organised on the spatial and memorial axis giving rise to *tropes of Amerindian space and memory*. The themes or tropes relating to space are: *nature or wilderness* (forest, lake, water, wind, earth, fire), the *North* and the *winding road*. On the memorial axis, the following themes or tropes can be identified: *the Indian, the body, the father, the mother, the double* and *the dog*. Transposed onto the semiotic model of Greimas's actantial narrative schema and as depicted on the Diagram 5, the themes listed above can be seen to occupy key narrative positions or functions in the narrative of *SLPN*:

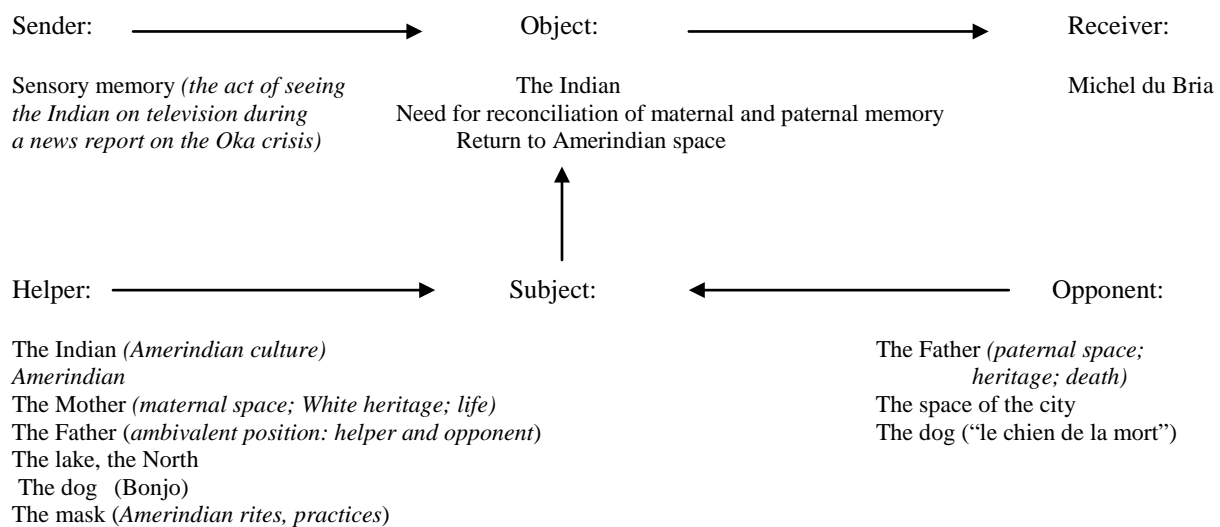


Diagram 5: Actantial narrative schema in *Sept Lacs plus au Nord*.

3.3.2.1. The Figure of the Indian or the Trope of Return and Rebirth

While the mother can be seen to be the dominant female figure in the narrative, the text is permeated by numerous, often ambiguous, references to "l'Indien", Michel's soul mate and teenage love, as he

remembers the time of their friendship during the summer that preceded his departure for college, that was followed by the period of separation and feeling of loss.

At the beginning of the novel the reader learns that Michel briefly sees the figure of the Indian in a television news report on the Oka crisis some time before he decides to return to the village of Oka. This pivotal moment sets the narrative in motion and is experienced as a shock by Michel. The mediatisation of the Oka crisis and the demonisation of the image of the “savage” Mohawk Indian (an image that was often exploited by the media during the crisis) in contrast to the image of the heroic White soldier, are referred to in the next passage:

Et il y avait l'Indien, bien sûr. Une seule fois, il l'avait aperçu aux nouvelles, à la télévision: adossé au tronc d'un gros pin, il pleurait, sans se cacher le visage, comme autrefois. L'image est passée très vite, tout de suite ils ont montré à nouveau les guerriers masqués, les barbelés, le soldat blond, héroïque, propre, debout devant son ennemi noir, le Mohawk, le warrior sanguinaire, affrontement de cowboys et de sauvages des vieux films, la drôle de guerre au jour le jour, dans la pinède. (15)

More importantly, this brief moment of visual identification of the suppressed yet never forgotten figure of his friend “l'Indien”, is sufficient to awaken suddenly Michel's teenage experience of a critical transformation that occurred in a crucial moment of self-identification with the Indian after his inclusive use of the pronoun “us”:

Une fois son corps revu, pas mort, jamais disparu, bien sûr, mais inimaginable depuis l'été de ses treize ans, le dernier été, surtout depuis la grande nuit du Bria: “What's wrong with us?” Il avait dit “with us”, et non “with them” et il avait pleuré, pour la première fois. Et Michel avait pensé, plus tard écrit: “La transition, au bord du grand précipice, vient d'avoir lieu: le passage de sa foi en la mienne.” Et, inexplicablement, il avait duré jusqu'à aujourd'hui, il avait pu, il avait su attendre. (15)

As will be shown in the analysis of *SLPN*, it is through *sensory or corporeal memory* that Michel's suppressed, dis-membered memories become re-membered and that he is able to access self-knowledge and make sense of his fractured experiences and his past. Lalonde touches here on the important problem of the connection between the political and the poetic, thus posing the question of “how the political is

experienced at the level of the senses”.²⁷⁵ In her study of the connection between the political and the poetical in everyday life and the conceptualisation of *sensory memory*, the Greek sociologist Nadia Seremetakis argues for the inclusion of the concepts of *perception* and *memory* in the study of (material) culture, observing that the study of these concepts often remains marginalised by ethnographers and sociologists fixated on the exploitation and study of the literal materiality of artefacts and cultural objects.²⁷⁶ Departing from the example of the loss of sense of taste²⁷⁷ and the self-imposed experience of tastelessness in “cultures that undergo colonial and post-colonial experiences of transformation”, Seremetakis argues that the discourse on loss propagated through public culture fulfills an ideological function in order to present a normative, modernist view of the present and push into the sphere of private experience all knowledge that is no longer publicly accepted by this prevalent ideology:

The discourse on loss is an element of public culture, an official ideological stance taken towards the past that aligns the speaker with the normative view of the present, i.e., modern times. Yet, as the discourse of loss congeals into an element of public culture, that which has never been lost, but which can no longer be said, shared and exchanged, becomes the content of unreconciled personal and privatized experience (...) What can be lost is not the senses but the memory of the senses (...) Re-perception is the creation of meaning through the interplay, witnessing, and cross-metaphorisation of co-implicated sensory spheres. Memory cannot be confined to a purely mentalist or subjective sphere. It is a culturally mediated material practice that is activated by embodied acts and semantically dense objects.²⁷⁸

As Seremetakis explains further, this compartmentalisation and scientific rationalisation of the senses is particularly characteristic of a culture of modernity, as the senses are “externalised as utilitarian instruments”. In fact, the study of perception and memory as “embodied acts and semantically dense

²⁷⁵ Seremetakis, C.N. (ed.), *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996 (1st ed. Westview Press, 1994).

²⁷⁶ Seremetakis, C.N. (ed.), *The Senses still*, 1996. See Seremetakis, C.N. ,“The Memory of the Senses. Part I. Marks of the Transitory”, pp. 1-19.

²⁷⁷ The author evocatively uses here the example of the gradual disappearance of a certain type of Greek peach called *rodhákino* from the summer markets in Greece. As Seremetakis argues, the experience of tastelessness can become self-imposed as a result of an internalised attitude of the Other in cultures that undergo colonial and postcolonial experiences of transformation leading to a feeling of estrangement and defamiliarisation.

²⁷⁸ Seremetakis, C.N. (ed.), *The Senses Still*, p. 9.

objects” can reveal that “there are substances, spaces and times that can trigger *stillness*”. This concept of stillness is defined by Seremetakis as follows:

Stillness is the moment when the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen. It is the moment of exit from historical dust.²⁷⁹

The idea of *stillness* as a simultaneous moment of temporary cultural suspension and of “exit from historical dust” is particularly relevant to the analysis of the text presented here. Michel’s return to his native space, a space of wilderness and recovered corporeality, can be said to embody this space of stillness in the sense that Seremetakis gives it. Michel’s suppressed Amerindian nature represented in the figure of the Indian is tied to a sense of loss of corporeality that can only be recovered through his awakening of sensory memory or memory of Michel’s childhood and teenage sensory experiences of the body, the “water” and the “wind”. The feeling of exhilaration and recovered corporeality (previously divided between city and nature), is expressed by Michel in the following passage:

Un desserrement délicieux, les valves du cœur qui travaillaient formidablement, l’air presque liquide du matin qu’il buvait sans s’étouffer. Il pensait: “Je retrouve mon corps”, comme s’il l’avait perdu. Délivré, il sourit et se dit que oui, finalement, il avait perdu son corps, du moins l’avait prêté, jamais donné – il ne pouvait pas – à des rues, à des bureaux, à certaines mains inquiètes et bienfaitantes. (23)

While many passages refer to Michel’s memories of “the Indian”, indicating the passage to the realm of the symbolic, the only material trace that the Indian leaves behind is a letter addressed to Michel that he handed over to Angèle while in hiding during the Oka crisis. The scene of the handing over of the letter (by Angèle to Michel) occurs exactly in the middle of the novel and represents the place of the narrative’s main transformation. It is also at that precise moment that Angèle reveals the name of the final destination of their journey to Michel. The letter contains a few words and a drawing of the main geographic points of passage on the journey to the lake of Camachigama:

²⁷⁹ Seremetakis, C.N. (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 12.

Et ces cinq mots, calligraphies soigneusement, plutôt dessinés:
SI JAMAIS TU ME CHERCHES

Suivait un parcours aux premières étapes connues, déjà franchies, bien sûr: Pointe-aux-Anglais, Saint-André d'Argenteuil, Petite-Nation, lac Nomingue. Puis la flèche zigzagante montait, montait, traversait le parc La Verendrye, passait le lac de l'Ecorce, contournait le réservoir Cabonga. En longeant la rivière des Outaouais, elle revenait dans les sapins dessinés très serrés, et finalement pointait sa tête vers le lac Camachigama. (84-85)

The moment of revelation of the existence of the Indian's letter marks both the material and the symbolic starting point of the process of Michel's rebirth. It sets into motion the dynamics of return and rebirth that lie at the centre of the narrative of *SLPN*, as implied in the following section:

Il se sentait nettoyé, neuf, transporté facilement dans le paysage, comme Orphée qui serait remonté, impuni, des Enfers. Et puis, d'une certaine façon, il savait. Il avait suivi Angèle, lui avait obéi en tout, prenant le chemin qu'elle désignait et qui serpentait plutôt que cet autre qui allait en ligne droite. (90)

Lalonde's reference to the figure of Orpheus in the passage above as one who comes back from the land of the dead (and possesses transformative and purifying properties) has specific cultural resonances in the Amerindian imaginary. It refers to an important myth that is prominent in the Iroquois native mythology tradition and that the Mohawk share with the Iroquois peoples (as one of the five tribes belonging to that group). Indeed, the Orpheus-type myths can be seen to belong to one of the three main types of myths that play an important role in the religion of Aboriginal people in general: the "Creation myths", the "Trickster myths" and the "Culture Hero" myths.²⁸⁰ In the Orpheus-type myths, the "Culture Hero" makes a dangerous journey to the world of the dead to bring back a deceased loved one. In native mythology, the world of the dead, that is believed to lie at a great distance from the world of the living, can only be reached after a difficult and perilous (spiritual and physical) journey. The resemblance between Michel's journey and that of the figure of the Culture Hero as developed in Aboriginal native mythology is striking: Michel's quest takes on the form of a difficult spiritual journey that leads him to the symbolic

²⁸⁰ *The Canadian Encyclopedia online*: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/religion-of-aboriginal-people> (accessed on 23/05/2012).

“world of the dead” (the world of forgotten memories where the Indian resides), bringing back his memories of the Indian (and, by extension, of Amerindian heritage and culture) from the world of the dead into the “world of the living”. Another allusion to this myth can be found in another important character of the story: the dog or “le chien de la mort”. It is indicated in the novel that the dog, that first appeared when Michel’s father died, reappears on Angèle’s door shortly before she and Michel set off on their journey and follows them during all their travelling. First a creature belonging to the “world of the dead”, the dog disappears towards the end of the novel and returns as a “good animal” that enables Michel’s and Angèle’s safe passage from “the world of the dead to the world of the living” and leads them to the Indian.

3.3.2.2. The Figure of the Double and the Dynamics of Fracture

The dynamics of duality in *SLPN* that was referred to briefly in the previous section is characterised by a fracture in Michel’s identity or a state of *fracture identitaire* that is represented by the opposing images of the father and the mother. Michel’s fractured identity and the conflicting maternal and paternal memories that he is trying to reconcile within himself after returning to his native space undergo a gradual transformation through the process of rewriting of both individual and collective memory of his paternal, Amerindian heritage. Michel’s psychological fracture is most clearly expressed at the point, symbolically, after Michel and his mother, Angèle, arrive at the borders of the ancestral forest, “la vraie forêt primitive, inapprivoisable” (103):

- Oui, je suis encore vous deux, j’existe simplement pour vous continuer. Ou plutôt, non! Faudrait dire: ma vie à moi, c’est vos deux vies à tirer au clair. Vous êtes toujours en moi, toi à vivre et lui à mourir, comme le jour et la nuit.” (109)

At the beginning of the text, the reader becomes at once immersed in the natural spaces of Michel’s childhood, characterised by strong, contrasting colours of autumn and the dark, ancestral trees of the

forest. The native landscape that brings about emotions of both high beauty and terror is compared to the paintings of Michel's father that he calls "le demi-sauvage, le sang-mêlé" (33). This entry into native space immediately brings back the divided family memory, paternal and maternal, and marks Michel's entry into the fractured space of double heritage:

Non plus de prière possible. Ne restait que cette déchirure qui avait tout fondé, tout décidé en lui, depuis toujours et pour toujours. Double vie, polarités irréconciliables et pourtant jointes, réunies, accolées par force au plus enfoui du corps. (13)

As argued previously, the father occupies an ambivalent position and functions as the main opponent to Michel's identity quest, because of his own troubled double heritage and also because he had decided to send Michel to college, an event that was experienced as a double traumatic event and separation by Michel, as it led to his separation from the secure space of childhood and family life and his separation from the Indian. Michel's ambiguous feelings towards Louis-Paul, his father, and his double heritage depict him as a painter lost in a world that he is desperately trying to replicate on the canvas, as a "captif inquiet, cet apôtre trahi et tombé en désespoir" (106). In opposition to the tormented figure of the dead father that haunts Michel, the positive nurturing figure of the mother embodies a relationship of closeness between mother and son, as one who is here to guide and to protect him in moments of anxiety:

Alors, il évoqua l'image radieuse, le souvenir calmant par excellence: Angèle, debout dans le soleil de ce matin de mai, étendant son linge sur la corde zigzaguant entre les pommiers qui perdaient leurs fleurs dans ses cheveux. Souvenir qui sentait l'herbe chaude et le bleu à lessive, clair et net matin de Pâques, résurrection qui l'endormit encore une fois très doucement. (35)

The mother whom Michel calls "la blanche Iroquoise" is a storyteller, a keeper of oral, ancestral memory, as she tells Michel stories from her own childhood and youth, brings back to life forgotten individual memories and gradually prepares Michel for his meeting with the Indian. As "celle à qui la vie et la mort faisaient signe" (33), Angèle is haunted by the "dog of death" that mysteriously reappears in front of her house after the death of Louis-Paul and follows Michel and Angèle on their journey. But, Angèle's retelling of the last story about a young Indian villager and singer, Banjo Deplessis, defies death and

prevents them from smashing into the mountain; the “dog of death”, also named Banjo, that follows the two characters on their journey becomes, in a symbolic turn, a docile dog.

The discourse of ambiguity that permeates the narrative of *SLPN* and Michel’s internal quest for reconciliation of his divided paternal and maternal memory is punctuated by an important spiritual experience, that of Michel’s first “ONNONHAROIA” or encounter with his first vision, a ritual in which the Indian fulfils the role of the spiritual guardian. The ritual of Onnonharoia is one of the main religious rites among Iroquois people, and Michel’s description of his first vision resembles the rituals of the “Guardian Spirit Quest”.²⁸¹ The following passage illustrates the final stages of Michel’s Onnonharoia in which he sees his spiritual guide, a mynah bird that reveals to him the path to be followed:

Le fou rire grimpa de son ventre à sa gorge: il éclata en tempête qui fit s’envoler les oiseaux dans un tranquille bruit de plumes immatérielles. Seul le mainate resta, comiquement perché sur son front, sa face pointue inclinée piteusement sur son aile dépliée: “Sorcellerie, tant que tu voudras, dit l’oiseau en ouvrant le grand bec, mais regarde quand même, tête de bois!”. Ses pattes labouraient maintenant son visage, puis, d’un bond maladroit, l’oiseau sauta sur sa poitrine et, gardant ses ailes ouvertes, se pencha dangereusement: un œil immense, pareil à un soleil d’enfant, envahit tout l’espace et coula sur lui comme le jaune gluant d’un œuf. (96-97)

The object of the mask that appears in Michel’s vision next is a symbol of duality and can be said to bear a particular meaning in Lalonde’s narrative, as it fulfills the function of an important ritual object or recurring symbol in the religious rituals and ceremonies of the Iroquois people²⁸²:

Alors, essayant en vain de faire la grimace, il sentit durcir un masque sur son visage, se former une croûte sur ses joues (...) et le masque lui parla, avec la voix de l’oiseau: “On peut être soi-même et porter un masque. Il n’y a pas de mal, tant que l’on s’efforce de faire venir au monde ce qui n’existe pas encore. (96-97)

²⁸¹ Source: *The Canadian Encyclopedia online*.

²⁸² In the masked shamanistic practices of the Iroquois people, the mask, also known as False Face, is the ritual object used by the “medicine society” or the “False Face society”. A functional analysis of the mask in the rites of the Onondaga Nation (one of the Nations in the Iroquois Confederacy) and the dualism inherent in the beliefs and practices of the False Face Society vs. the human society can be found in the article by H. Blau, “Function and the False Faces; A Classification of Onondaga Masked Rituals and Themes” in: *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 79, n° 314, 1966, pp. 564-580.

As Chevalier and Gheerbrant explain, the mask represents the “deuxième Jumeau Créateur, le Mauvais Frère, qui règne sur les Ténèbres” in Iroquois dualist mythological thinking²⁸³ and in dancing healing rituals. More interestingly, it is part of the dualistic thinking contained in the symbol of the twin, as it refers to the image of the “double”, but also that of the Other. Namely, in dualistic thinking, the symbol of the twin represents the world through two opposite states (light and darkness, life and death, earthiness and the celestial, life and death, good and bad). It refers to the “état d’ambivalence de l’univers mythique” and expresses internal tensions within man that need to be surpassed or resolved or a “contradiction non résolue”.

As was shown in the analysis above, the place of contradiction or inherent ambiguity of both being true to oneself and wearing a mask is especially problematic for Michel, and it is this contradiction that he will seek to resolve. However, as Michel’s vision tells him, he has to accept it in order to find his own path, as there is no harm in doing so, “tant que l’on s’efforce de faire venir au monde ce qui n’existe pas encore”. As a writer preoccupied with the poetics of identity and the art of writing, Lalonde refers here to creative practice in general and to the art of writing in particular: the only way for Michel to resolve the inherent contradiction of the fractured Self is through writing.

3.3.2.3. The Figure of the Lake and the Theme of Unification and Renewal

²⁸³ According to the two authors, the ancient tradition of dualist thinking in Iroquois mythology and religion has survived until today on the Iroquois reserve and can be said to have its roots in natural dualism or the Iroquois’ division of the annual cycle into two main seasons, one in February and the other one in October. Iroquois’ dualistic thinking is reflected in the figure of the mythical twins that represent the good brother or the image of the home on the Indian reserve on one hand, and the bad brother or the White man and his progress on the other. Chevalier & Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, p. 547.

In *SLPN*, the imagery of water is related to the spiritual experiences and the sensations of “fluidity” of the body and the mind, experiences that speak of Michel’s deep connection with his Amerindian identity, as can be seen in the following passage:

Quand est venu l’Indien, il était prêt: son corps savait déjà qu’il pouvait faire plus que marcher et parler sur la terre. Il y avait l’eau, ses courants dans lesquels la pensée comme le corps, flottait, perdait son assurance, dépassait ses limites, surprenait la souveraineté mouvante du monde. (60)

Belonging to the paradigm of the imagination of water, the lake, with its “deep waters”, functions as a primary place of both family and ancestral memory in *SLPN*.²⁸⁴ It is the central trope representing Michel’s (and Louis-Paul’s) native space and is associated with images of the innocent time of happy childhood. Michel’s feeling of familial fusion is evoked in the following way in the passage below:

Autrefois, dans le vieux bazou de Louis-Paul, combien de fois n’avaient-ils pas, tous les trois, cherché puis trouvé, la crique, la baie sauvage, l’anse de gros cailloux où cascadaient la chute? Ils s’y baignaient, nus tous les trois. Ils pêchaient, Louis-Paul dessinait, assis à l’ombre, emplissait les poches de sa veste de douzaines de croquis pour passer l’hiver (...) Michel nageait avec sa mère jusqu’à la petite île, ils riaient, leurs rires étaient repris par l’écho d’une grande falaise, ils revenaient vers la plage en faisant la planche. (59)

The dynamics of renewal and regeneration that underpins the imagination of water and the space of the lake is referred to again in the scene of Michel’s and Angèle’s visit to Lake Saint-Amour after a detour; the lake where Louis-Paul proposed to Angèle, and whereby the space of the lake evokes feelings of stillness that were referred to earlier in the analysis:

C’était sa solitude, bien sûr, qui le rattrapait encore, animale et tranquille, inexorable. Mais aussi, mêlée à la paralysie du délaissement, il y avait une paix sans souvenirs ni désirs, la parole d’honneur du temps présent que lui donnait Angèle et les jacinthes, Louis-Paul et l’Indien, la brise d’eau et la lumière vacillante sur le visage de sa mère. (121)

According to Bachelard’s phenomenological theory on the imagination of water in the Western imaginary, the lake symbolises the energy of dark, stagnant, still water, and often symbolises death. In Amerindian imaginary, however, it symbolises life and the primordial return to nature and, by extension,

²⁸⁴ Bachelard, G., *L’Eau et les rêves, Essai sur l’imagination de la matière*, Paris: José Corti, 1942.

ancestral culture. Thus, in the Amerindian context, the lake expresses pre-colonial freedom and evokes the lost, ancestral times of fishing, canoeing and hunting at the time of the arrival of European colonisers.²⁸⁵ Like the forest, the lake is a trope of Aboriginal cultural memory, evoking images of the colonial dispossession of Aboriginal people and their territory after the arrival of the colonisers of Nouvelle-France, something that is succinctly depicted in the following passage that refers to the Lake of Two-Mountains,²⁸⁶ speaking of the progressive denaturalisation and slow death of Michel's father's favourite lake and the gradual disappearance of Amerindian culture in the face of modernity:

Le lac, au commencement leur lac à eux, puis le lac du clan, le cher lac de son père, maintenant le lac du gouvernement, avait été empoisonné, lentement mais sûrement, au mercure, à la gazoline, aux excréments humains. Violence plus meurtrière que les coups de mitraillette de l'été dernier, dans la pinède. Mort mise au compte du progrès, du confort, de l'irréversible puissance du blanc, de son entêtement américain de propriétaire gaspilleur... La mort du lac et celle de son père avaient commencé au même temps, étaient peut-être parentes, en tout cas pareilles. Comme la mort des ormes. (20)

This politicisation of space and memory through the evocation of colonial history and loss of the Amerindian territory is reframed within the borders of Michel's individual childhood memory in a poetic image of the lake and its boats that take off to the sky, an image that was formed in Michel's imagination as a child, since he did not properly understand the full connotations of the meaning of the word "voler" used by his father:

Michel se souvenait bien de ces petits caps aperçus dans le ciel, navires aux mâts dentelés de bouleaux et de sapins, non pas volés, mais envolés, qu'il imaginait survolant le lac et disparaissant derrière les nuages, à chaque fois que son père parlait de ses fameuses "terres volées". L'enfance résout à sa guise les énigmes suggérées par les grands. (48)

The seventh lake, Lake Camachigama, located in the Cabonga reserve, acts as the ultimate space of renewal and unification in which the Indian resides and awaits Michel's arrival. It is in the very last stage of the novel, after Michel and Angèle escape death, that we see them reaching their final destination.

²⁸⁵ See, for example, the literary function of the figure of the lake in *La Saga des Béothuks* by B. Assiniwi and in *Volkswagen blues* by J. Poulin.

²⁸⁶ Reference to the polluted Lake of Two-Mountains is made in the *Le Devoir* article "En passant par Oka" (16 January 1993, interview with Jacques Allard).

Standing on the raft that is now only a couple of hundred of metres from the lake's beach, Michel finally sees the Indian walking into the water, with a child on his shoulders. It is with this last scene of hope and of new beginning that the book comes to an end. This final scene of unification between Michel and the Indian not only symbolically marks the recovery of Michel's fractured identity, it also signifies the entry into the mythical time of the "rencontre fondatrice de la Nouvelle-France pour qu'il y ait fusion des identités en présence" and marks "une utopie de réconciliation", as observed by Tremblay.²⁸⁷

In the context of Québécois' cultural imagination, the space of the lake is closely connected to the imagined space of the North shared both by the Aboriginal and White populations. They are part of the myth of the North that will be examined in more detail in Roxanne Bouchard's text analysed in the last chapter. While, in the case of France, colonisation was propagated positively through this myth, in the case of the British, it was often associated with a feeling of loss. As Peter Davidson²⁸⁸ himself argues, the space of the North in the Canadian imaginary carries multiple meanings and evokes ambivalent emotions. In the context of British settler colonies and the process of colonisation and displacement of Irish and Scottish population, the North was often associated with ideas of "sadness, loss and exile", but it also produced more positive attitudes of "Canadian wilderness as a retreat from artificiality into reality" and was viewed "as a place of spiritual cleansing and healing", or as a space representing "the ideal of the pure and cleansing North".

In *SLPN*, the space of the North primarily represents a frontier, a border, a space of liminality and is defined by its fluidity, its shifting nature. Thus, the seven lakes in Lalonde's narrative do not so much symbolise the fixed, primordial, lost space of wilderness and Amerindian memory, a representation that equates spatial loss with loss of authenticity and identity loss and a view that is represented in the figure

²⁸⁷ Tremblay, E., "Une identité frontalière. Altérité et désir métis chez Robert Lalonde et Louis Hamelin", *Études françaises*, 41:1, 2005, p. 107-124, at: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/010849ar> (accessed on 01/04/2011).

²⁸⁸ Davidson, P., *The Idea of North*, London: Reaktion Books, 2005, p. 189-191.

of Michel's father. Instead, they primarily fulfill a symbolic function: they represent the seven physical, mental and spiritual places of Michel's journey through time and space whose progression can be tracked through the material passage of these seven geographic locations. The space or the space-time geography that is created in this way becomes fluid and dynamic, as it becomes relational, something that fully supports Massey's conceptualisation of space and place. This relationality is also inscribed in the title of the novel: the seven lakes in *Sept Lacs plus au Nord* do not refer to absolute, material points on a geographic map that is static; instead they can only be fully defined in relation to each other and in relation to their primary point of reference that remains absent, that of the real and imagined space of Oka.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the question of space and memory and how these two concepts are represented in the three texts selected. The aim was to show to what extent the literary treatment of space and memory or time in the three texts presented supports Massey's argument about the interrelationship between space and time, and whether they engage with Soja's idea of the demystification of spatiality when it is applied in the (post)colonial Francophone context. The semiotic analysis of Djébar's and Lalonde's text reveals a concern and need for the incorporation of dualist paradigms (West–East and White–Aboriginal) if one is to unveil the mystifications of space within the postcolonial paradigm of cultural memory. In turn, how space and place is represented in all three texts becomes crucial to the way in which spatial loss should be understood; it is ultimately defined and experienced as identity and loss of memory. In Djébar's case, the gendered division of public and private space in the Islamic–Arabic context becomes the primary image or “generator” of spatial memory, a memory that is also gendered. In Lalonde's case, spatial loss and the alienation from Amerindian identity are defined as a loss of corporeality; the recovery of sensory memory

must pass through the return to the original place of trauma. Finally, Poulin's text seeks to redefine both space and memory through the transcendence of the dualistically constituted spaces and the gradual emergence of a consensual space within which different identities, memories and histories can be negotiated. The recovery of lost memory does lead to the recovery of lost space. All three texts point to the fact, however, that it is a discourse of ambivalence, and not a discourse of subversion that dominates in relation to how space, place and spatial loss are conceptualised.

More generally, it is the investigation of the politics and poetics of memory in different postcolonial, cross-cultural contexts that underlies the analysis presented in this chapter. A politics of memory inevitably leads to the selective processes and institutionalisation of both memory and forgetting and the production of national, cultural and official memories (but also spaces), something that is argued by Connerton²⁸⁹ and Whitehead.²⁹⁰ Equally, the strategies of countermemory described in Djébar's and Poulin's text show that these strategies cannot be conceived outside the official discourse of politics of memory, even if they are articulated in a space of countermemory. On the other hand, the power of a poetics of memory resides not only in its capability to re-appropriate and rewrite the past, but also to create a new level of consciousness through the access of "marginalised" mechanisms of sensory and corporeal memory, as argued by Seremetakis.²⁹¹ Lalonde's *SLPN* shows that the reconciliation between the Amerindian and non-Amerindian (White) memory can start to take place only by rehabilitating the forgotten processes of the memory of the body. It is through the awakening of this type of individual memory, a memory that is inseparable from the processes of collective memory, that the re-appropriation of one's own identity or history can take place. It is by returning to the place of trauma, a place that resides below the level of one's consciousness, that one can begin to make sense of or piece together

²⁸⁹ Connerton, P., *How Societies Remember*, 1989; Connerton, P., "Seven types of forgetting", in: *op. cit.*, 2008, pp. 59–71.

²⁹⁰ Whitehead, A., *Memory*, 2009.

²⁹¹ Seremetakis, C. N., *The Senses Still*, 1994.

one's own fractured past. What Lalonde's writing ultimately shows, is a concern for resolving larger, complex issues of existing tension between collective and individual identity and of the constant moving between the poetic and the political, a condition with which writers belonging to "minority" cultures or literatures seem to be especially preoccupied.

Continuing the investigation into the interplay between space and the three main literary themes selected (imagination, memory, border), and how these participate in the critical process of unveiling hidden connections between space, social relations and power, the notion of border will be examined in Chapter 4 from the perspective of identity and difference, exile and translation, broadening the geographic and theoretical scope of the analysis of cultural memory that was studied in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will investigate the relationship between space, spatiality and the concept of the border in three distinct cultural and urban contexts - Morocco, Tunis and Québec. It will aim to analyse how the literary treatment of the space of the postcolonial city, constructed as a dynamic space of cultural connections and borders, shapes the writers' understanding and experience of space, place and spatial loss in a multicultural and urban context, and how this understanding participates in the process of demystification of space and spatiality.

CHAPTER 4. BORDER GEOGRAPHIES: SPACE AND THE BORDER

*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgement Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth.*

Rudyard Kipling

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will examine the relationship between space and the border.²⁹² As explained in the introduction, the choice of the theme of the border was the result of the rationalisation of the final corpus selection through the regrouping of the themes of exile, wandering and the city, themes that appeared to be recurrent in a number of texts encountered at both the preliminary and final corpus selection stage.

However, it was also the result of the need to conceptualise the border in the postcolonial Francophone literary context. In the context of this thesis, thinking on the border has been extended to include its theoretical application as “method”.²⁹³ A number of theoretical approaches to the notion of the border were considered; however, the thinking on the border that has been used in this thesis is that which has informed and been shaped by Walter D. Mignolo’s work on borders.²⁹⁴ As a concept that contests hegemonic Western imaginations of space, border-thinking has informed the understanding in this thesis about the critical process of demystification of spatiality or the unveiling of the relationship between space and power in the (post)colonial Francophone context. This notion has therefore been one of the key theoretical

²⁹² The concept of the border has been gaining central ground within the interdisciplinary field of border studies and can be said to have acquired the status of an independent object of study. The literature search conducted on the number and type of works within the interdisciplinary field of border studies indicates that studies on the concept of the border are well developed within contemporary, social and geopolitical theory, as well as cultural studies in general. See the Association for Borderlands studies founded in 1976, <http://www.absborderlands.org/>. The notions of the “border” and “boundary”, as well as the related notions of mapping, cartography and territory have been implicitly or explicitly present at the centre of the critical thinking and analysis of researchers working in these disciplines. However, it appears that this concept has not been fully conceptualised and appropriated by a wide number of critics and scholars working within the field of postcolonial Francophone studies and comparative literature. See the latest edited volume of Hargreaves, A., Forsdick, C., and Murphy, D. (eds.), *Transnational French Studies, Postcolonialism and Littérature-monde*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010. See, in particular, the last chapter “Mapping *Littérature-monde*”.

²⁹³ The work of the social theorists Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson shows that a conceptualisation of the border as method is necessary when studying the Western discourse on space and the processes of border differentiation in the context of globalisation. These global processes, Mezzadra and Neilson argue, are at the base of the “continuous reshaping of different geographical scales” and the “different kinds of mobilities that traverse and intersect in different spaces”. They call for the redefinition of the assumed stability and homogeneity of different kinds of geographical spaces, contributing to their increasing complexity and heterogeneity in “global space-time”. See Mezzadra, S., & Neilson, B., “Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labor”, in: *Transversal / EIPCP* multilingual journal, 2008, at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/mezzadraneilson/en> (accessed on 10/06/2011).

²⁹⁴ See: Mignolo, W., *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: literacy, territoriality, and colonization*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995 (2nd ed. 2003) & Mignolo, W., *Local Histories/ Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000.

concepts used for the interpretation of the texts and authors selected in this chapter and it has enriched the critical and comparative reading of the other texts presented in this thesis.

The examination of the processes and mechanisms of European colonial expansion and their consequences for the production and generation of hegemonic sites of knowledge and power lies at the centre of Mignolo's concept of border-thinking. Expanding on "the notions of colonial and imperial difference and the colonality of power" analysed in the context of the ideological discourse and colonial experience of the renaissance, the Argentinean critical theorist and semiotician redefines the notion of the border as an "epistemic metaphor", making it possible to think beyond the idea of "hegemonic Western conceptualisation".²⁹⁵ Essentially, Mignolo argues for the introduction of "border thinking" in the field of critical theory in order to address the theoretical shortfalls arising from the co-existence of the two main hegemonic discourses of the "right" and of the "left", and help the critic to think "from the interior exteriority of the border". In doing so, he acknowledges the contributions of a variety of critics that were instrumental to his development of border-thinking; arguing for a move away from "territorial thinking", he shows how Abdelkébir Khatibi's notion of "une pensée autre" was instrumental to his rethinking of the border and the development of border-thinking theory. For Mignolo, Khatibi's theory can be equally applied to early modern history and the era of the renaissance (as it brings to the fore the ideology of the discourse of Renaissance in the context of the conflict between the Christians and the Moors in the sixteenth century), and to the interrelationship between the discourse and ideals of the Enlightenment and the post-Enlightenment era of the French colonisation of the Maghreb, which was based on these ideals. Equally central to Mignolo's border theory is Khatibi's argument on the decolonisation of knowledge²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Delgado, E., and Romero, R. J., "Local Histories and Global Designs: An interview with Walter Mignolo" in: *Discourse*, 22:3, Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2000, p. 7–33.

²⁹⁶ Khatibi, A., "Décolonisation de la sociologie" in: B.E.S.M, n° 121-122, Rabat, 1978.

based on the two concepts of a “double critique” and “une pensée autre”²⁹⁷ (of Occidental and Islamic fundamentalism), concepts that are crucial to the deconstruction of dualist thinking and the constitution of the field of border thinking where, paradoxically, it becomes possible to think without the Other. As Mignolo explains:

A double critique becomes at this intersection a border thinking, since to be critical of both, of Western and Islamic fundamentalism, implies to think from both traditions and, at the same time, from neither of them. This border thinking and double critique are the necessary conditions for “an other thinking”, a thinking that is no longer conceivable in Hegel’s dialectics, but located at the border of coloniality of power in the modern world system (...) In this case, Arabic philosopher Ibn Khaldun becomes canonical in his difference from German philosophers. The epistemological potential of border thinking, of “an other thinking”, has the possibility of overcoming the limitation of territorial thinking (e.g. the monotopic epistemology of modernity), whose victory was possible because of its power of subalternisation of knowledge located outside the parameters of modern conceptions of reason and rationality.²⁹⁸

As Mignolo rightly points out, Khatibi’s concept of “critique double” entails a re-examination of the ideological discourse of Western and Islamic thought and calls for a “redistribution of the geopolitics of knowledge” in the context of power-geographies (to use Massey’s concept), and in the discourse determining Occidentalism as the dominant imaginary and Orientalism as the Other. It is located in “borderlands”, to use Gloria Anzaldúa’s term.²⁹⁹

Three main perspectives on the relationship between space and the border will be studied in the three texts selected to address the theoretical questions around border-thinking posed above: identity and difference; exile; and translation.³⁰⁰ It will be shown that these themes are significant for the way in which the space of the Maghrebian and North American (post)colonial city is being constructed: as a space of the border. Abdelkébir Khatibi and Hédi Bouraoui are well known in the field of Maghrebian studies;

²⁹⁷ Khatibi’s theoretical programme “Pensée autre” is given in Khatibi, A., *Maghreb Pluriel*, Denoël/SMER : Paris/Rabat, 1983.

²⁹⁸ Mignolo, W., *Local Histories, Global Designs*, 2000, p. 67.

²⁹⁹ Anzaldúa, G., *Borderlands: La Frontera, The New Mestiza*, San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007 (1st ed. 1987).

³⁰⁰ The texts and authors selected are: Khatibi, A., *La Mémoire tatouée* in: *Œuvres de Abdelkébir Khatibi, I. Romans et Récits*, Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 2008, pp. 9-113; Bouraoui, H., *Retour à Thyna*, Tunis: l’Or du Temps, 1996; and Brossard, N., *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration*, Montreal: Les Quinze, 1980 (1st ed. 1974).

each of them has a singular postcolonial migratory history essentially defined by the nomadic experience of varied cultural contacts. Nicole Brossard's work is little known outside the field of Québécois studies; her experience is essentially shaped by that of feminist theory and postmodernism and the issues of bilingualism, translation and female corporeality. What writing strategies and narrative devices in particular are being used to deal with the border both as metaphor and method? To what extent does the authors' treatment of the border and boundary participate in the demystification of the Eurocentric discourse on space and place, and if so, how is this achieved? As was the case in the first two chapters, the results obtained from the semiotic analysis of space and place and the analysis of the narrative and deep levels of meaning will be discussed, and it will be shown how these results engage with Massey's theory on space and Soja's argument about the demystification of spatiality. The analysis of Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée* will discuss how the notion of difference and cultural and memory trace is deployed in the geography of the (post)colonial space of the Moroccan and European city, giving rise to the construction of the city as both a site of discursivity and a mythical space of desire. This spatial duality installs a discourse of ambivalence at the centre of Khatibi's text, reflected in the binary pair Maghreb-France. It will examine whether this ambivalence can be deconstructed by using Khatibi's concept of "intersémiotique transversale" or semiotic border-crossing as a strategy of border-thinking.³⁰¹ It will offer a semiotic analysis revealing the significance of the isotopy of the street and the meaning and value attributed to the figures of the labyrinth and the mirror in the context of the representation of the Moroccan city. It will look at the representation of the European city in Khatibi's work in the context of the gradual move from duality to the "travelling" identity of the *voyageur*, enabling border-thinking and border-crossing that go beyond fixed identity and cultural boundaries. This move towards deterritorialisation and the propensity towards the European and/or cosmopolitan space and place that one

³⁰¹ The terms "border-crossing" and "border-thinking" in relation to Khatibi's concept of "intersémiotique transversale" need to be differentiated. Although they are theoretically connected, Khatibi does not use the term border-thinking in his analysis of the "signes migrants" that he understands as symbolic border-crossing between the semiotic systems of calligraphy or tattooing to those of written language.

can also note in the later writing of Mohamed Dib previously analysed, as well as in that of number of other Maghrebian authors such as Assia Djebar or Hédi Bouraoui, certainly deserves to be studied further. The analysis of Bouraoui's *Retour à Thyna*, the second text analysed, will discuss the relationship between distance and exile in the Maghrebian context showing how the writing strategy of distance and the position of exile can both be used as strategies of border-thinking, embodied in the position of "location-in-movement" and "double consciousness" in the sense given by Walter Mignolo. Understood and experienced in this sense, the position of exile can actively participate in the demystification of the Eurocentric discourse on space; it calls for a redefinition of the notion of exile and spatial loss and the role it plays in the Western discourse on loss and nostalgia. It will show how Bouraoui's work interrogates border-identity and the identities of the border through a re-writing of the native space in the Tunisian context and the double attitude of *Sfaxitude* and cosmopolitanism expressed in his notions of "transpoétique" and "transculture". It will demonstrate that the spaces of the native city of Sfax and of the ancient city of Thyna are constructed as a (post)colonial dystopia-utopia and expressed at the deep level of meaning through the opposition between tradition and modernity. This duality, in turn, is deconstructed through the trope of the gate that functions as a trope of passage or border-crossing, as well as through the narrativisation of the histories and memories of both cities. This give rise to the creation of "space-time" geographies as sites of competing official and repressed memories and histories in the context of Tunisia's history of colonisation, both European and Arabic and Islamic. Finally, Brossard's *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration* will be introduced by a discussion on the theme of the city in modern Québécois writing and the significance of the imaginary space of Montréal in forging Québec's new cultural identity, an issue that explains the recurrent presence of imaginaries of the border, boundaries and "border-crossing" in writing on the city. Finally, it will be shown how Brossard uses the inscription of the female body on the urban space of Montréal to deconstruct the Western colonial narratives and meaning of the urban postcolonial experience in the Francophone-Anglophone and Native-White context. It will be demonstrated how she makes use of the strategy of translation both as a method of border-thinking and a

textual device whose aim is to subvert the dominant discourse on space (and power) on the one hand, and the discourse on language (and power) on the other hand. Last but not least, it will discuss the results obtained from applying semiotic analysis to Brossard's text and the reasons for the difficulties of applying such a model to the text (something that has also been partly noted in Khatibi's text). It will argue that whilst it has not been possible to identify the semiotic square at the deep level of meaning, as well as the object of the quest and the narrative structure at the narrative level, because of Brossard's deliberate use of the method and strategy of deconstruction that calls into question the referentiality of language, it was possible to identify a number of isotopies at the surface level of meaning that "punctuate" the text at the surface, a process that participates in the production of meaning.

4.2. Identity, Difference, Trace: the Construction of the Space of the European and Moroccan city in Abdelkébir Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée*

*On n'est qu'une série de traces, au fond.*³⁰²

Abdelkébir Khatibi

As the British scholar Mark Currie argues in his introduction to *Difference*, where he examines the different meanings that this philosophical concept has acquired in modern literary theory, the notion of difference has shown itself to be extremely enduring but also ambiguous, especially when associated with another crucial critical notion, that of identity. The concept of difference has been defined either in terms

³⁰² Khatibi, A., *L'Œuvre de Abdelkébir Khatibi (Préliminaire)*, Rabat: Marsam, 1997 (interviews, extracts of Khatibi's writings, bibliography, commentary).

of “individuality and particularity” or in terms of a “relationality” that refers to “the systematic (or systemic) basis for meaning, and the relational context of identity”:³⁰³

And yet, in the reception history of the concept, there is also a consistent opposition to the term and the kind of analysis it implies on the basis that the structuralist concept of difference actually abstracts the entities it analyses to the extent they are emptied of all particularity and individuality.³⁰⁴

The notions of dual identity, and of identity and difference and their significance for Khatibi’s work, have been widely discussed by a number of critics from different positions.³⁰⁵ At the centre of Khatibi’s debate on the notions of identity and difference, notions that will be examined here in relation to Derrida’s philosophical concept of *différance*, is Khatibi’s argument that the Western concepts of identity and difference are both concepts that are defined negatively and that they are culturally constructed in terms of absolutes. According to Khatibi, the deconstruction of these two Western notions should lead to the decolonisation of the Maghrebian subject and the transgression of the binary paradigm of difference (between France and the Maghreb), something that Fatima Ahnouch also argues in relation to his work and his understanding of collective Maghrebian identity:

Le concept de “l’identité aveugle” et de la “différence sauvage” qui est, a priori, philosophique et que Khatibi associe aux questions de la culture et de l’identité maghrébines, a pour but de “décoloniser” l’ “être maghrébin” contre l’illusion de sa clôture.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ The definition of language meaning in Saussurean linguistics is based on the relational understanding of the notion of difference: “...dans la langue il n’y a que des différences. Bien plus: une différence suppose en général des termes positifs entre lesquels elle s’établit; mais dans la langue il n’y a que des différences sans termes positifs”, p.166. In: Saussure, F., *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris: Payot, 1972 (1st ed. 1915). Semiotic theory (as developed by Greimas) continues the Saussurean linguistic tradition and uses structural semantics as the theoretical frame of reference in explaining language meaning.

³⁰⁴ Currie, M., *Difference*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 13.

³⁰⁵ See for example: Memmes, A., *Abdelkébir Khatibi: l’écriture de la dualité*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994; Gauch, S., “Fantasies of Self-Identity, Khatibi’s *The Book of Blood*”, in: *The New Centennial Review*, volume 1, number 1, Spring 2001, pp. 201-228; Ahnouch, F., *La Langue, la mémoire, le corps, L’articulation de l’imaginaire culturel*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004; Hennuy, J.-F., “Examen d’identité: voyageur professionnel et identification diasporique chez Jean-Philippe Toussaint et Abdelkébir Khatibi”, in: *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*, volume 60, number 3, 2006, pp. 347-363; El Nossery, N., “L’Étrangeté rassurante de la ‘bi-langue’ chez Abdelkébir Khatibi et Nancy Huston”, in: *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 11, n° 3, 2007, pp. 389-397; Orlando, V., *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in the Francophone Literature of the Maghreb*, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1999.

³⁰⁶ Ahnouch, F., *La Langue, la mémoire, le corps: L’articulation de l’imaginaire culturel*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004, p. 4. In the paragraph preceding this quotation, Ahnouch cites Khatibi’s own definition of the concepts of the terms

The analysis of *La mémoire tatouée* presented here will seek to answer how Khatibi deconstructs these two notions or what strategies he uses to do so, and whether he manages to unpack fully these two notions.

Derrida's unpindownable notion of *différance*³⁰⁷ can be used as the starting point to explain how both difference and identity should be unpacked and deconstructed. Derrida's notion of *différance* is to be understood as a critique of the structuralist interpretation of the notion of difference. In other words, *différance* becomes in Derrida's poststructuralist critique and a temporal concept that carries within it the notion of *trace* as it entails the cross-contamination of the past, present and future.

In *LMT*³⁰⁸ both space and memory are constructed in terms of identity and difference and then deconstructed through the notion of *différance* or trace, something that installs ambiguity at the centre of the text, ambiguity that calls for a "lecture oblique du texte". This oblique approach to reading is, according to Khatibi, necessary when the critic undertakes the interpretation of any text. It bypasses the "binarisme métaphysique" contained in structuralist discourse (on language) along two poles of meaning (metaphorical and metonymical) and allows for an unveiling of the repressed semiologic systems that have historically been obscured by such discourse. This type of reading can be linked to Khatibi's approach and concept of "intersémiotique transversale", as already discussed in the introduction.³⁰⁹ Although Khatibi's analysis of the different semiotic systems in Moroccan culture is extensively

"identité" and "différence": "J'appelle l'identité aveugle, l'illusion d'un moi absolu et la différence sauvage l'illusion d'une altérité absolue" in: Khatibi, A., "Pour une véritable pensée de la différence", *Lamalif*, n° 85, Janvier 1977.

³⁰⁷ Derrida, J., *De La Grammatologie*, Paris: Minuit, 1967.

³⁰⁸ The abbreviation *LMT* will be used in the following analysis each time reference is made to *La Mémoire tatouée*.

³⁰⁹ Khatibi, A., *La Blessure du nom propre*, Paris: Denoël, 1974. As already seen, such an interpretation was particularly relevant in the case of Dib's *Les Terrasses d'Orsol* and where a fundamental tension between the generation of presence and absence of meaning at the surface and deep level of meaning in the text was noted.

discussed by the author in *La Blessure du nom propre*, it becomes less clear how is one to apply such a reading or approach to the Maghrebian Francophone text. If one assumes that the Maghrebian Francophone text contains a French frame of reference associated with French culture and language, as well as references to traces of other semiotic systems that have been repressed or occulted (both European and Maghrebian), then its status can be viewed as highly ambiguous. The presence of several opposing systems of meaning or frames of references – that of the French (written and oral) language and culture and of the Arabic (written and oral) language and culture – creates a series of oppositions expressed as tensions that uniquely transform the meaning of the Magrebian Francophone text. Rather than using the concepts of identity and difference in the interpretation of the Maghrebian Francophone text, the notion of the trace becomes instrumental to the way in which one is to interpret the Maghrebian Francophone text.

So, although the concept of difference is central to Khatibi's discourse on identity in *LMT* (as it can reduce the Other to the position of "différence sauvage"), both identity and difference are assigned a negative value, as they prevent the realisation of a "pensée autre" represented in a third space; they both act as opponents to the narrator's quest for a recuperation of maternal, corporeal memory and a dual postcolonial identity. As Khatibi thematises in *LMT* and develops further in his later theoretical work, the construction of (personal and collective) identity that excludes the "Other" fixates, or congeals the Self and therefore carries in itself the seeds of an essentialist, reductionist binary discourse.³¹⁰ It is this aspect of Khatibi's theory that Walter Mignolo appropriates and develops further in its theory on border-thinking.

³¹⁰ The conceptualisation of identity and difference (or "différences") in the context of (French) racism is offered by the Tunisian Jewish writer Albert Memmi. Memmi deconstructs the egalitarian values of the Jacobin ideal of the French Republic and unveils the hidden relationship between racism and difference embedded at the centre of the French (post)colonial discourse on difference. Memmi, A., *Le Racisme: description, définition, traitement*, Paris: Gallimard, 1994.

The semiotic method was first applied to *LMT* in order to test the validity of semiotic analysis based on the Greimassian model to the corpus of non-Western texts selected here. As can be seen from Table 3 and Diagram 6, a series of semes and sememes belonging to the isotopy of space and place were identified; some of these significant spaces occupy specific places in the narrative structure of *LMT*. Although the sememes of Maghrebian native space (both natural and cultural) are predominant in the text, it can be noted that on the surface level of meaning a series of (apparent) relations of oppositions or dual relationships can be established. Interestingly, it is the sememe of *rue* that has one of the highest occurrences in the text compared to other sememes of native spaces such as *maison* or *école*. The significance or the multidimensionality of the space of the street and that of the medina will be analysed in more detail, but for now attention should be drawn to it here. Also, an apparent opposition can be established between the European and the Moroccan spaces, but both of these spaces can be said to stand in opposition to a “third” space, the space of wandering or nomadism. The sememes referring to the spaces of nomadism are particularly dominant in the last part of *LMT*. This gradual movement from duality to a third space can be said to underlie the narrative structure of the text.

Isotopy / Semes	Sememes	Frequency of sememes	Space type and/or Space Opposition
Native space / space of childhood	/maison/, /rue/, quartier, /village/, /pays/, /mer/, /sable/, /soleil/, /figue/, /fleur/, /datte/, /exotique/, /sableuse/, /sauterelle/, /montagne/, /paysage/, /plage/, /rocher/, /terre/, /vent/, /lagune/, /vagues/, /arbre/	196 ³¹¹	Open–closed, Private–Public, Native–foreign; Morocco–Europe; Natural–Urban
National space	/Maroc/, /marocain/, /pays/	27	Morocco–Europe
Dual space	/école/, /classe/	18	Colonised space–colonial space
Maghrebian city	/Marrakech, La place Jamaa Ltina/, /ville/, /Casablanca/, /El Jadida/, /Essaouira/, /ville parallèle/, /terrasse/, /bar/, /boutique/, /bordel/,	99 ³¹²	Moroccan city–European city

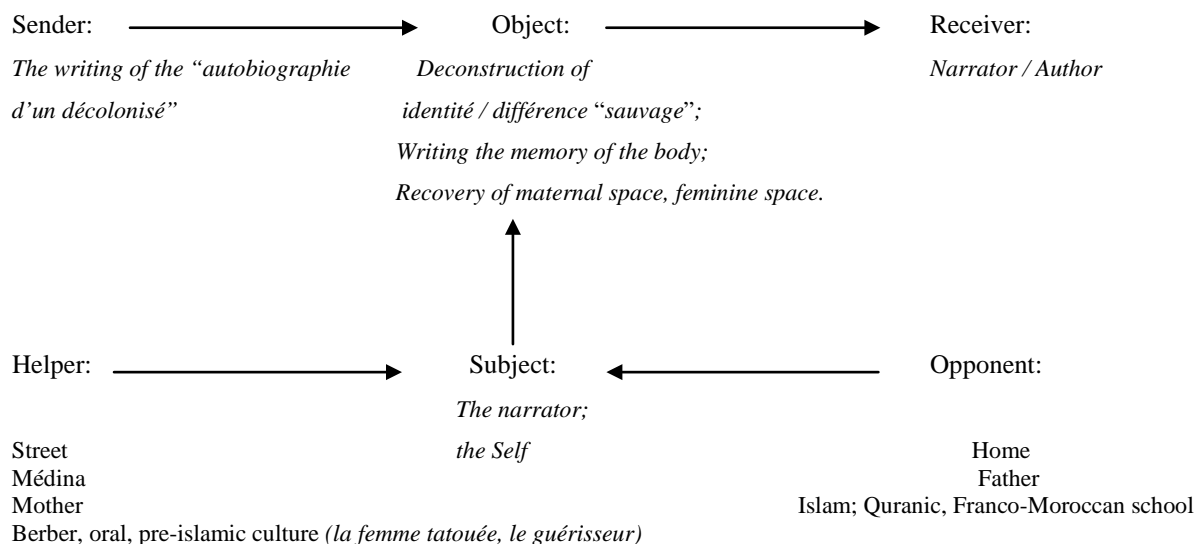
³¹¹ 34 occurrences of the sememe /rue/ were counted in this category.

³¹² 2 occurrences of the sememes /El Jadida/, 2 occurrences of the sememes /Essaouira/, 17 occurrences of the sememe /Marrakesh/ and 20 occurrences of the sememe /Casablanca/ were counted in this category. The towns of El Jadida and Essaouira were mostly referred to as sememes /ville/ or /ville parallèle/ (21 occurrences).

	/cinéma/, /cimetière/, /théâtre/, /labyrinthe/, /dédale/, /médina/, /Cordoba/		
Maghrebian cultural space	/Algérie/, /algérien/, /Nedjma/, /harem/, /hashisch/, /henne/, /coutume/, /calligraphie/, /culture/, /Cherkaoui/, /Kateb/, /tatouée/, /tatouage/	43	Morocco–Europe
European city	/Paris/, /rue/, /quartier/, /Rive Gauche/, /café/, /bar/, /théâtre/, /galerie d’art/, /Stockholm/, /Londres/, /Sofia/	44 ³¹³	Morocco–Europe
European cultural space	/jardin/, /cinéma/, /Internat/, /universitaire/, /collège/, /école/, /Occident/, /Sorbonne/, /discothèque/, /littérature/, /écrivain/, /jazz/, /culture/	81	Morocco–Europe
Wandering (nomadic identity)	/monde/, /désert/, /mouvement/, /errance/, /lointain/, /marche/, /ville/, /voyage/, /retour/, /fugue/, /univers/, /ailleurs/, /route/, /évasion/, /géographie/, /nomade/, /mobilité/, /exil/, /déracinement/, /dérive/, /univers/, /horizon/, /évasive/, /bédouine/	183 ³¹⁴	Nomadism–Sedentarism

Table 3. Presentation of spatial isotopies in *La Mémoire tatouée*.

The actantial narrative schema of *LMT* can be depicted as follows:



³¹³ 18 occurrences of the sememe /Paris/ were counted in this category.

³¹⁴ 27 occurrences of the sememe /monde/ and 20 occurrences of the sememe /désert/ were counted in this category.

Colonised / Orient

Essaouira

El Jadida

Marrakesh

Paris

Arabic language (*Arabe dialectal, Arabe classique*)

Coloniser / Occident / the Other

Paris/ European city

French language

Diagram 6. Actantial narrative schema in *La mémoire tatouée*.

If the act of writing of an “autobiographie d’un décolonisé” could be identified as the “sender” idea in the narrative, it was more difficult to define what the subject’s object of the quest is, because of the multiplicity of discourses, genres and meta-discourses that are intertwined in *LMT*, something that the analysis of the narrative structure of *LMT* is not really able to elucidate. Indeed, at the metatextual level, *LMT* poses a fundamental question, that of the status and validity of (Occidental) autobiographical discourse. As remarked by Debra Kelly, the linearity and “traditional” character of autobiographical discourse are being subverted by a “whole meta-discourse on the possibilities and impossibilities of writing autobiography” that disrupts the linearity and process of actual autobiographical discourse and questions the “validity and functioning of memory”.³¹⁵ As shown in Diagram 6, although one can establish a series of binary pairs or mirroring oppositions (such as mother–father, colonised–coloniser; Occident–Orient; French language–Quranic language; Quranic language–Berber dialect, “identité–différence”; “Self–Other”; “sacred–secular; “Islamic–pre-Islamic”; “tattoo–calligraphy”; “character A–character B”), their oppositional relationship in the text is an ambivalent one. As already noted, this position of ambiguity assigned to the main actors in the narrative is characteristic of several other postcolonial texts that are analysed within this thesis such as Djébar’s *L’Amour, la fantasia*, Poulin’s *Volkswagen blues* and Lalonde’s *Sept Lacs plus au Nord*. The only oppositional pairs that seem to function consistently on the axis “helper–opponent” are the pairs “home–street” and “European space–

³¹⁵ Kelly, D., *Autobiography and Independence, Selfhood and Creativity in Postcolonial North African Writing in French*, 2005, pp. 234-235. The first part of the book, entitled “Série hasardeuse I”, deals with the narrator’s childhood, entry into Franco-Moroccan school and departure for Paris to study at the Sorbonne; the second part, entitled “Série hasardeuse II”, retells the narrator’s travels. The reader is able to follow the life of the narrator chronologically, from his childhood through to his return to his native country and his travels around the world.

Medina”. Indeed, the nomadic space of the street and the maze of the medina already mentioned fulfil an important function as helpers in the narrative, as they aid the narrator’s quest for freedom and nomadic wandering and assist him in his capacity to navigate within both the Occidental and the Arab societies or cultural spaces.

The theme of identity and difference can be said to be embedded in *LMT* as a fundamental value at the deep level of meaning. Yet, the realisation that both identity and difference are reductive terms, unable to define the narrating Self, is expressed in the passage below, that appears in the chapter “Fugue sur la différence” and in which the narrator/author exclaims: “Différence, passez par la fenêtre!”, concluding that memory is unreliable since it fixes the Self as much as identity does:

J’avais l’impression d’être joué, cette identité minable, inactuelle, expulsée de ma lassitude, vie quelque peu orpheline, qui se pensait dégagée, aérienne, innocente, écrivant à sa femme ou à ses amis ses impressions anglaises. J’avais vu, mais le regard abuse; revenir chaque fois à la mémoire, et cette chose est déjà attitude en cendres. Conserver quoi? Identité épouvantable, en ceci qu’elle vous suspend dans votre battement, se retirer, évanoui et sans souvenir, phrases anecdotiques. (94)

The fundamental opposition “identité–différence” is presented in Diagram 7:

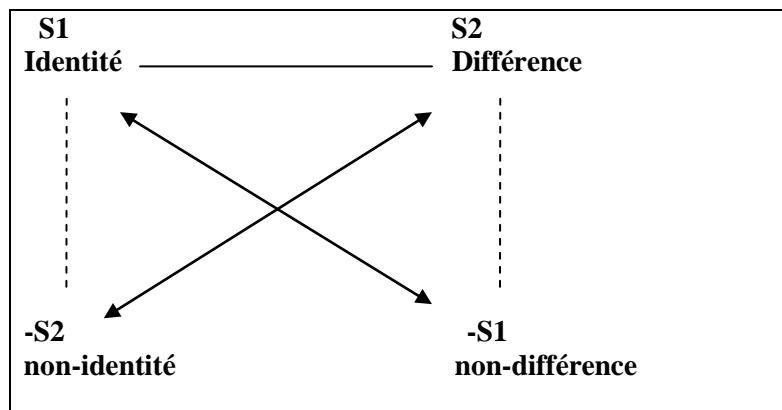


Diagram 7. Representation of the *semiotic square* for the isotopies of identity and difference in *La Mémoire tatouée*.

According to semiotic theory, and as shown in the representation above, the relationship S1 and S2 (identité vs. différence) is a relationship of opposition. The terms S1 and –S1 (identité vs. non-différence) and S2 and –S2 (différence vs non-identité) are in a relationship of contradiction; they cannot exist simultaneously. Finally, the terms S1 and –S2 and S2 and –S1 are in a relationship of complementarity; they demonstrate “the coherence of meaning”.³¹⁶ This interpretation can be viewed as problematic in the sense that in *LMT*, the pair “identity–difference” is only in an apparent relationship of opposition; it is constructed artificially. The (assumed positive) term S1 “identité” is in fact not in an oppositional relationship to the (assumed negative) term S2 “différence”. In other words, identity is not axiologically opposed to the “différence” in terms of value.³¹⁷ Equally, the terms S1 and –S1 (identité and non-différence) defined by the relationship of contradiction do, in fact, coexist in Khatibi’s text. Both “non-identity” and “non-difference” are inscribed in *LMT* in the form of memorial, spatial and textual traces. So, although the representation of the semiotic square of the pair identity–difference is possible for *LMT*, it cannot adequately be used to explain the multiplicity or the layers of meanings and the traces embedded in Khatibi’s text.

4.2.1. Memorial Trace, Cultural Difference and the Space of the Moroccan City in *La Mémoire tatouée*

³¹⁶ The relationships between terms or isotopies within the semiotic square are referred to in French as “la relation de contrariété”, “la relation de contradiction” and “la relation de complémentarité”. Greimas and Courtés, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, pp. 30-31.

³¹⁷ Axiology refers to the theory or system of value. More concretely, it is the arrangement of values on the paradigmatic axis, whereas ideology is the arrangement of values on the syntactic axis and from an actantial perspective. Greimas and Courtés explain the concept of axiology (French: axiologie) as follows: “On peut considérer que toute catégorie sémantique, représentée dans le carré sémiotique (vie / mort, par exemple) est susceptible d’être axiologisée du fait de l’investissement des deixis positive et négative par la catégorie thymique *euphorie/dysphorie*.”

In *LMT*, the discourse on native space is closely related to the dynamic spaces of the memorial and cultural trace. In the following sections on the space of the Moroccan city, the question will be asked as to how the symbolic or literary spaces of the (Moroccan) city are constructed in the text and what discourses emerge as a result of a dual construction of the Moroccan and European space. The analysis on the Moroccan city will concentrate on the examination of two figures of the Arabic and Islamic imaginary in particular, the labyrinth and the mirror, figures that defy the colonial imagination of the coloniser. Ultimately, this analysis should elucidate the question of whether Khatibi's text succeeds in deconstructing the notions of identity and difference and in subverting the Eurocentric discourse on space in relations to these two notions through the notion of memorial trace.

The narrator's memories of the native city are evoked in the second "meditation" that punctuates the scriptural body of *LMT*:

Par le jeu de la dissimulation, le souvenir métamorphose la ville de notre passé en une nostalgie blanche: les chemins partent et aboutissent au même nœud, les quartiers se renvoient les uns aux autres dans un puzzle de formes, de surfaces et de couleurs. Deux images se détachent de ma mémoire nomade, images légères et mouvantes comme la géométrie de l'hirondelle. (29)

The memory of the native city is no longer physical and material; instead it is represented as a lost memory, as a "nostalgie blanche". The semiotic analysis conducted shows that different values are assigned to the spaces of the two cities of Essaouira and El Jedida as the spaces of the feminine vs. the spaces of the masculine. This division produces a gendered discourse on the space of the Moroccan city in the (post)colonial context. Whilst El Jadida is constructed and represented as the space of the masculine, a space of discursivity and a space of cultural difference, Essaouira is represented as the space of the feminine, a space of desire, or a space of the memorial trace. This gendered representation of the Moroccan city as either feminine or masculine only partly supports Massey's critique of gendered spaces and places in the Western context and the feminine vs. masculine values that are assigned to certain

spaces and places.³¹⁸ What Khatibi seems to be primarily interested in is not the subversion of the public and private spheres in Islamic Arabic society coded and performed as spaces of the masculine vs. and the feminine, but how the Maghrebian space is constructed within the framework of the Western colonial discourse on space, a discourse that allowed for France's inscription of Eurocentric conceptions of space onto the dominated, non-Western spaces of its North African colonies. So, it could be argued that masculinity for Khatibi is problematic not because it supports a gendered vision or division of the sphere of the public and the private in Islamic society, but rather because it is linked to discourse or "discursivity" and to masculine, colonial domination. Equally, the concept of the feminine is not questioned because it is relegated to the sphere of the private in Maghrebian society, but rather because it represents the native space of the maternal as the space of the dominated. A similar critique of a colonial gendered vision of Maghrebian space has been noted in Djébar's *L'amour, la fantasia*, as discussed in Chapter 3.

A very good example of the mystification of Arabic and Islamic space can be found in the figure of the labyrinth as it is perceived and interpreted by the Western subject. A figure often represented in Arabic calligraphy, as Khatibi explains in *La Blessure du nom propre*, the figure of the labyrinth induces various "accidents of reading", through the reversal of letters, through a "jeu de miroir" or the mutual reflection of letters, through jumps from one line to another, inversions, or "enchâssements".³¹⁹ As he argues in his reference to Roger Caillois' text in *Hommage à Borges* in which the imaginary space of the labyrinth is defined, Caillois is able to interpret the labyrinth only through the grid of Cartesian space that is ordered

³¹⁸ See Massey: "Spaces and places are gendered through and through...". Massey, D., *Space, Place and Gender*, p.186.

³¹⁹ As Khatibi shows in an example of the figure of the labyrinth, the reading of the Quranic text proceeds through a series of calligraphic signs that start at the bottom corner with the word *Allah* and whose graphic movement is circular, following the form of a square or a zigzagging form and finishing in the centre with the word al'az'im contained in the phrase "Dieu l'Immense dit la vérité" or sadaqa allah al' az'im (*La Blessure du nom propre*, pp. 194-195).

and symmetrical, a cultural stereotype that Khatibi analyses in his text “The Colonial Labyrinth” that will be discussed in more detail later in this analysis.³²⁰

The figure of the labyrinth is connected (spatially and culturally) to the images of the street (/rue/) and the medina and to the descriptions of the spaces of the two Moroccan cities of the narrator’s childhood and adolescence. The memory of the street is a potent childhood memory and a recurring motif in *LMT*. The (public) space of the street in the Moroccan context is invested with a positive value throughout *LMT* and it functions both as the archetypal, native space of the home and as the nomadic, labyrinthine space of the medina; it signifies both belonging and wandering. As such it is contrasted with the enclosed, symbolically coded space of the parental home, and the dual space of the school. Moreover, it is the experience of the body in the archetypal space of the street that leads to the spatialisation of memory. It is the loss of the native space of the street that creates a destabilisation and disorientation in the narrator’s memory. When the memory of the space of the street emerges in the narrator’s mind and is recounted it brings to the surface a destabilisation of meaning through the questioning of the validity of memory:

si mon corps se détache de ce point spatial, c’est que je ne sais plus pourquoi je suis là, ce que je suis venu faire; plus de mouvement vers les autres, seulement une couleur, elle-même miroir de ma séparation. (20)

Je traverse mon enfance dans ces petites rues tourbillonnantes, maisons de hauteur inégale, et labyrinthe qui se brise au coin d’un quelconque présage (...) Qu’est-ce encore, une rue? Ce feuillage de chaux, usé par la pluie : je traverse mon enfance, au-dessus de ces tombeaux retournés, et si des chats affamés se rompent dans le soleil. (25)

Later in the text, Khatibi compares the experience of wandering in the street with that of the deciphering of the meaning in “l’art du clin d’œil”, when the narrator affirms: “dans la rue le corps ne résiste [pas] à l’art du clin d’œil”.³²¹ The “clin d’œil” is situated between the eyes and removes the gaze from the

³²⁰ Caillois, R., *Hommage à Borges*, L’Herne, 1964, p. 214, cited in Khatibi, *La Blessure du nom propre*, p. 196.

³²¹ Le “clin d’œil” or “ghammâz” is another term for “l’intersourcier” (Third Eye), the Moroccan tattoo that is placed between the eyes (Khatibi, *La Blessure du nom propre*, p.113). The motif of the “clin d’œil” appears several times in *LMT* and is given special significance in Khatibi’s text.

position of the centre, in other words, it signifies a decentred gaze, an explanation that Khatibi gives in *La Blessure du nom propre*:

Il y a déplacement du regard, ce qui me lit, ce qui me donne à voir, ce n'est pas le regard naturel, c'est bien quelque chose entre le regard naturel et son substitut (...) L'inscription (rhétorique) du clin d'œil requiert une qualité rythmique, le transport de l'image ébauchant une intercalation musicale (...) le clin d'œil lorsqu'il est tatoué esquisse un vol, un flottement des sens.³²²

This decentred gaze is actualised in the allegoric and nomadic space of the medina; its circular arrangement makes it possible for the narrator of *LMT* to overcome the symbolic fracture dividing the narrator's body between the colonial and the Moroccan space, and protects him against this fracture: "la rue m'enveloppe de si près que la médina et ses allégories se répercutent dans le labyrinthe de mes phrases" (33).

The image of the space of the medina as a feminine, maternal space of protection in the figure of Aïcha Kandicha³²³ is contrasted with the colonial imaginations of space and the French garden in the Parc Spiney in which the narrator played as a child "défilant dans le désordre d'un enfant colonisé" (34). The idea of the colonial imagination and the space of the labyrinth is elaborated in Khatibi's 1988 text entitled "The Colonial Labyrinth".³²⁴ In the text he challenges the French idea of the tripartite division of the (Moroccan) colonial city into the European quarter (the quarter of the "pieds noirs"), the mellah (Jewish quarter) and the medina (Arab quarter).³²⁵ He contrasts the Western perception of the maze in which the labyrinthine space is reduced to an image of "folklore" – a space that disorients the Western subject and that he is unable to appropriate – with his own reflections and visions of the native spaces of the medina

³²² Khatibi, A., *La Blessure du nom propre*, p. 113.

³²³ Aïcha Kandicha is one of the most famous legends and a being of Berber mythology and traditional Maghrebian culture. She is depicted as an evil figure, but is also seen to represent a symbol of wandering. Duvignaud, F., *Le Corps de l'effroi*, Paris: Le Sycomore, 1981.

³²⁴ Khatibi, A., "A Colonial Labyrinth", in: *Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations and Nomadisms*, *Yale French Studies* 83, Lionnet, F. & Scharfman, R. (eds.), vol. 2, 1993, pp. 5-12.

³²⁵ Maréchal Lyautey organised the French protectorate in Morocco in 1912. Khatibi discusses how the enclosed space of the medina that was instigated by Lyautey came to signify the prime space of resistance for the enclosed Arab population.

and the mellah, spaces that are culturally shared and experienced in the same way by the Arab and Jewish subject.³²⁶ In his letter to the Egyptian Jacques Hassoun (that he refers to in the article) he explains how the “so-called labyrinth is also a cultural way of treating space”, offering a series of strategies of “walking, of meeting, of avoiding” that install an internalised “psychology of detour”. This psychology of detour can be said to defy the imagination of the coloniser; however, it does not succeed in resolving tensions and conflicts resulting from the separation of the spaces of the medina and the mellah imposed externally by the French. As Khatibi explains further, the cultural memory of the maze has produced a collective space deeply ingrained in the subconscious of the Arab and Jewish subject, “it is a reflection of a common history, a memory that turns into a psychoanalyst’s dream” and “the nostalgia for this space is not a mere cry out of the past but really *the trace of a trauma*, of a lost land” (9). The maze or the labyrinth therefore functions as an ideal site of mystification of spatiality both in the European and the Arab context. Does Khatibi as a postcolonial subject find himself so closely involved in the process of reconstruction of a fractured cultural memory that he does not fully succeed in demystifying the notion of the labyrinth?

Khatibi’s numerous references to the image of the double, opposing the Self to Other and the West (Occident) to East (Arabic culture) in *LMT* function as metaphors of the figure of the mirror or the mirroring image. Interestingly, in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the image of the mirror was also shown to be an important theme in *Les Terrasses d’Orsol* by Mohammed Dib, an author whose imagination is greatly inspired by Sufi philosophy.

³²⁶ Khatibi refers here to the definition of the word labyrinth as given by the French anthropologist and sociologist, Roger Caillois, previously mentioned. The reflections on the shared experiences of the spaces of the medina and the mellah echo Khatibi’s views on the Palestinian question that he discussed in *Vomito Blanco, Le Sionisme et la conscience malheureuse*, Paris: 10/18, 1974.

As argued by Khatibi, in the Quranic text the figure of the mirror appears as one of the most important calligraphic figures; it is represented by the opposition of a number of writing sequences or signs that are exact reflections of each other, forming a symmetrical figure.³²⁷ Indeed, according to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, multiple meanings are attributed to the symbolism of the mirror in Islamic thought and in Sufi philosophy.³²⁸ Firstly, the mirror does not only reflect the soul, it also has the potential to transform the soul. Secondly, it is a preferred metaphor and theme in Islamic philosophy and mystic thought that is inspired by Neoplatonism; it can be said to function as the “symbole du symbolisme”. Thirdly, in Sufi philosophy in particular, there is the belief that the universe is made out of a multitude of mirrors in which the “Essence” is being reflected in its multiplicity and infinity; “les miroirs symbolisent les possibilités qu’a l’essence de se déterminer elle-même”. Finally, in Islamic doctrine the mirror symbolises the conscience of the believer; according to a famous hadith “le croyant et le miroir du croyant”.

Equally evocative as the calligraphic figure of the labyrinth, the figure of the mirror is a recurrent image in *LMT*; it is embedded in a number of binary pairs constitutive of the narrative structure of *LMT* and of the deep level of meaning. In the binary pair of the childhood spaces of El Jadida and Essaouira, the town of Essaouira can be seen to function as a mirroring image of the town of El Jadida. However, whilst El Jadida is the space of cultural difference that divides the coloniser and the colonised, Essaouira is the space of memorial trace, it is a space of nostalgia and loss that can only be recovered and rewritten as a literary space. While, as has been shown, El Jadida can be seen to function as the site of discursivity, history and colonial power, Essaouira is experienced as a maternal space, a space of childhood and desire that is constructed as a mythical space.

³²⁷ See definition of the calligraphic figure of the mirror in Khatibi, A., *La Blessure du nom propre*, p. 203.

³²⁸ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, pp. 638-639.

As an ultimate site of writing, Essaouria is a lost space to be recovered by the writer “porté par le vent doux et salé de l’Océan”, a process that calls for “la renaissance de l’espace”. Indeed, an early image of the space of Essaouira surfaces on the first pages of *LMT* and ruptures the linearity of autobiographical discourse. In it, the narrator’s evocation of his entry into the sea when he was four years old captures his first sensory memories, in which the significations of the sounds la mer / la mère / mémoire become blurred:

Mer, mère, mémoire, lapsus échappés à cette frileuse nostalgie. Accord si décisif entre la mère et mon corps (...) Accord prédestiné, me dira-t-on, puisque la mer est le motif de ma première mélodie. (20)

Not surprisingly, it is the metaphor or the figure of *water* that predominates in the lyrical description of the space of Essaouira. Poetical references to the sea, the sounds of the waves, the beach, the sand, the boats and the water are frequent occurrences in this passage stretching over three pages. However, these images also function as exotic representations of the Moroccan space of the South. In the following passage, the narrator’s poetic description of the town as a “coquille entourée de sable [qui] s’ébauche en une miniature aux couleurs tendres” (36) is followed by the sensory evocations of sun and the *parfum* of the Moroccan South that appear stereotypical:

Coquille entourée de sable, cette ville s’ébauche en une miniature aux couleurs tendres, et je tais d’autres vibrations: la surprise du soleil, la ville se recroquevillant et le parfum d’argan, lieu commun du Sud marocain et impression douçâtre d’un vol continu. (36)

An exoticised image of the space of the city is reinforced by the sensual experiences of the narrator as a young child surrounded by the maternal, feminine figures of the narrator’s aunt and the other women in his aunt’s house. These eroticised, feminine spaces that the narrator identifies with the harem are given an ambivalent value; they remain spaces divided by the dichotomy of public-private and masculine-feminine space. The gendered division between the private space of home and the public space of the street in which the woman can only appear wearing the “haïk” is alluded to in the following passage:

De la maison de la tante, j'avais spectacle sur la rue, le haïk est une draperie en danse. Ma requête de descendre dans la rue me réintroduisait dans le jeu du clin d'œil, la femme par ici se couvrait tout le corps et l'on surprenait, sous une apparition fouguese, un seul œil, un seul bien au-dessus de mon appel. Je m'égarais devant ces formes imprécises. Sauve-toi. (36)

Sociologically speaking, the space of the harem and the related discourse of the veil or 'hijâb' do not only represent the physical separation or the physical barrier between men and women in Islamic society, they also install a social-political barrier in that society. They regulate the place of women in traditional Maghrebian society and their identity by constricting them to the private, interior spaces of the house and the harem, in opposition to the public, exterior spaces (such as the street) constructed as the spaces of the masculine.³²⁹

If Khatibi remains ambivalent about the space of the harem in *LMT*, the figure of the prostitute and the space of the brothel are valued positively, as it can be deduced from the following two passages:

J'appris avec eux [les Américains] la direction du bordel. Les prostituées de la ville étaient amusées, m'a-t-on dit, par ces mâcheurs têtus qui cachaient leur sexe dans de petites poches jamais vues. (16)

Les putains de Casablanca fumaient des cigarettes avec le sexe, c'était du luxe, bien sûr! Le bordel de notre petite ville était modeste: un mercantilisme artisanal, un bordel intime, presque familial (...) Adolescent, je conclusais: arrachons la pureté des ténèbres d'une putain et la prostitution du cœur d'une pucelle. Dichotomie à tous les égards mystique: je divisais les autres avec mes phantasmes et me classais dans un étrange érotisme. (23)

Consequently, whereas the spaces of the home and of the harem in *LMT* are constructed as the traditional spaces of the feminine, the space of the brothel in *LMT* is constructed as a transgressive space on / of the border where the traditional values of purity and chastity can be allied by those of the prostitute as a

³²⁹ Mernissi, F., *Sultanes oubliées, Chefs d'état en Islam*, Casablanca: Le Fennec, 1990, p. 109-110: "L'Islam est un phénomène cosmique, et, en tant que concept territorial, il est menaçant... L'Islam est un phénomène cosmique, un rapport précis à l'espace. Et cette dimension cosmique est ce qui fait de la différence des sexes une architecture. La femme appartient à l'espace intérieur, le harim, l'espace défendu, et le chef d'Etat appartient à l'espace extérieur, l'espace public" (cited by Michel-Mansour, T., *La portée esthétique du signe dans le texte maghrébin*, Paris: Editions Publisud, 1994, p. 96). The term "place" in Mernissi's argument, explains Michel-Mansour, should be understood both in the sense of "lieu" and "l'espace". Thus, if a woman penetrates into a space that has been coded as masculine in Maghrebian society, she will be viewed as subverting the established order or causing the "fitna".

feminine figure that is capable of both transgressing the traditional socio-political role assigned to women and of defying Western imperial domination.

To summarise, the (post)colonial space of the native city of El Jadida is constructed in *LMT* as a site of discursivity that allows for the existence of competing and contrasting discourses on the space of the postcolonial city and on the Western and non-Western imaginations of that space, as seen in the case of the Moroccan spaces of the labyrinth and the medina. On the other hand the space of Essaouira is represented as the space of the feminine; it signifies the space of desire, but also of rupture of meaning. It becomes a space of (individual and collective) memorial trace that is in opposition to the space of El Jadida as the space of cultural difference.

4.2.2. The Representation of the European City and the Move Towards Deterritorialisation

In a much later text entitled *Un Été à Stockholm*, a novel that deals with the constructs and ideas of travelling identities and translation in the globalised world, Khatibi introduces the space of the Northern city of Stockholm as space for his text. There, the space of the Northern city is imagined to function as a site of the realisation of an identity in “becoming”, a question that can be said to be Khatibi’s writing project from *LMT*. But it is not so much Khatibi’s move from the dual space of Maghreb–France as depicted in *LMT* to a space of deterritorialisation embodied in the space of the North that should surprise here; it is more the fact that the city of Stockholm functions in Khatibi’s novel as a cosmopolitan space where the process of deciphering of (postcolonial) memory that was initiated in *LMT* can be opened up to the possibility of an exploration and actualisation of cultural border crossings and passages of identities as the narrator learns to explore “le secret des frontières, des passages, des issues et des impasses” (318). The city of Stockholm appears as a utopia of cosmopolitan space where cultural translation is possible; it

is also the city of/on the border; it is part of the “territoire-limite” of Sweden (319). Thus, here, Sweden signifies the space of peripheral Europe that casts its decentred gaze on the European space; Khatibi adopts the writing position of the “third eye” evoked previously, a technique that participates in the demystification of European space. Interestingly, Stockholm is the city that René Descartes visited and died in in 1650 after he was invited by the Swedish queen Christina to be her philosophy tutor, something that is evoked in the novel. Here, the allusion is made to the existence of the periphery–centre constellation during the early modern era and the cultural domination of the European centres of Paris and London over centres of Northern Europe such as Stockholm and Copenhagen.

Contrary to the peripheral space of the Northern city in *Un Été à Stockholm*, the post/colonial space of the European metropole – Paris – is a space experienced as dysphoric and assigned a dysphoric value in *LMT*. Khatibi’s representation of the French metropole is often characterised by irony and parody as predominant writing devices. In the chapter entitled “Rive Gauche” the narrator/author gives an objectifying account of his experiences and reflections on the cultural colonial urban space of Paris. Here, the figure of the mirroring image of the Other is recast in the socio-cultural context of the colonialist experience. The idea of the “Other in the Self” is further explored through a series of reflections that signify the dangers of the violent encounter with the West. The narrator qualifies his first journey as his first “tentation nomade”, exclaiming: “Ce vol, rencontrer l’Occident dans le voyage de l’identité et de la différence sauvage” (73).

The majority of the cultural and public spaces of Paris that the narrator visits or resides in remain spaces that signify detachment, boredom and evoke a sense of solitude and nostalgia; there, the feelings of cultural alienation predominate, while at the same time the narrator searches for his own identity reflected in the mirror of the West:

Je souffrais d'un chagrin sans emblème, mais ma patience était bien coriace, je ressemblais à l'égaré présent à moitié dans ses ombres, passant et disparaissant dans le reflet d'un coin de rue... Dans le métro, on lisait pour moi, on parlait de la vie lointaine, tout m'était égal. (75)

At the same time, as an “éthnographe démusclé de l'Occident”, the narrator parodies the French cultural and literary scene of Paris; these spaces represent sites of quintessential, colonial French identity as is the case of Robbe-Grillet or Godard, avant-garde figures who are nevertheless figures of the French cultural canon. From these passages on Paris it appears that the recovery of the narrator's identity is possible only through the recovery of the cultural spaces of the Maghrebian literary and artistic heritage; he makes references to Kateb, “poète errant”, and to Cherkaoui, the young Moroccan painter inspired by Klee. The experience of the modern city of Paris with its multiple urban, cultural spaces that are only provided as distractions from solitude is lived by the narrator with a prevalent feeling of dysphoria, a feeling that highlights the alienating experience of exile and process of “acculturation” of the colonised subject who cannot be inscribed into the dominating space of the French metropole. Ultimately, Paris remains a space where it is impossible to cross cultural, political, social borders; it remains a space of “la différence sauvage”. Like the city of El Jadida, Paris is a space of discursivity, of reproduction of a Eurocentric discourse on spatiality; it is a space defined by cultural, social and political difference.

The chapter on the alienating experience of Paris finishes with a break or rupture in the narrative; no issue is possible in the space of the dual relationship Maghreb–France; the narrator / author gives his place to his double: “Je parle de mon passé comme s'il s'agissait chaque fois d'un temps à expulser. Soit! Je donne la parole à un autre double!” (87). Both from a semiotic analysis point of view and from the point of view of Massey's critique of the production of geographies of power, Khatibi's inclusion of the space of Paris in *LMT* indicates that Khatibi does not deconstruct the dualistic relationship Maghreb – France, thus reproducing the North-South geographies of power.

The first chapter of the second part (or *Série Hasardeuse II*), “Fugue sur la différence”, evokes the period of the narrator’s travels around the world before coming back to Morocco. Here, the writing and construction of an identity in “becoming” is explored through the trope of wandering and the metaphors of “passage” and border-crossing and the inclusion of the urban spaces of London, Sofia, Stockholm, Havana, New Delhi, and Berlin, that all signify spaces of a cosmopolitan identity. However, the dualism of the European and non-European spaces persists; these spaces remain opposed to the primordial space of the Maghrebian imaginary, the desert, and to the ancestral, labyrinthine city of Cordoba. As the space of the void and as a negation of history, the desert is the mythical space of Bedouin culture:

Eh quoi! croit-il, l’invité du désert, jouer avec cet espace sans danger pour son propre espace? Eh quoi! croit-il, l’invité, divaguer plus fort que le désert, et quelle phrase en errance le retiendra devant ce vide qui ne lui renvoie rien? Eh quoi, croit-il rebondir avec les Bédouins par-delà des siècles, vers la horde des poètes poignardés de dos, royaumes et plumes de roseau d’un parchemin? (100)

The discourse on dual identity is again enacted in the short section “Variation sur la Différence” that finishes with the final reversal of discourse on identity and memory. Indeed, the last image of this chapter is one in which the narrator marks the body of the West with a tattoo; this is a mirroring act of the colonised image of the Moroccan prostitute that bears the signs of tattoos imposed by the coloniser. This ultimate symbolic reversal indicates that both the colonised and the coloniser are not only engaged in a relationship of dominance, they are also engaged in the relationship of mutual dependence in the sense that Memmi gives it when he speaks of the duo colonised–coloniser. The images of the “first”, “second” and “third” sign that are evoked by one of the two doubles in the epilogue of the novel entitled “Double contre double” can be read as references to the cultural traces to be recuperated in the context of the Moroccan imaginary; they can be read as a recalling into cultural memory of the (postcolonial) Self. Thus, any decolonisation of the imagination or what Khatibi might refer to as “la Très Grande Violence” must pass through the deciphering and the recovery of cultural traces contained in the individual and shared collective memories and histories of a nation.

To conclude this reading of Khatibi's text, the analysis presented here showed that spatiality in Khatibi's text *LMT* can be seen to be fundamentally constructed around the notions or paradigms of cultural difference and memory trace, notions that make the practice of demystification of spatiality in the Maghrebian context ambiguous. The spaces of the Moroccan city are represented both as spaces of desire and as spaces of discursivity that allow for a critique of France's imperial discourse on cultural domination to take place whilst at the same time reinforcing a view of space and place grounded in Moroccan identity and cultural trace. As has been argued in the introduction to this analysis, there exists in *LMT* a close connection between space, memory and identity, perceived from the point of view of both *différence* and *différance* or trace; however, this discourse installs an ambiguity at the centre of the text that makes Khatibi's method of reading of "intersémiotique transversale" a difficult one to apply to the text. The semiotic analysis conducted on the text revealed that the production of meaning at all levels of meaning is maintained in *LMT* through a series of culturally and socially determined (apparent) oppositions that are governed by the fundamental opposition of identity and difference. The dichotomies of public-private and masculine-feminine space are maintained in the representation of the Moroccan spaces explored in the text, something that does not support a feminist view on, and critique of, the production of discourses on gendered space and place. What Khatibi is primarily interested in is not the deconstruction of those gendered discourses on spatiality that define both Moroccan society and identity, but rather in the processes and practices of decolonisation of the Moroccan subject that can only be attained through the paradigm of memory trace and the critique of the discourse on cultural difference.

4.3. Deconstructing Exile: Distance and the Writing of the Native City in Hédi Bouraoui's *Retour à Thyna*

*Quand ma Sfaxitude me renvoie
Son goût de pataclès et de dorade
Son parfum de fill et yasmine
J'oublie le halo de son soufre*

*Je ne ressens point de nostalgie*³³⁰

Hédi Bouraoui

As was argued in the analysis presented in the last section, Khatibi interrogates cultural memory constructed as a discourse on identity and memory trace, and examines its consequences for the construction of collective and individual identity in the Maghrebian postcolonial context, issues that say something fundamental about the relationship between space and identity and problematise the notion of border-thinking. By contrast, the work of the Tunisian-born writer Hédi Bouraoui can be said to interrogate the issue of border-identity and of identities on the border in the context of exile.

Hédi Bouraoui was born in 1932 in Sfax, Tunisia. He was educated in France and the United States where he received degrees in English and American literature and in Romance studies. After he completed his doctorate in comparative literature (French, English, American and Italian) in the United States, Bouraoui obtained a position at York University, Toronto, Canada, where he has been teaching and living since.³³¹

An acclaimed poet and writer, he is the author of over twenty collections of poetry, as well as numerous novels, works of critical theory and short stories. He has won many national and international literary prizes and was the founder of the *Centre Canada-Maghreb*, recently renamed as the *Centre Canada-Méditerranée*. Bouraoui's writing project fundamentally addresses the problematic of individual and

³³⁰ Bouraoui, H., "Sfaxitude" in: *Sfaxitude*, Bergerac : Les Amis de la poésie, 2005.

³³¹ As Bouraoui himself noted in an interview that was conducted with the author on the eve of the *Poet in the City* event in July 2011, he was the first one to introduce a transcultural studies programme in Canada and gave courses in Maghrebian, African and Caribbean literature (see interview in Appendix 2 of this thesis). His work has received relatively little attention within academia. See, however, *Perspectives Critiques: L'œuvre d'Hédi Bouraoui* (eds Sabiston, E. & Crosta, S.), Ontario: Série monographique en sciences humaines 11 (publié en collaboration avec le Centre Canada-Maghreb), 2006. The book is a collection of twenty-five essays based on papers presented at an international conference entitled *Transculturel-Transpoétique : L'œuvre d'Hédi Bouraoui* that took place at York University, Toronto, 26-28 May 2005.

collective identity in the context of global contemporary culture and society through the notions of *transculturalisme*, *créaculture* and *transpoétique*, three crucial concepts in Bouraoui's politics and poetics of writing. As the author himself defines these terms in an interview:

la *transpoétique* c'est le transvasement d'une poésie à une autre, le passage d'un registre poétique à un autre, le va-et-vient entre les langues, les métaphores, les styles, les registres, les sonorités (...) La *transculture*, dans ce sens-là, est un échange de valeurs culturelles différenciées qui s'entrecroisent, s'harmonisent, se chevauchent etc. Tout comme, d'ailleurs, la *créaculture* (...) qui peut se définir comme l'interaction entre l'Homme et son milieu, mais aussi comme un échange de créations de valeurs culturelles entre l'homme et la femme, l'individu et le pays, les sociétés et les nations.³³²

Bouraoui defines himself as Sfaxien, Tunisian, Maghrebien and African-Mediterranean, but he also embraces his European and North American cultural influences, experiences and education, something that is visible from his opus, which transcends Maghrebien, European and Canadian literary and cultural spaces and borders. He does not wish to be locked into the (cultural and critical) space of dualistic thinking or what he calls the space of "binarité infernale", something that, according to him, has happened to the majority of Maghrebien authors.

The unique position that Bouraoui occupies as a writer who transcends all borders and as someone who has appropriated the notions of "transpoétique" and "transculturalisme", notions that he has often used himself when speaking of his work, makes it impossible to assign a single origin, either cultural or geographic, to his work.³³³ The analysis that is being offered here concentrates on one of the few texts in which Hédi Bouraoui deals with the issue of exile and the space of the native city. It interrogates the

³³² See interview conducted with Hédi Bouraoui in Appendix 2 of this thesis.

³³³ Christiane Ndiaye remarks that Bouraoui's work seems to receive very little attention from those scholars who work in the field of Maghrebien Francophone literatures. Indeed, at the time when Ndiaye's article was written, Bouraoui was still not listed on the LIMAG website as a Maghrebien author. However, this lack has since been corrected and the editors of the site include him in the corpus of referenced authors. Ndiaye, C., "Bouraoui: la critique devant une écriture transculturelle et transgénérique" in: *Perspectives Critiques, L'œuvre d'Hédi Bouraoui* (eds Sabiston, E., Crosta, S.), Ontario: Série monographique en sciences humaines 11 (publié en collaboration avec Centre Canada-Maghreb), 2006, pp. 263-277.

representation of native space from the position of critical and geographic distance, issues that are of primordial importance for Bouraoui and for the argument of this thesis.

4.3.1. Exile and Distance: Writing Between Utopia and Dystopia in *Retour à Thyna*

The construction of native space in *Retour à Thyna* and the deployment of the trope of the native city of Sfax will be examined from the writing strategy of *distance*. This strategy participates in the deconstruction of exile both at the level of the poetic and at the level of the discourse on native space and the border as viewed within the paradigm of Mignolo's border-thinking. These are issues that are fundamental for the discussion of the border that is presented here. It should be aligned with Massey's socio-political, anti-essentialist interpretation of place already discussed previously, which should be defined outside the paradigms of nostalgia and loss or the search for the identity of a place and lost authenticity.

The critical and writing position of *distance* or distanciation can be seen to fulfil several roles and functions in *Retour à Thyna*. Firstly, it enables the author not to be identified with the characters of the novel, something that, according to Bouraoui, is a necessary precondition of novel writing.³³⁴ Secondly, and equally importantly, the adoption of the position of (critical) distance is necessary, according to the author, in order to deconstruct the duality or the "binarité infernale" in the relation *colonised-coloniser* or

³³⁴ "Dans *Retour à Thyna*, j'ai fait en sorte que les personnages ne sortent pas de la Tunisie, car je ne voulais pas que l'on identifie les personnages avec l'auteur. Mon but n'était pas d'écrire 'l'histoire de Bouraoui', le nombrilisme ne m'intéresse pas. Même si je prends des éléments de ma vie et les mets en fiction, je ne veux pas que l'on m'associe à mes personnages. Une distanciation entre les personnages et l'auteur est absolument nécessaire" (see interview in Appendix 2 of this thesis).

Maghrebien–French that the majority of Maghrebian authors, in Bouraoui’s opinion, have internalised and have not been able to bypass in their writing, as already mentioned. This notion of distance appears also in Bouraoui’s later collection of poems entitled “Sfaxitude” published in 2005.³³⁵ In the introduction to this collection, Bouraoui describes the experience of what it means for him to write the native city from a distance. In it, the author speaks of the writer’s creative experience that is to be expressed neither as a “nostalgie de pacotille” nor as one that can be seen in terms of alienation, but rather as one that wants to privilege a position of thinking differently about place and space, thinking that appears close to Massey’s own conceptualisation of space:

Ecrire sa ville natale n’est pas contempler son nombril! Ni conforter l’ego dans sa folle fierté de quadrature du cercle. C’est la nommer, lui rendre ainsi les honneurs. Et colmater en même temps les brèches de la blessure du Lieu de naissance. Se distancier pour ajuster l’Idéal que l’on aurait souhaité qu’elle garde et la réalité affligeante qu’elle assume sans rien nous demander.³³⁶

Thus, while the writer warns against the dangers of writing a “nostalgie de pacotille”, he also argues that the position of critical distance or distanciation is necessary in order for the author to be able to look at the native space without idealisation or regret. However, as the collection of Bouraoui’s essays show, the position of distance is as complex as it is ambiguous; although adopted critically and theoretically, is also experienced both emotionally and artistically.

Bouraoui’s reflections on the notions of space, place and exile are very close to Walter Mignolo’s own interpretation of exile as a “location-in-movement” rather than “location-in-land” or dis-location. For Bouraoui, as for Mignolo, the notions of (native) place and exile are not bound up with the notions of territoriality or location as fixed, defined entities. Exile is not to be viewed as geographic displacement or in terms of spatial loss of native land; rather, both exile and place need to be seen as existing “beyond the

³³⁵ Bouraoui, H., *Sfaxitude*, Bergerac: Les Amis de la Poésie, 2005. The copy used here is the copy sent electronically by the author. The pagination refers to that document, not to the published collection.

³³⁶ Bouraoui, H., *Sfaxitude*, 2005, p. 2.

imaginary of the nation, of the territory with frontiers”. This in turn means that exile is a construct that can be experienced as a state of mind, as a “location-in-movement rather than geographic dis-location”:

Exiles “have” to leave the territory where they belonged and, consequently, are located in a particular kind of subaltern position, and that subaltern position creates the conditions for double consciousness and border thinking. To be in exile is to be simultaneously in two locations and in a subaltern position.³³⁷

As Mignolo argues and as it has been discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the thinking behind the notions of “territoriality” and “location” as fixated entities and the interpretation of any movement as dis-location from a fixed origin have their origins in the “national imaginary that began to take shape in the eighteenth century in Europe”. It therefore follows that to exercise border-thinking is to deconstruct or demystify the discourse on both location (space and place) and exile:

All these different kinds of locations in movements that I am referring to are all forms that have been historically articulated by the colonial nature of power (i.e., coloniality of power) in the making of the modern /colonial world system. And in that sense, in that precise sense, they are all potential loci of epistemic, politic [sic], ethic [sic], and aesthetic border thinking.³³⁸

Thus, Bouraoui’s concept of *sfaxitude* can be understood as a “state of mind”. Indeed, as he explains, it is to be understood as “une attitude d’être Sfaxien, avec tous ses soubassements culturels”.³³⁹ Although fully appropriating his local origins, the city in Bouraoui’s work, paradoxically, appears as a multicultural and cosmopolitan space and is a recurrent locus of writing. As the author explains:

dans mes livres, je décris toujours le couple, la ville, le pays, le cosmos – j’aime donner une vision globalisante du monde. Les identités figées et l’enfermement des gens, ça me révolte.³⁴⁰

Narratively speaking, *RT*³⁴¹ is a novel composed of ten chapters or points of entry into the different spaces and histories of the city of Sfax and in which both the Tunisian past and the present are being questioned.

³³⁷ Delgado, L.E., Romero, R. & Mignolo, W., “Local Histories and Global Designs: an interview with Walter Mignolo”, in: *Discourse*, 22:3, Fall 2000, Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, p. 14-15.

³³⁸ Delgado, L.E., Romero, R. & Mignolo, W., “Local Histories and Global Designs: an interview with Walter Mignolo”, in: *op.cit.*, p.16.

³³⁹ See *Interview with Hédi Bouraoui* in Appendix 2 of this thesis.

³⁴⁰ *Interview with Hédi Bouraoui*, Appendix 2.

The last chapter, entitled “Sur les traces de l’olivier: La paix dans les cœurs” can be seen as a space of utopia where it becomes possible for the individual, the couple, the city and the country to attain a state of peace and mutual understanding and the total acceptance of difference. In terms of novel typology, *RT* is written in the genre of the detective story and contains several characteristics and narrative rules that can be ascribed to the “roman à énigme”, as defined by Todorov.³⁴² In addition, it contains elements of a love story (between Mansour and Zitouna, who gradually fall in love while investigating the murder of their friend Kateb), an aspect that is excluded from the detective genre as defined by Todorov. However, it also has many elements of the historiographic novel, where multiple histories and different layers of the city’s past are unveiled in combination with a socio-political commentary on Tunisia’s nationalist project since the time after independence. In its questioning of the relationship between the past and the present, *RT* can be viewed as a postmodern novel in which the very processes of writing history are called into question by assuming the position and practices of “New Historicism”. Instead of a subject–object binary paradigm contained in modernist thinking, “New Historicism assumes the impossibility of critical distance and the inseparability of the subject and object, thereby enabling the writer to “rewrite a different kind of history”. However, Bouraoui’s own appropriation of the position of distance calls this practice into question.

Retour à Thyra tells the story of Mansour Hachem, a young journalist from Taparura, Roman toponym of the city of Sfax, who investigates the mysterious murder of his friend Kateb, “écrivain public et fonctionnaire de Radio Taparura”, shortly after Tunisian independence. In his quest to uncover the perpetrator and the motive for the crime, Mansour is helped by an emancipated young woman of Berber origin, Zitouna, with whom he is secretly in love. Zitouna, who is also Kateb’s cousin and fiancée, is haunted by the memories of rape by her cousin that occurred when she was fifteen years old. She can be

³⁴¹ The abbreviation *RT* will be used every time reference is made to *Retour à Thyra* in this analysis.

³⁴² Todorov, T., “Typologie du roman policier”, in: *Poétique de la prose*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980, pp. 9-19. Todorov analyses two principal types of the detective novel, the “roman à énigme” and the “roman noir”.

seen as a second principal character of the story, as she is herself embarked on a quest of recovery of the multiple cultural heritage and occulted past of the ancient roman city of Thyna or *Thaenae* situated in the proximity of the city of Taparura / Sfax. Both Mansour's and Zitouna's quests take on the form of a double search: the solving of the mystery of Kateb's murder and the revival of their native city's occulted cultural memories and histories. Kateb, whose name means *the writer* in Arabic, is "le disparu de la transparence" (219). He is an idealist, at odds with the nation and the local authorities and its political elites, as he too tries to restore Taparura's multiple cultural past and histories. The significance of his murder is symbolic; Kateb can be seen to represent the paradigm of the engaged artist or intellectual who assumes the position of internal exile in his own country. His death cannot be prevented; it can only be investigated and explained. It is interesting to note here that Kateb's body is found "juste à la frontière entre la ville arabe et la ville européenne", signalling a parallel between the physical location of the body on the border of two quarters and the symbolic location of the cultural and identity borders of the (colonial) European and Maghrebian space:

Kateb étendu de tout son long, poings fermes repliés vers le buste avec sa tête fracassée pointant vers Bab B'Har et ses pieds vers les remparts de la Médina donnait l'impression d'avoir été propulsé de la muraille vers l'espace fluctuant et libre de la mer, comme si la terre expurgeait son mal pour le projeter et le déverser dans les flots anonymes d'une Méditerranée boudeuse. (60)

The location of Kateb's body on the border of the two cities can be assigned multiple readings. It can be interpreted as the writer falling victim to the negative consequences of colonialism or as a critique of the threat of artistic liberty and expression in post-independence Tunisia and the ascent of the "single identity" discourse that may be said to have found its basis in Tunisian nationalism. This criticism needs to be read in the larger economic and political context of the government's rapid industrialisation in less developed parts of the countries after Tunisian Independence in 1956.³⁴³

³⁴³ After independence, the Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba apparently embraced liberal, pro-European values. As Kenneth J. Perkins notes in his book *A History of Modern Tunisia*, Bourguiba's economic and political policies in the sixties included a series of industrialisation projects in the less developed parts of the country in the centre, south, and west that would make the country less dependent on imports. It was expected that these policies would

If attention is now turned to the narrative structure of *RT*, the narrative structure of the novel can be represented as shown in Diagram 8:

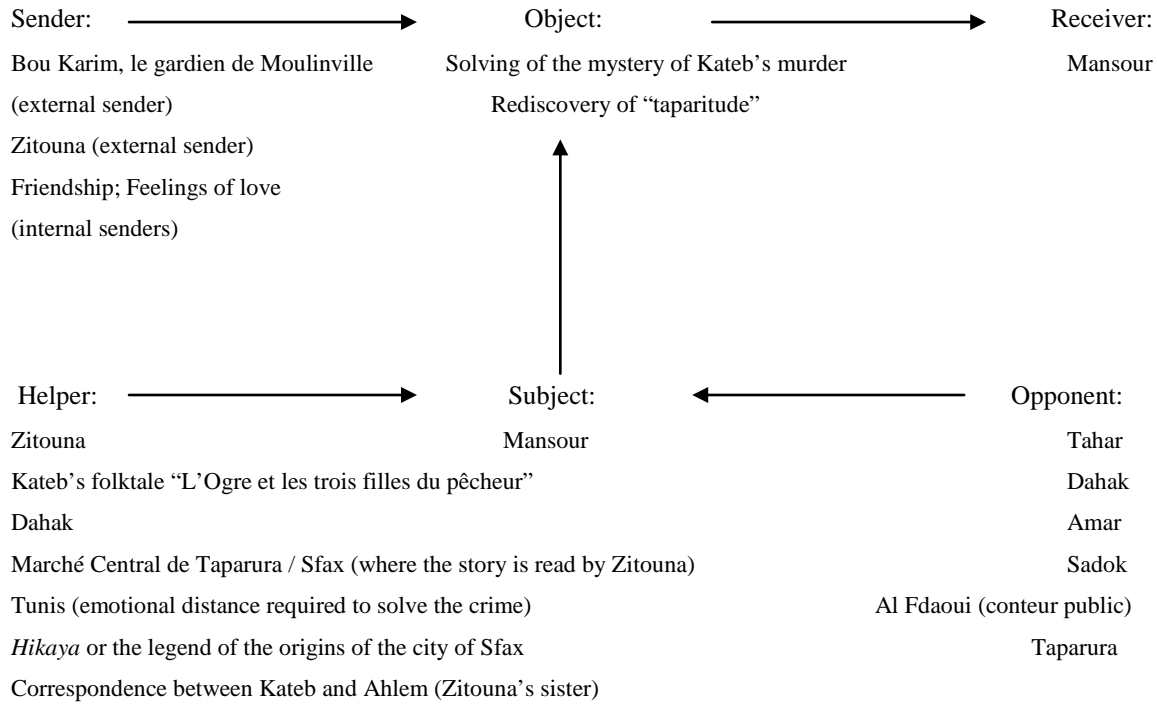


Diagram 8: Actantial narrative schema in *Retour à Thyna*.

As can be seen from Diagram 8 that represents the actantial model from Mansour's perspective, it is Zitouna and Dahak (an actor) that play the role of helpers in the narrative. An important clue helping Mansour in his quest is Kateb's folktale that Zitouna reads posthumously in public on the Marché Central de Taparura. Zitouna assumes here the male role of the *conteur public*, a public role that women are not

"balance economic growth by extending modern industrialisation beyond the capital, where they had been concentrated in the colonial period" (149). These industrialisation projects were largely unsuccessful, as the author explains, for a variety of social, political and economic reasons. See: Perkins, J. K., *A History of Modern Tunisia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

allowed to assume in traditional Arab society and that is now indicative of her emancipated status in post-independence Tunisia. Zitouna's sister Ahlem is another female character who can be seen to play an important role in the narrative. It is after Ahlem is found dead and a note from Kateb is found among her belongings that Mansour is able to start unravelling the puzzle of Kateb's murder. Ahlem, who has been sending threatening notes to Kateb because she witnessed her sister's rape, contributes to his murder indirectly by confiding her grievances to Al Fdaoui, the city's *conteur public*, and offering him money to avenge her sister. However, Al Fdaoui, who ends up confessing to Kateb's murder, is also working as a spy for Tahar, a local politician, who has both personal and professional reasons for wanting Kateb dead. Interestingly, a negative role is assigned here to the character of the traditional storyteller, a role that is normally portrayed positively in Maghrebian texts. The symbol of the storyteller depicted negatively can be seen as representing the inauthentic writer. But it can also be viewed as a social commentary on modern Tunisia's negligence of the traditional values of oral culture that have contributed to the gradual disappearance of the professional storytelling that used to fulfil an important social function in Tunisia until the sixties. The negative consequences of the disappearance of storytelling in the city are commented on in the following passage:

les habitants souffrent d'une claustrophobie étouffante dans leur couscoussier cloisonné dont ils ne peuvent échapper. Aussi la bouffée d'oxygène plus ou moins attendue d'une reprise de la tradition des conteurs mise à jour ne peut que les satisfaire et recevoir, de leur part, un franc succès. Innover, instaurer la surprise culturelle au cœur même des transactions marchandes, voilà l'idée de Dahak. (84)

As one can see from Diagram 8, Tunisian oral history and tradition are important helpers in the story. Both Kateb's folktale *L'Ogre et les trois filles du pêcheur* to be told on the Marché Central (constructed by the French) by Zitouna and the legend or the *Hikaya* of the origins of the city of Sfax told by Al Fdaoui contain crucial clues to be deciphered by Mansour and Zitouna in order to understand the motives behind Kateb's murder.

As will be shown in the analysis that follows, the novel can be seen to be constructed around the fundamental opposition of values of tradition and modernity in modern Tunisia. The representation of the deep level of meaning of the text can be produced as shown in the semiotic square below:

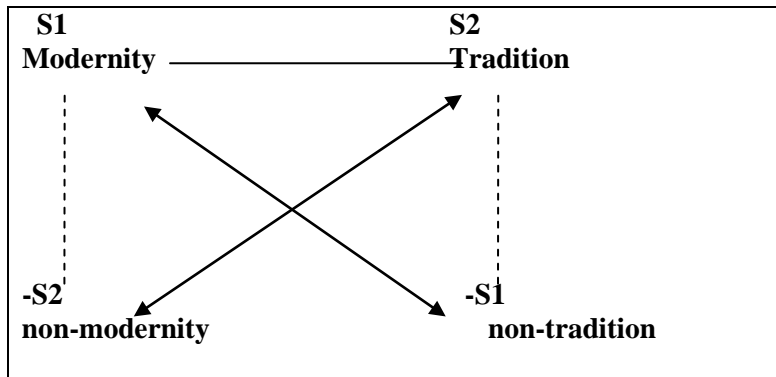


Diagram 9. Representation of the *semiotic square* for the isotopies of tradition and modernity in *Retour à Thyna*.

The identification of the theme of tradition and modernity at the fundamental level of meaning identified in *RT* concurs with socio-political readings that have identified this theme as being a recurrent one in Tunisian writing in French, something that a number of critics have pointed out. As the Tunisian poet and critic Tahar Bekri notes, a number of Tunisian novels written in French during the eighties deal critically with the question of modernisation and the nationalistic discourse of progress and modernity that were introduced by Bourguiba’s government after independence.³⁴⁴ However, Bekri also observes that although the quality of this literature is undeniable, it is mostly sustained by authors who have emigrated as a consequence of the decline of popularity and use of the French language in Tunisia’s literary circles

³⁴⁴ Bekri, T., *Littératures de Tunisie et du Maghreb, suivi de Réflexions et propos sur la poésie et la littérature*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1994. Authors such as Hélé Béji and Fawzi Mellah deal with the problem of “false modernity” or the political question of exercise of power in Tunisia.

and the lack of publication opportunities for those writers writing in French.³⁴⁵ This geographic distance, according to Bekri, was necessary as a number of writers found themselves constrained by a negative climate and a feeling of auto-censorship: “La distance géographique était nécessaire pour quitter des situations qui ont conduit à la création des blocages négatifs et même à l’auto-censure” (27).³⁴⁶

So, the semiotic reading of the text shows that the narrative in *RT* is constructed around the fundamental opposition tradition–modernity already mentioned, or between the symbolically opposed socio-political space of Taparura that is conceived as a space of the masculine, and the mythical space of Thyna that is conceived as a space of the feminine. In the analysis that follows, it will be shown that, as in the case of Khatibi’s *LMT*, the space of the city is constructed both as a space of discursivity and a site of conflicting memories and histories. First, the notion of the spatial isotopy of passage will be examined; it will be argued that the concept of the “gate” is a fundamental metaphor in Bouraoui’s writing and whose meaning conveys the idea of opening and border-crossing.

4.3.1.1. Border-Crossing and the Trope of Passage in *Retour à Thyna*

As already pointed out, *RT*’s narrative is divided into ten chapters. Seven out of ten chapter titles refer to a different gate or “bab” (door) of the city of Sfax: “Bab Ed Diwane”, “Bab B’Har”, “Bab Jebli”, “Bab El Farh”, “Bab El Kashbah”, “Bab El Gharbi” and “Bab Echargui”. These “doors” or gates take the reader through a number of different narrative stages and can be seen to mark different openings into the spaces

³⁴⁵ As already discussed in chapter 2, the decline of the French language since Independence needs to be read within the context of Tunisian specific linguistic and colonial history and its application of bilingualism. After Tunisian independence, the Arab language was introduced as the official language in the country, but the French language was still taught at both primary and secondary level and the linguistic situation of bilingualism was prolonged.

³⁴⁶ Bekri, T., *Littératures de Tunisie et du Maghreb, suivi de Réflexions et propos sur la poésie et la littérature*, 1994. One could cite here the case of self-imposed exile of the Tunisian-Jewish writer Albert Memmi, who emigrated to France in 1956. Memmi completed his University studies at the Sorbonne University after the Second World War and married a Frenchwoman.

and histories in the past, present and the future of the city and the country. They can be seen to function as important points of passage or as spatial and historical borders that need to be crossed in order for the story and the quest to be completed. Each chapter is introduced by a quotation from texts of the North African, mostly Tunisian, literary tradition such as those by Saint Augustine, Albert Memmi or Mahmoud Messadi, as well as those from a number of oral traditional sources such as Tunisian and Berber proverbs and songs. Thus, each chapter is not only an entry into the space and the history of the city, it is also a site of intertextuality in which a dialogue between of the author and his own literary heritage is established. While each “gate” acts as an entry into the different stages of the story and important events in the city’s and character’s history, the spaces that are assigned a function in the narrative are the ones that demarcate, delineate and connect the European city and the Medina in the city of Sfax during the colonial period. As already seen, Khatibi’s description of the Moroccan city of El Jadida in *La Mémoire tatouée* shows how the colonially imposed separation of the different spaces of the Arabic city has negative consequences for the construction of an integrated identity, by introducing a fracture or rupture in the imagination of the colonised and ex-colonised subject, as well as in the cultural memory and history of the ex-colonised subject and nation. In *RT*, it is the gate *Bab Ed Diwane* (principal gate of the Medina of Sfax) that represents a space of both connection and separation between the local and European urban spaces, something that is evoked in the following passage:

Bab Ed Diwane, Porte du "Conseil" qui s'ouvre sur la mer puisque, dans les temps immémoriaux, elle abritait les bureaux de la douane et du conseil du Pacha. Cette première ouverture donnait, au sud, sur le faubourg des chrétiens et des juifs à la deuxième moitié du dix-huitième siècle et, au Nord, sur la Grande Mosquée à l'intérieur de la Médina. (18-19)

The history of the gate Bab Ed Diwane that used to connect the spaces of the Jews and Christians in the south and the spaces of the Arabs within the Medina in the North evokes a time of peaceful cohabitation of the various ethnicities, cultures and religions in the city prior to the French colonisation. The gate’s destruction by the French colonisers as they invaded the city in 1881 after the rebellion by the local

population, is both a symbol of the city's rebellious spirit and the moment of entry into the time of colonisation, that will result in the disintegration of the texture of the city's multiple cultural memories.

A second gate of significance in the novel is Bab B'Har; indeed, it is the arrival of the French that prompts the construction of Bab B'Har in the city. "Bab B'Har" can be literally translated as "Porte de la Mer" and designates the modern city, also called Bled Essaouri or "ville française".³⁴⁷ Conceived as a modern, European urban space that would allow the French to effectively govern the city and would provide them with direct access to sea, access which had undoubtedly an important economic function, it also functioned as an exclusion zone for the indigenous population.³⁴⁸ As remarked by the author, however, its borders were not entirely impenetrable, an assertion that signifies a space of ambiguity and mutual dependence in the duo colonised-coloniser:

On avait construit Bab B'har en gagnant sur la Méditerranée. Vaste coquille prête à accueillir aujourd'hui la population autochtone frustrée depuis trois quarts de siècle et qui voit là une occasion d'occuper le territoire jadis interdit par le Français. Dans les temps lointains, les rouleaux des vagues se fracassaient aux pieds des remparts de la Médina. Ce gain d'espace servit à ériger l'infrastructure à partir de laquelle les colons gouvernaient de main de maître. Pendant la période coloniale, les "indigènes" ne pouvaient habiter ce centre ville, tenu exclusivement dans les griffes puissantes de l'Administration et du Commerce. (...) La Porte de Mer s'étendait donc

³⁴⁷ This translation is provided by Bouraoui in *Retour à Thyna*, 1993.

³⁴⁸ Like in Sphax, "Bab B'Har" or the modern city was also erected in Tunis at the time of French colonisation. The urbanisation methods installed by the Europeans in the colonisation era follow a similar pattern in all main Tunisian cities; around the medina and the old city centre the modern European city is established with its administrative and financial centre. The progressive division between the modern and the traditional, old city has as a consequence the spatial and economic segregation of the non-European population. The process of modernisation and Europeanisation of the city leads at the same time to the ruralisation of the traditional city centre or the medina that is the consequence of the migration of the rural population into urban areas in search for work. See Kassab, A., & Ounaïnes, A., *Histoire générale de la Tunisie, Tome IV, L'époque contemporaine (1881-1956)*, Tunis: Sud Editions, 2010, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/124907923/HISTOIRE-GENERALE-DE-LA-TUNISIE-TOME-4-L-Epoque-Contemporaine> (accessed 27/05/2013): "Pour loger les européens, les Autorités du Protectorat entreprennent de mobiliser à partir des terres domaniales des superficies considérables à proximité des anciennes agglomérations urbaines ou villageoises et d'y aménager de nouveaux quartiers systématiquement viabilisés. La mobilisation des espaces voués à l'urbanisation est réalisée avec les mêmes méthodes et les mêmes procédures utilisées pour la création des centres de colonisation dans les régions rurales: par la domanialisation et l'expropriation et, secondairement, par l'achat à partir du fonds de colonisation" (p. 145). "Ce processus de dédoublement de la ville avait pour conséquence le déplacement du centre vers le noyau colonial et la dévitalisation de la cité traditionnelle ; il s'accompagnait d'une nette ségrégation spatiale, sociale et ethnique entre les différentes communautés" (p. 154).

de Bab Ed Diwane jusqu'au port. Cette topographie rigoureuse comportait des perméabilités, et les frontières n'étaient pas d'une étanchéité sans faille. (31-32)

In relation to the space of the Medina, the space of the European city can be seen to function as an extreme type of heterotopic space in the sense that Foucault defines it. Speaking of different types of heterotopias and the characteristics and functions they can be seen to appropriate and fulfil in a culture or society, the function of this extreme type of space is the creation of "another real" perfectly arranged and symmetrical space that can be seen to function as a result of the compensation principle for the lack of spatial order and symmetry encountered otherwise. In this particular instance, it can be understood as a mirror-image of the labyrinthine space of the Medina:

Enfin, le dernier trait des hétérotopies, c'est qu'elles ont, par rapport à l'espace restant, une fonction (...) Celles-ci se déploient entre deux pôles extrêmes (...) Ou bien au contraire, créant un autre espace, un autre espace réel, aussi parfait, méticuleux, aussi bien arrangé que le nôtre est désordonné, mal agencé et brouillon. Ça serait, l'hétérotopie non pas d'illusion mais de compensation et je me demande si ce n'est pas un peu de cette manière-là qu'on fonctionne dans certaines colonies.³⁴⁹

Foucault's ideas on colonial space echo Khatibi's views on the colonial imagination of the space of the Medina, imagination that allows for the space of the European city to function as a compensatory mechanism for restoring order and symmetry. Here, Foucault's uncertainty or vagueness in relation to how is one to define colonial space is obvious. The hidden link or relationship of causality that can be established between space, social relations and power (as Massey and Soja understand it) is missing from Foucault's analysis of the colonial spaces. However, his views on the interrelationship between geography and power are explained in a series of interviews conducted between 1972 and 1977.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ Foucault, M., "Des espaces autres. Hétérotopies", in: *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, vol.5, 1984, pp. 46-49. The text that was published in the French journal *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* in October 1984, had originally been written as the basis for a lecture given by Michel Foucault in 1967. It is considered to be one of the founding texts on the concept of space that preceded Lefebvre's publication *La Production de l'espace* in 1974. The criticism that Foucault received at the time and his ambivalent position towards the significance of his theory most probably had as a consequence that he never published the text. The text was never reviewed for publication and the manuscript was released into the public domain shortly before Foucault's death.

³⁵⁰ See Chapter 19, "Questions on geography" in: Crampton, J. and Elden, S. (eds), *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 174-182.

To conclude this section, the trope of the “gate” or “door” can be seen to function both as a point of closure and passage into the city’s cultural memory and history, as well as into the lives of the characters that inhabit these spaces. The trope of the gate signifies both a space of / on the border and of border-crossing; it functions both as a line of closure and opening in relation to cultural identity and difference.

4.3.1.2. The Dystopian Space of the Postcolonial City of Taparura or the Trope of Modernity

As already indicated, the tropes of tradition and modernity are constructed symbolically through the opposition of the two historical and cultural spaces of the cities of Taparura and Thyna. In the analysis that follows, the question will be asked as to what values are being attributed to the trope of tradition in relation to the trope of modernity and how the process of spatialisation of history and memory of these two cities contributes to the production of these values. This question is considered to have direct implications for the meaning that is given to spatial loss in *RT*, and for how spatial loss is defined. An analysis of the main spatial isotopies in *RT* will first be presented and discussed, followed by a socio-cultural reading of the main spaces identified.

Isotopy / Semes	Sememe	Frequency of sememes	Opposition
Native city	/ville/, /Sfax/, /cité/, /Taparura/	154	native–foreign; modernity–tradition
Country	/Tunisie/, /pays/	63	regional–national
Ancient (Punic) city	/Thyna/	27	modernity–tradition
Medina quarter	/Medina/	23	modernity–tradition

Capital city	/Tunis/	12	regional–national
Europe; Western culture	/France/, /Europe/, /européen/, /Occident/	12	Europe–Maghreb
Native quarter	/Moulinville/	5	local–urban
Colonial European quarter	/cité/	2	Europe–Maghreb
Paris	/Paris/	2	Europe–Maghreb

Table 4. The presentation of spatial isotopies in *Retour à Thyna*.

While semiotic analysis of isotopies of space in *RT* allows for an identification of the main spaces represented and the values assigned to these spaces, it does not allow for the clear interconnectedness between space and time or memory, something that is clearly embedded in Bouraoui’s narrative, to be expressed or analysed semiotically. So, the difficulty of applying the Greimassian model for the analysis of isotopies of “space-time” that was already noted in the texts analysed in Chapter 3 has been observed also in Bouraoui’s text. This is another example of the type of limitation that was encountered when applying Greimassian analysis to the corpus, something that can be counterbalanced by applying Massey’s reading and notion of space-time to the same corpus. One of the main objectives of this thesis, as already stated, was to apply semiotic analysis and to test how it engages with Massey’s and Soja’s theories on space.

As can be seen in Table 4, references that are used to designate the city of Sfax have the highest number of occurrences. As will be shown, in the descriptions that are given of its inhabitants dysphoric values predominate; these negative values are related to the larger context of rapid modernisation that occurred in Tunisia after the independence. On the other hand, a positive valence is attributed to the space of Thyna. Interestingly, there are only occasional references to cultural and geographic European spaces outside the Tunisian space; this leads to uniformity of space and stability of meaning in the text. Thus, the

main opposition that expresses the fundamental value of the text is not one that opposes the European and the Maghrebian space, as was seen in the case of Khatibi's text *LMT*; instead it is one that opposes the histories and memories of the modern and ancient spaces of the two Tunisian cities, Taparura and Thyna. Apart from the variety of sensory memories of the native space (during French colonisation) expressed through the sense of smell, taste or touch, another important aspect of the trope of locality is relayed linguistically through the technique of code switching. Indeed, Bouraoui inserts a variety of words from the Tunisian language to designate that the local and Arab culture are being inserted into the French language: "le Nif", "bel osbane", "legmi", "lablabi", "machmoum", "sour", "fatiha", "el barka fikoum", "karnita el bled", "jnens et bouras", "koufia", "takrita". In all cases, a translation or explanation of the concept in question is provided, a strategy that indicates an intention on the part of the author to make the text accessible to the Western reader. This technique of localisation leads to the exoticisation of the text and the Tunisian / Maghrebian space.

The description of the city of Sfax / Taparura in the last years of French colonisation is introduced in the first chapter of the book, entitled "Bab Ed Diwane: Battants ouverts de la Medina" which recounts Mansour's childhood and teenage experiences during the last years before the arrival of Tunisian independence:

Taparura, en état de léthargie proverbiale, est en train de changer de peau. Habituellement ennuyeuse, elle se fait soudain belligérante, agressive, exacerbée par le désir de son indépendance. (11)

The dysphoric values of symbolic and physical violence attributed to the colonisers are contrasted with Mansour's positive feelings towards the native quarter of Moulinville with its "esplanades (...) de mimosas touffus au parfum de miel":³⁵¹

Il se remémore ses jeux d'adolescent dans le quartier de Moulinville où, avec ses amis, il jouait aux cavaliers errants, le Juif Moshé Boukhobza et le Français Marcel Lucido. (16)

³⁵¹ Moulinville is Hédi Bouraoui's quarter. The Moulinville quarter was mostly inhabited by Europeans.

The apparent contradiction between dysphoric values attributed to the colonisers and the euphoric values assigned to the quarter of Moulinville can be explained by the ambivalence that some habitants of Taparura must have experienced in relation to French colonisation and the experience of living in the affluent, residential quarter of Moulinville. Mansour's individual memories often find their expression in vivid sensory experiences of the native place that range from memories of childhood dishes prepared by the mother as, for example, the "couscous complet avec son bouillon, ses légumes et sa viande", to recurrent evocations of local smells and perfumes. Memories of the taste and smell of local ingredients and condiments such as the olive and olive oil, almonds, dates, citrus and orange fruits make frequent appearances throughout the text. Indeed, the importance of sensory memory in the characterisation of Mansour as a local inhabitant of the city is visible from his description as "ce dégustateur de 'bouillon de pataclès, pain d'orge et zest de citron', comme on définit tout bon citoyen de la région". Here, the convivial character of the inhabitants of Taparura is mentioned in the context of the city's multicultural character before independence and the discourse on transculturalism.

It is in the second chapter entitled "Bab B'Har: A portée de mer, les enjeux nouveaux", signifying the entry into the postcolonial period, that one is introduced to the negative signs of Tunisia's modernisation, as expressed in the negative image: "la Médina se bâtit miraculeusement la nuit où l'on démolit les vieilles pierres pour construire sans autorisation" (38). The critique of the government's liberal policies that led to the negative effects of industrialisation on the life and character of the city of Sfax in the post-independence period are clearly expressed in numerous passages throughout the novel. At the same time, there are many references to the materialistic and commercial spirit of the Taparuriens that show a total disregard for their own past and cultural heritage. The superposition of Sfax's glorious past onto the stark images of its present, testify to the way Bouraoui sees the effects of the country's independence. The materialism of the modern city is contrasted with references to Sfax's multilayered history (Arabic,

French, Spanish) as an enclosed space of the medieval fortress and its Berber foundations, as shown in the following passage:

Taparura, “la fortune, l’heureuse”, ville antique, précède dans le temps et l’espace la ville médiévale de Sfax, du dixième siècle. Quant au nom du roi de Numidie, Syphax, “le bien protégé, bien armé”, il s’apparente à celui de la ville. Ainsi se succèdent et se superposent les images sur le socle berbère originel, preuve qu’il existe une homogénéité de la population qu’un géographe andalou situe jusqu’au Rif marocain. Berbérie fleurissante au génie constructeur qui sera envahie par les Hilaliens au onzième siècle, ce qui n’empêchera pas la ville de s’affirmer comme l’un des centres les plus florissants du Maghreb! (72)

The dystopian narrative of the city’s postcolonial present is constructed through the opposition of the images representing the city’s rich history and the uniformity and material character of the modern postcolonial city, thus producing a duality of discourse tradition–modernity at the centre of which lies the question of postcolonial identity. As Denise Brahimi observes, in *RT* the postcolonial city is depicted as being in search of its own postcolonial identity and image:

A coup sur, ces changements-revirements signifient la difficulté à se trouver un rattachement clair, un symbole pertinent. Cette ville n’a pas d’image d’elle-même et ne sait pas celle qu’elle aimerait donner.³⁵²

Certainly, the succession of installations of different statues, sculptures and other public monuments in the central square of the city after independence indicate that the inhabitants are unsure as to how to construct the modern, postcolonial space of the city. Yet, the construction of a single identity in the postcolonial space of the city is not possible; the usage of the toponyms of Thyna, Taparura and Sfax in the novel is not only an indicator of the city’s multiple spaces and histories, they also reveal the impossibility of assigning a single origin to the space of the native city. They can be said to participate in the demystification or unmasking the idea of native space, a view that both Maghrebian and non-Maghrebian subjects equally subscribe to, a demystification that is necessary in order to unpack the concept of place defined within the paradigm of single origin, locality as authenticity, and the romantic

³⁵² Brahimi, D., “La traversée des pays et des mots”, in: *Perspectives critiques: L’œuvre d’Hédi Bouraoui*, 2006, p. 33.

and nostalgic values that are assigned to place. This unpacking is fundamental to the conceptualisation of spatial loss that does not reduce this concept to the lack or loss of geographic space and local place; instead, it allows for the reframing of the notion of spatial loss experienced and constructed positively as border-thinking.

4.3.1.3. The Utopian Space of Thyna or the Trope of Tradition

The unifying symbol of the diversity of Sfax's cultural heritage and multiplicity of origin is the symbol of the *olive tree* represented in the name of the female character Zitouna, a young Berber woman born on the outskirts of Thyna. Zitouna's quest symbolises the search for the recovery of the cultural city's forgotten antique past. She is described as somebody "qui a le nez fourré dans l'archéologie de sa ville et la tradition orale, la Geste Hialienne, incluse" (39). Her project is to revive and reintroduce the cultural heritage of Thyna within the walls of the Medina of Sfax.³⁵³

ramener l'esprit de Thyna dans l'enceinte même de la Medina à laquelle elle appartient. Bab El Kasbah apparait comme lieu idéal pour accueillir la ville-mère dans le sein de la ville-fille. Taparura accoucherait alors d'un enfant qui ne serait autre que sa génitrice. Pour redevenir un foetus, Thyna a dû mourir symboliquement, dernier trépas qui va revitaliser l'enceinte, les Sours de Bled El Arbi. (170)

Thus, whereas the space of the modern city is depicted critically from the viewpoint of the industrialisation and modernisation project, as has been shown, the cultural and historical space of the roman city of Thyna or *Thaenae* is a symbolic, utopian space that must be deconstructed and

³⁵³Zitouna's project for the revival of the city has its basis in urban realities. Contrary to the Medina of Tunis, the Medina of Sfax is not a UNESCO Heritage protected site. Although a project for the restoration of the Medina has been initiated, there is still a sense of urgency among its inhabitants to restore the Medina due the high level of degradation of its spaces and monuments, as can be seen from the city's website: <http://www.sfaxonline.com/sfax/sfax-histoire-population/886-la-medina-de-sfax-de-la-grandeur-a-loubli> (accessed on 13/08/2011).

reconstructed; as such it is assigned a positive value and is defined as a space of symbolic transformation. Historically speaking, Thyna is an important Tunisian archaeological site (situated approximately twelve kilometres from the city of Sfax). Although very few archaeological sources for Phoenician or Punic civilisation are still available today, the historical importance of the items found on the archaeological site of Thyna point to its Phoenician origins; it is presumed that the city was a Phoenician *comptoir* on the borders of the Carthaginian empire. Thyna became a Roman colony in 46 BC after it surrendered to the Roman Empire. According to the Italian critic Giuliana Toso Rodinis, who analyses the elements of Romanity in *RT*, the first reference to the city's name is found in the work of the Roman author, philosopher and historian Pliny the Elder.³⁵⁴ The French archaeologists were the first ones to discover the ruins of Thyna after Tunisia became a French Protectorate. According to Zitouna, the French immediately appropriated this cultural heritage as their own, glorifying the city's Ancient Roman past as part of French history and occulting any other cultural strata in the city's history:

Pourquoi les Français s'épuisent-ils à nous convaincre que tout ce qui est vestige sur notre sol appartient aux Européens? Pourquoi tiennent-ils à tout prix que la fondation et l'origine même du nom, Thyna, soit romaine, et non punique ou phénicienne? (167)

The space of Thyna, "ville romaine en ruine" ou "l'ancienne ville romaine *Thaenae*", "Thyna la merveilleuse" represents a utopian space in the city's distant history; it signifies an idyllic space and a paradise recovered. Moreover, Thyna is the space of Zitouna's childhood memories as she listened to her grand-mother's stories of the ancient Berber city of Henchir Thyna, "cette belle cité rayonnante et prospère [qui] fut détruite par les premières invasions arabes", stories that captured Zitouna's imagination as a child:

Elle a toujours entendu sa grand-mère raconter de fabuleuses histoires sur Henchir Thyna qui se trouvait près de leur boura à Ain Fallat (...) Sa place stratégique enviée la plaçait à la limite de l'ancienne province d'Afrique et de la nouvelle. Cette frontière était marquée par un large fossé qui commençait à Thyna et s'étendait très loin à l'intérieur du pays. (118)

³⁵⁴ Rodinis, J. T., "Retour à Thyna de Hédi Bouraoui et ses éléments de romanité", in: *La Tunisie dans la littérature tunisienne de langue arabe et langue française*, Tunis: l'Or du Temps, 2001, p. 218.

Interestingly, the trope of the border or liminality makes its appearance in the passage above in the reference to Thyna as being a strategic commercial centre on the border between Numidia and the Carthaginian Empire or between the *Africa Vetus* and *Africa Nova*.

Throughout *RT*, historical fact is combined with narrative fiction, a device that problematises the relationship between past and present. Bouraoui combines historical discourse and historical references about the past and origins of the cities of Thyna and Sfax with the use of legends, epic poems and mythical references. It is the moment of the identification of Zitouna with the ancient Roman city of Thyna that symbolises potently the representation of the spatial and temporal superposition of the modern city of Sfax with the roman city of Thyna. This is shown in the following passage where Mansour sees Zitouna as “la romaine Thyna vêtue à la tunisienne”, as she enters the central stage of the Marché Central where she is about to read Kateb’s story:

C’est la romaine Thyna vêtue à la tunisienne qui s’avance en personne jusqu’au cœur du marché de la Taparura moderne pour y planter la vérité de sa régénération, à l’image de celle de Kateb. C’est Thyna la majestueuse qui lira le conte du proscrit, preuve de son pardon à l’ingratitude des hommes aussi bien qu’à la cruauté d’un seul. (96)

If, as Rodinis’ analysis shows, one can find numerous elements of *romanité* in Bouraoui’s text that refer to the close contact and co-existence and mutual influences of different cultures and civilisations in Tunisia in the time of antiquity – Roman, Numidian and Carthaginian – that challenge the discourse on the single origin and history of Sfax, another interpretation of the insertion of the elements of Romanity in *RT* could also be advanced. While Zitouna’s goal is to revive Thyna’s multiple cultural past that goes all the way back to its Punic or Phoenician origins, one could explain her quest to rehabilitate the city’s past as a symptom of her desire, as someone who is of Berber origin, to return to a time prior to the arrival of Arab civilisation that was characterised by a wide project of modernisation in the field of architecture and urbanism. In other words, it signifies Zitouna’s desire to subvert not only the French appropriation of its

past, but also the construction of the Arab “ideal city” and that of the cultural heritage of Islam. The discourse of tradition in *RT* should not only be read in opposition to the discourse of modernity in post-independent Tunisia, but also in the context of the cultural process of “modernisation” that took place during the era of the Arab conquests in North Africa and the rest of the Mediterranean from the seventh century (CE). Indeed, as the Italian historian Enrico Guidoni argues,³⁵⁵ one of the main features of Islamic urbanisation across all of the territories conquered (including those in Europe) was the modernisation of the urban organisation of the Roman city in the form of a reconciliation of the heritage of architecture with the theoretical abstract concept of the “ideal city”³⁵⁶ in Islam:

La “modernisation” de la cité antique vigoureusement imposée par les musulmans dans toutes les villes de la Méditerranée, obéit au principe de conciliation entre la réalité urbaine existante (de tradition gréco-romaine) et la conception théorique abstraite de la “ville idéale” des conquérants (...) Partout, ce processus suit des règles assez précises: la destruction des grands axes rectilignes (avec des exceptions, très soulignées dans les documents historiques, qui naturellement confirment la règle; dont l'exemple le plus remarquable est celui d'Alexandrie en Egypte) le réemploi maximum des structures de défense, l'occupation privée des édifices et des immeubles publics, la tendance générale à conserver les rapports physiques entre la ville et le territoire, mais dans un contexte qui à l'intérieur des villes suppose un rapport complet de tous ces rapports.³⁵⁷

As Guidoni argues further in his book, it is precisely the project of urban modernisation brought in by the Arabs that represents the originality of many cities in the Mediterranean.

The last chapter of the novel marks the entry into an urban utopia where the present and past are reconciled through the symbolic union of Mansour and Zitouna. It sees Mansour solving the mystery of Kateb's murder, the realisation of Zitouna's project of the regeneration of the city's local heritage, and

³⁵⁵ Guidoni, E., *La Ville européenne: formation et signification du quatrième au onzième siècle*, Bruxelles: Pierre Mardaga Editeur, 1981 (1st ed. 1978).

³⁵⁶ As noted in our analysis of Dib's text *Les Terrasses d'Orsol*, the image of the ideal city as paradise on Earth can be seen as one of the fundamental images in the Islamic literary tradition. According to Guidoni: “Le paradis est une des images les plus importantes dans la littérature islamique qui concerne la ville. C'est la référence idéale permanente pour les centres les plus beaux et les plus importants, qui ne se rapporte pas tant à l'urbanisme qu'à la luxuriance de la végétation et à l'abondance de l'eau courante, qui sont les signes de paradis tel qu'il est décrit dans le Coran” in: Guidoni, E., *op.cit.*, p. 57.

³⁵⁷ Guidoni, E., *op.cit.*, p. 20.

Mansour's decision to return to his native city after having resided in the capital of Tunis for several months. Paradoxically, the trope of locality and native space fully emerges in Bouraoui's text at the end of the narrative. In a symbolic gesture, Mansour remaps the city's historical and cultural space and restores it to its origins, as seen in the following passage, and as he recovers his "taparitude":

Aussi, épingle-t-il, pour sa part, une carte en forme de peau de vache d'où partent des rayons solaires, glanant, dans la ceinture à jamais fuyante des jnens, des bouras et des oliveraies, l'essence de son âme. Sur ce plan de Taparura, il note la disparition des tenailles du port, agrandi, la gare reconstruite et rénovée, l'érection dans Sfax-centre d'une galerie marchande et d'un hôtel Abou Nawas quatre étoiles avec terrasse, piscine et café au deuxième étage abolissant celui de la Place Marburg, ancien lieu des rencontres. (212)

Through Mansour's gesture of the remapping of the space of the city the obscured relationship between space and power is unveiled, something that can be linked directly to Soja's argument on the demystification of spatiality. On the other hand, the utopian vision of the recovery of place that is as smooth as it is unproblematic contrasts not only with Massey's views on the relational character of place, it also contrasts with Bouraoui's own views on the notion of "transculture", one of the central notions of his writing project, as already mentioned.

To summarise, it has been argued in the above analysis that in *RT* the construction and critique of the utopian–dystopian discourse of tradition and modernity in the urban context is at the centre of Bouraoui's narrative. In the discourse on tradition and modernity that instals a myth of a lost city and memory prior to independence, the duality of the pair is deconstructed through the trope of passage or border-crossing and the rewriting of cultural memory and history of the past and present. These devices, that can be identified as border-thinking devices, participate in the subversion of the dominant Arab and European colonial discourses on space and place, but they also highlight the ambivalent position of the migrant writer in the Tunisian / Maghrebian context. Whilst they point to Bouraoui's concern and appreciation for the traditional values of native, local space, they also stress his need to move into the space of transcultural identity through the strategy of distance. Spatial loss in the context of transculturality

becomes a concept that can be redefined as gain and as something that is valued positively by the migrant subject. This is an issue that remains one of the central concerns for Bouraoui and his writing project, and one that is central to the argument held in this thesis.

4.4. Translating Bodies, Translating the City: Bilingualism and the Space of the City in Nicole Brossard's *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration*³⁵⁸

*Mémoire ou souplesse de l'œil: à l'ouest le quartier anglais de mon enfance, et superposée, l'image inversée de mon désir pour l'Est montréalais.*³⁵⁹

Nicole Brossard

As the analysis of Khatibi and Bouraoui's texts has shown, in the Maghrebian context the postcolonial space of the city is constructed around the philosophical themes of identity, difference and trace, and around the cultural paradigm of tradition and modernity – themes and paradigms that oppose the Western and non-Western world. In the context of Canada, the city is a space defined by the imagined spaces of the border and boundaries and of border-crossing, in the context of the discourse of multiculturalism and Anglophone, Francophone and Amerindian cultural spaces. Spatial loss in this context is culturally determined; it refers to the loss of Francophone or Amerindian cultural identity and memory, and is expressed recurrently through the theme of loss of origin, something that has been noted in Ferron's and Roxanne Bouchard's text.

³⁵⁸ Brossard, N., *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration*, Montréal: Les Quinze, 1980 (1st ed. 1974).

³⁵⁹ Brossard, N., "Aura d'une ville", in: Dupré, L., Roy, B., & Théoret, F. (eds.), *Montréal des écrivains*, Montréal: Typo, 1988, p. 39.

As a writer living in Montréal, a place of a unique cultural and physical co-habitation of the Anglophone and Francophone (but also Amerindian) cultures and language communities, Nicole Brossard has always been fascinated with the problem of translation as an “act of passage” from one language to another or from one genre to another, thus problematising the issue of the border and border-crossing in language and literary form in her writing:

Personally, I have always been fascinated by translation, as I am usually writing about acts of passage, whether it is passage from fiction to reality, from reality to fiction, or from one language to another. I wrote *Mauve Desert* because it blows my mind to think that someone can consider a reality in their language while I can't in mine and vice-versa (...) I like to work with translators because it keeps me alert in my own language.³⁶⁰

It can be said that for Brossard the philosophy of language and the relationship between language and identity on the one hand, and the relationship between language and space, on the other, stand at the centre of her writing project. In a short piece entitled “Aura d’une ville”,³⁶¹ Brossard poetically speaks of the city of Montréal as a multiple, open, yet intimate space of desire and literary creativity. For Brossard, who was born and grew up in the Anglophone (West) side of Montréal, it is the space of the East or the Francophone side of the city that is a mythical and real space of desire:

Ô combien j’aurais voulu échanger les noms de l’orthographe difficile des rues Coolbrook, Earnscliffe, Clanarald pour un peu d’histoire québécoise à travers les noms vifs de Lafontaine, Papineau, de Lorimier! Je triche un peu, car à vrai dire mon attirance pour l’Est était surtout affaire d’interdit (...) A l’est, les travailleurs et les communs; à l’ouest, les Anglais, les patrons, les médecins et avocats. Entre les deux, la rue Saint-Laurent était une limite, un seuil. (39).

The imaginaries of the border and boundaries and of border-crossing (notions that Brossard explores in her writing from many angles through her fascination with the practice of translation) and their connection with the theme of the imaginary of the city have played a significant role in the shaping of modern and contemporary Québécois and French Canadian consciousness and identity, as has been

³⁶⁰ Williamson, Janice. Interview with Nicole Brossard. *Sounding Differences: Conversations with Seventeen Canadian Women Writers*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993, p. 57–74.

³⁶¹ Brossard, N., “Aura d’une ville”, in: Dupré, L., Roy, B., & Théoret, F. (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 38-42.

pointed out by a number of critics.³⁶² Interestingly for the analysis presented here, Vachon points out that the representation of the city of Montreal in Québécois literature does not only evolve through time (thus making it possible to track down a “cultural memory” of the city and its development and metamorphosis from a historical and social perspective), it also changes spatially (transversally) depending on whether the author is Anglophone, Francophone or allophone. The representation of the space of Montréal by a Francophone author will historically be one of alienation and dispossession, with this space becoming gradually appropriated. As will be shown, the appropriation of urban space by the female characters is a major theme in *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration*. On the other hand, Vachon argues, the discourse of the city in the texts of Anglophone and Jewish authors is characterised by an attitude of assurance followed by an attitude of uncertainty towards the space of the city.

As the analysis of *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration*³⁶³ will demonstrate, for the lesbian feminist writer Brossard, the urban, cultural and linguistic space of Montréal is a space that can be appropriated by “radical” women, “les urbaines radicales”: “Rue Duluth, rue Rachel, rue Marie-Anne, les urbaines radicales tissent au fil de leur voix, de leurs gestes et de leurs textes, un savoir-vivre qui aménage Montréal au cœur de mon identité”.³⁶⁴ Brossard sees the necessity for women to appropriate the space of the city as one of the conditions of the realisation of “feminist consciousness”, an idea that Brossard explores throughout her writing. In a short (translated) article published in 1995 in *Yale French Studies*, Brossard defines this concept of feminist consciousness in the following way:

My purpose is not so much feminism, though, as it is to understand how feminist consciousness works and to identify the difficulties it encounters according to what it protests, asserts, or purposes. How does feminist consciousness *treat* reality so that we may inscribe our certainties

³⁶² See Vachon, M., “Survol critique de la géographie littéraire”, in: *Frontières flottantes, lieu et espace dans les cultures francophones du Canada / Shifting boundaries, place and space in the Francophone cultures of Canada*, Amsterdam / New York: Rodopi, 2001, p. 91-104. Gilles Marcotte and Pierre Nepveu point to the importance of the city as a site of the imaginary in Québécois writing. Marcotte, G. and Nepveu, P. (eds.), *Montréal Imaginaire*, Montreal: Fides, 1992.

³⁶³ Brossard, N., *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration*, 1980 (1st ed. 1974).

³⁶⁴ Brossard, N., “Aura d’une ville”, in: Dupré, L., Roy, B., & Théoret, F. (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 41.

and perspectives which form the thinking and creative subjectivity of an as yet unwritten world.³⁶⁵

Indeed, the question of how feminist consciousness treats the reality of urban space is central to the novel analysed here.

As indicated above, Brossard's main preoccupations can be said to lie with the themes of the city and urban modernity as themes that recur in her writing. At the same time, her formalist approach to writing and her radical feminist project during the 1970s reflects the "new mood of experimental writing in Québec".³⁶⁶ This writing situates itself within the larger cultural, literary and theoretical currents that emerged in Europe, especially France.³⁶⁷ As the American critic Karen Gould points out in her analysis of "writing in the feminine" and the social, literary and theoretical trends in Québec:

[there is an] emerging "crisis" of confidence in the representational powers of the language and a mounting distrust regarding the organic wholeness, the ostensibly unified sign system, and the presumed signification or predetermined meaning of the literary text.³⁶⁸

This crisis of confidence on the part of the writers and intellectuals in Québec in the early 1970s regarding the "representative powers of language", "presumed signification" and "predetermined meaning of the literary text" was a sign of an emerging postmodernist discourse challenging the existence of totalising (meta-)narratives. The strategy of the destabilisation of meaning and the constant moving of boundaries between the real and the virtual (or reality and fiction) and between narrative and meta-discourse are

³⁶⁵ Brossard, N. & Godard, B., "The textured angle of desire", in: *Yale French Studies, Another Look, Another Woman: Retranslations of French Feminism* (ed. Huffer), n° 87, Yale University Press, 1995, p. 106.

³⁶⁶ Gould, K., *Writing in the Feminine, Feminism and Experimental Writing in Québec*, Carbondale and Edwardsville: University of Illinois Press, 1990, p. 54.

³⁶⁷ Brossard's first novel *Un Livre*, published in 1970, was viewed as the prototype for the Québec *nouveau roman*. The writers of the Nouveau Roman of the 1960s that were especially influential in Québec were: Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet, Butor and Duras. Among the critical thinkers and theorists are found Barthes, Ricardou and Blanchot.

³⁶⁸ Gould, K., *Writing in the Feminine, Feminism and Experimental Writing in Québec*, 1990, p. 54.

fundamental features of a poetics and aesthetics of writing that Brossard explores in her early text *FK*.³⁶⁹ However, her writing becomes influenced more and more by the radical feminist practices and thinking that inscribe themselves within a larger feminist discourse to which women writers in Québec begin to subscribe to from the mid seventies and that will give rise to a specific textual strategy and practice of an “écriture du corps” in Québec. As Karen Gould explains, this development of a specific locus of female self-consciousness and feminist thinking in Québec can be seen to occur in parallel with a rising disenchantment and concern of women writers and intellectuals for their political and social positions in modern Québécois society, as they started to question the prevailing narratives of a male-dominated nationalist and revolutionary discourse on Québec that emerged in the 1960s under the movement of the Quiet Revolution.

4.4.1. Urban Space and the Female Body in *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration*

As already indicated, the exploration of linguistic and spatial urban crossing lies at the centre of *FK*.

When explaining her text, Brossard gives the following analysis:

The issue of language and turbulence is at the heart of my novel *French Kiss*, a novel that I wanted to be a crossing of Montreal, with a female character driving her “vieux char” from the eastern end of Sherbrooke Street, all the way to the western end, her itinerary interrupted by a passionate French kiss, a long pause represented by the play between languages and tongues in love, on the corner of Sherbrooke Street and Saint-Denis.³⁷⁰

Brossard uses the strategy of translation as a textual device whose aim is to subvert the dominant discourse on space (and power), on the one hand, and the discourse on language (and power) on the other hand. There are numerous instances in the text of the technique of “code switching”, bringing the

³⁶⁹ The abbreviation *FK* will be used each time reference is made to *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration* in this analysis.

³⁷⁰ Brossard, N., “Excerpts from *Ecrire: L’horizon du fragment* (translated by Ch. Larkosh)”, in: *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, n° 1, January 2009, pp. 67-68.

interplay and mixing of different language varieties and styles. These include the switching between standard French, joul and old French, and give rise to the presence of a variety of multilingual strategies that disrupt the monolingual character of language. This playful attitude to language, Brossard herself explains, is not only linked to her interest in translation, but also reveals the way in which Brossard can use the English language; sometimes as symbolic excess, symbolic noise and as a consequence of “unforeseeable outbursts, additional details, palimpsests” and, at other times, as “a sort of a shield”, a way of distancing herself from “what seems too real”, as a strategy of switching identity, becoming another Self, a Modernist “strategy of permanent exile”.³⁷¹ On the other hand, the strategy of grammatical subversion through the use of such devices as the absence of punctuation, omission of definite articles or other morpho-syntactical and semantic anomalies that disrupt the meaning and grammaticality of the text are a standard occurrence in *FK*. This need to subvert the French language is explained in Brossard’s text “Ecrire; l’horizon du fragment” in which the author speaks of the feeling of “incompetence and alienation” of Québécois authors in relation to their spoken language:³⁷²

Torn by their awareness of a dichotomy between writing well and speaking badly, there are a number of Québécois authors who have questioned themselves regarding their relationship to language, about the feeling of incompetence and alienation that governed their use of spoken language.³⁷³

The Quiet Revolution, as Brossard explains, has not only had as a consequence the questioning and reframing of Québécois collective history and memory, it has also brought to the fore the question of language and identity in the urban context of the postmodern city, a question that was already discussed in the introduction to Brossard’s analysis. As Brossard explains further in her text:

³⁷¹ Brossard, N., “Excerpts from *Ecrire: L’horizon du fragment* (translated by Ch. Larkosh)”, pp. 67-68.

³⁷² From a different perspective, the theatrical piece published in 1995 by Larry Tremblay, *The Dragonfly from Chicoutimi* explores the question of the connection between identity and language, and the issue of bilingualism as identity fracture. In the text, the main character uses an English that is immersed in the French grammar, a powerful textual device that brings to the fore the problematic of the symbolic value of the English language as the dominant language in the position of power, a position that results in the alienation and identity fracture of the Québécois subject.

³⁷³ Brossard, N., “Excerpts from *Ecrire: L’horizon du fragment* (translated by Larkosh, Ch.)”, 2009.

It is only by arriving in the “secular city”, in the real and in the symbolic sense, that an entire literary generation found its desire for neon, for car horns, for swearing, for Amerikan-ness, for a country, for marijuana, for sexuality and for a very French brand of textuality. That created a lot of new words to pronounce, concepts to invent or take in, identities to declare and transgressions to make good on. It is not an overstatement to speak of turbulence.

At one level, Brossard’s *FK* is a story of five characters, three women and two men, that engage in a metaphorical *French kiss* at the intersection between Rue Sherbrooke and Rue Saint-Denis, a spatial coordinate that can be seen to divide East (Francophone) and West (Anglophone) Montréal and that represents both an embodied and symbolic nodal point of connection between gender, language, culture, history and politics. However, it is also a story about two female characters, Marielle and Camille, who engage in a *French Kiss* at midday, as is made clear in the following passage.

Le moment du baiser au moment des bruits de la circulation qui traversent la rue St-Denis de bord au bord...La circulation appartenant au discours intérieur du rythme cardiaque...Camille ta langue est bonne dans ma bouche...Recommencement : un baiser assez « chaste » sur les lèvres de Camomille. Lèvres mordillées. Douleur/détente. Plaisir, lèvres léchées, mouillées...Secousses et rumeur. Dans la ville, des ramifications ondulent, sans orientation précise au gré des chantiers de construction...Géographie des reliefs, la langue sur tes dents à *joue à joue* ... (83)

Marielle’s drive through the city from East to West Montréal is interpolated with Marielle’s flashbacks and images of her kiss with Camille, as can be noted in the following passage at the beginning of the text:

Passage assez clair de Camomille à Marielle Deslauniers, rue Sherbrooke, on file quarante milles à l’heure dans le réel, sur l’asphalte, en Plymouth, vieille décapotable mauve, couleur de 1965. On roule habituellement entre l’appartement de la rue Coloniale et les édifices de la rue Stanley. Mais aujourd’hui: croisière urbaine. Suivre la rue Sherbrooke d’un bout à l’autre, de l’est à l’ouest. De l’ouest à l’est. Manège historique et géographique. Les courants chauds, les violents. Far east, down town going away far west. Les motels aux croûtes sèches de peintures. Les néons cheap et flashy. Marielle conduit les yeux larvés. (15)

One of the main strategies of *FK* is its deconstruction of the linear, tempo-spatial narrative and the insertion of the trope of corporeality. In *FK* the trope of corporeality is expressed through the theme and metaphor of the memory of the female lesbian body that is capable of rewriting the memory and the space of the gendered, bilingual city and the use of translation and plurilingualism as main textual strategies. One could claim that for Brossard these textual devices lie at the centre of her writing in the feminine;

they problematise the question of alterity and otherness from a gender-centred perspective, but they also raise the question of space, gender and power, something that is at the centre of Massey's critique on discourse on space, as argued throughout this thesis. Indeed, there exists a close connection in *FK* between the differing emotive aspects of (French and English) bilingualism, the question of translatability and the possibility of the re-inscription of the female body in the male-dominant discourses of urban modernity.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the text and the theme of the female body and the city, some general observations will be offered about the applicability of the Greimassian semiotic analysis model to *FK* and the presentation of the results obtained by applying this method to the text.

It can be noted that (as in the case of Khatibi's text *La Mémoire tatouée*) Brossard's text *FK* does not lend itself to the straightforward application of the Greimassian semiotic analysis model. As discussed in the analysis of *LMT*, the narrative structure in Khatibi's text and the apparent chronological order of the recounting of past events and experiences in the life of the narrator/author are exploded from within the text through the production of a multiplicity of cultural traces and meanings in what Khatibi calls "le cristalle du texte" that lies at the centre of his "intersémiotique transversale". Because of multiple experimental textual strategies such as the abolition of grammar and syntax, the mixing of the planes of the real and fiction, the interpolation of meta-textual commentaries, the absence of temporal-spatial unity (leading, among other things, to the disappearance of the function of referentiality in language), there is no identifiable narrative in *FK* that would implicate any sort of subject-object or helper-opponent relation or any recognisable quest. In other words, it is not possible to identify a narrative structure in *FK* that would lend itself to the kind of semiotic reading based on a Greimassian semiotic model. In fact, the object of the quest is meta-textual and self-reflective: it is the deconstruction by the narrator/author of the narrative of history and the calling into question of the referentiality of language. However, as is the case

with Khatibi's text it was possible to identify in *FK* a certain number of isotopies that can be seen to “punctuate” the text at the surface. A presentation of these isotopies is given in Table 5. While *FK* can be seen as a conscious attempt on the part of Brossard to write a text that would deconstruct the ideology of language and essentialist meaning, the fact that it was possible to identify a certain number of themes in the text by using semiotic analysis indicates that it is not possible to evacuate meaning from text, as words do not only construct reality, they also signify reality.³⁷⁴

Isotopy / Semes	Sememes	Frequency of sememes	Space type and/or Space Opposition
Body	/corps/, /bouche/, /lèvres/, baiser, kiss/, /plaisir/, /yeux/, /œil/, /désir/, /toucher/, /danseuse/, danser/	847	Corporeal
Natural space	/pluie/, /feu/, /bois/, /ciel/, /eau/, /vert/, /terre/, /roches/, /foret/, /soleil/, /neige/, /espace/, /dehors/, /brume/, brouillard/, /glace/, /baie/, /rivière/, /automne/, /verdure/, /végétation/	314	Natural–Urban
Border, border-crossing, Boundary	/autre/, /french/, /bord/, /parois/, mur/, /différence/, /entre/, /or/, /passage/, /traverser/, /percer/, /pénétrer/	306	Border–Border-crossing
Urban space	/ville/, /rue/, /cité/, /place/	216 ³⁷⁵	Natural–Urban
Transient space	/train/, /auto/, /gare/, /route/	44	Transient–Static
Sherbrooke Street	/rue Sherbrooke/	25	Cultural
Montreal	/Montréal/, /montréalais/	25	Urban
Colonial space	/Rue Coloniale/	9	Colonial
Amerindian space	/algonquine/, /réserve de	7	Amerindian

³⁷⁴ The debate between referential and relational meaning in language is at the centre of the debate about language and referentiality between the structuralists that privilege relational meaning and the poststructuralists that privilege referential meaning.

³⁷⁵ 55 occurrences of the sememe /ville/ and 55 occurrences of the sememe /rue/ were identified.

	Caughnawaga/, /Hochelaga/		
Québec	/Québec/	2	National

Table 5. The presentation of spatial isotopies in *French Kiss: étreinte et exploration*.

As can be seen from the analysis presented in Table 5, the isotopy of corporeality (of the female body) predominates in *FK*. The sememes with the highest occurrence in *FK* relate to the female body and the female sensuous experiences of touch, kissing, desire and pleasure. The sensual experiences of female corporeality and sexuality are intertwined with the experiences of the city, language and textuality. This connection between the body and the city is introduced by the narrator / author from the beginning of the text: “On y confond avec les mots *le corps* et *la cité*, une géographie: des cartes sur table, des planches anatomiques, des systèmes” (13). The inscription of the female body and desire within the structure of fragmented narrative can be seen in the following passage taken from a section in which the grammatical and syntactic order of the (French) sentence are deconstructed, a textual strategy that is characteristic of the whole text:

Camomille et Lucy se font l’amour comme des sirènes agitées, double volet, sans dessus (sonore), sans dessous (marin), des membranes dilatées jusqu’à la ceinture, bouche ouverte et kif kif (inspiration/expiration). Nuage...Toute la séquence d’amour qui insère le corps dans l’instant ; la transe intime et le contrôle parfait des ondes sillonnant les systèmes, nerfs et muscles en activité. De toute beauté – l’éclair pénétrant la bouche, nourriture et fermeture de sens... En plein « traffic » et clarté grise, au matin. Faudrait se lever si on veut aller chez Georges. (56-57)

The love scene between Camomille and Lucy described in the above passage is followed by a meta-textual commentary located above the plane of the real and the plane of fiction that further destabilises the linearity of the narrative and disrupts the linguistic and semantic unity of the text. The experience of the (female) body and pleasure is beyond / before language:

Entailler, entamer le réel/le fictif. Un épisode de plaisir, bon! maintenant que s’est il passé inside the skull? In and out like life and death. Rien à voir avec le langage. Ça n’est arrivé ni en anglais ni en français. (57)

The abundant insertions of the trope of the female body and the explicit descriptions of the sexual experiences in *FK* can be viewed to be characteristic of the theoretical preoccupations of French feminist critics in the 1970s that resonated among a number of young experimental women writers: Nicole Brossard, Madeleine Gagnon, France Theoret and Louky Bersianik. Grouped around the experimentalist literary journal *La Barre du Jour* that was founded in 1965, these writers foregrounded the female body and sexuality in their writing and explored the relationship between language, text and the female body or the “interplay between the body, the words and the imaginary”.³⁷⁶ Although the influence of radical feminist thought of Anglo-American feminists and experimental feminist writers during the 1970s on Brossard’s work and that of Québécois radical feminist thought is undeniable, Brossard was inspired in many ways by the work and theoretical psychoanalytical debates on the configuration of the “woman” and her position in language that were coming from France. Brossard (and the radical feminist writers named above) fully embraced Cixous’s notion of “the coming to writing”³⁷⁷ or her “privileging of the imaginary over the symbolic, of excess and desire”. However, unlike Cixous’s definition of an “écriture au féminin” that can be equally practised by male and female writers, Brossard appropriates the concept of an “écriture féminine” as a “gendered-marked experimental practice in which women alone are engaged rather than as an anti-phallogocentric or anti-logocentric approach to writing”.

On the other hand, the social and political importance of privileging (the writing of) the body that was recuperated by radical feminist writers in Québec such as Brossard needs to be understood against the backdrop of Québec’s specific socio-cultural and political history. As Gould points out, unlike in France

³⁷⁶ Gould, K., *Writing in the Feminine, Feminism and Experimental Writing in Quebec*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1990, p. 43. This is a very useful and informative introduction to the social and theoretical contexts of feminist experimental writing in the 1970’s in Québec.

³⁷⁷ Cixous gave lectures in 1971 and 1972 in Montréal. Her work *La venue à l’écriture* was published in 1977 and was written in collaboration with Madeleine Gagnon, one of the four most influential feminist experimental writers in Québec and by the French feminist and writer Annie Leclerc.

or the United States, the dogmatic, conservative position and the dominant discourse of the Catholic Church and its religious elites in Québécois society on the question of female sexuality and the female body uniquely participated in the formation and perpetuation of a number of social, political and familial attitudes of suppression of the female body. As the Québécois writer Marcelle Brisson suggests, feminist writing in Québec led to an experimental, radical practice of the “writing of the body” (“écriture du corps”) that is unique to Québec.³⁷⁸ According to Gould, “Brisson views this dramatic move towards corporeal inscription in the works of Québec’s feminists as a politically motivated search for identity – personal and collective – and as a reappropriation of the right to speak of and about the female body from a women’s point of view”. Thus, the foregrounding of the female body in the text of Québécois female writers represents “a strategic form of resistance to a specific cultural history”.³⁷⁹

It can be claimed that the interrelationships that Brossard privileges in *FK* are the relation between the body, language and space, on the one hand, and between the female body and the space of Montréal, on the other hand. The literary space of writing of the female body is traversed by a space of writing of the city and of the multilingual linguistic space in a fragmented process of narration in which the French, English and Québécois French idioms and tongues are closely intertwined. In her analysis of Brossard’s work, Gould speaks of analogies between the female body in motion and the discourse of the male-dominated urban space of the city of Montréal, arguing that the “dissembling and reassembling of the discourses of the city and modernity” are enabled in Brossard’s language:

Moreover, the exploratory nature of Brossard’s language in *French Kiss* demonstrates how the structures of patriarchal language must themselves be dissembled and reassembled so that the

³⁷⁸ Brisson, M., “Femme et Écriture”, in *Arcade* n° 11, 1986, p. 26-32 (cited in Gould, K., *op.cit.*, 1990, p. 45).

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.* Gould’s analysis points to the importance of 1977 as a date that marks a significant shift from the literary project of writing in the feminine to the appearance of a “new physicality in female discourse”. The year 1977 saw the appearance of three important theoretical feminist texts that are an indicator of that shift: *Mon Corps dans l’écriture* (Gagnon), *L’Amer* (Brossard) and *Bloody Mary* (Théoret). Interestingly, Cixous’s *La Venue à l’écriture* was published in the same year.

discourses on the city and on modernity in general are no longer constructed within the restrictive frameworks of linear, quantitative and scientific modes of expression.³⁸⁰

The following passage from *FK* illustrates the close connection that Brossard establishes at the level of imaginary between the narration of the female body and the city on the one hand and between the body of words or grammar in the text. The same figure of the concordance between the body of the text and the body of the city that appeared at the beginning of the text is repeated again in the following passage:

Fiction/réalité. On y confond le corps et la cité. La grammaire des mots-composés. Les doubles et les originaux, négatifs et photos. Mine de rien, mine d'amour et mine tout court. Explosive. Or et désormais éparpillés dans le texte, suite logique et adverbiale qui pénètre jusqu'à la mémoire de Camomille...On marche. On remonte et descend des rues bondées de ptits vlimeux qui se faufilent entre les autos avec une telle rapidité que les chauffeurs perdent les pédales, leur mères leur voix, le souffle parfois de l'un d'entre eux. (66-67)

The moment of (metaphorical) kissing and of the meeting of tongues of the five characters that occurs in the middle of the text at the intersection of two avenues of East and West Montréal, Rue Sherbrooke and Rue St Denis, can be interpreted as a textual device that establishes the relation between the female body and the feminisation of the urban space. It also signifies an imagined cultural moment of linguistic border-crossing and inter-relation in which the characters' tongues (physical and linguistic) can be said to meet. Here again, Brossard's frequent use of the word "langue" testifies to the presence of the practice of *l'écriture du corps* or of the writing of the body as a feminist textual strategy. The following passages in *FK* make this point clear:

tout est analogue et comparaison dans ce texte, ce croisement d'attitudes ainsi que des langues qui tournent et se retournent dans la bouche comme des moulins à vent joyeux dans leur élan...Tout ceci est un jeu d'embranchements, enluminures et détresse des lettres qui fornicent avant d'apparaître plus ou moins clairement sur la page. (71)

Here, Brossard plays on the multiple meaning and significations of the word "langue" as the language we speak and as a physical organ that is the "initial source of sexual contact and physical pleasure for the

³⁸⁰ Gould., K., *op.cit.*, 1990, pp. 72-73.

narrator and her characters”. As Gould observes, Brossard’s text “incites a unique kind of fervor into the analogous acts of loving and writing” and “fuses and confuses sexuality and textuality, creativity and politics”.³⁸¹

As mentioned previously, the scene of *French kissing* involving the five characters of the novel occurs symbolically in the middle of the text in a delirious scene of *jouissance* that expands across twenty nine pages in the chapter entitled “Une seule fois”. This passage is interspersed with images of the female body and the sensations of pleasure in the act of kissing and the body of the city with its ramifications of streets, connections, noise and networks, establishing again a close link between the internal and external geographies:

FRENCH KISS...Poursuite du baiser, de la densité qui étrangle les articulations ; le plaisir gémit. Pleurer parler rire le plaisir étouffé et fait monter les larmes jusqu’aux yeux, redescendre en douce le long, le rond des joues. (93)

Entre Camomille et Lucy et...Marielle, la ville et sa structure. La jungle de béton que l’écriture tente vainement de traverser, tout en cherchant les failles et les brèches...Montréal transpire, une sueur de signalisation, une preuve à formuler que tes désirs ne sont pas mes réalités....(99)

Finally, the chapter concludes with the narrator’s reflections and comparison of the connections between the body (“le baiser”), symbolic falling (“chute incontrôlable”) and the act of writing (“le texte”) and the impact that sensations and pleasure have on the geography of the body but also on the geography of the social and cultural space of the city (“espace bas de la ville”):

Le baiser aura donc été une reconstruction de l’épreuve devant la glace, un plissement des lèvres, une béance totale, une chute incontrôlable. Or si te saisir par les poignets pour t’ouvrir la bouche et m’y introduire évente quelques rêves, c’est que le texte demande pour sa part, une intrusion possible et pillage des usages que tu disperserais autrement. (104-105)

4.4.2. The insertion of (post)colonial Amerindian memory as a space of liminality in *FK*

³⁸¹ Gould, K., *op.cit.*, p.74.

Critics often speak of *French Kiss* as a novel on language and desire, yet few seem to concentrate on its postcolonial frame of reference expressed not only in the meeting of the bodies in the space of the divided postcolonial city of East and West or Anglophone and Francophone, but also in the inclusion of multiple (post)colonial memories, as well as in the richness of the linguistic material that poses important questions about bilingualism in the postcolonial context.

As already mentioned, Brossard often mixes standard English and French with the spoken variety of Montreal known as *joual*, and, occasionally, also Old French. Yet, while the lesbian feminist, modernist and deconstructivist narrative strategies in *FK* have been well studied, the author's concern with a number of questions that engage with the postcolonial in the North American Francophone context have been given much less attention.³⁸² It is argued here that Brossard's text lends itself particularly well to a postcolonial reading if one combines the question of the relationship of the space, gender and the body with that of a rewriting or re-mapping of Francophone, Anglophone and Amerindian histories and memories. If one reads the text from a postcolonial perspective, the questioning of (post)colonial memory and the incorporation of conflicting memories and histories becomes an important aspect of *FK*. A reference to Amerindian memory is made in first pages of the novel in which the dark and unnamed space of the forest is opposed to that of fast life and neon lights of the modern city that Marielle passes through on her car journey towards the West side of the city. From the start, the insertion of Amerindian memory introduces a symbolic fracture in the narrative and the novel:

Ça pousse du dedans et du dehors comme les flèches et les haches ardentes, les roches meurtrières catapultés du haut des Plaines – se balance, danse algonquine, au gré des poutres larges de deux pieds. (16)

³⁸² An exception to this underrepresentation of postcolonial readings of *FK* is Lynne Huffer's article "From Lesbos to Montréal: Nicole Brossard's Urban Fictions" in: *Yale French Studies*, Same Sex/Different Text? Gay and Lesbian Writing in French, n° 90, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996, pp. 95-114.

Equally, Brossard's recurring insertion of "rue Coloniale" as an obvious reference to Québec's colonial past is inscribed on the body of the city that is assigned an ambivalent value, through both its colonial and postcolonial past and present. "Rue Coloniale" is located in the left-wing intellectual quarter of Mont-Royal and is used throughout the novel both as a site of the city's colonial past and as a site of liminality. It is explained at the beginning of the novel that Marielle makes regular journeys between the rue Coloniale (presumably her residence) and rue Stanley where she works as a "telephoniste". So, on the one hand, the spatial metaphor of the rue Coloniale can be said to refer to the French colonial history of Montréal going back to the 16th century marking the beginnings of French colonisation and the arrival of Jacques Cartier in 1535 in the Iroquois village of Hochelaga located on the river Saint-Laurent; today, Hochelaga is a national historic site of Canada located on rue Sherbrooke, but it is also designates a rough, destitute quarter on the eastern side of the city that was once a working-class quarter in Francophone / Eastern Montréal. But, while the topos of "rue Coloniale" can be read as a colonial reference, the apartment situated on rue Coloniale is also a space of liminality in which the five characters live and/ or meet regularly between 1973 and 1978. These liminal experiences are recounted in the extracts of an autobiographical novel within the novel inserted at various places in the novel in which the pronoun "nous" can be said to refer to the collective experience of postcolonial Québec going through the social and cultural transformation of the Quiet Revolution.

Although there are only a few references made to Amerindian spaces in the book (see the number of occurrences to Amerindian space in Table 5), the most significant reference appears on the last page of the novel and the mention of the Caughnawaga reserve (situated approximately 70 kilometers outside Montréal). As shown in the passage below that closes with a citation from Jacques Cartier's journal from 1535, reference is made here to the arrival of the French colonisers and the fractured Amerindian memory and history and loss of identity and meaning:

Reste à l'histoire sa perte dans l'éclatement. Le sous-bois de Caughnawaga. La *dépense* du signe. Pendant que la mort efface déjà nos luxes/reflets, nos références historiques qui se perdent dans l'agglomération des sens détruits. Montréal surface et totems: "Et au parmy d'icelles champagnes, est scitué [e] et assise ladicte ville de Hochelaga, près et joignant une montagne, qui est, à l'entour d'icelle, labourée et fort fertile, de dessus laquelle on voyt fort loing." (157)

As argued by Lynne Huffer, Brossard's inclusion of the space of the Caughnawaga reserve in *FK* can be read as the result of writing as la "dépense du signe" or the expenditure of the sign; so, through the process of writing the human body and the city, the Iroquois reserve is transformed into a space of excess, a surplus of memory. By introducing the space of the Iroquois reserve, thus, Brossard subverts the discourse of imperial, nostalgic memory and rewrites the blank space of French-Canadian memory prior to the European arrival; she replaces the Amerindian space of Hochelaga (Amerindian name for the city of Montréal) and the cultural and spatial loss that it entails at the centre of *French Kiss*. Interestingly, Brossard's premonitory mention of the reserve announces what will become a highly symbolic, problematic site of conflicted and contested memories, not only of Québec's but also of Canadian recent history. As has been discussed in the analysis of Lalonde's text, the reserve and its surroundings will become the symbol of Amerindian revolt in the course of dramatic events that took place in the Oka village in 1992 leading to the "Oka crisis", so almost twenty years later after the publication of Brossard's novel.

In conclusion, as the analysis conducted on *FK* shows, the strategies of translation and multilingualism that permeate Brossard's text serve to subvert monolithic discourse on language, culture and the subject. Indeed, it is the paradigm of translation as a space of border-crossing that governs a number of symbolic relationships in the text; those connecting the female body and the city, the language and female body, and the language and the city in the bilingual context of the space of Montréal. Semiotically speaking, although it was possible to identify the main spatial isotopies at the surface level of meaning, it was not possible to give a semiotic analysis of the narrative and deep levels of meaning, because of Brossard's

conscious multiple strategies of subversion; the destabilisation of meaning through the destruction of French grammar and the constant moving of boundaries between the real and the virtual (reality and fiction), and between narrative and meta-narrative. The space of the postcolonial city in *FK* is constructed and experienced as a site of Western discursivity and (colonial or patriarchal) power; it is to be rewritten both by the imprinting of the female body and memory and the inclusion of Amerindian space and memories on the male-dominated, White spaces of the city.

4.5. Conclusion

The analysis of the texts presented in this chapter problematised the question of the interrelationship between identity and border through the strategy of “border-crossing”. The question was being asked as to what extent the concept of border-thinking can be said to participate in the demystification of spatiality in the three texts selected, leading to other interpretations of how spatial loss should be defined. The results obtained from the analysis of these texts show that the practice of border-crossing and the concept of border-thinking are powerful concepts with which discourses on space and power can be deconstructed or subverted. In the case of *LMT*, this process of subversion primarily lies in the unpacking of the notion of cultural difference and the inclusion of memorial trace at the centre of the Maghrebian Francophone text, something that has been shown in the analysis of the space of the Moroccan city both as a site of discursivity and production of history and as a site of desire. In *RT*, the analysis conducted has shown that the utopian–dystopian discourse of tradition and modernity in the urban context lies at the centre of Bouraoui’s narrative. This duality is constructed and deconstructed through the trope of the door or gate, the opposition of the modern and the ancient city and the rewriting of cultural memory and history. These strategies and devices of border-thinking offer a critique of the deconstruction of the dominant colonial discourses on space, place and power and highlight the concerns of a migrant writer. They can redefine

the concept of spatial loss outside the paradigm of a Eurocentric discourse on nostalgia leading to an interpretation of positive values of spatial loss in the context of “transculture”. Finally, in *FK*, dominant discourses on gendered and colonial spaces and / of the city are deconstructed through the practice of translation, the inscription of the female body and the recovery of lost Amerindian memories on the bilingual and colonial spaces of the city of Montréal.

Leaving Chapter 4, on space and the border, that examined the notions of identity and difference, exile and translation in a variety of cultural contexts, and how they inform the selected writers’ representations, understandings and experiences of space, place and spatial loss, Chapter 5 will study the relationship between space and the contemporary. It will look at the relationship between the creation of contemporary imaginations of space and imagined spaces as collective social practices in the context of globalisation. The question that will be posed by both of the young writers selected is how is one to make sense of place again in the era of globalisation, mass migration and spiraling technological progress.

CHAPTER 5. CONTEMPORARY GEOGRAPHIES: SPACE AND THE IMAGINATION II

But the better we know tradition – i.e., ourselves – and the more responsibly we deal with it, the better things we shall make similar, and the better things we shall make different.

Gerhard Richter

*On cherchait des modèles dans l'espace et le temps, l'Inde et les Cévennes, l'exotisme ou la paysannerie.
Il y avait une aspiration à la pureté.*

Annie Ernaux

5.1. Introduction

In the final chapter of this thesis, the relationship between space and the imagination will be examined in the contemporary context of globalisation. As Doreen Massey's critique of the discourses of modernity and globalisation shows, the simultaneous production of spaces of locality and globality is essentially shaped by the multiple yet disjunctive forces of modernisation; they define the space of the contemporary world in which we live. The question will be posed as to the way in which the construction of postcolonial individual and collective identity in the Maghrebian and Canadian Francophone context is being shaped by a number of co-existing yet competing local, national and transnational discourses on space. The question will be asked as to how the often opposing processes that govern these spaces affect the production of geographic and cultural imagination. Globalisation is to be understood here in the sense that Doreen Massey gives it and as presented in the introduction to this thesis; both as a postcolonial critique of modernity and a *spatialisation of history*³⁸³ as well as a consequence of neo-liberal capitalism and of the neo-liberal ideology of free market of economic and human capital.

The investigation into the presence / absence of the practices of the demystification of spatiality in the postcolonial Francophone literary context that has been driving the analysis presented in this thesis started with an examination of the relationship between "native space" and production of the spaces of the imaginary in Dib's and Ferron's writing. Imaginary space in that context was understood as an artistic practice and mode of expression born, produced and experienced at the level of the individual subject. In the analysis of the texts presented in the final chapter, the concept of imagination in the contemporary context is extended to include its definition as a "collective social practice", and as developed by the

³⁸³ Massey, D., *Power-geometrics and the politics of space-time*, Heidelberg: Department of Geography, University of Heidelberg, 1999.

social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai.³⁸⁴ As Appadurai argues, it can be understood as a phenomenon that is being driven by two major forces of modernisation or globalisation: the electronic media and mass migration; this globalised and globalising aspect of the imagination as collective social practice can be said to have fundamentally redefined subjectivity. A parallel can be drawn here between Appadurai's definition and Jameson's debate on the culturally dominant aesthetics of postmodernism in which "aesthetic production (...) has become integrated into commodity production generally",³⁸⁵ producing a "waning of affect" or a new type of "emotional ground tone" and "intensities". As Jameson argues, this waning of affect can be seen to be the logical result of the weakening of historicity, a new type of "depthlessness" (or spatialisation of history) and a move from the time to the space paradigm signifying one of the constitutive features of the postmodern.³⁸⁶ As for the notion of the contemporary³⁸⁷ that has been used to situate the two texts presented here as contemporary geographies, it is to be understood primarily in the sense that the anthropologist Paul Rabinow gives it, that is, as a "*moving ratio of modernity*" in the fluid, constantly moving space of the contemporary.³⁸⁸ As such, it is to be

³⁸⁴ Appadurai, A., *Modernity at Large, Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*, Minneapolis / London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003 (1st ed. 1996), p. 31: "the imagination has become an organised field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organised practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. This unleashing of the imagination links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is a key component of the new global order."

³⁸⁵ Jameson, F. *Postmodernism: the cultural logic of late capitalism*, London / New York: Verso, 1991, p. 56.

³⁸⁶ For Jameson, the conceptual shift from time as linear progress and history to space as simultaneity, synchronicity or depthlessness is what differentiates the modern from the postmodern. See also Massey's debate on Jameson's theory on space in "Instantaneity/Depthlessness" in: Massey, D., *For Space*, pp. 76-80.

³⁸⁷ A literary review conducted into the theories on the contemporary showed that if contemporary theory and contemporary theorist are terms that are widely accepted to refer to a wide range of theories and theories ranging from psychoanalytical or critical theory to postcolonial or gender studies, it is more difficult to find texts that explicitly offer a debate on the contemporary; the term remains as elusive and fluid, as it is widely used. There seems to be little consensus in the contemporary research community as to how one should define it. See, for example: Audet, R., "Le contemporain: autopsie d'un mort-né" in: *Enjeux du contemporain, Etudes sur la littérature actuelle*, Québec: Éditions Nota Bene, 2009. Accessed on 25/04/2012 at: <http://contemporain.info/contemporaneites/>; *Le roman français de l'extrême contemporain, Ecriture, Engagements, Enonciations* (eds. Havercroft, B., Michelucci, P., Riendeau, P.), Québec: Éditions Nota Bene, 2010, p. 8-9. As the editors of this collection of essays explain in the introduction, the concept of "l'extrême contemporain" refers both to the critical distance to be taken from the present, and to an immediate engagement with the present.

³⁸⁸ Rabinow, P., *Marking Time: on the Anthropology of the Contemporary*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 2. The italics are part of Rabinow's quote.

considered as producing dynamic, constantly emerging forms where both new and old elements co-exist and can take up “multiple configurations and variations”.³⁸⁹ Without wanting to presume too much from simultaneous publication, something that can be explained as mere coincidence, one can maintain that the parallel production of the two texts analysed in this chapter coming from two distinct cultural areas that both interrogate issues of cultural memory in their own socio-cultural contexts is in itself a reflection of contemporaneity; it is the product of the contemporary within which they are inscribed.

The textual analysis that follows will show that in Roxanne Bouchard’s *Whisky et paraboles* and in Nina Bouraoui’s *Mes mauvaises pensées* two different expressions and productions of the contemporary imagination are at play. While Bouchard’s imagined space can be qualified as a localised micro-geo/graphy that calls for the return to the space of nature and the notions of localised culture, identity and space in the context of contemporary Québec, Bouraoui’s imagined space could be seen as a macro-geo/graphy of spaces of globality that seeks to deconstruct the dual space of culture in the Franco-Algerian context and inscribe itself within discourses on lesbian and cosmopolitan identity. Although these two texts, written as autofictional novels, are different from an aesthetic and poetic standpoint, it will be shown that they both essentially interrogate the validity and the role spaces of nature and culture play for the construction of postcolonial identity and geographic imagination in the contemporary context of globalisation. Indeed, as has been debated in various places in this thesis, discourses on nature and culture that developed especially in the era of Enlightenment and Romanticism underpin both the Eurocentric discourse on space and the argument on the demystification of spatiality. The analysis of Bouchard’s *Whisky et paraboles* will show how Bouchard re-maps the peripheral rural space of Québec through an inscription of locality perceived as a dynamic space of identity. It will demonstrate that at the deep level of meaning, Bouchard’s text is characterised by a dynamics of tension between the paradigm

³⁸⁹ Rabinow does not refer explicitly to Baudelaire and his definition of modernity. However, his views can be compared with Baudelaire’s reflections on modernity in “Le peintre de la vie moderne”, 1863. In his essay, Baudelaire defines modernity as encompassing the notions both of transiency, fluidity, and of the eternal.

of continuity (survival) and paradigm of rupture (renewal and regeneration) as two types of discourses that underpin the discourse on rurality in traditional and contemporary Québec. It will discuss how the space of rurality as a trope of regeneration is embedded in the Romantic values of the return to nature and the value of rural life as propagated in the French-Canadian tradition of the French *coureur de bois*. As such it is in opposition to the discourse on rurality as survival; this discourse is inscribed in the colonising discourse of the French Catholic Church propagated through the production of the “mythe du Nord” as a colonising myth and the founding master-narrative of the French colonisation of the territories of North America known as Nouvelle France. It will be demonstrated how Bouchard’s treatment of rural space can be understood as producing a (post)colonial ecological and Aboriginal discourse through the inclusion of the space of the forest, the symbol of the torrent and the trope of Amerindianity. Finally, it will argue that the construction of intertextual identity that Bouchard searches for operates in the same space of tension between continuity and rupture.³⁹⁰ Through the use of intertextual references, Bouchard seeks to inscribe her text within the French-Canadian literary tradition of the *roman de la terre*, as well as the Québécois’ oral and musical tradition. The analysis of Nina Bouraoui’s *Mes mauvaises pensées* will be read in the context of the analysis of France’s colonial memory and “the return of the repressed”. It will be asked what function the concepts of loss and melancholia fulfil for this young Franco-Algerian author whose cyclical writing on the space of Algeria cannot be fully explained within the discourse of deconstruction of dual culture. It will examine to what extent Bouraoui is able to deconstruct or subvert the binary (post)colonial relationship France-Algeria through the process of writing and the literary recovery of a lost Algeria viewed as a fantasised, imagined space and as a space of geographic imagination. It will

³⁹⁰ The term intertextuality was coined by Kristeva and used in her essays “Word, Dialogue and Novel” (1966) and “The Bounded Text” (1966-1967). Both essays appear in her first volume of essays *Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, 1969. It relates to Kristeva’s views of the text as a dynamic form or unit that is defined by its relation to other texts. The notion of intertextuality has received many different interpretations and meanings in critical literary theory, something that makes it impossible to offer a definitive description. In the context of the analysis of Bouchard’s text *Whisky et Paraboles*, the concept of intertextuality (as in the example of Bouchard’s use of the intertextual reference of *Maria Chapdelaine*) has been expanded to refer to literary identity (as in the “intertextual identity”, a term used by Roxanne Bouchard herself) and to literary spaces (as in the “intertextual spaces” when referred to the spaces of the forest and the torrent that figure prominently in Bouchard’s book).

argue that Bouraoui's text produces a macro-geography and a geography of power of the opposing spaces of the North (France) and the space of the South (Algeria) whose re-mapping can only pass through the metropolitan space of Paris.

5.2. Re-appropriating Rural Québec: Writing Between Filiation and Rupture in Roxanne Bouchard's *Whisky et paraboles*

*je te salue, silence
je ne suis pas revenu pour revenir
je suis arrivé à ce qui commence*³⁹¹

Gaston Miron

5.2.1. Appropriating One's Past, Re-Writing One's Future: Search for an "Intertextual Identity" in Roxanne Bouchard's *Whisky et paraboles*

In his article entitled "Se souvenir d'où l'on s'en va: l'Histoire et la mémoire comme reconnaissance et distance",³⁹² the Québécois historian Jocelyn Létourneau (previously referred to in Chapter 1) discusses the question of the construction of collective memory of the Francophone Québécois and the troubled, ambiguous relationship they still maintain with their own past. Observing that "generally speaking" neither (Francophone Québécois) historians nor intellectuals have been willing to reframe this question

³⁹¹ Miron, G., *L'Homme rapaillé*, Montréal: l'Hexagone, 1994 (1st ed. 1970, Montréal: P.U.de Montréal).

³⁹² Létourneau, J., "Se souvenir d'où l'on s'en va: l'Histoire et la mémoire comme reconnaissance et distance" in: *French Historical Studies*, Spring 2000 23(2): pp. 277-300.

outside the paradigm of the prevailing feeling of victimisation by the Other,³⁹³ he claims that the “Franco-québécois” remain imprisoned within the oppositional space of the dialectic pair past–present that does not offer any political solution nor does it allow for a reconstruction of collective memory. The question that needs to be asked in this context is not whether Francophone Québécois remember their past when they affirm “Je me souviens”. In other words, the problem is not, as Létourneau argues, one of a collective “trou de mémoire”, as many specialists claim; the question is not whether the Francophone Québécois remember their past, rather what past they do remember.³⁹⁴ Viewed from this perspective, the role of the historian in the reshaping of Québécois’ collective memory becomes a central one; historians and those scholars dealing with history have the responsibility to act as mediators for the construction of both the Québécois’ past and, more importantly, future. But, if historians and those studying history have to accept ethical and professional responsibility for the Québécois’ active reshaping of history and memory, what role should the Québécois writer assume, if any? What past, present and future should s/he be writing?

As the Québécois specialist in French Studies Anne Caumartin observes, ethical questions, especially those related to the notion of continuity or “préoccupation de la suite”, have been at the centre of contemporary Québécois and French novel in the last ten years, something that is especially prominent in

³⁹³ In the case of Québec, the *Other* refers to Canada’s colonial past and relates primarily to British, but also to Americans. However, it can also refer to the France in the sense of the French *Other* as a symbol of cultural domination, as shown in Roxanne Bouchard’s case.

³⁹⁴ As Létourneau shows, indicative of this selective collective memory are the views collected from a number of secondary school students. They were asked to describe during their final history exam how they see Québec’s history from the middle of the nineteenth century. These views point to the young students’ perception of the Québécois nation and people as one in which Québec is seen as being dominated by the British and/or the Americans. The arrival of the “Révolution tranquille”, on the other hand, is seen as being a defining moment that facilitated national and cultural awakening. What is paradoxical about these views or statements about Québec’s history is the students’ emphasis of Québec’s colonised past in relation to Britain, whilst, at the same time, they are in the position of denial in relation to their own French-Canadian colonial past and the colonised Aboriginal population.

the case of the *roman de filiation*.³⁹⁵ This (re)new(ed) sense of responsibility in writing, that has received very little attention from literary criticism, deserves to be analysed. It can be seen, argues Caumartin, to be articulated around two moments of cultural history; that of the past or the “mémoire culturelle” and that of the future or of “la pensée à-venir”. As such, it signifies a search for a new humanism that has been lost:

Selon cette hypothèse, on anticipe que la présence marquée de la responsabilité dans le roman contemporain, tant au Québec qu'en France, indiquerait dans l'époque actuelle de l'histoire culturelle la réhabilitation d'un certain humanisme qui rendrait à l'individu ce qu'il avait perdu: son rôle déterminant dans la marche du monde.

Caumartin's comparative reading seems to concur with the interpretation being offered here, as will be shown in the analysis to follow. Indeed, the question of continuity of Québécois' cultural memory is of paramount importance for the young female Québécois writer Roxanne Bouchard; as will be shown, *Whisky et paraboles*³⁹⁶ can be seen as a text that operates in a cultural intertextual space of tension between continuity and rupture, the space within which Bouchard aims to construct an intertextual identity.

Roxanne Bouchard was born in 1972 in Saint-Jérôme, Québec. She has taught literature at the Cégep³⁹⁷ in the town of Joliette (in southwestern Québec) since 1994 and has published two novels to date: *Whisky et paraboles*³⁹⁸ (2005) and *La Gifle*³⁹⁹ (2007). Bouchard won acclaim for her 2005 novel for which she

³⁹⁵ See Caumartin, A., *Responsabilité et littérature. L'éthique des romans de filiation contemporains au Québec et en France*, research project of the Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la littérature et la culture québécoises (CRILCQ), http://www.crilcq.org/recherche/poetique_esthetique/responsabilite_et_litterature.asp (accessed 29/01/2011).

³⁹⁶ Bouchard, R., *Whisky et paraboles*, Montréal: VLB Editeur, 2005.

³⁹⁷ Cégep is an acronym in French for “*Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*” or “College of vocational and general education”.

³⁹⁸ In the following analysis, the abbreviation *WP* will be used each time reference is made to this text.

³⁹⁹ Bouchard, R., *La Gifle*, Montréal: Coups de tête, 2007.

received the Robert-Cliché 2005 First Prize and the Grand Prix de la relève littéraire Archambault 2007.⁴⁰⁰

In an interview with the author,⁴⁰¹ Bouchard explained that the Québécois are still suffering from a problem of “double-colonisation”, a condition that has contributed to their difficulty in fully appropriating their past and developing their own cultural identity; these reflections underline Létourneau’s own analysis discussed above on the ambiguous relationship that Québec maintains with its past. Indeed, when asked whether Québécois literature can be defined as postcolonial, Bouchard affirms:

Je ne pense pas qu’on puisse parler vraiment d’une littérature qui soit “post-coloniale” au sens culturel et politique du terme. On souffre toujours au Québec d’une colonisation double: celle d’une “sur-culture française” et d’une “sous-culture” américaine (depuis le mouvement de “contre-culture”).⁴⁰²

Indeed, Bouchard’s preoccupation with Québec’s “neo-colonial” position and loss of its cultural identity highlights the productive tension to be found in *WP*; this tension is evident if one considers her conscious search to inscribe herself within the lineage of the *roman de la terre* and of the ideals of the French-Canadian *coureur de bois* (terms that will be discussed at length in the analysis that follows), whilst also embracing intextual strategies and linguistic innovation. Indeed, Bouchard likes to disrupt the grammatical rules of the French language by using truncated sentences that emulate orality and oral speech. When asked what relationship she maintains with the French language, Bouchard explains:

Je cherche à écrire dans une lignée (celle des écrivains d’ici), j’aime le français et ses complexités, sa musicalité, ses richesses, je tente de dépoussiérer la grammaire française pour forcer la vieille langue française à entrer dans l’ère de la parole, du chant. Je tente de la débarquer de sa tablette et la forcer à parler!⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ Created in 1978 by the Salon International du livre de Québec, the Robert-Cliché prize is awarded to three unpublished writers; the Grand Prix de la Relève littéraire Archambault is awarded by the Librairies Archambault to authors for their first published novel.

⁴⁰¹ The interview with Roxanne Bouchard was conducted during a ten-day research trip to Montreal between 4 and 15 April 2010. The trip was funded by the School of Social Sciences, Languages and Humanities, University of Westminster.

⁴⁰² See interview with Roxanne Bouchard attached in the Appendices to this thesis (Appendix 1).

⁴⁰³ See interview with Roxanne Bouchard, Appendix 1.

As the author herself indicated,⁴⁰⁴ numerous intertextual references have been incorporated into the text *WP*. These references belong to the Québécois literary canon that should be easily recognised by a native Québécois reader or an informed student of Québécois literature. Any informed Québécois reader will also be able to identify references to popular songs from contemporary Québécois song writers, as well as from the folklore tradition. It is outside the scope of this thesis to offer a detailed analysis of all of Bouchard's intertextual references.⁴⁰⁵ However an interpretation of some of the more significant references will be given in the analysis that follows.

5.2.2. The Paradigms of Filiation and Rupture in *Whisky et paraboles*

WP is an autofictional text that contains many elements of the fantastic. It is a confessional narrative of a young woman, Elie, who escapes from the city and decides to leave her previous life by retreating into Québec's countryside, moving to a rural village (designated only by the adverb *ici*) located in the region of Péribonka. The multiple reasons for Elie's retreat are revealed to the reader gradually in a journal that she writes between the months of September and July. Whilst she tries to come to terms with her past and her relationship with someone she calls "le mandoliniste", Elie will come into contact with a succession of characters who will encourage and challenge her quest for self-discovery. Richard is a famous

⁴⁰⁴ I would like to convey my deep thanks to Roxanne Bouchard for offering me a copy of the novel where she has herself indicated by hand all the intertextual references that she explicitly uses. Roxanne's generous and original gesture has allowed me to produce a more accurate textual reading and has enhanced the analysis of the novel. The author's hand-written inscriptions have offered me a unique insight into the creative processes that she has been engaged with when writing the novel.

⁴⁰⁵ The following references have been identified by Bouchard and appear as quotations from Québécois novels, short-stories and poems in the text: Hémon, L., *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916); Ducharme, R., *L'Avalée des avalés* (1971) & *L'Océantume* (1968); Roy, G., *Bonheur d'occasion* (1954); Trudel, S., *Le Souffle de l'harmattan* (1986); Hébert, A., *Le Torrent: nouvelles* (1965) & *Un Habit de lumière* (1999); Hamelin, L., *Betsi Larousse ou l'ineffable eccité de la loutre* (1994); Ferron, J., "Suite à Martine" in: *Contes (Contes anglais, contes du pays incertain, contes inédits*, 1993, 1st ed. 1968); Guévremont, G., *Le Survenant* (1945); Miron, G., "L'Octobre" in *L'Homme rapaillé* (1st ed. 1970); Nelligan, E., "La Romance du vin" (1899); Garneau, H. St. D., "Le Jeu" & "Et L'Oiseau dans ma cage d'os", in: *Regards et jeux dans l'espace* (1937).

musician who, unlike Elie, does not question the materialistic values of Western consumerist society, but whose self-assurance hides some deep-rooted emotional insecurities that will be revealed in the course of his friendship with her.

The first significant transformation in the book occurs at the beginning of the novel when a young girl called Agnès or Amorosa (the name given to her by Elie) makes an entrance into Elie's life. Amorosa is an abused child who lives nearby with an alcoholic mother who is violent and has practically abandoned her child. Elie is taken by Amorosa's personality from the first moment she sees her and she offers her temporary refuge and soon becomes her foster parent. Although attached to the child, Elie is haunted by the ghosts of her past and is afraid of taking full responsibility for another human being. In the end, Elie will adopt Amorosa, an act that marks the start of the resolution of her individual past and the return to her Québécois roots. She will form a new family with the "conteur", thanks to her spiritual guide, the Amerindian jazz pianist Manu, who acts as the main helper in the recovery of Elie's lost spirituality. While Elie and Amorosa can be seen to represent the theme of "généalogie choisie"⁴⁰⁶ or the trope of rupture, André, the violinist, symbolises the people of Québec and its proud French Canadian heritage.⁴⁰⁷ After first learning that he was adopted and later that his wife Chloé has concealed her infertility from him, André falls into depression and smashes up his old violin, a symbol of French Canadian heritage, in a dramatic scene. Diagram 10 represents the narrative actantial schema for the novel and shows the roles played by each of the characters of the novel:

⁴⁰⁶ See interview with Roxanne Bouchard in Appendix 1 of this thesis.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

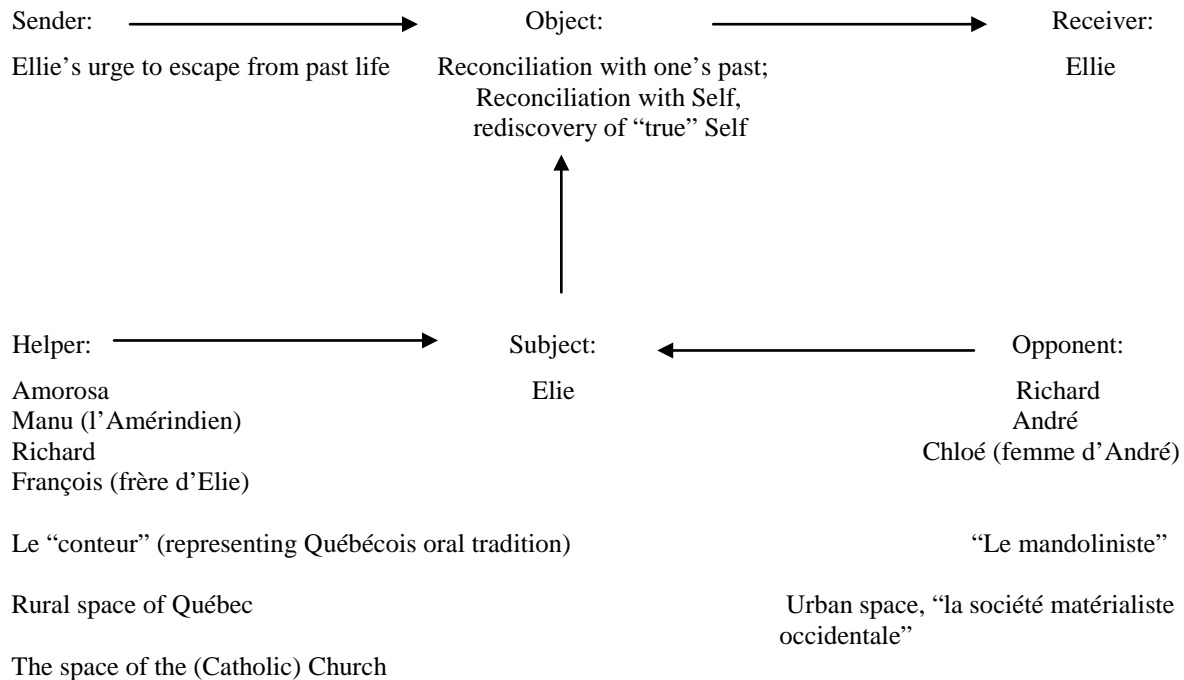


Diagram 10. Actantial narrative schema in *Whisky et paraboles*.

As already indicated, *Whisky et paraboles* is constructed around a dynamics of tension between the paradigm of continuity or filiation and the paradigm of break or rupture. These govern the meaning and narrative of the novel and create a number of physical, spiritual and literary spaces, which in turn give rise to a space of intertextuality cutting across the fundamental opposition of the binary pair continuity–rupture. Following the method of semiotic analysis, the fundamental opposition that occurs at the deep level of meaning can be represented in terms of Greimas's semiotic square:

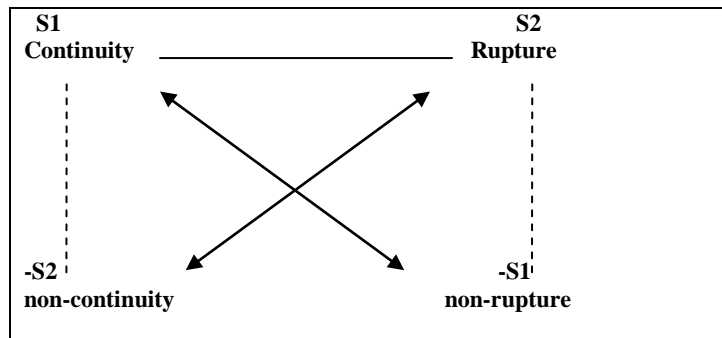


Diagram 11. Representation of the semiotic square for the isotopies of continuity and rupture in *Whisky et paraboles*.

The theme of rurality can be seen to appear on both the paradigms of filiation and rupture and those of survival and regeneration. The most significant idea on the paradigm of rupture is expressed by the trope of rurality as regeneration. This trope that is represented by Elie is invested with the romantic values of the return to nature and an idyllic vision of rural life and is connected to the concept of *métissage* embedded in the ideals of the French-Canadian *coureur de bois*. Both Amorosa and Elie inscribe themselves within the paradigm of rupture through the trope of a “généalogie choisie”; Elie becomes Amorosa’s adoptive mother. Thus, the theme of the “généalogie choisie” and those of rurality as regeneration stand in direct opposition to the theme of continuity or survival that is being conveyed through the characters of André and Chloé. Belonging to the paradigm of continuity, the idea of rurality as survival, as developed in the “mythe du Nord”, expresses the ideology of the French Catholic Church and the ideals of rural life and glorifies the mission of French colonisation and French-Canadian land settlement. The second most important trope in Bouchard’s novel within the paradigm of continuity, the *trope of religiosity*, is expressed through the rejection of the Judeo-Christian religion, the gradual deconstruction of the discourse of Catholicism and the re-appropriation of Catholicism as an essential part of Québécois’ cultural identity. As already noted, the *trope of intertextuality* can be said to inscribed both within the paradigms of continuity and rupture; it is invested with the positive value of the text’s inscription within the Québécois literary and oral tradition, but there is also a need to regenerate that tradition through the intertextual use of literary references. The theme of intertextuality is characterised

by a number of intertextual spaces, among which the space of the forest and the space of the torrent can be said to be the most prominent ones; these spaces can be seen to participate in the formation of the postcolonial discourse on ecological and social spaces in the Québécois context. Finally, the *trope of Amerindianity* that also operates in a space of tension between rupture and continuity is embedded in Manu's character; it represents alienation and loss of Amerindian identity, as well as Amerindian spirituality.

To conclude, the paradigms of continuity and rupture function at all levels of meaning, from textual and surface to deep level. In the sections that follow, the most significant tropes identified will be analysed in more detail through a presentation of intertextual spaces, the spaces of rurality and the space of the French Catholic Church; these tropes can be said to play a significant role in Québec's collective memory and geographic imagination. They can be regarded as forming together Bouchard's discourse on rurality and religiosity in Québec and will be analysed in detail in the sections that follow. A detailed presentation of the trope of Amerindianity, the third most significant space in Bouchard's text, will be excluded from this analysis. Instead, it will be treated within the context of the presentation of the intertextual space of the forest to be analysed in the sections that follow.

5.2.3. The Theme of Intertextuality: The Spaces of the Forest and the Torrent in *Whisky et paraboles*

As already mentioned, the theme of intertextuality operates on the paradigm of continuity and is invested with the positive value of the text's inscription within the Québécois literary and oral tradition. It is characterised by the intertextual treatment of the space of the forest and that of the torrent. Both of these

natural spaces function as literary spaces that participate in the formation of the postcolonial discourse on ecological, social and cultural spaces in the Québécois context.

5.2.3.1. The Space of the Forest

The intertextual use of *Maria Chapdelaine* that will be discussed in the next section has a long history in French-Canadian literary tradition, one that can be traced back to Félix-Antoine Savard and his novel *Ménaud, maître-draveur*, a late example of the rural novel or *roman de la terre*.⁴⁰⁸ An analysis will be given here of Bouchard's and Savard's treatment of the space of the forest in their respective texts as they present some striking similarities, but also differences in the way they treat the forest as a primordial space of rurality in the French-Canadian context.⁴⁰⁹

The appreciation of nature and its sounds, of the passing of seasons, of open, wild spaces of the North, as well as of the privileging of silence in relation to speech (in an opposition between nature and culture) can be said to feature prominently in Bouchard's novel, something that can also be found in Savard's *Ménaud* and Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine*.⁴¹⁰ However, interesting differences as to the underlying values underpinning Savard's and Bouchard's novels can be found.

⁴⁰⁸ Savard, F-A., *Ménaud, maître-draveur*, Québec: Librairie Garneau, 1937. The *roman de la terre* designates writings between 1846 (*La Terre Paternelle*, Patrice Lacombe) and 1947 (*Marie-Didace*, Germaine Guèvremont) that have as subject matter the rural life of the French-Canadian population (see Chapman, R., *Siting the Quebec Novel: the Representation of Space in Francophone Writing in Quebec*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2000).

⁴⁰⁹ Interestingly, Bouchard has not identified Félix-Antoine Savard as one of her literary references; instead the book can be seen to function in the text as a trope of the collective Québécois imaginary.

⁴¹⁰ Hémon, L., *Maria Chapdelaine*, Paris: Grasset, 1954 (1st ed.: 1916, Paris). The novel is considered as the founding text of French-Canadian literature and has been classified as a *roman de la terre* or a *roman du terroir* by Canadian critics in the 70s and 80s. It is the story of a young woman who is in love with François Paradis, symbol of the *coureur du bois* and of the Québec's "pre-conquest state before the fall of British rule".

Firstly, while the textual references to *Maria Chapdelaine* in Savard's *Ménaud, maître-draveur*, inscribe this text, as observed by Vauterin,⁴¹¹ within the French cultural space (as opposed to the British space of the coloniser), Bouchard seeks to re-appropriate the intertext of *Maria Chapdelaine* within the contemporary cultural and literary Québécois space. Secondly, as argued by Vauterin, Savard's novel is to be read within the French-Canadian nationalistic paradigm of territorial belonging and *enracinement* propagated in the ideological discourse on the superior values of rural life by the Catholic Church; in it, the space of the forest functions as the main symbolic space of representation of rural values with an ambivalent meaning that make the interpretation of this trope a complex one in Savard's book.⁴¹² In the text, the forest can be said to function both as a mythical space of territoriality firmly rooted in the imagination of the earth and as an abstract space of the collective imagination that is "detached from territory" and that is represented primarily from a view emanating from the "above":

A reprendre une analyse bachelardienne de cette forêt, on constaterait rapidement que plusieurs éléments du décor sylvestre sont avant tout aériens: "la lumière, le long des arbres, coulait comme un miel doré" (Savard 70, 187). L'essentiel de la forêt, de sa poésie dans *Ménaud*, émane d'un sommet et glisse ensuite vers les personnages qui s'y trouvent. L'espace forestier est alors appréhendé entre la cime et le sol et contient autant la matérialité de l'arbre que la brume et les exhalaisons qui remplissent ce volume où la masse importe moins que la légèreté.⁴¹³

For Vauterin, this ambivalence announces the arrival of urban life and progress, thus subverting the French-Canadian discourse on territoriality. However, there is another possible interpretation of this ambivalence that is not mentioned in Vauterin's analysis. It can be seen as a symptom of the advance of

⁴¹¹ Vauterin, T., "Aventures urbaines et géographies forestières dans le roman canadien-français des années 1930", in: *Geo/graphies: Mapping the Imagination in French and Francophone Literature and Film*, Freeman G. H. (ed.), Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003, p. 179-189.

⁴¹² As Vauterin interestingly observes, the space of the forest is significantly absent from the French-Canadian novel until 1937-1938. The publication of two novels that are the subject of his analysis, *Ménaud, maître-draveur* and *Les Engagés du Grand Partage*, in which the space of the forest is represented as an important space of French-Canadian culture at the discursive, territorial and symbolic level, therefore deserves closer analysis. This late inclusion of the space of the forest in the French-Canadian novel is even more significant when one considers the important role that it has played in the economic development of French-Canadian society and the space it occupies geographically. On the other hand, socio-politically speaking, the introduction of the space of the forest in literary fiction comes at a time when the urbanisation and industrialisation processes in the French-Canadian society are already well underway.

⁴¹³ Vauterin, T., "Aventures urbaines et géographies forestières dans le roman canadien-français des années 1930" in: Freeman, G. H., (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 183.

the processes of globalisation that will affect the production of the imagination as a collective social practice in the sense that Appadurai gives it. The abstraction of the space of the forest in *Ménaud, maître-draveur*, with its dominating element of “air”, signifies the transformation of this space into an ideological discourse mapping “from above” the ideas of the French-Canadian intellectual and religious elites at the time, a discourse that excludes the native Amerindian population from the founding myth of the origin of the nation. Contrary to this type of representation, an opposite dynamics is at work in Bouchard’s novel. Indeed, in *WP* the solid element of wood has fully replaced the element of air and lightness; this can be read as an attempt to de-codify and deconstruct the White, colonial discursive space on territory and belonging, so powerfully expressed in the mythical space of the forest and the North. By de-codifying this ideological space, Bouchard aims to restore the space of the forest to its “natural”, original state again and uses instead a view emanating from “below”. She can be said to reframe the space of the collective imagination by re-inscribing the space of the forest as an inclusive space. However, this process of de-codification is problematic, as the space of the forest is not only strongly associated with the “mythe du Nord” and the figure of the French-Canadian *coureur de bois*, it also represents the primordial lost space in Amerindian imagery, leading to conflicting memories, incorporated in Manu’s character. The reference to the “Forêt Boréale” of Elie’s French-Canadian ancestors is opposed to the native population’s loss of the forest with the arrival of European colonisation, as shown below:

Manu appartient sûrement à une de ces peuplades ancestrales qui ont construit les arbres, érigé le vent, la montagne et les rivières et qui, aujourd'hui, ont perdu leur forêt. (56)

Désormais sans forêt et sans terre, il n'a plus d'endroit où déposer la lignée de son peuple. Condamné au déséquilibre, il erre avec ses mains sur le piano. Il jasse. (120)

Interestingly, in *WP*, the dysphoric space of the Amerindian reserve stands in opposition to the open spaces of nature, while the figure of the Amerindian fulfils the function of the spiritual guide in the narrative. This was also the case for the figure of the Indian in Lalonde’s *Sept Lacs plus au Nord* and for the figure of Pitsémine in Poulin’s *Volkswagen blues*. These similarities among authors that write from

very different positions show a common concern for the unresolved questions of Amerindian memory and history; they testify to the fact that the Amerindian imaginary and myth haunt the collective imagination of Québec.

Thus, the deconstruction of the White colonial discourse on the space of the forest as a space of mapping from “above” involves a reworking of Québec’s cultural memory and the creation of an ecological postcolonial counter-discourse, something that Bouchard tries to achieve through the inclusion of the symbol of Amerindianity and the figure of the Amerindian jazz pianist Manu.

To conclude, the space of the forest in *WP* functions as an intertextual space. In the contemporary Québécois context, the space of the forest remains a fundamental space for Québec’s cultural memory and an important trope of the geographic imagination, as already discussed in the analysis on Ferron’s text *LA*. Interestingly, the range of narratives and values associated with that natural space in the Western tradition can be said to be embedded in a number of ideological discourses on nature, ranging from conservative discourses that developed in conjunction with the Romanticism to contemporary, ecological discourses on that space, as Bouchard’s analysis of *WP* demonstrates. Indeed, the multidimensional, polyvalent character of the space of the forest and the various cultural and ideological inflections that it can acquire have already been discussed both in the first chapter of this thesis on the spaces of the imagination in Dib’s and Ferron’s writing, and in the second chapter on space and memory in Lalonde’s text.

5.2.3.2. The Symbol of the Torrent

The torrent is another intertextual reference and symbol belonging to the spaces of nature that deserves to be analysed and has a high number of occurrences in *WP*; forty-three occurrences (43) have been identified in the text. The following poetic passage describes the sounds of melting ice and snow that turn

into an unstoppable torrent of water, marking the passage of seasons and the end of a cold winter. It also marks a moment of psychological change for Manu, Elie and Amorosa as they witness this scene:

La fissure. Soudain, c'est descente en chute libre: à toute allure sur les rochers, ça se fracasse en grosses gerbes, ça jaillit, ça crépite et ça se casse. La glace éclatée, L'eau hurle et l'hiver se déchire.
Le printemps en débâcle dans le piano et le brame du torrent.
...Et nous avons presque peur.
Mais brusquement.
Brusquement, c'est le retour, l'arrivée, la joie. (181-182)

In *WP*, the symbol of the torrent is embodied in the tragic figure of Chloé; like Anne Hébert's main character in the story "The Torrent" that will be referred to below, she commits suicide by throwing herself in the torrent. The two passages below testify to the symbolic power with which the metaphor of the torrent is endowed, referring both to liberation (through the act of Chloé's suicidal death) and the ambivalent character of water as both purifying and negative force:

Je me souviens uniquement que, dans ce conte, je devenais une source, une chute, un torrent. Mes cheveux fleurissaient d'algues en nénufars. C'était très beau. (81)

Je suis homme-médecine, Elie. Pourtant, je serai de fertilité impossible tant que je n'aurai pas accepté de vivre mon aliénation. Je vais entrer dans ce torrent et en crever les eaux. Avec Chloé, je ne serai plus jamais seul; à nous deux, nous formons déjà une légende. (206)

Thus, the metaphor or the imaginary of the torrent in *WP* does not only function as a recurring sensory and poetic device, it functions as a trope of intertextuality referring to one of Québec's key literary works and socio-cultural moments. It is inspired by Anne Hébert's story "Le Torrent" that appeared in 1950 in her first book of stories *Le Torrent* and was later published in 1963 in Paris.⁴¹⁴ Written as a first person narrative, this is the story of François, a young boy suffering greatly under a violent and repressive mother who forces him to renounce all sensory experience and desire. In order to erase his mother's "sin", François eventually ends up rebelling against and killing his mother, but he is incapable of forging

⁴¹⁴ Hébert, A., *Le Torrent: nouvelles*, Paris: Seuil, 1963. Hébert had to move to Paris in order to get her work published and find a more "sympathetic audience". She lived in Paris until 1997 and then returned to Montréal, three years before her death. See *Encyclopedia Britannica* accessed on 06/04/2012: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/259013/Anne-Hebert?anchor=ref737680>

relationships with others and commits suicide by throwing himself into the torrent. “Le Torrent” was badly received by Québec’s publishers, mostly because of its violent content. However, it had a profound effect on Québécois society at the time. Announcing the period of Quiet Revolution when it was written and published in parallel with the arrival of the most important socio-cultural and political movement in Québec’s modern history, “Le Torrent” crystallised perfectly, according to many critics, the state of collective alienation and dispossession of the Québécois people and played a crucial role for intellectuals “dans leur prise de conscience d’une aliénation collective et la nécessité de prendre en main leur destin de nation au lieu de le subir comme une fatalité”.⁴¹⁵

5.2.4. The Theme of Rupture: Elie or the Space of Rurality as Regeneration in *Whisky et paraboles*

From the perspective of the Catholic ideological discourse propagated in the era of French colonisation, the rural space in the Québécois’ collective imagination is intrinsically linked to the “mythe du Nord” as the founding, master narrative of the French colonisation of the North of America. The myth of the “Mission providentielle”, embodied in the heroic figures of the French explorers Jacques Cartier and Samuel Champlain, is part of this master narrative. According to the Québécois sociologist Christian Morissonneau, the discourse on rural space has at its origin the ideology of the “mythe colonisateur” propagated by the French empire and the French-Canadian elites that has been deployed in three stages between 1870 and 1950: “le mythe de la Mission Providentielle du peuple franco-canadien, le mythe de la Terre Promise et le mythe de la régénération”.⁴¹⁶ The ideological discourse of the myth of the North can be found through the whole of this period both in literary fiction in works such as *Maria Chapdelaine* and *Nord-Sud*, as well as in political discourse in texts of propaganda, in governmental pamphlets, political

⁴¹⁵ Bishop, B., “A La Source de la révolution tranquille: ‘Le Torrent’ d’Anne Hébert”, in: *The Art and Genius of Anne Hébert, Essays on her Works, Night and Day are One* (ed. Pallister, J. L.), Madison / Teaneck / London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press & Associated University Press, 2001, pp. 131-135.

⁴¹⁶ Morissonneau, C., *La Terre promise : le Mythe du Nord québécois* (préf. de Jean-Charles Falardeau), Montréal: Hurtubise HMH, 1978.

speeches and newspaper articles.⁴¹⁷ Interestingly, as Morissonneau shows from the numerous sources consulted, in the myth of the North, there resides both a dynamics of regeneration as *renewal* and the dynamics of survival as *conservation* of traditional values. As already argued, the same dynamics of regeneration and conservation can also be found Bouchard's novel. The trope of rurality as trope of conservation and survival that is embodied in the character of André in *WP* is once again deployed as a trope of religiosity through the colonial discourse of the Catholic Church. In the novel, André is depicted as the representative of the *colonial heritage of the settler colonies*. His fall into madness can be said to represent the depressive, repressive and destructive forces of the discourse on the French-Canadian nation and cultural memory, a discourse that has its origin in the conservative ideology on rural life and territory propagated by the Catholic Church, in which the paradigm of filiation, once again, stands in opposition to the paradigm of rupture. As Morissonneau shows in his analysis of the emergence of the ideological discourse of the Myth of the North, the French clerical elites were one of the main propagators of this myth. In the production of this myth, the North can be said to function as an empty signifier, a virginal space of wilderness whose meaning can be filled with ideological values and discourse. The composing myths of *La Terre Promise* and *La Mission Providentielle* propagated by the French religious and political elites derive their meaning from religious discourse on (the conquest of) the North, which is, in turn, based on the master narrative of colonisation of the North. At the end of the nineteenth century the religious myth of the North becomes a territorial myth of the *Terre Promise*; religious discourse turns into an official discourse on territory, on the French Canadian nation and nationality.⁴¹⁸ It also becomes a discourse on morality, agriculture and the attachment to the land and the rural values of life. As such, it stands in opposition to the *myth of regeneration* and the individualist ideals of the *coureur de bois*, most famously portrayed in *Maria Chapdelaine*'s character François Paradis, ideas that embrace values of

⁴¹⁷ Hémon, L., *Maria Chapdelaine*, 1954 (1st ed. 1916); Desrosiers, L.P., *Nord-Sud*, Montréal, Éditions du Devoir, 1931.

⁴¹⁸ According to the data cited by Morissonneau, the number of priests in Québec increased significantly; from 225 in 1830 it rises to 2102 in 1880. Hamelin, L.E., "Evolution numérique séculaire du clergé catholique dans le Québec", in: *Recherches sociographiques* 2, 1961, p. 189-241.

nomadism, mobility and return to life in nature. Thus, for New France, the ideal of the *coureur de bois* that was supported by a number of French philosophers and monks in the seventeenth century quickly becomes a threat, because of its rebellious nature, its egalitarian values and its close relationship with the Amerindian population, an ideal that can be found in Rousseau's idea of the "bon sauvage". It is therefore not surprising to find that in its religious discourse and valorisation of sedentary, rural life, the Catholic Church will speak against this subversive ideal and will support the idea of the inhabitant who cultivates his land.

As Ceri Morgan and Daniel Laforest discuss in their bilingual "Introduction" to the 2011 issue of the *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, the rural past holds a significant symbolic value in the Québécois' collective imagination and a particular place in their identity; a place that has been significantly contested by the arrival of the Révolution tranquille and its ideas of progress and modernisation. Since then, the symbolic tension between the space of the city and the rural space has led to the establishment of a paradigm of rupture between the rural and the urban that has been explored in the spatial imaginary of a number of Québécois writers, but it has also reinforced a simplified vision of non-urban spaces of the hinterland as spaces of tradition and conservation that is still prevalent among contemporary critics:

le monde académique québécois c'est jusqu'à présent montré peu enclin à revenir sur l'écart posé à l'origine entre un espace urbain déclaré de facto cosmopolite (Montréal essentiellement) et un monde rural devenu à bien des égards le réservoir commode des signes du passé.⁴¹⁹

It can be said that the reasons for the lack of attention from contemporary critics to the non-urban spaces in Québec that Morgan and Laforest reflect on, can be found in the different reductive representations and values opposing urban vs. non-urban spaces of Québec's past and present. Whilst it is true that the city of Montréal is an imaginary topos that has a long tradition in Québécois writing, starting with Gabrielle

⁴¹⁹ Morgan, C., & Laforest, D., "Introduction" in: *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 24, n° 2, 2011, p. 115.

Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*,⁴²⁰ the rural past has a significant symbolic value in the Québécois' collective imagination and a particular place in their identity. This value has been significantly contested by the arrival of the "Révolution tranquille" with its own values of progress and modernisation. The symbolic tension between the space of the city and the rural space already mentioned that has led to the establishment of the paradigm of rupture between the rural and the urban has reinforced the simplified vision of non-urban spaces of the hinterland as spaces of tradition and conservation opposed to modernity and progress:

In fiction and discourses around national identity, this simple rift between the rural and the urban has become a dominant model of representation, the interpretation and telling of Québec's (post)-modernity. The heartland and hinterland have remained in simple opposition to the city space.⁴²¹

So, and as the authors argue, the development of an epistemological perspective on and study of the spatial imaginary and geographic imagination of non-urban and ex-urban spaces in contemporary Québécois writing can greatly contribute to the conceptualisation of the "arrière-pays moderne et contemporain dans l'histoire culturelle québécoise".⁴²² These spaces, in turn, contribute to the production of the discourse on nature in contemporary Québec, a discourse that is the subject of textual analysis in the first part of this chapter.

The semiotic analysis of *WP* has shown that Bouchard's micro-geography re-maps the peripheral rural space of Québec through the inscription of locality perceived as dynamic space of identity.

The setting (or the topic space, semiotically speaking) of *WP* is the region of (or the municipality of) Péribonka, located in south-central Québec on the lake of Saint-Jean. The region of Péribonka is also the

⁴²⁰ Roy, G., *Bonheur d'occasion*, Montréal: Société des Éditions Pascal, 1945. The novel describes working-class life in the early war period. It won the Prix Fémina in Paris and the Literary Guild of America Award in New York. Translated into more than 15 languages (*The Tin Flute* in English), it brought Roy literary fame (Canadian Encyclopedia online: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/gabrielle-roy>, accessed on 21/01/12).

⁴²¹ Morgan, C., & Laforest, D., "Introduction" in: *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, p. 116.

⁴²² Morgan, C., & Laforest, D., p.xx.

setting of *Maria Chapdelaine*.⁴²³ As Rosemary Chapman observes, the description of this area in the novel is one that neglects the industrialising aspects and portrays it as a vast inhabited space.⁴²⁴ Thus, Hémon's novel greatly contributed to reinforcing an exotic view of French Canada as a space of collective imagination that draws on landscapes of peripherality (both cultural and geographic) as being outside urban development, wild spaces where nothing happens. As Chapman notes, Maria is depicted as the symbol of the traditionalist way of Québécois life as she marries someone from the region (Eutrope Gagnon) after the death of her lover, thus continuing the process of colonisation and abandoning the ideals of freedom. Her choice "emerges as (...) a denial of desire, of mobility and of imagination".⁴²⁵

WP can be seen as a novel that inscribes itself within the long literary tradition of writing of *Maria Chapdelaine*, referred to previously. By using this classic intertextual reference, Bouchard seeks to re-appropriate this most widely read text of French Canadian literature that was, ironically, written by a Frenchman. Its incorporation at the beginning of the text destabilises *Maria Chapdelaine*'s colonial frame of reference by displacing it within the contemporary context of the collective imagination and globalisation:

M'enfuir. J'ai claqué toutes les portes pour aller m'échouer dans mon auto et j'ai grignoté les routes du Québec, kilomètre par kilomètre, conduisant mon désarroi fugitif sur les chiffres: la 31,

⁴²³ As Chapman explains, the area Hémon refers to in his text was known as the "Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean" area. It was densely populated by the Amero-indian population (for 4000 years prior to the arrival of the French in the 16th century). Although tropes of empty space, winter and cold predominate in the text, the area was in fact highly industrialised (with a strong forest industry) at the end of the 19th and the beginning of 20th century.

⁴²⁴ Chapman, R., *Siting the Quebec novel: the Representation of Space in Francophone Writing in Quebec*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2000.

⁴²⁵ Chapman, R., *op.cit.*, p. 54. According to Chapman, three other novels written between 1982 and 1992 can be viewed as sequels of Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine*: Clapin, S., *Alma-Rose*, Montréal: Fides, 1982; Gourdeau, G., *Maria Chapdelaine, ou, Le Paradis retrouvé*, Montréal: Les Quinze, 1992; and Porée-Kurrer, P., *La promesse du lac*, Chicoutimi: J.C.L., 1992. While *Alma-Rose* reinforces a reading of the history and memory of Québec as being a peripheral space whose future can only be defined through its relationship of the colonial past with France, a more prominent place is accorded to the urban spaces of Québec (alongside with Paris) in *Maria Chapdelaine ou le Paradis Retrouvé*. To argue her point, Chapman uses the frequency analysis of toponymic references in the three novels. As she concludes from her analysis, there are twice as many toponymic references to France as there are to Québec (city or territory) in *Alma-Rose*. Interestingly, in *Maria Chapdelaine ou le Paradis Retrouvé* rural spaces are replaced by urban spaces with Montréal, Québec (province) and Paris being the most cited places. Yet, the cultural domination of Paris as the main literary space appears clearly in the novel.

la 40, la 55, la 138. J'y suis allée comme à la loto, gagnant pour gros lots des noms de villages qui baptisaient ma tourmente de cette poésie qui a convaincu Maria Chapdelaine de s'établir à Péribonka: Saint-Ferréol-les-Neiges, Saint-Aimé-des-Lacs, Cap-à-l'Aigle, Port-au-Persil. J'ai erré des jours, des jours et des jours, orientant mon repentir sur les clochers paroissiaux, dormant sur l'accotement, cherchant là où je pourrais dire “ici” et sentir que... (9)

Therefore, Bouchard attributes to her heroine a distinctively contemporary meaning by characterising her as a “nouvelle Maria indécise” or as someone who is unsure about her own identity and place in the globalised world.

In semiotic terms, the rural space in *WP* plays the function of topic space, whereas the city remains a heterotopic space. Indeed, an analysis of the spatial isotopies at the surface level of meaning represented in Table 6 has shown that non-urban spaces or peripheral spaces predominate in the novel.

Isotopy / Semes	Sememes	Frequency of sememes	Space type and/or Space Opposition
Rural space	/ici/, /maison/, /chalet/, /bar/, /neige/, /terre/, /rivière/, /village/, /aube/, /bois/, /chemin/, /dehors/	419	Rural–Urban
Nature	/eau/, /torrent/, forêt/, /lac/, /mer/, /montagne/, /vent/, /falaise/, /arbre/, /vague/, /ciel/	233	Nature–City
Silence	/silence/	101	Silence–Parable
Interior space	/chambre/, /cuisine/, /intérieur/	52	Interior–Exterior
Québec, Local space	/Paspébiac/, /Péribonka/, /Port-au-Persil/, /Cap-à-l'Aigle/, /Cap-Chat/, /Rivière du Loup/, /Saint-Aimé-des-Lacs/, /Saint-Ferréol-des Neiges/, /Saint-Jean-Port-Poli/, /Québec/, /pays/, /nation/	31	Native–Foreign; Local–Global
Global space	/monde/, /continent/, /Terre/	26	Global–Local
Transient space	/auto/, /voiture/, /char/	18	Transient–Static
Amerindian space	/La Réserve/	7	Aboriginal–White
City, urban space	/ville/	5	Urban–Non-urban
North	/Nord/	4	North–South
America	/Amériques/, /Amérique du Sud/	3	North–South

France	/outré-mer/	1	Colonial–colonised
West	/Occident/, /village-globalisé/	1	West–East
French Canada	/pays/	1	French Canada–Québec

Table 6. The presentation of spatial isotopies in *Whisky et Paraboles*.

From the first lines of the novel, the enumeration of Québec’s villages creates a strong sense of locality that Ellie is trying to re-trace and remap whilst driving on the rural roads of her native Québec. As demonstrated earlier in the analysis, the space of the interior and of the exterior geography can be said to be merged into a new space of identity in which geography and the subject have become indistinguishable. As can be seen from Table 6 that shows the frequencies of the spatial isotopies identified, while rural and natural spaces are by far the most cited spaces in the novel, very little reference is made either to the space of the city or to foreign spaces or to the space of an *ailleurs*. The absence of reference to urban space and its values of cosmopolitan life are particularly striking: there is no mention of any of Québec’s main cities such as Montréal or Québec, nor is there any mention of any European cities such as Paris. The local, peripheral and non-urban spaces of Québec thus stand in opposition to spaces of an anonymous globality depicted only as “le monde” and endowed with negative values of the materialistic and consumerist Western society. However, although a clear distinction between the space of the local and the space of the global is noticeable at the surface level of meaning, the notion of *place* as named locality in *WP* cannot be said to be a reactionary and conservative vision of identity and place that is traditionally assigned to this notion.⁴²⁶ Instead, it is constructed as a dynamic space of identity that is determined primarily by the social relations between the characters and Elie’s own individuality, in line with Massey’s own understanding of the notion of place. The relational character of space in the novel is

⁴²⁶ As already debated in the introduction to this thesis, Doreen Massey’s theory is primarily concerned with a redefinition of the concepts of “space” and “place” in the context of globalisation (or “time-space compression”) and the way in which these notions are tied up with gender in Western societies.

reinforced by the fact that the village in which the narrative is situated stays unnamed. It is defined only in general terms as any village of Québec that has a bar, a church and a convenience store:⁴²⁷

Quittant le fleuve, j'ai bifurqué sur la route des chantiers et des forêts où s'écarter et j'ai fini par aboutir ici. Comme dans tous les villages jetés au hasard, on y retrouve l'essentielle trinité permettant de survivre au néant: un dépanneur, un bar, une église. Une croix de chemin, une affiche de maison à vendre derrière laquelle s'étire une allée de terre qui s'enfonce dans le bois... Ça ne promettait rien et c'est pour ça que j'ai su que. (*sic*) (10)⁴²⁸

Moreover, the human geographic notion of spatiality clearly comes to the fore in Bouchard's text. If local place is made out of social relations and as the social can be said to be spatialised, then "geography is not simply territorial".⁴²⁹ Such a conception and imagination of space undoes the mapping of the opposing pairs "local/global" and concrete/abstract into themselves, as Massey argues:

then The global is just as concrete as is the local place. If space is really to be thought relationally, it is no more than the sum of our relations and interconnectedness, and the lack of them; it too is utterly "concrete". (It is evident here how romanticising the local can be the other side of understanding space as an abstraction). (184)

Finally, an important aspect of the interior geography as space of identity is rendered through the isotopy of silence; this is the reason why it has been classified as a spatial isotopy in Table 6. The sense of silence in *WP* qualifies the exterior geography of the open, natural spaces and landscapes such as the lake, the snow, the river and the dawn. However, as a spiritual concept, silence also marks the interior geography of the character; it is most often associated with Elie's need for recovery of the spiritual Self. Again, the interior geography of the subject and the exterior geography of the landscape are fused into one. As a figure of lost spirituality, silence is often attached to a dysphoric feeling, a necessary step on one's spiritual journey of self-discovery in order to find one's own voice again:

⁴²⁷ In Québec (and in other parts of French-speaking Canada) the word "dépanneur" is used to refer to a convenience store, independent corner-shop or a delicatessen.

⁴²⁸ Brossard often uses truncated sentences in French, as can be noted at the end of this quotation. She explains the truncated use of sentences as a mark of orality in language, as can be seen in the interview with the author, Appendix 2.

⁴²⁹ Massey, *For Space*, p. 184.

Dans ces jours si sombres, il n'y a plus que des silences et des falaises. Des silences coupables d'avoir inventé des falaises. Alors, il faudrait avoir le courage de ceux qui reprennent la parole, qui défient les gouffres et qui demandent pardon. (57)

5.2.5. The Theme of Continuity: the Catholic Church or the Trope of Religiosity

The theme of rurality associated with values of continuity and survival embodied in the character of André (as already mentioned) is a central part of the French colonial discourse of the Catholic Church.. Turning one's attention more closely to the trope of religiosity in *WP*, one can see that the most significant intertextual reference – that of Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine* – that appears in the first paragraph of the novel is immediately followed by a reference to religiosity. Elie's depiction as "nouvelle Maria indécise" acquires a specific meaning in the context of the reference to the place of Gethsemane⁴³⁰:

Rouler le chemin de croix à rebours, remonter en Gethsémani, éloigner de mes lèvres la coupe trop bue jusqu'à la lie. Croire, nouvelle Maria indécise, que la poésie de mon pays peut lui offrir un destin. (9)

The frequent occurrence of religious references such as the Bible, (the stations of) the cross, the cup, (holy) water, religious parables, baptism, crucifixion, faith, Jesus Christ or God mark Elie's interior monologues throughout the novel.⁴³¹ Claiming that "la méconnaissance du passé mène à l'impossibilité d'une définition identitaire", Bouchard explains in her interview that the Catholic religion is an important component of Québécois' cultural identity that should not be ignored in the context of contemporary

⁴³⁰ Gethsemane is the "garden across the Kidron Valley on the Mount of Olives, a mile-long ridge paralleling the eastern part of Jerusalem, where Jesus is said to have prayed on the night of his arrest before his Crucifixion." Accessed on 06/04/2012 at:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/232182/Gethsemane>

⁴³¹ There are 105 occurrences in the text relating to religious references, including religious life and practice.

debates on Québécois identity and Québec's pluriculturalism. Indeed, as Bouchard herself explained, she consciously incorporated the theme of the Catholic Church and of the religious parables in the novel.⁴³² She shows a concern for the re-appropriation of Québec's religious Catholic identity and wants to acknowledge the role of resistance that the Catholic Church played both during the British colonisation and the Revolution tranquille as an important participant in the creation of the Québec's cultural identity and memory:

La thématique des Paraboles [dont je me sers dans *Whisky et Paraboles*] et de l'histoire (personnelle et collective) que l'on construit est indissociable, au Québec, de l'Eglise. Dans cet héritage culturel, l'Eglise représenta d'abord la colonisation française et la crainte de la Révolution française. Elle fut aussi un instrument important de résistance contre la colonisation britannique. Il est important de rendre compte de cet héritage qui est éliminé depuis les années soixante-dix et l'arrivée de la Révolution tranquille.⁴³³

Although a critique of Judeo-Christian discourse is clearly at work in Bouchard's novel, her approbation of the positive values that the Catholic Church played is also clearly present. At first, Elie is not able to reconnect with the notions of Christian faith and morality, but her entry into an old Catholic church at the end of the novel to try and make sense of the choices she made in her past and to face her guilt marks an important moment of transformation; it will lead to the recovery of her own identity and Self:

Pour reprendre pied et arrêter la fuite, je suis entrée dans l'église. Mais je ne sais plus comment prier. C'est vain dans ma tête et vide autour de moi. Le Pater Noster, l'Ave Maria et le Sanctus, c'est tout ce que j'ai de mémoire pour me sentir bénie du baiser de ma mère qui me bordait jadis dans la paix du Christ. (265)

Tenter la confession, pourquoi pas, pour me donner une absolution, une foi, une église à moi qui serait enfin. (266)

In her conversation with the church's caretaker, Elie learns that the church is over two hundred years old and that its French-Canadian founders are still buried under the building's foundations. The old man's

⁴³² For an analysis of the relationship between postcolonial literature and the theme of religiosity, see Vautier, M., "Transculturalism, postcolonial identities, religiosity in Lalonde's *Sept Lacs plus au Nord* and Tostevin's *Frog Moon*", in: *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 9:3, 2006, pp. 365-380. In her paper, Marie Vautier makes the argument about the supposed relationship between transculturalism, postcolonial identity and religiosity in post-nationalist Québec.

⁴³³ Interview with Roxanne Bouchard, Appendix 1.

commentary is an ode to French-Canadian heritage and cultural memory. Describing these ancestors as “quelques Canadiens français colons, trappeurs, boutiquiers, des lignées d'hommes des bois sculptées dans la Forêt boréale qui sont partis d'une pauvreté de petite misère et ont construit un village à la hache” (268), Bouchard aims to reshape French-Canadian collective memory through another reference from Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine*:

Nous avons apporté d'outre-mer nos prières et nos chansons: elles sont toujours les mêmes, ma p'tite dame: le *Pater Noster*, l'*Ave Maria*, le *Sanctus* (...) Nous avons apporté dans nos poitrines le cœur des hommes de notre pays, vaillant et vif, le cœur le plus humain de tous les cœurs humains: il n'a pas changé. Toute la fondation, toute la structure, tout ça, c'est un témoignage. Nous sommes un témoignage, ma p'tite dame. Une suite des choses. Un enracinement. Ce qui a deux cents ans, dans cette église, c'est la foi. (268)

Elie's handing over of a telegram from her ex-lover that she had kept for years marks the final transformation in the narrative, as she is finally able to liberate herself from her past Self and realises as if in a moment of epiphany: “La beauté de l'église érigée en témoignage et la foi devant soi. On fait juste continuer”. Elie's ritualistic gesture allows her to embark on the construction of a new identity in union with “le conteur” and Amorosa. So, Elie inscribes herself within the paradigm of continuity; her final recovery of identity passes through the recovery of her French-Canadian memory and the reconnection with the roots of her Catholic religious identity; Elie's final transformation leaves no space for the construction of either a postcolonial or a transcultural identity.

Although one can agree that the trope of religiosity in *WP* is used as a cultural trope of the collective imagination, something that Vautier would argue, it does not necessarily follow that the literary construction of identity will be one that is transcultural or postcolonial. The complexity of this question is well illustrated in Bouchard's own ambivalent position towards the values of recovery of Amerindian memory as a constitutive part of Québec's collective memory. As Bouchard herself acknowledges in her interview, Québécois' ambiguous relationship to native Amerindian culture and identity and the question of their inclusiveness into the space of Québec, coupled with their denial of colonial history, are a

complex issue, something that Brossard is well aware of. When asked to comment on the idea of whether one can speak of a return to the “racine amérindienne” in contemporary, post-nationalist Québec, an idea that was advanced by the Québécois writer of mixed origin, Yolande Villemaire,⁴³⁴ Brossard questions whether a straightforward inclusion and definition of the “racine amérindienne” in the Québécois identity is possible and disagrees with Villemaire’s claim:

Je ne suis pas d’accord avec Yolande Villemaire quand elle affirme que “nous nous en allons aujourd’hui vers notre racine amérindienne”. Comment définir cette racine amérindienne dans le contexte de l’absence d’une racine Québécoise, qu’est-elle au juste? L’indifférence des Québécois à l’égard des Amérindiens ne peut pas être sous-estimée, elle est plus que troublante, mais l’absence des racines québécoises est tout aussi préoccupante (...) L’indifférence des Québécois à l’égard de leurs racines me blesse. Peu importe qu’on soit fiers ou non du passé, nous avons devoir de mémoire.

Roxanne Bouchard’s intellectually honest response shows that a collective “return” to Amerindian origin might not be sufficient to resolve the multilayered problematic of Québécois’ perceived lack of origins and loss of cultural identity. However, it also signals that there is still no greater agreement among intellectuals and writers in Québec on how to resolve the question of Québécois’ right to Amerindian memory, something that the texts analysed here demonstrate. It seems that for Bouchard, the question of spatial loss in the Amerindian context that is expressed both as territorial and as cultural loss can therefore only be resolved after the question of loss and recovery of French Canadian territory and identity has been resolved.

⁴³⁴ Yolande Villemaire was born in Saint-Augustin-de-Mirabel in 1949 and is of mixed origin (Métis). She is a well established Québécois writer and a novelist, poet and playwright. The quotation referred to here is taken from an interview she gave to the already mentioned Québécois Jean Royer (Royer, J. *Romanciers québécois, entretiens, essais*, Montréal: l’Hexagone, 1991, pp. 324-325): “Nous, la préoccupation nationaliste, nous ne l’avons pas eue parce que les autres ont fait le pays avant nous et pour nous (...) La génération de la contre-culture a rejeté le nationalisme pour se trouver une identité américaine très forte. Avant nous, le Québec avait compris sa racine française. Notre génération a été de l’époque qui a compris notre racine américaine. Puis, je dirais qu’aujourd’hui nous nous en allons vers notre racine amérindienne.” Villemaire refers here to the second wave of the post-nationalist generation of writers who are no longer preoccupied with ideas of nationalism and prefer to call on the multicultural past and present of the Québécois cultural and literary space.

To summarise, the analysis presented shows that the novel of *WP* is constructed as a micro-geography that calls for the return to the space of nature and to the notions of localised culture, identity and space in contemporary Québec situated in the era of globalisation. Bouchard re-maps the peripheral space of Québec through the inscription of locality and a discourse on rural space constituted dynamically along the paradigms of continuity and rupture, as well as through the production of intertextual spaces that produce a tension between these two paradigms. Brossard's re-appropriation of the rural space of Québec leads to the construction of a postcolonial ecological and Aboriginal discourse through her treatment and inclusion of the spaces of the forest, the symbol of the torrent and the trope of Amerindianity. The paradigms above should presuppose a "complicity/ resistance dialectic". However, the semiotic analysis of Bouchard's text showed that the themes of rurality and Catholic-based religiosity identified do not function as tropes of transcultural identity or postcolonial consensus; instead they function primarily as markers of Québécois' cultural identity and collective imagination that can only be fully restored by returning to one's own cultural origin. They ultimately show the need to make sense of place again, as they speak of the author's search for a new humanism.

5.3. Writing (in) the Space of Franco-Algerian Culture: Recovering Lost Algeria in Nina Bouraoui's *Mes mauvaises pensées*

*Je m'adapte à tout. Très vite. C'est comme une folie, cette faculté d'adaptation. C'est plusieurs vies à la fois. C'est une multitude de petites trahisons.*⁴³⁵

Nina Bouraoui

⁴³⁵ Bouraoui, N., *Garçon manqué*, Paris: Editions Stock, 2000, p. 162.

An analysis of the various inflections of postcolonial discourses on space and spatial loss in the writing of the authors presented so far has been offered in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. In the first part of this final chapter, the question of France's colonial discourse on the ideals of rural life propagated by the French Catholic Church, and of the re-appropriation of rural space, has been examined in the context of postcolonial contemporary Québec in Bouchard's *Whisky et paraboles*. In the second part that follows, the question of the representation of the spaces of the South and North in the postcolonial literary context of the Maghreb will be studied through an examination of Bouraoui's treatment of Franco-Algerian cultural and memory space. More particularly, the question that is posed here is to what extent Bouraoui seeks to deconstruct the binary relationship France-Maghreb through her search for and engagement with "third" cultural and geographic spaces (either Mediterranean, as in *Garçon manqué*, or North American, as in *Mes mauvaises pensées*) and if so, why she cyclically returns to the space and imagination of Algeria in her writing. Is Bouraoui's obsession for the recovery of (the memory of) Algeria a sign of her incapacity to remember and an indication of her anxiety or fear of "losing the experience of loss" of that place?⁴³⁶ Or should her cyclical return to the space of Algeria be examined in the larger, contemporary context of the collective imaginations of the South, something that a number of Maghrebian Francophone writers seem to have embraced as a result of their need perhaps to break away from the borders of national literature and to inscribe themselves within and explore the culture and history of the Mediterranean?⁴³⁷ Throughout the novel, one can unveil a discourse on migrant identity in Bouraoui's writing that is reframed within the imagination of the South. Defining herself as a "sujet sans racines profondes", the narrator uses her Algerian heritage as the site of an imagined Southern identity that becomes the source of the narrator's *rêves orientaux*. The narrator's dual Self becomes a literary Self constantly reinvented on the backdrop of the narrator's "tableaux Algériens":

⁴³⁶ Bouraoui, N., *Garçon manqué*, 2000. Bouraoui, N., *Mes mauvaises pensées*, 2005. The abbreviation *MMP* will be used each time the latter text is referred to in the analysis.

⁴³⁷ The imagination of the space of the Mediterranean seems to have captured the attention of a number of North African Francophone writers. See Salim Bachi, *Les amours et les aventures de Sinbad le Marin*, Paris: Gallimard, 2010 or Bouraoui, H., *Méditerranée à voile toute*, Ottawa: Éditions du Vermillon, 2010.

puisque je suis un sujet sans racines profondes, puisque je n'ai rien de mes grand-parents algériens, que le visage de mon père qui ressemble à sa mère, que des bribes de la vie de mon grand-père, mais rien de ses mains sur mon visage, de sa voix dans ma tête, rien, parfois l'odeur d'un gâteau, le sucre des cornes de gazelle, le goût de la fleur d'oranger, le chant des oiseaux aussi, puisque mes grand-parents avaient des arbres dans leur jardin avec des oiseaux nichés sous leurs feuilles, puisque les oiseaux sont la vie, ou une forme de vie du Sud. (143-144)

So, if the maternal and paternal spaces of France and Algeria can be defined poetically as spaces of life and death, something that will be discussed in the analysis that follows, they could also function as representations of the geographic imagination of the global spaces of the North and South constructed through power-relations, something that Bouraoui's novel does problematise. Finally, could Bouraoui's excavatory memories of Algeria be viewed as a symptom of a "retour du refoulé" in the societal, political and cultural contemporary spaces of France? The concept of the "retour du refoulé" is analysed in Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire's discussion on France's colonial memory and nostalgia, concepts that were part of France's colonial discourse of the nineteenth century, embedded in the ideological values of the Third Republic.⁴³⁸

Ultimately, one could argue that Bouraoui's writing combines all of these different perspectives, as mentioned above. If that is so, then the question that arises is not only how one is to conceptualise or define space and place in bicultural or multicultural contexts, something that Massey does not seem to be explicitly concerned with in her discussions on space, place and gender, but equally importantly for this thesis, how one is to conceptualise spatial loss in the context of Franco-Algerian cultural conflicting, multiple memories and histories. What roles does loss of space and place fulfil for Bouraoui? Can Algeria really be said to be lost for her? Or are the writer's melancholic memories and her retelling of the loss of Algeria, conceptions that would be defined from a socio-political perspective of human geography as mystifications of space and place, necessary as they are a source of writing and creativity?

⁴³⁸ Blanchard, P., Bancel, N., Lemaire, S., *La fracture coloniale: La société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial*, Paris: La Découverte / Poche, 2006 (1st ed. 2005), p. 10.

As has been argued by a number of critics, the classification of Nina Bouraoui as a writer within a defined literary space is problematic; although she is a writer whose imagination is deeply rooted in the Algerian imaginary, an imaginary to which she constantly returns, as already stated, she also likes exploring the space of Western culture and its cosmopolitan and urban identities.⁴³⁹ She has developed a style that is classical and lyrical, but also impregnated with sensuality; her writing on Algeria could be compared to that of Albert Camus. Indeed, when reading Camus' reflections on Algeria, one can find some striking similarities in the way in which the lost space of Algeria is imagined and reconstructed in both these writers' memory and textual production.⁴⁴⁰ In the short poetic piece entitled "Retour à Tipasa", written in 1952, Camus speaks the language of memory and reflects on life, death, loss and exile. The historic time of the city of Algiers in the context of post-war Europe is opposed here to the mythic time of the ruins of Tipasa, a place that for the author remains a place of youth and happiness and to which he returns in memory after almost twenty years. What this lyrical piece encapsulates perfectly is a writing dominated by the aesthetics of loss, aesthetics fully expressed in Camus' melancholic voice and descriptions of that place. Although clearly referring to different periods of Algeria's colonised past, both Camus' and Bouraoui's texts make reference to the ruins of Tipasa in their evocations and memories of Algeria. The place of the ruins of Tipasa seems to symbolise for both writers a site of lost history and memory in (post)colonial Algeria:

Quinze ans après, je retrouvais mes ruines, à quelques pas des premières vagues, je suivais les rues de la cité oubliée à travers les champs couverts d'arbres amers, et, sur les coteaux qui dominant la baie, je caressais encore les colonnes couleur de pain.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁹ Bivona, R., "Nina Bouraoui: une écriture migrante en quête de lieu", in : *Littérature des Immigrations, 2) Exils croisés, Perspectives Comparatistes*, Charles Bonn (ed.), Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995, pp. 125-136.

⁴⁴⁰ Yet, the question of Bouraoui's and Camus's intended readership is an interesting one. While one can assume that Camus' intended readership is predominantly a French metropolitan one as argued by E. J. Hughes in his analysis of Camus' *Le Premier Homme* and *La Peste*, it is less obvious who Bouraoui's intended readership is as she occupies a double space of identity and culture (Hughes, E. J., *Le Premier Pomme, La Peste*, Exeter: University of Glasgow German and French Publications, 1995).

⁴⁴¹ Camus, A., "Retour à Tipasa", in: *op.cit.*, 1954, p. 157.

je suis triste à cause de l'Algérie, je suis le cœur de l'Algérie, il y a ces photos prises dans les champs de ruines romaines du Chenoua ou de Tipaza, ces photos qui disent bien toute la beauté et toute la solitude de l'Algérie, je suis triste à cause de cela, je suis comme cet homme un jour, à Barbès, qui crie: "Je vous déteste tous parce que vous avez oublié les Algériens." (25)

Interestingly, the figure of Camus appears in a number of texts of first and second generation Franco-Algerian and Algerian women writers, as Debra Kelly discusses in her analysis on Camus and the literature on loss in the postcolonial Francophone context.⁴⁴² So, Bouraoui is not alone in her implicit and explicit evocation of Camus; the figure of Camus emerges recurrently in Djébar's texts.⁴⁴³

In *MMP*, loss and melancholia operate within a paradigm of disappearance, a recurrent theme in Bouraoui's writing.⁴⁴⁴ Indeed, in an interview in 2012, in which Bouraoui talks about her latest book, *Sauvage*,⁴⁴⁵ the Franco-Algerian writer explains in the following way what the theme of disappearance and death mean for her writing:⁴⁴⁶

Le thème de la mort est lié à la disparition. Je voulais écrire une sorte d'enquête métaphysique. A quoi a-t-on recours pour retrouver les disparus, les morts ou dans tous les cas pour s'en soigner ? Est-ce que le monde dans lequel on vit est seul et unique ou est-ce qu'au-delà de ce monde il y a autre chose?

⁴⁴² Kelly, D., "Le Premier Homme and the Literature of Loss" in: *The Cambridge Companion to Camus* (ed. Hughes, E. J.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁴⁴³ Albert Camus is cited in the epigraph to Djébar's text *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*. The writer also appears in an enigmatic passage related to Berkan's childhood memories of the Casbah in *La Disparition de la langue française*. Finally, Camus is acknowledged by Djébar as belonging to the tradition of Algerian literature in *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*. Djébar, A., *Le blanc de l'Algérie*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1995; Djébar, A., *Ces voix qui m'assiègent*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1999, p. 213; Djébar, A., *La disparition de la langue française*, Albin Michel, 2003, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁴⁴ The abbreviation *MMP* will be used each time the text *Mes mauvaises pensées* is referred to in this analysis.

⁴⁴⁵ Bouraoui, N., *Sauvage*, Paris: Stock, 2011.

⁴⁴⁶ Journet, A., "Nina Bouraoui et Sara Stridsberg: "L'écrivain est un marginal", in: *L'Express*, 09/05/2011.

Accessed on 12/04/2012 at:

http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/nina-bouraoui-et-sara-stridsberg-l-ecrivain-est-un-marginal_990537.htm

Again, Bouraoui's cyclical return to the space of Algeria in her writing and her need to recover her memories from the invading processes of disappearance and forgetting give rise to a poetics of loss firmly anchored in the Algerian space as a site of (contemporary) imagination.⁴⁴⁷

Some critics have argued that in *Mes mauvaises pensées* one can identify a shift from a fractured space of dual identity (as in Bouraoui's earlier novel *Garçon manqué*) into a composite, third space of identity: a shift at the political level from a position of the fractured / colonised subject to a position of a nomadic / postcolonial subject.⁴⁴⁸ The analysis that will be presented here aims at questioning such an interpretation; instead, it will attempt to show that Bouraoui does not ultimately fully manage (or need) to deconstruct the binary relationship France–Algeria.⁴⁴⁹ The semiotic analysis conducted on *MMP* shows that the passage between the cultural space of France and the cultural space of Algeria can only be achieved through the symbolic and embodied passage or transformation in the metropolitan space of Paris. In other words, it is only the transformation of identity in and the appropriation of the metropolitan, contemporary space of Paris that make this transformation and passage possible, something that can be demonstrated by applying the semiotic reading to the text. So, in the case of Bouraoui's text, the semiotic reading of the text appears to be incompatible with Massey's theory on space and her critique of geographies of power. Bouraoui's progressive positive representation of the French metropole in *MMP* can be viewed as an endorsement of the Eurocentric discourse on space, something that would stand in direct opposition to

⁴⁴⁷ The novel *Sauvage* is the latest novel in the series of texts that explicitly explore the space and memory of Algeria. See footnote 451.

⁴⁴⁸ See Vassallo, H., "La mémoire dans la peau: Memory, identity and trauma in Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué*", *Society for French Studies*, 48th Annual Conference 2007, 2-4 July, Birmingham. The relationship between "life narrative", postcolonial memory and the body is discussed in Vassallo, H., "Wounded Storyteller: Illness as Life Narrative in Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué*", *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2007, pp. 46-56.

⁴⁴⁹ Although several interpretations are possible, it is held here that the reconciliation of identity in *Garçon manqué* (the novel is divided into three parts, *Alger*, *Rennes* and *Tivoli*) is only apparent. Algiers and Rennes emerge again as spaces of the divided or fractured Self in *MMP*, something that indicates that the feeling of reconciliation of identity described in *Garçon manqué* was temporary.

Massey's statements on the subversive character of the postcolonial subject as one that always bypasses the metropolitan centre.

Nina Bouraoui was born in 1967 in Rennes, France, of an Algerian father and a French mother. Between the years 1970 and 1980 she lived in Algeria and at the age of fourteen returned to France. She currently resides in Paris where she first became known for her text *La Voyeuse Interdite* (1991), a text that promoted her to the label of a “*Beur*” or “*second generation*” immigration writer, a label that can no longer be attributed to her work. The novel *MMP* is the penultimate novel belonging to the series of five texts that explicitly deal with an “Algerian theme”.⁴⁵⁰

MMP is set in the closed, confined space of what is most likely a psychoanalyst's office in which a young Franco-Algerian woman writer works through her childhood and adulthood memories and experiences, after having felt she was being obsessed by “*des mauvaises pensées*”. From the first lines of the text, the reader enters the intimate, dark space of the narrator that starts as a confession about the “malicious thoughts” of a foreign, repressed Self by which she is possessed:

Je viens vous voir parce que j'ai des mauvaises pensées. Mon âme se dévore, je suis assiégée. Je porte quelqu'un à l'intérieur de ma tête, quelqu'un qui n'est plus moi ou qui serait un *moi* que j'aurais longtemps tenu, longtemps étouffé. (9)

Fundamentally, it is the narrator's real, imagined and symbolic paternal and maternal spaces of Algeria and France that are being deconstructed in *MMP*: “je vous dis, tout de suite, je suis de mère française et de père algérien, comme si mes phobies venaient de ce mariage” (18). Then, towards the end of the novel, after evoking a scene in which she recalls her and her mother in the *appartement de la rue X*, the narrator

⁴⁵⁰ *La Voyeuse interdite*, Paris: Flammarion, 1991; *Le Jour du séisme*, Paris: Stock, 1999; *Garçon manqué*, Paris: Stock, 2000; *Mes mauvaises pensées*, Paris: Stock, 2005; *Sauvage*, Paris: Stock, 2011.

concludes that she is inevitably torn between two spaces and an in-between space that she will need to cross:

Alors se superposent nos deux lieux, l'Algérie sur la France puis la France sur l'Algérie. Quand je m'installe face à ma mère, je deviens la doublure de mon père (...) il y a une fuite et un resserrement du temps, je construis un pont, j'ai toute ma vie pour faire le grand écart entre les deux terres, entre mon père et ma mère. (254-255)

The narrator's superposition of the oppositional spaces of France and Algeria is interesting here, as it is a device that Bouraoui also uses in her earlier novel *Garçon manqué* when she exclaims: "L'Algérie est trop proche de la France. Comme traversée. Trop liée aussi".⁴⁵¹ The oppositional relationship France–Algeria that a semiotic reading of the text has identified is therefore a highly ambiguous one; in fact, both France and Algeria evoke feelings of dysphoria for the narrator.

5.3.1. The Paternal Space of the South: "Eurydice perdue deux fois" or Writing the Myth of Algeria

MMP begins with a superposition of two other mirrored spaces: Nice and Algiers. As was argued in Lalonde's text *Sept Lacs plus au Nord*, the awakening of a subject's particular sensory memory becomes the main trigger for the recollection of repressed memories; here, it is the memory of a lost Algeria that resurfaces as an ambivalent space of paradise and hell:

Avant mes mauvaises pensées, il y a cet été à Nice, ces vacances à Castel Plage (...) je crois que tout commence là, dans une confusion des lieux, le sud de la France que je découvre, l'Algérie qui revient par superposition d'images: la mer, la baie, les palmiers, les jeunes garçons qui sifflent sur la Promenade (...) J'ai retrouvé mon paradis – les bains chauds et profonds, l'odeur des fleurs, la lumière rose - et j'ai retrouvé mon enfer: l'idée d'une force qui étouffe. Je ne suis jamais retournée en Algérie. (13-14)

In the passage above that is a moment of anamnesis, the space of the French South – Nice – immediately evokes images of another space that is reminiscent of this Mediterranean city – Algiers – and that bring to

⁴⁵¹ Bouraoui, N., *Garçon manqué*, 2000, p. 161.

the surface feelings of guilt of never having returned to Algeria. It could be said that it is at that moment of realisation of non-return that Algeria stops being a historical or a geographic space for the narrator, becoming instead a memory, a prime source of writing. So, the paternal space of Algeria in *MMP* is a site of mythical memory that could be described in Lacanian terms as a “Eurydice deux fois perdue” as it is lost twice: first, as the childhood space through the narrator’s moving to France and secondly, through the fading of memory and the impossibility of experiencing this space again through the sensory experiences of the body.⁴⁵² Algeria becomes a utopia, a place of fantasy, of paradise lost, but also the genesis of writing:

Cette colère, c’est la trace de la terre, la colère c’est encore la force de l’Algérie en moi, la force de sa beauté: les criques, les plaines, la montagne, le désert, le vide de la nature, le vent, le vent sur mon corps, le vent qui fait plier les coquelicots, le vent qui soulève le sable, le vent entre les pilotis de l’immeuble, le vent sur l’eau qui se plisse et gonfle, le vent dans l’herbe, là où je me couche, où je me sens si bien (...) il y a un glissement de la terre algérienne sur mon corps, je veux dire par là que j’ai le statut de l’enfant sauvage. Je ne me suis pas remise de cela. L’écriture vient de celà. (201)

Indeed, at the end of the novel, the narrator asks herself: “Quel serait mon livre si j’écrivais sur le bureau de ma chambre d’Alger? Aurais-je encore l’écriture dans ma main?” (283). More importantly, Algeria is also the place of lost sensuality; it is the place of the narrator’s first experiences of the beauty of the female body and of her later discovered homosexuality, experiences embodied in the character of the beautiful, rich Madame B. with which she stays one summer while her mother is being treated in France:

Madame B. prend toute la beauté de l’Algérie, elle prend tout mon épanchement à la beauté, il y a cette façon de jeter mon sac dans le coffre de la voiture, de fumer avec un fume-cigarette, de m’asseoir près d’elle, de rire, de conduire vite, de mettre dans la radiocassette ma chanson préférée, *The Logical Song*; tout est là, mon destin amoureux, mes rêves, madame B. n’est pas en vie, elle est dans la vie. (37)

⁴⁵² Lacan, J., *Les Quatre Concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Le séminaire, Livre XI, 1964), Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973. The quotation refers to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and the definition of the unconscious as follows: “Pour me laisser aller à quelque métaphore, Eurydice deux fois perdue, telle est l’image la plus sensible que nous puissions donner, dans le mythe, de ce qu’est le rapport de l’Orphée analyste à l’inconscient”, pp. 33-34.

The prominence of the space of Algiers and Algeria has also been identified in the semiotic reading applied to the text. A semiotic analysis of the text revealed that socially constructed contemporary urban, open, closed and transient spaces feature prominently in the text, as shown in Table 7. Out of these, the urban space of /Alger/, the closed space of the /appartement/ (both in Paris and Algiers), the national and paternal space of /Algérie/, and the urban space of the /rue/, as well as the natural spaces of the /mer/, /plage/ and /fôret/ dominate in the text. The multidimensional (public, private, open) space of the /piscine/ has particular significance in Bouraoui's text with a relatively high level of occurrences.⁴⁵³ The swimming pool of Zeralda⁴⁵⁴ signifies the childhood space of trauma in which the narrator almost drowns, whilst the drowning scene of a young white girl in the swimming pool of Madame B. marks another significant memory in which the narrator watches the anonymous girl drowning after she pushed her into the pool.

The national space of France, the provincial space of Rennes and the metropolitan space of Paris represent the maternal space of the North. Paris is evoked both through the confined space of the narrator's apartment ("l'appartement de la rue X" or "au 118 rue Saint-Charles"), spaces of official French memory such as public monuments and museums, and through a series of sites of supermodernity or "non-lieux"⁴⁵⁵ such as markets and commercial centres. On the other hand, Rennes, space of symbolic death, is mostly evoked through the narrator's memories of the grand-parents' house, the garden and the funeral of the narrator's aunt.

⁴⁵³ 34 occurrences in total refer to the sememe /piscine/: 20 occurrences refer to various swimming pools that the narrator has visited, 6 occurrences refer to the private swimming pool of "Madame B." and 8 occurrences refer to the "piscine de Zeralda".

⁴⁵⁴ Zeralda is a seaside resort located in Algeria.

⁴⁵⁵ Augé, M., *Non-Lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Paris: Seuil, 1992. See: "un espace qui ne peut se définir ni comme identitaire, ni comme relationnel, ni comme historique définira un non-lieu", p. 100.

Table 7 shows the analysis of main spatial isotopies in *MMP*. Whilst one could assume, based on the importance that Algiers and Algeria occupy in Nina Bouraoui's writing, that open spaces and spaces of Algeria (as the space of the South) would be attributed a euphoric value by the narrator through a positive identification with the father, and those of France (as the space of the North) a dysphoric value through the negative identification with the mother, the thymic and deep level analysis of meaning shows that the value that dominates is one of ambivalence. This analysis confirms what was already argued earlier; both France and Algeria are spaces that are constructed and experienced dysphorically by the narrator.

Isotopy / Semes	Frequency of sememes	Sememes
urban	221	/Alger /, /Paris/, /Rennes/, /Nice/, /Provincetown/, /ville/, /rue/, /parc/, /avenue/, /boulevard/, /arcades/, /place/
open	137	/mer/, /plage/, /forêt/, /piscine de Zeralda/, /ciel/
closed	143	/appartement/, /chambre/, /escalier/, /cabinet/, bureau/, /cercueil/, /tombe/
transient	104	/voiture/, /hôtel/, /avion/, /train/, /quai/
public	79	/piscine/, /lycée/, /collège/, /club/, /centre commercial/, /galérie/, /supermarché/
domestic	69	/maison/, /"La Résidence"/, /intérieur/
local	63	/village/, /route/, /région française/
national	54	/Algérie/, /France/, /other/
global	33	/monde/, /pays/, /continent/, /aire géographique/
cultural	22	/jardin (de Rennes)/, /ruines/, /musée/, /palais/
paternal (South)	128	/Alger/, /Algérie/, /appartement (d'Alger)/, /"La Résidence"/
maternal (North)	72	/appartement (Paris)/, /Paris/, /Rennes/, /France/

Table 7. The presentation of spatial isotopies in *Mes mauvaises pensées*.

Looking at the isotopy of the natural spaces in the novel and the different values assigned to these spaces, a clearly positive, *euphoric* value is attributed to the isotopies such as /mer/ and /plage/ that both represent open, unspoiled spaces of the South. On the other hand, an ambivalent or *phoric* value can be said to be assigned to the space of the /forêt/. Ambivalence towards such a space can be detected in formulations such as “la beauté de la forêt d’eucalyptus” (euphoric), “la forêt qui nous encercle” (dysphoric) in which the forest is perceived as both a beautiful and a suffocating space. As is the case with Ferron’s, Dib’s and Bouchard’s texts analysed here, the trope of the forest as an archetype of the Western imaginary also appears in Bouraoui’s text as a significant trope of the Algerian imagination and a recurrent theme linked to the narrator’s place of childhood:

Nous vivons dans un immeuble construit sur pilotis, bordé par une forêt d’eucalyptus; la nuit, le vent ressemble à des voix prises dans les arbres, je vais sur la petite terrasse rouge et je regarde, après la forêt, il y a la baie, ce miracle de l’Algérie, et il y a la mer qui semble avancer vers moi. (17)

It can be argued that the gradual transformation of a poetics of loss into an aesthetics of loss inscribed within the paradigm of disappearance starts with the acknowledgement of the narrator’s painful loss of the space of Algiers as a “déracinée”, a state that evolves into a particular aesthetics of writing; language becomes the site where the dead can be resuscitated and cultural memory retold as the consequence of uprooted identity:

Alger existe parce que j’y ai vécu, parce que je m’y suis laissée; c’est moi qui fais Alger et non l’inverse. Je ne suis pas une exilée, je suis une déracinée. (18)

Les morts sont chaque fois ressuscités par notre langage, par notre manière de les raconter, ce sont eux les livres, ce sont eux l’écriture qui court, ce sont eux les petits papiers amoureux. Je pourrais écrire la légende de mes grands-parents algériens. (46-47)

As a trope signifying absence, the city of Algiers is impregnated in the narrator’s mind with the images of whiteness of the snow and desert, images that evoke the beauty of her mother’s pale skin, but also of her mother’s illness:

C'est une obsession chez moi cette beauté, ce plein de beauté (...) la beauté, l'immense beauté d'Alger un jour sous la neige, la mer blanche, les pistes de Chréa, le désert glacé (...) c'est encore la beauté des nuages en avion, la beauté de la forêt d'eucalyptus, la beauté de ma mère qui étouffe, sa peau bleue (...). (24)

Conversely to the figure of the mother, the figure of the father evokes shared feelings of yearning and nostalgia for the native space of Algeria, but also a yearning for life:

Je suis comme mon père, je sais pourquoi nous regardons ensemble les photographies d'Alger, il n'y a pas que l'enfance, il n'y a pas que la jeunesse, c'est le point le plus reculé de la mort, il est là-bas, notre paradis ; il est dans cet appartement, dans ses chambres, dans son escalier blanc, dans sa forêt, il y a une forme d'éternité dans ce lieu perdu, et je n'y vais pas, vous savez, je n'y vais pas. (76)

The narrator's identification with her father is enabled by her father's partial loss of sight; the father's physical loss of sight becomes for the narrator the place of a symbolic loss of space and physicality; it becomes the prime site of paternal loss. A paternal native space, Algeria now acquires the dimension of a mythical space for the narrator that she will seek to recover through writing:

Avant mon père me disait: "Je ne vois que la moitié des choses, il me manque une dimension, je n'ai aucune notion de géométrie dans l'espace parce que je ne peux pas me représenter l'espace, si j'avais eu mes deux yeux, j'aurais conquis le monde". Sur les photographies d'Alger, mon père porte des petites lunettes noires, il a cet air étrange quand je lui dis un jour: J'ai tes yeux. J'écris aussi pour cela, pour restituer l'espace de mon père, pour lui rapporter ce qu'il n'a pas vu. (91)

The significance of the relationship between the space, memory and the body, a theme that is recurrent in Bouraoui's text, is expressed below through a vivid memory of a bathing scene with the sister and her friend M.B.; it is compared to the narrator's creation of her own *tableaux algériens*:

Ce que je comprends, c'est que se forment devant moi mes tableaux algériens. Il y a tant de sensualité, sur ce rocher plateforme, dans la terre rouge, sous l'eau chaude et profonde, dans l'odeur aussi que je retrouve au Cap Martin. Souvent je me dis que je fais tout pour reconstruire mon édifice sensuel, j'ai rapporté l'Algérie en France, j'ai rapporté sa douceur et sa violence, et je suis devenue sa douceur et sa violence. (200)

Later, the narrator evokes the memory of the mythical place of the Rocher Plat again: "j'ai tant de fois écrit sur ce vaste rocher, blanc et poli, posé sur la mer, j'ai tant rêvé de ce lieu, de ce paradis, j'ai tant vu

pleurer ces années dans ma famille” (250). The narrator’s loss becomes that of her sister: “Ma sœur a perdu son amie. Ma sœur a perdu une partie de l’Algérie, les fêtes dans l’appartement bleu, les journées au Rocher Plat, les retours en voiture vers Alger, la légèreté de vivre, de se laisser vivre (...) Je reste avec elle, je regarde ses ruines, je sais que moi aussi je suis en train de perdre quelque chose” (249-250). Further on in the text, the disappearance of Algeria resonates with the memory of the disappearance of her sister on the Plage du Figuier: “L’épicentre du séisme algérien a lieu plage du Figuier, là même où mes parents pensent avoir perdu ma sœur à jamais puisqu’elle disparaît pendant deux heures. Je me demande souvent si la conscience enregistre ces trous noirs, si nos peurs d’adultes ne sont pas liées à nos égarements d’enfant.” (282). Again, the narrator’s memory of the Rocher Plat and the creation of the memory space of “tableaux algériens” resonates with Camus’ piece *Retour à Tipasa*. Though their experiences of the site of Tipasa differ, both in Bouraoui’s and in Camus’s case, the space of Algeria is represented as an “Algérie dépeuplée”, an Algeria deprived of Algerians:

Du côté des ruines, aussi loin que la vue pouvait porter, on ne voyait que des pierres grêlées et des absinthes, des arbres et des colonnes parfaites dans la transparence de l’air cristallin (...) Dans cette lumière et ce silence, des années de fureur et de nuit fondaient lentement. J’écoutais en moi un bruit presque oublié, comme si mon cœur, arrêté depuis longtemps, se remettait doucement à battre.⁴⁵⁶

At the end of the novel, the narrator’s family memory is reawakened in another scene in which sensory memory is provoked; while walking through the street of Roi-de-Sicile in Paris and passing by an oriental bakery, the narrator suddenly accedes to the space of corporeal memory below the level of consciousness, concluding that her body remembers the thing she thought she had lost (“mon corps a la mémoire que j’ai perdu”). The question, however, remains open as to how to piece these memories together again:

Je ne me souviens pas de mon père entre ses deux parents, je devrais superposer les maisons de Rennes et de Jijel. Je devrais mélanger les deux jardins de mon enfance. (272)

⁴⁵⁶ Camus, A., “Retour à Tipasa”, in: *op.cit.*, 1954, p. 163.

To conclude this section, and as shown in the analysis presented, the paternal space of the South is associated strongly with the space of life. However, this space is haunted and often invaded by the fear of disappearance and the presence of death and loss, represented in the space of the North. The semiotic representation of the fundamental values of life and death is rendered in the semiotic square as follows:

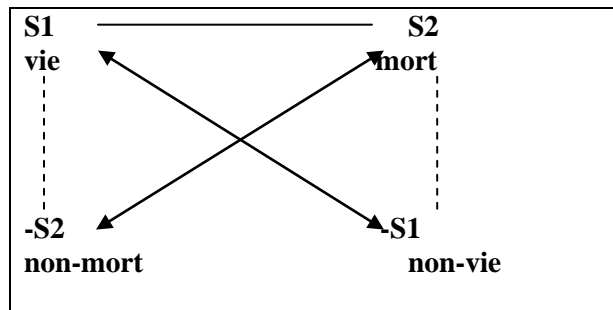


Diagram 12. Representation of the *semiotic square* for the isotopies life and death in *Mes mauvaises pensées*.

Yet, the constant movement between and the simultaneous juxtaposition of the spaces of life and death are expressed through the narrator's state of ambivalence. This ambivalence is clearly expressed in the following passage in which she recalls one of her recurrent memories, that of her drowning in the *piscine de Zeralda*, in which life and death are both conceived and experienced as being inseparable. In this passage another death is evoked, that of the Swiss-born French architect Le Corbusier:

C'est l'image de la piscine de Zeralda qui revient. Le Corbusier s'est noyé ici, au large d'une crique, il adorait la mer, il nageait loin, il n'avait pas peur, il disait que la mort et la vie sont si indissociables qu'il y a dans ce lien quelque chose de l'ordre de la beauté. (52)

Bouraoui's references to the figures of Camus and Le Corbusier,⁴⁵⁷ both seen as controversial figures in the colonial history of Algeria and France, indicate that she seeks to rehabilitate their memories and re-

⁴⁵⁷ Le Corbusier visited Algiers for the first time in 1931; he had an ambitious urban plan for the city of Algiers that included the integration of the French and Algerian populations in the same dwellings. His planning project, known as the "plan Obus", went through numerous drafts, but was never accepted by the local French ruling government. For some, Corbusier's vision of the Ville Radieuse was a utopia, for others it was considered innovative for his time. Instead of using the Cartesian principles of a geometric and symmetric urban space, Le Corbusier suggested a plan

inscribe their place within the imagined space of Algeria. It also speaks of the difficulties and complexities arising around the inscription of the contested memories of pieds-noirs and French colonisers within France's official colonial history.

5.3.2. The Maternal Space of the North: the Provincial Space of Rennes

Whilst the spaces of Algeria and of the American city of /Provincetown/ represent life, the maternal space of Rennes is seen to signify death by the narrator, like the "piscine of Zeralda"; both of these places generate feelings of claustrophobia and suffocation in the narrator. Unlike the city of Rennes, the national space of France, although also signifying the narrator's maternal space, remains neutral or *aphoric*; it is a space which for the narrator represents neither life nor death. It is this work of restoring the lost links of her disintegrated family and the work of deconstruction and reconstruction that the narrator undertakes in the process of writing.

Rennes, a space that is associated with the narrator's mother, is the space of disappearance. It most often emerges in images of her grand-parents' house and garden that are represented as "small", fragile memories that can break at any point: "Je suis restée un hiver chez mes grands-parents, je n'ai aucune tristesse de cette période, juste des petits souvenirs, comme des petites perles sur un fil de soie" (21). These childhood memories are superposed onto those of the death of the mother's sister and the underlying feelings of sadness that Rennes evokes: "Je pense que Rennes est une ville maudite; je pense que je viens aussi d'ici, de la mort. Alger serait du côté de la vie, de ma vie nouvelle, de ma vie inventée, Rennes serait du côté des disparitions" (77). A feeling of strangeness and displacement dominates in the narrator's later memories and the realisation of the absurdity of petit-bourgeois living experienced during

that incorporated many organic forms that follow the local configuration of the Algerian landscape and climate, leaving the Casbah intact (whilst at the same time proposing the destruction of old Paris in his controversial "plan Voisin"). See: Potelle, S., "Le Corbusier-Alger, le rendez-vous manqué", in: *Qantara, Magazine des cultures arabes et méditerranéennes*, Printemps 2006, pp. 12-15.

the summer vacations in France, as “ces petites pierres qui forment la tristesse de mes vacances françaises. Ce n’est pas vraiment désagréable, ce n’est pas vraiment joyeux, c’est entre les deux, c’est déplacé, je ne m’inscris pas dans le paysage” (238). A scene in particular from the narrator’s childhood describes the grandfather’s racist views towards North Africans and his use of the name *bicot*, something that the narrator does not understand:

Il y a cette scène au restaurant, à Lyon, c’est l’été, encore l’été, la saison-catastrophe, nous sommes à table, ma sœur, ma mère, un oncle, je crois, et mon grand-père, dans une phrase si banale pour lui – vous savez, le langage usuel des gens, quand cette façon de parler entre dans la vie, quand il n’y a plus de mesure –, il dit: “Je suis allé acheter mon journal chez le *b.* du coin”. Je ne comprends pas le sens du mot, je ne l’ai jamais entendu. (19)

The power of generational transmission of a racist France represented in the figure of the severe French grand-father and the anxiety dominating the mother are at the centre of the narrator’s neurosis. The scene in the Lyons restaurant implies not only that the mother’s marriage with her Algerian father was unacceptable to her parents, but that the mother’s fear of her own father is at the root of her asthmatic attacks, forcing her and the children to leave Algiers.

Although the ill body of the mother becomes eventually a source of creativity that instigates the practice of writing and reinforces the paradigm of disappearance, the mother is most often associated with feelings of sadness and suffocation. Thoughts and experiences related to the mother are the nodal point of the narrator’s feeling of culpability, but also of her fascination with death and disappearance.⁴⁵⁸

je suis fascinée par la mort, vous dites que c’est à cause de la maladie de ma mère, à cause de ses asphyxies; c’est encore la beauté des nuages en avion, la beauté de la forêt d’eucalyptus, la beauté de ma mère qui étouffe, sa peau bleue, son corps presque perdu. (24)

c’est ce couple encore, moi et ma mère, moi et le corps de ma mère, c’est cette union qui me fait peur là, c’est encore le corps qui enveloppe, étouffe, j’ai trop de chair autour de moi, ma maison

⁴⁵⁸ References to the mother in the text are twice as frequent as those to the father. In the first 100 pages of the novel only, the phrase “ma mère” appears 133 times. This compares with 58 references to “mon père”. Amazingly, the pronoun “je” appears 1184 times, something that cannot solely be explained by the text being a first-person narrative. As the semiotic analysis has often shown in the texts analysed in this thesis, the frequency of the repetition of a certain seme contributes to the creation of meaning.

est ce mur de chair, tout l'amour de ma mère pour moi, toutes ses mains, toutes ses épaules pour me tenir, pour me soutenir alors que j'aimerais tant tomber. (101)

The difficulty of the subject becoming a separate entity and experiencing the symbolic loss of the mother are expressed in what is called in Freudian (and later Lacanian) terms the death drive. The death drive can be explained as “nostalgia for lost harmony, a desire to return to the preoedipal fusion with the mother’s breast, the loss of which is marked on the psyche by the weaning complex”.⁴⁵⁹ Interestingly, Lacan situates the death drive at the level of the symbolic, that belongs to the realm of culture, not nature; the death drive is “simply the fundamental tendency of the symbolic order to produce repetition”.⁴⁶⁰

5.3.3. The Space of Transformation: Paris

As previously indicated, in semiotic terms, /Paris/ functions as the topic space and a place of passage and transformation in *MMP*, a symbolic place that the subject must go through in order to pass from the state of death to life (or from life to death); it is the space of cultural translation and exchange for the narrator. Eventually, Paris will become a place of desire and Eros. However, at the beginning of the narrative, the subject (the narrator) is in clear disjunction with the object of its value:

Il y a un vertige de l’Algérie, il y a un tourment. Je pense toujours que je dois partir, je pense qu’il m’est impossible de partir et surtout de m’adapter, à la France, et au cœur de la France, à Paris, à l’avenue des Champs-Élysées, aux quais de Seine, au Trocadéro, aux lumières de la ville, à cette impression de vitesse qui m’est étrangère. (59)

This feeling of separation and estrangement from the other is reinforced by the disparity between the narrator’s French identity and her sense of a divided Self when she exclaims: “ je ne suis pas une étrangère comme les autres, je suis Française, mais je me sens étrangère aux formes qu'on me propose, l'appartement, le collège, les gens, la chambre que je partage avec ma mère, il y a la disparition en moi de

⁴⁵⁹ Evans, D., *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Analysis*, Hove / New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2003 (first ed. 1996), p. 32.

⁴⁶⁰ Evans, D., *op.cit.*, p. 32.

l'Algérie" (100). The gradual loss of Algeria is first experienced at the level of the personal as the loss of personal space and objects, then at the level of the Algerian landscape and ultimately, at the level of the sensory. The loss of the material space, natural space and corporeal space leads to a generalised sense of loss of identity reinforced by a parallel process of forced integration into the Parisian space and society:

Je laisse ma chambre d'Alger, je laisse mes livres, je laisse mes vêtements, je laisse les sables et la mer, je laisse le vent et les fleurs, je laisse l'odeur de mon odeur (...) je perds mon accent, je change, vite, ou plutôt je me tue, vite, j'apprends, je m'intègre, et je me désapprends, je perds ma lumière, je perds l'odeur des champs de marguerites sauvages, je perds la chaleur du corps, j'apprends à vivre au 118 rue Saint-Charles. (101)

It can be deduced from the narrator's memories and experiences of the spaces and places that she has inhabited that she is a member both of the Parisian and Algerian intellectual elites, something that is understood to also be true for Nina Bouraoui. When analysing the representations of the main spaces of Paris in *MMP*, one can observe that they are defined both by feelings of aphoria and dysphoria to begin with, with a progressive move towards the feeling of euphoria. The closed space of the appartement in the street X ("l'appartement de la rue X") is associated with a dysphoric feeling, whereas the commercial spaces of supermarkets and shopping centres, as well as official and public spaces such as museums, monuments and boulevards, are associated with Marc Augé's spaces of "hypermodernity" and opposed to the "lieu anthropologique" in the sense that Augé gives this term; they are experienced as spaces "void of any emotional or personal charge".⁴⁶¹ Progressively, however, the official and historical monuments and sites of French history such as "Place de la Concorde", "Arc de Triomphe", "Place de la Victoire" and "Arcade des Tuileries" become sites of positive identification and embodiment for the narrator.

However, the feeling of estrangement experienced by the female, Franco-Algerian narrator in *MMP* does not resonate, understandably, with the male, Moroccan narrator's experiences in Khatibi's *La Mémoire*

⁴⁶¹ Augé, M., *Non-Lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Paris: Seuil, 1992, p. 68: "[le lieu anthropologique] est simultanément principe de sens pour ceux qui l'habitent et principe d'intelligibilité pour celui qui l'observe".

tatouée; whilst Khatibi's narrator perceives the place of Paris dysphorically, Bouraoui attributes phoric values to the metropole. Acknowledging that she is not a pied-noir, the narrator in *MMP* compares her experiences of spatial loss to those of the pieds-noirs, not to those of Maghrebian immigrants:

je sais que je ne suis pas comme les pieds-noirs, mais j'ai ce serrement au cœur quand je regarde les images des bateaux quittant la baie d'Alger pour Marseille, Nice, Bandol, moi aussi j'aurais voulu agiter mon mouchoir, moi aussi j'aurais voulu voir la côte s'éloigner puis devenir un petit point posé sur l'eau, une ombre, là. (112-113)

Bouraoui's allusion to the nostalgia of the pieds-noirs identifies her as a migrant subject searching for her lost identity and as having a fractured Self. Interestingly, the narrator eventually realises that she has finally found her place in Paris and exclaims: "je suis en vie, j'ai un lien amoureux avec Paris". It is only through the corporeal and cultural transformation of her new assumed "French" corporeality that she is able to bypass the binary oppositions France–Algeria and maternal–paternal. At the same time, the values of homeliness and authentic identity that are opposed to those of foreignness and loss of that identity can no longer be explained through the relationship of binary opposition in which homeliness is viewed as positive and foreignness as negative. Although the narrator exclaims "j'ai un lien amoureux avec Paris" (222), the ambivalence between the memory space of Algiers and the embodied experience of Paris remains, as the two cities now become superposed:

je traverse le parc Monceau, l'herbe, les arbres, les manèges, les balançoires, les cris des enfants, ce décor-là me relie à l'Algérie, je suis seule dans la ville et je sais que j'ai trouvé ma place à Paris (...) toute ma vie commence ici, toutes mes forces, toutes mes cassures, c'est la source des larmes, c'est la fin de l'Algérie. (222)

If memories of her paternal Algerian heritage continue to haunt the narrator, the recovery of her identity can only begin with the processes of deconstruction of the dual Franco-Algerian cultural space, something that was announced in *Garçon manqué*, as already remarked, and in which she observed:

“L’Algérie est trop proche de la France. Comme traversée. TROP liée aussi.”⁴⁶² In *MMP*, the reflections from two of the narrator’s favourite architects – Le Corbusier and Eileen Gray – close the novel:

je garde les mots du Corbusier: “Il y a la mort dans la mer” (...) Je garde les mots d’Eileen Gray: “Il faut déconstruire avant de construire”. Quand je viens vous voir, je garde l’idée d’une confession. (286)

But neither Paris, nor Nice are places where the narrator can ultimately reclaim her cosmopolitan and lesbian identity. Instead, she regains her full identity in the North American town of Provincetown that the narrator calls “la cité des femmes”, as it is the only space where she is able to liberate herself from the dual Franco-Algerian heritage, and where she is free to embrace her (homo)sexuality:⁴⁶³

Je ne confonds rien à Provincetown, je sais ce que je suis, je sais ce que je désire (...) tout a disparu en moi, la peur, la tristesse, l’exil, je le répète, je suis chez moi – *at home* – je suis rentrée, dans un pays que je connaissais bien avant de le visiter, le pays de mon enfance. (190)

5.4. Conclusion

The analysis of the two texts presented indicates that the production of the contemporary discourses on space in the literary postcolonial Francophone context is organised around the question of the construction and deconstruction of the discourses of nature (Bouchard) and culture (Bouraoui). These discourses are in close relation with the discourses on globalisation and modernity leading to the production of micro- geographies (Bouchard) and macro-geographies (Bouraoui). As Bouraoui’s text shows, the apparent reconciliation between the opposing dominated spaces of the South and the dominant spaces of the North in the Franco-Algerian context can only pass through the appropriation of the space of Paris as a site of production of colonial discourse, but ultimately, the recovery of the narrator’s Self is only possible in the globalised, North American contemporary spaces. The semiotic analysis of both

⁴⁶² Bouraoui, N., *Garçon manqué*, 2000, p. 161.

⁴⁶³ Provincetown, Massachusetts, is a coastal resort town and a popular vacation destination with gay men and lesbians.

Bouchard's and Bouraoui's text also showed that there lies an ambiguity or tension at the centre of the narrative and the deep levels of meaning, revealing that there exists a discourse of ambivalence rather than subversion in relation to the demystification of spatiality. Whilst for Bouchard, spatial loss is experienced culturally as a loss of collective identity and is viewed as part of the discourse on Québec's cultural identity and memory, in Bouraoui's case the loss of Algeria remains a primary source of writing; Algeria, for Bouraoui, and Québec, for Bouchard, cannot be fully demystified. In Bouchard's text this ambiguity is articulated around the paradigms of filiation and rupture and the discourse on rurality in the cultural context of Québec. In the case of Bouraoui's text this ambivalence is expressed in the space of dual culture and the tension that exists between the space of Algeria and the space of France, a tension that can only be resolved through the migrant subject's adoption of the values of French Republican discourse and her/his integration into the metropolitan space of Paris.

CONCLUSION

The research conducted here has been an investigative spatial and temporal journey into the question of spatial loss and its conceptualisation in the postcolonial Francophone context.

As presented in the first part of the Introduction, the main aim of the thesis was to investigate how the experience and treatment of space and place informed and shaped the representations and understandings of spatial loss in the writing of ten postcolonial Francophone authors from the Maghreb and Canada, by offering a contrapuntal reading of a number of texts from a cross-cultural and cross-generational perspective.⁴⁶⁴ It asked whether these authors participate in the demystification of the Eurocentric discourse on space, with reference to Soja's concept of the "demystification of spatiality", thus creating discourses of resistance; or whether they in fact reinforce the dominant hegemonic discourse(s) on space (and spatial loss) despite their presumed postcoloniality: a question that is highly relevant for the further understanding of relationships between space, place and power at the centre of (post)colonial discourse. It therefore firstly sought to define the usefulness of some of the main concepts in human geography for the field of literary analysis in the postcolonial context, and to critically evaluate the importance of contemporary debates on space, place and gender, on the interconnectedness between space and time, and on the demystification of spatiality and of space, for the conceptualisation of the notion of spatial loss and its understanding in the postcolonial Francophone comparative literary context. The research began with a critical evaluation of the key concepts of space and place and the adoption of Massey's definition of these terms as dynamic and relational concepts, as well as with the definition of spatiality as being that which is constituted by the social production of space, as Lefebvre argues, or, in other words, that which refers to the socio-political dimension of space, and to space as being socially and politically constructed, as

⁴⁶⁴ Said, E., *op.cit.*, 1994, p. 78.

argued by Massey. In turn, the interconnectedness of space and social relations highlighted the importance of domination and power, something that brought the concept of mystification of space to the centre of the investigation presented here. The concept of mystification (of space and of spatiality), introduced by Lefebvre (and imported from Karl Marx's ideas on the mystification of the capital), brought to the fore the importance of unmasking the concealed relationship between spatiality and power, something that is at the centre of Edward Soja's concept of demystification of spatiality. The demystification of spatiality was defined here as a social critical process that involves the unveiling of the hidden, repressed quality of space as an instrument or agency of power. It was posited as a process that can uncover the mystification of space ("les mystifications de l'espace") or consolidated attitudes, references and representations on space embedded in the Eurocentric discourse on space and place, as discussed in Said's, Lefebvre's and Memmi's theories. In the (post)colonial context, the practice of mystification (of space) was then characterised as one that takes place in the dialectic relationship and creation of myths by the coloniser and the colonised and gives rise to "mystifications of the Other" and the production of "counter-mythologies". Translated into the literary analysis of space, place and spatial loss in the postcolonial context, the practice of the mystification of space was then defined as being constitutive of the Eurocentric hegemonic discourse on space, as propagated by the West and its imperialist, exclusive and excluding conceptions of spatiality.

The main hypothesis of this thesis was that spatial loss cannot be studied in separation from how space and place are perceived, represented and conceptualised. Laying out its main objectives, the thesis set out to analyse the representations of space and place in the Maghrebian and Canadian Francophone context through the choice of three main cross-cultural "meta-themes", imagination, memory and the border; indeed, this thematic approach was central to the idea of undoing of national literatures that runs at the centre of the discussion held in this thesis. In the first part of the introduction the methodological framework, and the justification of the application of semiotic analysis to both the Western and non-

Western texts, were presented in order to evaluate the consequences of applying such a method of reading to the postcolonial Francophone text. One of the thesis' main objectives was to evaluate critically how semiotic theory on space, and semiotic analysis, engage with other theories and interpretations of space such as Massey's or Soja's. This was followed by a presentation of the corpus and criteria for selection. In the second part of the introduction, the study of spatial loss in Western contexts was contextualised within the theoretical frame of reference of European discourses and narratives on (spatial) loss. The study of colonial France's production of discourses on the geographic loss of its colonies in the nineteenth century was regarded as useful to define theoretically the concept of spatial loss in the postcolonial context, and to point to the interdependence of the production of European imperialist discourses on geographic loss and the production of discourses on space, place and spatial loss in the postcolonial Francophone context. However, this question was excluded from the analysis of spatial loss in the context of this thesis. In line with the main aim and objectives of the thesis (to study space, place and spatial loss in the texts selected and how Massey's conceptualisation of the notions of space and place engages with (post)colonial discourse on the relationships between space, place and power), a presentation of Massey's theory of space, place and gender, and her concept of spatialisation of globalisation as a critique of Eurocentric discourse on space and place, were critically evaluated in the second part of the introduction. Massey's critique of hegemonic assumptions and Western imaginations of space highlighted once again the significance of using Soja's critical idea of demystification of spatiality in order to investigate to what extent the authors and texts selected challenge or reinforce hegemonic conceptions and imaginations of space, an investigation that runs through the analysis presented in Chapters 2 to 5.

The presentation of the literary spaces and spaces of literatures in Chapter 1 served to contextualise the texts and authors selected through a critical evaluation of the two literatures studied from the position of the notion of resistance and their status as postcolonial Francophone literatures. The chapter began by problematising the notion and status of subversion as the main decolonising strategy of resistance in the

postcolonial context, and the authors' presumed use of strategies of subversion that challenge Eurocentric discourse on space, and potentially allow for the analysis and unmasking of the hidden relationship between space, social relations and power to take place. It suggested instead that the notion of ambivalence can better define the two literary spaces of the Francophone Maghreb and Canada studied, and proposed that they can be best characterised as "zones of instability", in which contradictory discourses on local, national and supranational spaces converge; something that is reflected in their status of double marginality (Maghreb) and peripherality (Canada) and leads to a discourse of ambivalence on spatial loss and lack in these literatures. It also tried to bring into focus the question of the writer and the production of national literature, problematising the definition of the concept of the "native" in literature and what functions it might have in postcolonial writing.

Chapter 2, "Imaginary Geographies: Space and the Imagination I", proposed to study the relationship between space and the imagination through the representations of imaginary spaces and places and writing strategies used in Ferron's and Dib's texts, in order to evaluate how space and spatial loss can be defined in relation to the space of the imaginary, and what the potential of the imaginary space is for a demystification of spatiality. The identification of strategies of localisation and re-orientation (Ferron), on the one hand, and deterritorialisation (Dib) on the other, in these two texts, helped elucidate the individual experience of the postcolonial (Francophone) writer in relation to the collectively imagined (postcolonial) space of the nation, and highlighted the prominence of this space as the primary, either imagined or real, postcolonial space of reference. In the case of Ferron, the nation was seen to function as the space of the collective myth of origin (explicitly also present in writings of other Québécois writers such as Poulin and Bouchard, analysed in Chapters 3 and 5). Ferron's representation of mythical space was challenged in the writings of Lalonde and Brossard (analysed in Chapters 3 and 4) through the counter-discourses of feminist theory and sensory memory. In the case of Dib, on the other hand, the imagined space of the native city and that of the postcolonial nation were problematised through the creation of an imaginary

“non-place” and the interrogation of alterity (something that could also be noticed in N. Bouraoui’s text analysed in Chapter 5). Most strikingly, the semiotic analysis at the surface, narrative and deep levels of meaning conducted on both texts revealed that, despite their different socio-cultural backgrounds and migration history, both authors expressed a shared concern for native space through the spatial relationship inside–outside, a relationship that, according to Sami-Ali, is fundamental to the construction of space and subjectivity. The space and the symbol of the forest in Ferron’s and Dib’s writing, in particular, were revealed to be very much part of what can be called a collective, archetypal imaginary and a travelling concept that cuts across all variables in the corpus. Finally, semiotic analysis also helped in revealing the presence / absence of the literary practices of demystification of spatiality. While in Ferron’s case the demystification of space and place was achieved through the inscription of a literary identity and the autobiographical discourse at the narrative level of meaning, the collective myth of origin about the native space of Québec was maintained through his positive vs. negative treatment of natural vs. social spaces. While the application of semiotic analysis on Dib’s text proved to be problematic at the narrative and deep level of meaning because of the dynamics of presence–absence of meaning at the surface level, and the embedded circularity of meaning at the subsequent levels, the culturally determined opposition inside–outside in Dib’s text allowed for a critique of the discourse of exclusion and the subversion of the Western discourse on space. Dib is the only author, together with Brossard, who is considered to have managed to “demystify”, according to the definition used in this thesis, the Eurocentric discourse on space and place.

Chapter 3, “Geographies of Memory: Space and Memory”, went on to analyse the relationship between space and memory based on three texts by Djébar, Poulin and Lalonde, in order to investigate how the concept of cultural memory participates in the (de)mystification of space in those writings. Positing a conceptualisation of space as a dynamic and relational concept that is closely linked to time, and as laid out in Doreen Massey’s theory, this chapter aimed at critically evaluating the extent to which the notions

of time and space can be seen to be constitutive of each other. It posited the notion of spatial memory and argued for the significance of the practice/s of forgetting. In particular, it analysed the treatment of space, place and memory in three distinct socio-cultural contexts and types of cultural memory. It established another striking result in the corpus that indicated that the generational variable might be as important as geographic belonging and geopolitical context. Both Poulin and Djébar were seen to apply the concept of counter-memory in their texts in order to challenge official (post)colonial memories and histories expressed through the strategies and devices of appropriation and negotiation of memory, something that could be explained in the context of emerging minority and feminist theory discourses on cultural memory originating from America that found their expression during the 1980s. These strategies showed, however, that counter-memory cannot be conceived outside the official discourses and paradigm of the politics of memory, something that led to the establishment of ambivalence inscribed in both of the texts analysed. When looked at from a comparative perspective, the similarities between Poulin and Djébar highlighted the existence of a shared literary and ideological emerging space; this contrapuntal reading allowed not only the comparison of very different geographically and historically situated texts, but also for an insight into the postcolonial representations of France both as coloniser (Algeria) and colonised (Nouvelle France and Canada) and France's different treatment of and relationship to its colonial territories; it participated in the unveiling of some of the many mystifications of spaces of Algeria and French-Canada / Québec that can be seen as part of France's (post)colonial discourse on geographic loss. The question of Amerindian memory in the context of French Canada and Nouvelle France was further explored in the analysis of Lalonde's text, which was set against the backdrop of the Oka crisis. Lalonde's text explored the appropriation of cultural memory through the notion of sensory memory from the perspective of Amerindian fractured identity and challenged the received notion of transculturalism in the context of postcolonial Québec. The semiotic analysis conducted on the text indicated that it is the trope of Amerindianity that lies at the centre of this Métis writer's text; it showed that the full recovery of fractured identity can only pass through a return to origins and the forgotten sensory experiences of the

body that lie below the level of consciousness. It indicated that sensory memory can be a powerful device for the demystification of spatiality. Although different writing strategies were at work, it concluded that all three texts show that the discourse of ambiguity and ambivalence, rather than a discourse of subversion in relation to space and memory, and how it informed the writer's understanding of spatial loss, is at play, highlighting a tension between a poetics and a politics of memory.

Chapter 4, "Border Geographies: Space and the Border", proceeded with the examination of the relationship between postcolonial spaces of the city and the notion of the border in three texts by Khatibi, H. Bouraoui and Brossard from the theoretical perspective of border-thinking. It began by interrogating the function of the cultural trace and its inscription in the geo/graphy of the (post)colonial space of the Moroccan and European city in Khatibi's text. It showed how the space of the postcolonial city in the Moroccan context is constructed both as a site of discursivity and a mythical space of desire, a spatial duality that installs a discourse of ambivalence at the centre of Khatibi's text. This discourse is reflected in the binary pair Maghreb–France, and calls into question the applicability of Khatibi's "intersémiotique transversale" to the Maghrebian Francophone text. It indicated that whilst the interpretation of the Maghrebian Francophone text is characterised by the irreducibility of meaning to an exclusively Western grid of reading, the presence of the French language installs semantic tensions between the Western and non-Western frames of reference that bring the concept of "intersémiotique transversale" into question. The analysis conducted revealed that values and discourses of ambivalence rather than those of resistance and subversion, are at play in both Khatibi's and Bouraoui's texts, something that was observed in most of the texts. The investigation into the treatment of the concept of the border in the postcolonial context then proceeded to the analysis of Bouraoui's text and his treatment of exile from the position of distance. Although Bouraoui is seen to use the method of border-thinking in his theoretical work through his concepts "transpoétique" and "transculture", the semiotic analysis conducted on Bouraoui's text seemed to problematise his theory and his presumed position as a transcultural and cosmopolitan writer of/on the

border. The semiotic analysis showed that the spaces of the native city of Sfax / Taparura and of the ancient city of Thyna were constructed as a (post)colonial dystopia–utopia expressed through the opposition tradition–modernity; these oppositions were partly deconstructed through the trope of the door or gate as a trope of passage, giving rise to a series of “space-time” geographies. The examination of the concept of the border and its potential for the unveiling the hidden and socially constructed relationship between one territory, culture and identity closed with the analysis of Brossard’s text. It showed how Brossard used the female body and the strategy of translation as border-crossing as an ontological and textual device enabling her to subvert the dominant discourse on space and language as instruments of power. More precisely, she managed to demystify the discourse on spatiality through the inscription of the feminine, lesbian body on the urban space of the multilingual city of Montréal and the destabilisation of narrative and grammatical structure of language. Chapter 3 concluded that while Khatibi’s and Bouraoui’s texts only partly participate in the demystification of spatiality, Brossard’s text successfully manages to do so, something that is fully demonstrated in the semiotic analysis conducted on these texts. Therefore, Brossard’s text is an important exception to the corpus: she is, together with Dib, the only other author that can be seen fully to demystify the Eurocentric discourse on space, something that was possible to establish through the systematic process of semiotic analysis. Brossard’s treatment of the space of the street as a trope of urban space in the Québécois context was indicative of the way in which the city and urban spaces were perceived, conceived and represented and the values with which they were invested. They appeared to be represented and evaluated negatively vs. positively both in Ferron’s and Bouchard’s text as opposed to Brossard’s text; this difference can be interpreted within the discourses and imagination on rural space vs. the city in the Québécois context, but also within what seem to be different male/female experiences of and relationships to these spaces. New conceptualisations of spatial loss appeared in the analysis of space, place and the theme of border in the three writings selected. Bouraoui’s strategy of distance and his discourse on transcultural identity allowed for a definition of spatial loss that could be conceptualised outside the concept of nostalgia.

Finally, Chapter 5, “Contemporary Geographies: Space and the Imagination II”, examined the relationship between space and imagination in the contemporary context. Introducing Appadurai’s concept of imagination as social practice in the era of globalisation, it argued that a new kind of contemporary imagination can be said to have emerged in the globalised world, in which it is once again necessary to make sense of place. It posited two of the main contemporary discourses on space, the discourse on nature and the discourse on culture, that each found their expression in the two texts selected. It compared Bouchard’s text to N. Bouraoui’s, and argued that these two texts are expressions of a “micro-geography” and “macro-geography” where identity, place and cultural memory find their different expressions as a result of the need to make sense of place again in the era of globalisation and high technological progress. In Bouchard’s text, the concept of locality was framed within the nostalgic Eurocentric discourse of a return to nature in the context of Québec’s cultural memory; however, the writer’s need for an intertextual identity creates a paradigm of continuity and rupture leading to an ambiguity at the centre of the text. On the other hand, the analysis of N. Bouraoui’s text tried to answer the question of the cyclical return of Algeria in this author’s writing as one that shows the author’s lyric exploration of and engagement with the mythical space of Algeria in the context of Franco-Algerian culture in which it becomes a site of writing. It showed how a reconciliation between the opposing dominated spaces of the South and the dominant spaces of the North in the Franco-Algerian context can only pass through the appropriation of the space of Paris as a site of the production of a Eurocentric discourse on space and place and a symbol of urban contemporary identity. Indeed, the semiotic analysis conducted on both texts demonstrated that there lies a tension at the centre of both texts between the poetic and the political, revealing, yet again, a discourse of ambivalence rather than subversion in relation to the question of demystification of spatiality. It was noted that spatial loss in Bouchard’s text was defined in the context of a discourse of loss of identity, while for N. Bouraoui it became a powerful source of writing and an artistic concept.

At the end of this research, some concluding remarks should be made. Firstly, the study of representations of space and place in the texts selected revealed that these are highly relevant for the way in which spatial loss is experienced, perceived and conceptualised in those writings. It highlighted the elusive and multidimensional character of both the notion of space and of spatial loss in the postcolonial context, and the different values attributed to loss of space and place in the literary context.

Secondly, the study of the mystifications of space conducted here concluded that a degree of demystification of spatiality is to a lesser or greater extent present in all the texts. However, this demystification is rendered more complex as it creates a tension between the poetics and politics of writing that characterises all of the writings studied, giving rise to strategies of ambiguity and ambivalence, rather than strategies of resistance and subversion. Indeed, as already indicated, the writings selected are situated within their own literatures that are themselves to be defined as shifting zones of instability, shaped by a number of contradictory discourses on locality and globality in the contemporary context. These literary spaces are therefore to be seen to be part of the local and global contemporary processes of discourses of the mystification of space, giving rise to their assumed positions as spaces of double marginality (Maghreb) and peripherality (Québec) in relation to the political, social and cultural space of metropolitan France, but also to those of Britain and America. A comparative reading of texts selected pointed to the hidden yet common connection to the imperial and neo-imperial spaces of France, Britain and America, and helped towards revealing the opaque, misplaced and misconceived relationship between space, place and power. The research conducted here pointed to the importance of the socio-political dimension of loss and lack in the postcolonial Francophone context and the discourse on spatial loss in the decolonising, postcolonial Francophone context that functions as a construct aimed at reinforcing the idea of the collectively imagined space of the nation-state; the question that can be posed here is to what extent it is informed and influenced by the production of France's (post)colonial discourses on geographic loss and European narratives on loss.

With regard to the question of how the research on spatial loss in the postcolonial Francophone context that has been presented here can be taken further, it can be concluded that the testing of the semiotic analysis on the corpus unveiled some significant results for the further understanding of postcolonial Francophone writing in French. These results should be tested on a larger corpus and in different geographic and socio-cultural contexts to study the values and axiological systems embedded in the representations of space and place and spatial loss underlying the narratives of these texts. It became clear in the process of the application of semiotic analysis to the corpus that Greimassian semiotics offered a number of advantages and limitations, when comparatively used with other theories of space such as Doreen Massey's, that offers a fluid, dynamic and anti-essentialist understanding of space. A systematic comparison of results obtained from semiotic analysis, and an engagement with the humanistic geographic reading of space and place offered by Doreen Massey, highlighted some of the main limitations of semiotic analysis and theory on space, especially in relation to the question of the separation of the notions of space and time (as expressed through memory), leading to a definition and understanding of the spatial as static and closed. It has been pointed out by humanistic geographic critics such as Massey that this conception of the spatial is one of the main problems with structuralism and the structuralist definition of the spatial.⁴⁶⁵ But equally, the comparative reading of space and place in semiotics and human geography pointed to a possible cultural bias in Massey's theory on space, place and gender; it points to the fact that a different conceptualisation of space and place in Islamic society might be needed to account for the specific socio-political, economic or cultural dimensions that the notion of home or the feminine, and the role that public and private space hold in these societies. Semiotics also

⁴⁶⁵ Massey, D., "The Prison-House of Synchrony" in: *For Space*, 2005, pp. 36-48. According to Massey, whilst one of structuralism's main contributions was to introduce a view of space and the spatial that is relational, as it is defined by its relations within a synchronic structure (thus evacuating time and temporality, or historicity), such a view of space exposes an "imagination of the spatial as synchronic closure" (p. 38). Massey's insistence on the openness of the spatial in a constant state of becoming is crucial to her theory on space as both a dynamic and a relational concept.

proved to be effective in unveiling the different processes of signification or generation of meaning in the Western and non-Western texts, and showing how these processes can be identified to account for the degree to which the Eurocentric discourse on space and place is demystified (for both the sender and the receiver). The process of analysis applied to Dib's text, for example, showed how the processes of generation of meaning at surface and deep level produce circular discourses on both the absence and presence of meaning through the neutralisation of a number of oppositions at the surface level of meaning and the generation of new meanings at the fundamental level. Equally, the impossibility of identifying a narrative and a set of fundamental values at the deep level of meaning in Brossard's text showed how the structure of the narrative can be deconstructed through the absence of narrative, but how meaning cannot be completely evacuated from language in a literary context. Most importantly perhaps, the analysis of the narrative level of meaning showed that there lies a narrative desire at the centre of most of the texts selected; all texts can be interpreted as narratives of *quest*.⁴⁶⁶ These narratives presented similarities in the way in which the subject's / narrator's / author's role was constructed. These shared features and common principles of storytelling might explain why it was possible to identify a narrative structure in most of the texts, based on these storytelling strategies. Stories have often evolved out of or have been incorporated into myths; they may derive from initiation rites or rites of passage.⁴⁶⁷ This initiatory journey as both a physical and philosophical challenge was explicitly explored in Lalonde's text. So, if the process of storytelling is part of the construction of myths, it follows that storytelling and narrativisation participate in the processes of mystification. This poses the question of whether writing on space is possible without the practice of mystification (from the point of view of both the sender and the receiver), something that problematises Massey's and Soja's socio-political understandings and conceptualisation of spatiality.

⁴⁶⁶ Todorov, T., *Poétique de la prose (choix), suivi de Nouvelles recherches sur le récit*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, Paris.

⁴⁶⁷ Bettelheim, B., *The Uses of Enchantment, The Meaning and Importance of Fairytales*, London: Penguin Group, 1976; Eliade, M., *Birth and Rebirth: the Religious Meanings of Initiation in Human Culture* (trans. from the French by Willard R. Trask), London: Harvill, 1961.

To conclude, how can the study of spatial loss contribute to the further understanding of the postcolonial spaces of Maghrebian and Canadian Francophone literatures? The study of space, place and spatial loss in the literary context presented here has involved the study of the unveiling of socially constructed discourses on space and place in the Maghrebian and Canadian postcolonial writing in French in order to understand what functions the mystification and demystification of space can assume in the postcolonial Francophone literary context. The debate held throughout this thesis and the results of textual analysis obtained indicate that the position of postcoloniality that would presume a demystification of spatiality cannot be automatically assumed; it is the discourse of ambivalence rather a discourse of resistance that defines the relationship that the writer entertains with the notions of space, place, and that of spatial loss. A multidimensional concept, the postcolonial discourse on spatial loss can be defined in the space of the interrelation between the social-political dimension of space or spatiality and its veiled instrumentality of power, but it can also be viewed as a space of border-thinking, as an important space of the imagination or a constant source of creativity. Spatial loss matters, but it is equally important to continue to ask the following questions: to whom does it matter, why and for what purpose?

Appendix 1: Interview with Roxanne Bouchard

The interview with Roxanne Bouchard was conducted in Montréal on 13 April 2010.

JBR: Tout d’abord, pouvez-vous me dire comment vous voyez la condition des écrivains québécois francophones au Québec et la relation qu’ils ont aux collègues anglophones (Canadiens, Américains), ainsi qu’aux collègues appartenant à une littérature migrante ou amérindienne?

RB: Je connais peu de relations entre collègues québécois francophones et canadiens anglophones. Par contre, la littérature néoquébécoise est de plus en plus reconnue, appréciée et enseignée. Ceci est une preuve d’acceptation de l’Autre au Québec. La littérature migrante est certainement très en vogue” aujourd’hui - prenez le cas de Danny Laferrière, par exemple. De l’autre côté, il y a une vraie méconnaissance de la littérature amérindienne. Il s’agit principalement d’une littérature de tradition orale qui souffre d’un problème de réception et diffusion. Il faut dire que les problèmes (sociaux, économiques et culturels) associés à la population Amérindienne sont tout aussi complexes qu’ils sont multiples. J’ai récemment visité la réserve algonkienne Manawan qui se trouve au Nord-est de Montréal et j’ai été choquée par les conditions de pauvreté dans lesquelles vivent les gens à l’intérieur de cette réserve. Ils souffrent de problèmes graves d’alcoolisme, de drogue et d’abus sexuel qui sont le résultat d’une discrimination et exclusion de la société. Il y a aussi le problème grave de la langue qui se pose et qui contribue certainement à un sentiment d’aliénation et d’impossibilité d’identification à l’autre.

JBR: Pensez-vous que l’on puisse envisager les littératures québécoise, manitobaine, ontarienne et acadienne, migrante et amérindienne d’expression française comme des littératures dites “postcoloniales”? Ou pensez-vous que ces littératures s’inscrivent plutôt dans un autre modèle théorique littéraire?

RB: Je ne pense pas qu’on puisse parler vraiment d’une littérature qui soit “post-coloniale” au sens culturel et politique du terme. On souffre toujours au Québec d’une colonisation double: celle d’une “sur-culture” française et d’une “sous-culture” américaine (depuis le mouvement de “contre-culture”).

JBR: En entrant dans la librairie Indigo, il y a quelques jours, je suis allée au rayon des romans québécois et j’y ai trouvé rangé un des livres d’Hédi Bouraoui qui est un écrivain franco-ontarien! Est-ce que vous pensez que cette classification fautive est illustrative d’une certaine simplification ou de l’appropriation de l’espace littéraire par les Québécois de toutes les littératures du roman Canadian francophone? La littérature acadienne, par exemple, semble se concevoir comme une “petite littérature” aussi bien par rapport à la littérature québécoise qu’à la littérature française.

RB: Je ne pense pas qu’il s’agisse de classification fautive. Le libraire ne savait pas où classer Hédi Bouraoui et il ne faut pas s’étonner qu’il en soit ainsi. Les éditeurs, les publicitaires, les lecteurs et les écrivains canadiens-français sont majoritairement Québécois. En ce qui concerne la littérature acadienne, son taux de production n’est pas élevé, mais elle produit des œuvres de qualité appréciable.

JBR: Quels sont les enjeux littéraires de cet espace littéraire canadien francophone qui reste toujours aussi varié que riche et quel est le futur de ces littératures dites de périphérie ou “marginales” dans le contexte de globalisation?

RB: Je ne pense pas que le statut de périphérie que certains attribuent à la littérature québécoise dans le contexte global soit notre problème principal. Elle souffre avant tout d’un manque de reconnaissance sur son propre territoire aussi bien dans les champs de média que ceux d’éducation et d’espace public...

JBR: Est-ce que vous êtes d’accord avec la citation de Yolande Villemaire de 1991:

“Nous, la préoccupation nationaliste, nous ne l’avons pas eue parce que les autres ont fait le pays avant nous et pour nous (...) La génération de la contre-culture a rejeté le nationalisme pour se trouver une identité américaine très forte. Avant nous, le Québec avait compris sa racine française. Notre génération a été de l’époque qui a compris notre racine américaine. Puis, je dirais qu’aujourd’hui nous nous en allons vers notre racine amérindienne”¹

RB: Je ne suis pas d’accord avec Yolande Villemaire quand elle affirme que “nous nous en allons aujourd’hui vers notre racine amérindienne”. Comment définir cette racine amérindienne dans le contexte de l’absence d’une racine québécoise bien définie? L’indifférence des Québécois à l’égard

¹ Royer, J. *Romanciers québécois, entretiens, essais*, Montréal: l’Hexagone, 1991, pp. 324-325.

des Amérindiens ne peut pas être sous-estimée, elle est plus que troublante, mais l'absence des racines québécoises est tout aussi préoccupante... L'indifférence des Québécois à l'égard de leurs racines me blesse. Peu importe qu'on soit fiers ou non du passé, nous avons devoir de mémoire.

JBR: Est-ce que vous acceptez d'être définie en tant que "femme écrivain québécoise francophone" ou un "auteur québécois francophone" par les media et l'académie? Ou considérez-vous cette catégorisation territoriale comme une contrainte? Je pense ici au manifeste "Pour une littérature-monde" signé par 44 écrivains écrivant en français et de leur refus d'une telle catégorisation.

RB: Je me considère en tant qu'auteur québécois tout court. Et je ne vis pas cette position comme une contrainte, mais comme un honneur. Je veux appartenir à ma culture et j'en suis fière.

JBR: Au début de votre livre *Whisky et Paraboles* l'héroïne du roman, Elie, écrit: "J'ai erré des jours, des jours et des jours, orientant mon repentir sur les clochers paroissiaux, dormant sur l'accotement, cherchant là où je pourrais dire 'ici' et sentir que" (9). *Whisky et Paraboles* déborde de références à l'église et de la religion catholique qui me semblent occuper une place importante dans votre imaginaire. Est-ce que vous voyez cette thématique religieuse comme une marque d'inscription délibérée dans le fil de la continuation de la tradition québécoise littéraire? Ou est-ce dû à des processus d'écriture plus inconscients et à une exploration ou une ouverture sur l'imaginaire collectif québécois?

RB: Il ne s'agit pas du tout d'un processus d'écriture inconscient, mais d'acceptation de l'héritage culturel, donc d'un processus conscient, voulu. La thématique des Paraboles [dont je me sers dans *Whisky et Paraboles*] et de l'histoire (personnelle et collective) que l'on construit est indissociable, au Québec, de l'Eglise. Dans cet héritage culturel, l'Eglise représenta d'abord la colonisation française et la crainte de la Révolution française. Elle fut aussi un instrument important de résistance contre la colonisation britannique. Il est important de rendre compte de cet héritage qui est éliminé depuis les années soixante-dix et l'arrivée de Révolution tranquille.

JBR: Je définirais votre écriture dans le roman comme une écriture "terrienne" ou ce que Gaston Bachelard appellerait une imagination de "la terre et les rêveries du repos"...En effet, le thème du retour à la terre natale, aux origines perdues (ou le thème du paradis perdu) me semble être tout aussi significatif dans ce texte. Comment ce thème de perte des origines, de

terre natale qui pourrait être interprété comme dénotant une certaine nostalgie du passé, s'inscrit-il, selon vous, dans la contemporanéité politique, culturelle et sociale du Québec et du Canada? Et comment vous placez-vous par rapport à l'histoire littéraire québécoise qui se fonde sur l'oralité et la tradition du conte?

RB: Je suis d'avis que la méconnaissance du passé mène à l'impossibilité d'une définition identitaire. C'est pour cela que j'ai voulu explorer ce thème du passé, de la perte de l'origine et de la mémoire canadienne-française dans mon texte. Je m'inscris dans une tradition d'écrivains et conteurs Québécois comme Jacques Ferron, Anne Hébert, Hector Garneau Saint-Denis, Gaston Miron, Louis Hamelin, Fred Pèlerin ou Yves Boisvert. Il y a dans mon texte un grand nombre de références et de citations cachées. Je suis à la recherche d'une identité intertextuelle. Je suis en quête d'une oralité de l'écriture et de la musicalité rythmique de la langue. J'emploie souvent la phrase qui s'arrête et qui est une marque de l'oralité pour moi. Cet arrêt signifie le non-dit, il donne la possibilité au lecteur de remplir cet espace.

JBR: Les espaces de la maison perdue dans la forêt, le lac, le village québécois animent tout aussi bien votre imaginaire. Quelles sont les valeurs que vous apportez ou donnez à ces espaces en tant que femme écrivain? Qu'est ce que ces espaces extérieurs représentent-ils pour vous?

RB: Pour moi, ces espaces sont des espaces de découverte pour soi. Ils symbolisent le retour à la paix, au silence, aux sources. Ils font partie aussi de souvenirs personnels associés au plaisir de la forêt, de la solitude, du silence...Les espaces ruraux permettent aussi l'insertion de personnages typés, plus grands que la vie et l'exploration d'imaginaire personnel.

JBR: Je voudrais maintenant passer à quelques de vos personnages:

JBR: Le personnage énigmatique de l'Amérindien Manu qui est pianiste de jazz – pourquoi avez-vous décidé d'introduire ce personnage Amérindien et que symbolise-t-il au juste dans votre livre?

RB: Manu est pour moi le personnage clivé qui n'arrive plus à habiter ni la réserve ni la terre de l'autre (aucun de mes personnages n'y arrive), il cherche un territoire et n'a que la frontière pour refuge. La rivière est sa purification et sa condamnation. Le même dilemme se présente pour lui en musique.

JBR: Le violoniste André casse son violon dans un moment de crise et renonce à l'idée d'une famille, d'une généalogie, et se décide à ne plus construire que des archets. Est-ce que ce personnage serait le reflet d'une partie de vous même? Ou est-ce que vous vous placez du côté d'Elie lorsqu'elle dit à André (p. 237): "Tu penses que tu n'as plus de famille; moi, je te dis que tu as mémoire du Québec, que c'est tout un pays dans ton archet!"

RB: André est inspiré par un personnage réel. Je me place plutôt du côté d'Elie. Elie représente la généalogie choisie. Elle est l'idée de la transmission et de l'inscription dans une continuité, mais aussi de celle de rupture. Je dois dire que l'indifférence des Québécois à l'égard de leurs racines me blesse. Nous avons un devoir de mémoire, peu importe que l'on soit fier ou non de son passé. Je pense que l'appropriation de l'imaginaire est essentielle dans le processus de recherche identitaire tout aussi bien collective qu'individuelle.

JBR: Enfin, le personnage du "conteur" est porteur de l'oralité dans le roman. Est-ce une oralité québécoise que vous envisagez ici ou une oralité qu'on pourrait appeler "universelle"?

RB: J'envisage l'oralité dans son aspect particulier Québécois et dans son aspect universel. Je vise surtout à apprendre à dire avec les mots du Québec, mais aussi apprendre à écrire (pour un jeune écrivain comme moi) avec les mots d'ici.

JBR: Est-ce que *Whisky et Paraboles* peut-être considéré comme un récit autobiographique?

RB: Non, pas du tout.

JBR: Quel rapport avez-vous à la langue française? Quelle valeur affective lui donnez-vous par rapport à l'anglais? Est-ce que vous ressentez ce que Lise Gauvin a appelé "l'hyperconscience linguistique" en parlant de la relation des écrivains francophones de la première génération à la langue française?

RB: J'ignore ce qu'est cette hyperconscience dont parle Lise Gauvin. Je cherche surtout à écrire dans une lignée (celle des écrivains d'ici). J'aime le français et ses complexités, sa musicalité et sa richesse. Je tente de dépoussiérer la grammaire pour forcer la vieille langue française à entrer dans l'ère de la parole, du chant. Ceci est un défi pour moi. Je veux la débarquer de sa "tablette" et la forcer à parler!

Appendix 2: Interview with Hédi Bouraoui, July 2011

The interview was conducted as part of the event “Poet in the city – The Maghreb: History and Pan-Arabism”, 6 July 2011, London, convened by Professor Mohamed Ben-Madani.

JBR: *Retour à Thyna* est le seul roman où vous traitez de l’espace et de l’histoire de votre ville natale. Pourquoi avez-vous décidé d’écrire ce roman?

HB: *Retour à Thyna* est mon premier roman à proprement parler. Avant celui-ci, j’avais écrit *L’Icônaison*, roman expérimental ayant une forme éclatée, sans personnages. C’était plus un long poème qu’un roman... Dans *Retour à Thyna*, j’ai fait en sorte que les personnages ne sortent pas de la Tunisie, car je ne voulais pas que l’on identifie les personnages avec l’auteur. Mon but n’était pas d’écrire “l’histoire de Bouraoui”, le nombrilisme ne m’intéresse pas. Même si je prends des éléments de ma vie et les mets en fiction, je ne veux pas que l’on m’associe à mes personnages. Une distanciation entre les personnages et l’auteur est absolument nécessaire. Ensuite, je ne tiens pas à être enfermé dans ce que j’appelle la binarité infernale, de la relation colonisé / colonisateur, ou Français-Maghrébin. A mon avis, la majorité des auteurs maghrébins se sont enfermés dans ce dualisme. C’est pour cela que je toujours dis que je suis, d’abord, Sfaxien (et même Moulinvillois, mon quartier natal), ensuite, je suis Tunisien, Maghrébin, et puis, je suis Africain-Méditerranéen. Toutes ces identifications à la fois... Mais, je suis aussi Européen, parce que, non seulement j’ai acquis la culture européenne et surtout française, j’ai été éduqué en France, mais aussi parce que je connais très bien les pays européens, y compris ceux de l’Est. Je me sens, donc, chez moi en Europe, je m’y inscris très bien. A la fin de mes études en France, je suis parti aux Etats-Unis où j’ai fait une Maîtrise sur l’œuvre de Henry James, puis un doctorat à Cornell University en littérature comparée (française, anglaise, américaine et italienne). A cette époque-là, je m’intéressais aussi à la linguistique et à la théorie de la critique littéraire. A l’Université de York, où j’ai toujours enseigné, j’ai été le premier à introduire la littérature magrébine, africaine et antillaise au Canada. Tout cela pour vous dire que,

lorsque vous introduisez une troisième dimension dans vos écrits, vous déconstruisez la binarité infernale. Donc, ma problématique, c'est la déconstruction de ce dualisme que nous, Maghrébins, avons internalisée en nous-mêmes. Il est certain qu'il nous reste, encore aujourd'hui, des relents du passé colonial. Je suis un ex-colonisé et je le reconnais. Mais, on peut résoudre ce problème-là en introduisant une troisième dimension (dans mon cas, l'Amérique du nord) qui nous permet de concevoir le monde différemment. Un peu dans le sens de ce que j'appelle l'échosmos ou l'écho du cosmos.

JBR: Comment voyez-vous aujourd'hui la relation entre les littératures francophones du Maghreb et du Canada?

HB: Premièrement, la francophonie du Maghreb est problématique, car elle reste difficile à définir et à analyser à partir du champ intérieur même de cette littérature. A mon avis, il faut sortir des sentiers battus de cette littérature pour la définir et l'analyser proprement. Ensuite, le futur des écritures francophones du Maghreb est, à mon avis, très incertain. Au Maghreb actuel, on accepte de moins en moins les écrivains francophones, alors que l'avenir des littératures francophones au Canada est assuré grâce au Québec. Ceci dit, je ne prévois pas la mort des littératures francophones au Maghreb, mais je pense qu'on y verra une renaissance progressive de la langue arabe et une augmentation du nombre d'écrivains arabophones. Il y a aussi le problème actuel de maîtrise de la langue française dans tous les pays du Maghreb. Il est significatif qu'à l'Université York, on nous a retiré les fonds de financement des cours sur les littératures francophones du Maghreb, des Antilles et de l'Afrique noire, car cela ne présente plus une priorité. De l'autre côté, le Canada francophone produit et produira toujours une littérature francophone dans un sentiment d'adversité et de manifestation identitaire. En somme des rapports contrastés qui n'en continueront pas moins à se stimuler dans une compétition saine. Ne pas oublier qu'il y a beaucoup d'écrivains et de critiques d'origine maghrébine qui chevauchent sur ces deux cultures dans l'immense pays de l'érable.

JBR: Quelle est, selon vous, la condition actuelle des écrivains francophones en Ontario et, dans ce contexte, quel est le statut de la littérature franco-ontarienne par rapport aux autres littératures francophones du Canada?

HB: En Ontario, nous avons une Association des Auteurs et des Auteures de l'Ontario Français (L'A.A.O.F.) qui compte près ou plus de 170 écrivains! La Province s'enorgueillit de cinq Maisons d'Éditions francophones, dont la mienne, le Vermillion, à Ottawa. Mais, par rapport au Québec, nous sommes toujours une minorité. Pour cela, toutes les autres "poches francophones" comme le Saskatchewan, le Manitoba ou l'Acadie se sont mises ensemble pour communiquer entre-elles et promouvoir leurs produits. Mais, paradoxalement, elles ne dialoguent pas toujours avec le Québec. Parfois, on nous répète: " Hors Québec, point de salut!" Communication difficile qui présente une problématique pas encore résolue. Par exemple, je suis membre de l'UNEQ depuis 1977, mais cette Association, dite nationale, me liste sur son répertoire, mais n'a jamais rien fait pour moi. Une fois au début dans les années 80, on m'a invité et listé comme Ecrivain tunisien, donc toujours étranger!

JBR: Savez-vous quel est le nombre de lecteurs qui lisent la littérature franco-ontarienne aujourd'hui?

HB: Je n'ai pas de chiffre exact, mais le nombre n'est pas grand. Je peux vous dire qu'il y a un demi-million de francophones sur neuf million et demi d'habitants en Ontario. Nous espérons servir les grands centres francophones de Sudbury au Nord, Ottawa à l'Est et Toronto au Sud où sont concentrés les francophones et donc de possibles lecteurs éventuels.

JBR: Lors d'une présentation que vous avez donnée à l'Université de Westminster à Londres, vous avez qualifié la relation entre l'Ontario francophone et le Québec à celle du rapport de "centre-périphérie". Est-ce que vous pensez que les choses ont changées ou la situation est-elle restée la même?

HB: La situation n'a pas beaucoup changé. Montréal est toujours le centre le plus fort, même si, à l'intérieur du Québec, vous avez d'autres centres importants tels que Trois-Rivières ou la ville de

Québec. Les centres francophones de l'Ontario se trouvent toujours en position excentrée. Il est vrai que l'Ontario les subventionne assez bien, et c'est grâce à ce soutien que les auteurs franco-ontariens sont en mesure de publier leurs livres. Mais, la dissémination de la littérature du Québec est beaucoup plus importante: le Québec envoie ses livres gratuitement aux universités et aux bibliothèques à travers le monde, alors que nous ne sommes pas en mesure de le faire. Le rayonnement de la littérature du Québec occupe la première place alors que nous n'apparaissions presque pas dans nos propres universités!

JBR: Justement, il est difficile de se procurer de vos œuvres en Grande Bretagne. Les bibliothèques n'en disposent pas toujours...

HB: La meilleure des choses pour se procurer les œuvres franco-ontariennes, y compris les miennes, c'est d'aller droit à l'éditeur. Sinon, contactez le site www.livres-disques.ca et on vous enverra les livres à moindre frais et le plus efficacement possible, car le Gouvernement d'Ontario subventionne les frais d'envois.

JBR: Pensez-vous qu'on puisse parler d'une sorte de "colonisation interne" de la part du Québec quant aux autres littératures francophones minoritaires? Ou s'agit-il plutôt d'une revendication d'identité Québécoise qui reste toujours dominante?

HB: La revendication d'identité reste toujours très dominante au Québec. Le nationalisme au Québec reste très fort, surtout parmi les écrivains. Le Bloc Québécois a disparu lors des dernières élections et pour qui les Québécois ont-ils voté à la place? Pour le parti le plus à gauche, le NDP (National Democratic Party), ce qui fait que ce parti a gagné cent sièges au Parlement alors que les Libéraux n'ont n'en gagné que trente-six. Ils ont été presque lessivés! On ne peut pas parler de "colonisation interne" mais on peut dire que la littérature québécoise est toujours mise en première ligne et toutes les autres restent minoritaires et donc mises dans le brouillard de l'insignifiant!

JBR: Quels sont vos rapports artistiques avec les écrivains anglophones en Ontario?

HB: Pour résumer vite, au début de ma carrière j’ai participé à la création d’une revue anglophone qui s’appelait “Waves”. Durant cette période, je communiquais souvent avec les poètes et les écrivains anglophones et j’étais assez bien connu dans ces cercles. Petit à petit, je me suis distancié, à cause de mon engagement dans les activités d’Associations francophones tel que le Salon du livre de Toronto, Alliance française et autres... Les liens ont fini par se rompre. A l’heure actuelle, les rapports entre les écrivains francophones et anglophones en Ontario n’existent presque pas, comparé au Québec, où ces rapports sont bien développés et où les œuvres des écrivains francophones sont traduits en anglais et vice versa. Donc, même si je me trouve dans une province anglophone, j’ai été obligé de me traduire moi-même, ce qui fait que j’ai été plus traduit en d’autres langues étrangères comme l’italien qu’en anglais, ce qui est tout à fait paradoxal! Par ailleurs, je suis très peu traduit en Tunisie, aussi, parce qu’en Tunisie il faut payer le traducteur et l’éditeur pour se faire traduire et je refuse de publier à compte d’auteur! Alors qu’en France, je suis beaucoup plus connu en tant que poète, ce qui est un peu paradoxal aussi.

JBR: Pouvez-vous décrire quel rapport vous entretenez avec la langue ou vos langues? Quel est votre rapport affectif au dialecte tunisien que vous parlez?

HB: J’ai une grande affection pour l’accent sfaxien qui est le dialecte tunisien que je parle. L’accent de Sfax est un accent typique du sud de la Tunisie, où l’on parle de façon “mahnou” ou de manière “relâchée”, par rapport à l’accent de la capitale qui est “pointu”. Je tiens beaucoup à un petit recueil de poèmes que j’ai écrit sur ma ville natale et qui s’appelle “Sfaxitude”. Il a été publié en France (100 exemplaires seulement) et traduit en italien. Je vais vous raconter une anecdote assez révélatrice: J’étais en vacances à Djerba avec ma famille et, pendant mon séjour, j’ai visité la synagogue La Ghriba qui est le seul lieu de pèlerinage pour les Juifs. Alors que je me promenais à l’intérieur de la synagogue, il y avait deux rabbins – un gros et un mince – qui lisaient la Tora. Lorsqu’il m’a vu, le gros rabbin pointa son doigt sur moi et s’exclama: “Inti Sfaxi: Toi, tu es Sfaxien!” Incroyable, mais

vrai! Je n'avais pas ouvert ma bouche, et il avait tout de suite deviné mon origine! J'ai été ravi! Donc, pour moi, le sfaxien est une langue émotionnelle... Quand je rentre en Tunisie, on veut toujours m'interviewer, ou bien à la télévision ou à la radio, surtout à Sfax. On me dit, bienveillamment, que je peux parler en arabe dialectal, si je ne peux pas parler en arabe classique. Mais ce que les gens ne comprennent pas, c'est que je ne possède pas la terminologie nécessaire en arabe pour discuter du langage poétique d'une œuvre ou parler de la théorie et critique littéraire en tant que professionnel... Je peux le faire en français ou en anglais, mais pas en arabe, ce qui est un handicap par rapport aux média tunisiens. Mais, cette situation linguistique est naturelle pour moi: je n'ai jamais utilisé la langue de la critique littéraire en arabe, mais, en même temps, je peux dire que je n'ai pas perdu mon accent sfaxien, je me sens chez moi dans ce dialecte. Je dois dire que ma langue de création est le français. Je possède bien l'anglais que j'utilise bien dans la critique littéraire. Et je baragouine l'italien, une langue que j'affectionne beaucoup.

JBR: Comment définissez-vous votre rapport au français? Pouvez-vous expliquer le processus de création de vos "mots-concepts"? Vous insistez sur le fait que vous ne créez pas des néologismes ou des mots-valises, mais que vous forgez des "mots-concepts"...

HB: Tout d'abord, j'adore la langue française. Non parce que c'est le français, mais parce que c'est ma langue, où je peux m'exprimer librement et avec plus d'efficacité. C'est aussi que je trouve dans cette langue, une façon particulière de créer des mots. On m'a qualifié de "forgeron des mots", (expression d'un critique français / canadien), forgerie non pas en tant que néologiste, mais pour présenter une conception du monde ou une vision qui est la mienne. Pour cette raison, je préfère appeler mes créations linguistiques des "mots-concepts". Par exemple, la "sfaxitude", c'est une attitude d'être Sfaxien avec tous ses soubassements culturels. "Souchitude" ou "souchique" désignent ceux qui mettent en vedette leurs origines, leurs souches pour se faire valoir plus que ceux qu'on appelle les immigrés récents. Alors que "l'originalitude" signale la référence à cet animal "trafiqué" au corps représentant la bosse du Chameau, le museau du cheval, les pieds du cerf... ce qui renvoie aux

origines multiculturelles, multiples par définition... J'aime bien m'élastiquer dans la langue, prendre un concept et lui donner toutes les latitudes possibles. Sur le plan de la forme, j'essaie de ne pas faire du Balzac ou du Victor Hugo. Ces auteurs l'ont fait mieux que je ne pourrais jamais le faire... Or, les Français moyens et les critiques veulent entendre du Victor Hugo, en un mot du classique. Donc, quand on fait une poésie qui n'a rien avoir avec Victor Hugo, les gens sont perdus ou du moins désarçonnés et ont de la difficulté à vous classer. Au fond, ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de créer une littérature "qui sente le Bouraoui", sans prétention aucune. Ce qui me distingue, peut-être, des autres auteurs francophones, c'est que je joue sur tous les registres linguistiques que je connais – l'italien, le français, l'arabe dialectal (ou, même, l'arabe classique quand je connais le mot...), l'anglais et tout autre langue qui me passionne, comme le maltais. C'est en faisant mes recherches à Malte pour le dernier livre de ma trilogie sur la Méditerranée que j'ai découvert que le maltais ressemblait beaucoup au dialecte tunisien! Faire un tissage de langues ou un patchwork linguistique multicolore, c'est ça qui fait l'originalité de l'œuvre sur le plan poétique.

JBR: Vous faites allusion ici à votre notion de la transpoétique?

HB: Exactement, la transpoétique c'est le transvasement d'une poésie à une autre, le passage d'un registre poétique à un autre, le va-et-vient entre les langues, les métaphores, les styles, les registres, les sonorités... La transculture, dans ce sens-là, est un échange de valeurs culturelles différenciées qui s'entrecroisent, s'harmonisent, se chevauchent etc. Tout comme, d'ailleurs, la créaculture... qui peut se définir comme l'interaction entre l'Homme et son milieu, mais aussi comme un échange de créations de valeurs culturelles entre l'homme et la femme, l'individu et le pays, les sociétés et les nations... Sur le plan de la poétique, j'essaie, donc, de trouver une manière d'écrire [en ces temps et en ces lieux] qui me permet d'exprimer ce que je ressens et ce que je pense, tout en me démarquant par rapport à ce qui a été fait. Cette prise de position littéraire et artistique comporte un risque, celui d'être considéré comme un auteur inclassable et de ce fait d'être occulté... Je suis fier d'être Tunisien et je ne veux pas cacher mes origines tunisiennes, mais j'ai combattu tous les ghettos toute ma vie et

je refuse d'être classé dans un ghetto littéraire, un label unique qui ne prenne pas compte de la multiplicité de mes strates culturelles et civilisationnelles!

JBR: Vous êtes, peut-être, tout simplement un auteur sfaxien...

HB: Moi, je veux bien, mais je ne crois pas que les Sfaxiens, qui sont parfois fiers de moi, veuillent me limiter à cette catégorie unique! Et je serai d'accord avec eux. Même pour les Canadiens, je suis toujours le Tuniso-Canadien, le Néo-canadien, le Canadien d'origine tunisienne en tant qu'écrivain. Jamais donc une classification unitaire.

JBR: L'espace de la ville est un espace privilégié pour vous et une importante source d'inspiration. Pouvez-vous expliquer le rôle que l'espace urbain joue dans votre œuvre?

HB: Je peux vous renvoyer, encore une fois, au terme de créaculture ou de l'interaction de l'Homme avec son milieu. Pour moi, le milieu urbain est le milieu où je saisis mieux la réalité et les valeurs culturelles dans lesquelles je vis. C'est pour cela que je situe volontiers mes livres (à part la trilogie méditerranéenne où l'unité principale de l'espace est l'île) dans un milieu urbain – *Retour à Thyna*, *Bangkok Blues*, *Ainsi parle la tour CN*, *La Pharaone*... Même si dans *La Pharaone*, je ne parle pas seulement de la ville, mais, aussi du pays, la ville y occupe une place fondamentale, elle y fonctionne comme un centre de gravité, un pilier... Je suis, finalement, citoyen beaucoup plus qu'autre chose, je suis quelqu'un qui aime les grandes villes et leur anonymat. Je suis heureux de dire que je vis dans deux villes que j'adore – Toronto et Paris. Donc, dans mes livres, je décris toujours le couple, la ville, le pays, le cosmos – j'aime donner une vision globalisante du monde. Les identités figées et l'enfermement des gens, ça me révolte...

JBR: Un autre espace mythique et historique qui occupe une place importante dans votre œuvre est celui de la Méditerranée... Pouvez-vous expliquer cette question dans le contexte de votre "trilogie méditerranéenne"?

HB: Mon rêve a été de faire une trilogie sur une traversée de la Méditerranée tel un Ulysse moderne où je pourrais explorer les espaces du Sud et, plus particulièrement, celui des îles du Sud. Ce Sud est souvent sous-estimé par le Nord qui l’ignore pour ne pas dire le méprise. Surtout pour son rythme lent, sa léthargie, son manque de compétitivité... Contrairement à l’espace du continent, les valeurs culturelles des espaces insulaires existent à un état beaucoup plus “condensé, concentré”, ce qui permet d’aller en profondeur. Dans le premier livre, *Cap Nord*, mon personnage principal, Hannibal ben Omer, combinaison d’un personnage historique, voir Hannibal Barca, et d’un autre mythique (Ulysse), décide d’entreprendre son voyage des “îles sources” de Kerkennah (île qui se trouve en face de ma ville natale) et de Djerba (qui est l’île des Lotophages dans l’*Odyssée*) à la Sicile et, puis, en Sardaigne. Immigration d’un sudiste vers le nord dans la légalité. Dans *Les Aléas d’une Odyssée*, Hannibal pousse son voyage vers un nord plus au nord, en Corse. Par ce point de passage, je règle la question de la binarité infernale (France / Maghreb)... Ensuite, il va se rendre en Crète et à Majorque, mais, contrairement à Ulysse, il ne reviendra pas à sa terre natale. Finalement, dans la dernière partie, *Méditerranée à voile toute*, c’est son fils, Télémaque ou Télé, qui poursuivra la quête en explorant les aventures de son père et des traces de son origine. A Malte, centre de la Méditerranée, il va découvrir certaines choses, le passé de ses aïeux et l’avenir qui l’attend... en un mot, vivre à un rythme nouveau d’une troisième génération. Ces voyages se terminent donc par une spirale, le détour vers Malte, pas en un cercle fermé, le retour à Kerkennah... En court, l’exploration de l’espace de la Méditerranée et de l’imaginaire méditerranéen occupent une place importante dans mon œuvre, car Mare Nostrum est le berceau de la civilisation Orientale et Occidentale, donc berceau de l’humanité, et aussi celui des trois religions du Livre – le Judaïsme, la Christianisme, l’Islam.

Ce carrefour et ces confluences me permettent d’explorer, de comprendre et d’analyser les diverses facettes de cette dimension essentielle à mon inspiration: L’Afrique / Méditerranée. Et surtout quand je la place dans le contexte Nord-Américain, cela m’encourage à occulter la “binarité infernale” et rayonner dans le village global qui de l’ordre de l’actualité.

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