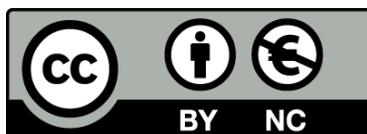




UNIVERSITAT DE
BARCELONA

Writing the In-Between: Transmediterranean Identity Constructions in the Works of Najat El Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche

Meritxell Joan Rodríguez



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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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in the Works of Najat El Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche**

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Doctoral Programme

Linguistic, Literary and Cultural Studies



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Generar sentido es una cuestión de colaboración [...], es un acto que se forma y sostiene a partir de los libros que los escritores leen, las personas con las que interactúan, y los siglos de historia cultural que pululan bajo su piel.

Gloria Anzaldúa, “To(o) Queer The Writer” – Loca, escritora y chicana”

C’est pour cela aussi que la fiction tout comme les recherches sont nécessaires, parce qu’elles sont tout ce qui reste pour combler les silences transmis entre les vignettes d’une génération à l’autre.

Alice Zeniter, *L’Art de perdre*

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Hace años, leí en alguna parte una cita de Stuart Hall que afirmaba que la identidad es una conversación siempre inconclusa. Aquella idea se sumó a otros sedimentos que, poco a poco, conformaron el empuje definitivo que me llevó a emprender esta tesis. Las siguientes líneas quieren ser un agradecimiento a todas aquellas personas que en el viaje doctoral me han ayudado a pensar sobre lo que significan las identidades y las identificaciones; a quienes han dialogado conmigo, con los textos que he elegido por compañía, y me han ayudado a resolver dudas, me han aportado herramientas de análisis. También a quienes han planteado preguntas para colocarme en el terreno de la problematización constante, el territorio que mejor acoge la noción de pertenencia, y el que sigo transitando. Esta investigación ahonda en la memoria, y teoriza sobre sus olvidos, y así como no recuerdo dónde leí la frase de Hall, es posible que olvide listar algún nombre; queda inscrito en el diálogo que he pretendido articular en este trabajo.

En primer lugar, quisiera hacer constar aquí el marco académico que ha hecho posible esta tesis. Como beneficiaria de una ayuda para la formación de profesorado universitario concedida por el Ministerio de Educación, fui becaria del Centre Dona i Literatura de la Universitat de Barcelona (hoy ADHUC–Centre de Recerca Teoria, Gènere, Sexualitat) desde 2014 hasta 2018. Agradezco a quienes me acompañaron en mis años como becaria, en los que aprendí a ser mejor lectora y mejor compañera. A Marta Segarra le agradezco haber confiado en la idea de tesis que le presenté, y el haber sabido darle forma, sugiriendo caminos de pensamiento que conformaron el andamiaje definitivo sobre el que he construido mis reflexiones. A Mònica Rius le doy las gracias por sumarse al proyecto y enriquecerlo con voces que le han aportado fonemas y ecos que no tenía cuando lo empecé. Gracias por las lecturas atentas y generosas de ambas, que se han complementado en todo momento y me han ayudado a aproximarme al espacio mediterráneo desde un entendimiento plural y heterogéneo.

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A Pepi, que heredó y me dio herencia.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to put forward a thorough reflection on contemporary processes of identity constructions, both individual and collective, which are criss-crossed by experiences of migration inscribed within the Mediterranean space, which I consider in its heterogeneity. Through two specific case studies, approached from a comparative and gender perspective, I look at subjects who understand themselves as tied to (physical and symbolic) experiences of displacement and claim fluid subjectivities. The works by Najat El Hachmi (Beni Sidel, 1979) and Dalila Kerchouche (Bias, 1973) present different factual dimensions and textual fabrics and are of a polyphonic nature. Because they pay attention to the multi-layered consequences that unfold from population movements, their nuanced considerations represent a precious guideline of sorts in understanding the syncretic fabric that shapes our world. I use the literary texts produced by these two authors of Maghrebi origin who grew up in Europe in order to filter my analyses, for I believe that the attentive regard that literature enables is of great value when it comes to problematizing rigid understandings of identity.

Both El Hachmi and Kerchouche inherited an experience of migration, initiated by their fathers, that led them to embody and undertake different interstitial positions in Catalonia and France, where they respectively live. In their works, they dwell on all these “in-between” positions that they, as writers, and the characters that they portray occupy. To do so, they use autobiographical essays first and, later on, fiction in order to delve into inherited cultural traditions, to contest clear-cut identity labels, and to explore the languages and experiences that have shaped their subjectivities. I thus read these texts as the tools that the authors use to enter into a dialogical relationship with their European societies, societies that, I argue, perceive them as an *immigrant* (in El Hachmi’s case) and as a *harki* (in the case of Kerchouche). As such, I critically consider El Hachmi’s and Kerchouche’s works as literary products and also as political artefacts that bespeak the authors’s agency.

The thesis is divided into two sections, “In Between Labels” and “In Between Languages, Memories and Spaces” –each containing two chapters–, which account for the different elements playing a part in the construction of their individual and collective identities

–a concept, that of identity, that I approach using epistemological cues borrowed from several disciplines, mainly those of postcolonial studies and the decolonial school, as I explain in the Introduction. In Catalonia and in France, El Hachmi and Kerchouche, and their characters, are encouraged to identify themselves as part of the societal tissue of these spaces. However, their belonging is hampered by the fact that they are perceived through the aforementioned “labels” of *immigrant* and *harki*, categorizations that place them in the terrain of alterity. At the same time, the familial communities of the authors and their characters want them to understand themselves in connection with their Maghrebi origins, which are differently nuanced in each of the cases.

El Hachmi and Kerchouche have found in the literary space a mode of dwelling and a felicitous way to conflate the languages, cultural traditions and memories with which they interact. They use the written page to inscribe the imaginaries that conform them, which have to do with experiences that are traversed by manifold silences –connected with the Franco-Algerian war and its aftermath, in the context epitomised by Kerchouche. In such gestures of inscription the authors not only create ties of belonging within the communities they identify with but also put forward historical rewritings and counter-memories that aim at contesting the hegemonic historical discourses that, in Europe, disavow the subjects conceived as *immigrants* or *harkis*. Ultimately, the intricate works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche studied in this thesis, whose rich intertextuality I put in dialogue with the theorizations of authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Homi K. Bhabha or Hélène Cixous, galvanize us to understand subjectivities as hybrid and fluid; always in process of translation, always “wounded” and hence open to the incorporation of enriching difference.

RESUMEN

La presente investigación doctoral tiene como objetivo proponer una reflexión minuciosa sobre procesos de construcciones identitarias contemporáneas, tanto individuales como colectivas, que están atravesadas por experiencias migratorias inscritas en el espacio mediterráneo, entendido desde la heterogeneidad que lo conforma. A partir de dos estudios de caso, analizados desde una perspectiva comparatista y de género, se analiza cómo los sujetos que se entienden a sí mismos como parte de experiencias de desplazamiento (físico y simbólico) reclaman subjetividades fluidas. Las obras de Najat El Hachmi (Beni Sidel, 1979) y Dalila Kerchouche (Bias, 1973) presentan componentes factuales diversos y su tejido se compone de diversas voces. Puesto que prestan atención a las múltiples y muy diversas consecuencias que se desprenden de los desplazamientos poblacionales, sus matizadas reflexiones representan una suerte de guía de gran valor para entender el sincretismo que vertebra nuestro mundo. Los textos literarios de ambas autoras –que comparten origen magrebí y el hecho de haber crecido en Europa– son el filtro de los análisis que se exponen en esta investigación, puesto que la mirada atenta que la literatura permite es de gran utilidad a la hora de problematizar entendimientos identitarios rígidos.

Tanto El Hachmi como Kerchouche heredaron sendas experiencias migratorias, iniciadas por sus padres, que las llevaron a personificar y a ocupar diferentes posiciones intersticiales en Cataluña y en Francia, donde viven respectivamente. En sus obras, profundizan sobre todas estas posiciones que ellas como autoras y sus personajes habitan. Para ello, hacen uso de la escritura autobiográfica primero y de la ficción después, con el fin de ahondar en tradiciones culturales heredadas, refutar etiquetas identitarias rígidas y explorar los lenguajes y experiencias que han moldeado sus subjetividades. Por todo esto, entiendo sus textos como las herramientas que las autoras usan para entrar en diálogo con sus sociedades europeas, sociedades que, según mis análisis, las conciben como *inmigrante* (en el caso de El Hachmi) y como *harki* (en el de Kerchouche). Desde este enfoque, analizo críticamente las obras de El Hachmi y Kerchouche como productos literarios y también como artefactos políticos que traducen la agencia de las autoras.

La tesis se divide en dos secciones, “In Between Labels” y “In Between Languages, Memories and Spaces” –divididas, a su vez, en dos capítulos cada una–, que dan cuenta de los diferentes elementos que juegan un papel en la construcción de sus identidades individuales y colectivas –y en la Introducción expongo que el concepto de identidad que articulo bebe de planteamientos epistemológicos que tomo prestados de distintas disciplinas, sobre todo de los estudios postcoloniales y de la escuela decolonial. En Cataluña y en Francia, El Hachmi y Kerchouche, y sus personajes son instados a identificarse con el tejido social de estos espacios. Sin embargo, su pertenencia queda truncada por el hecho de que son leídos a partir de las “etiquetas” mencionadas anteriormente de *inmigrante* y *harki*, categorizaciones que los colocan en el terreno de la alteridad. Al mismo tiempo, las comunidades familiares de las autoras y de los personajes de estas quieren que su proceso de identificación esté conectado con sus orígenes magrebíes, los cuales son diferentes en cada uno de los casos estudiados.

El Hachmi y Kerchouche encuentran en el espacio literario un espacio vital que les permite conjugar las lenguas, tradiciones culturales y relatos heredados con los que interactúan. Utilizan el medio escrito para inscribir los imaginarios que las conforman, que tienen que ver con experiencias atravesadas por múltiples silencios –relacionados con la guerra franco-argelina y sus consecuencias, en el contexto ejemplificado por Kerchouche. En dichos gestos de inscripción, las autoras no sólo crean lazos de pertenencia en aquellas comunidades con las que se identifican, sino que además plantean reescrituras históricas y contra-memorias. Estas tienen como objetivo cuestionar los discursos históricos hegemónicos que, en Europa, no tienen en cuenta a los sujetos concebidos como *inmigrantes* o *harkis*. Así pues, las complejas obras de El Hachmi y Kerchouche estudiadas en esta tesis, cuya intertextualidad se ha puesto a dialogar con las teorizaciones de autores y autoras como Gloria Anzaldúa, Homi K. Bhabha o Hélène Cixous, nos animan a entender las subjetividades como híbridas y fluidas; siempre en proceso de traducción, siempre “heridas” y por tanto abiertas a la incorporación de una diferencia que enriquece.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0. INTRODUCTION	
0.1 Why this Thesis	3
0.2 Why this Corpus	7
0.2.1 Explaining the Maghrebi Immigration to Catalonia	9
0.2.2 Explaining the Case of the Harkis	15
0.3 Why this Methodology	23
0.3.1 Explaining the Theoretical Framework	26
0.3.2 Explaining which Identity	35
0.4 Why English	45

FIRST SECTION: IN BETWEEN LABELS

1. UNDERSTANDING IMPOSED CATEGORISATIONS: WHAT LIES BEHIND THE LABELS <i>IMMIGRANT</i> AND <i>HARKI</i>	51
1.1 Religion as a Marker of (Not-)Belonging	64
1.2 Gendered and Biased Readings of the Other	74
1.3 The Internal/External Stranger	87
1.3.1 The Ambiguity of the Stranger	92
1.3.2 The Marked Stranger and their Potential to Mark Out Stereotypes	99
1.4 The Foreign (of the) <i>Immigrant</i>, the Foreign (of the) <i>Harki</i>	106
1.4.1 The Foreigner in the In-between	111
1.4.2 The Foreigner as a Friend	116
2. UNDERSTANDING THE INHERITED MAGHREB: ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY	121
2.1 The Body within the Familial Unit	128
2.2 The (Re)Foundation of the Community	137
2.2.1 Spatial Considerations	142
2.2.2 Transgenerational Relationships and Narratives	149
2.2.3 The Resignification of “Home”	157
2.3 The National Community	162
2.3.1 Women and the Nation	164
2.3.2 The Body, the Family and the Nation	167

SECOND SECTION: IN BETWEEN LANGUAGES,
MEMORIES AND SPACES

3. THE BORDERLANDS AS HOME:	
WRITING BEYOND VICTIMIZATION DISCOURSES	177
3.1 The Political Gesture of the Writer	180
3.1.1 Hybrid Productions	185
3.1.2 The Other(s)'s Voices	188
3.2 The Language of the In-Between	194
3.2.1 Language and Belonging	202
3.2.2 Writing, in French, to Unsilence Algeria	206
3.3 Beyond Monolingualism: The Language of the Multiple Self	213
3.3.1 The Mother('s) Tongue and the Body that Writes	216
3.3.2 Translated Subjectivities, Subjectivities In-Translation	221
3.4 The (Language of the) Borderlands	229
3.4.1 The Subject of the <i>Mestizo</i> Territories and their Agency	231
3.4.2 Hybridity Revisited	237
3.4.3 The "Wounded" Mediterranean as a Borderland	240
4. IN BETWEEN RECEPTION AND ACTION:	
THE WITNESS AS MEDIATOR	247
4.1 The "Mora" Writes Back	253
4.1.1 The Literary Text as a Questioning Tool	258
4.1.2 The Other Language, the Language of the Other	265
4.1.2.1 The Hybrid Tongue that Reads Back and its Reception	269
4.1.2.2 Language and Belonging	276
4.1.3 Writing the Oblivion to Become	280
4.2 The Harki Re(-)Members and Re(-)Writes	289
4.2.1 Writing (the Memories of) the War	294
4.2.2 The Harki Writer as a (Feminist) Historian, and as a Witness	302
4.2.3 Restaging the Past	309
4.2.3.1 The Harki Palimpsest	314
4.2.3.2 Counter-Imaginaries	318
4.2.4 The Wound that Enounces and Denounces	324
ANUDADAS CONCLUSIONES	333
REFERENCES	343

INTRODUCTION

0.1 Why this Thesis

This thesis was born from an *experiencia encarnada* and from my own understanding of myself as a migrant. In her text *The Vulnerable Observer* anthropologist Ruth Behar explains that her research work is inscribed in a position of vulnerability. Echoing ethnopsychiatrist George Devereux, she claims that “[w]hat happens within the observer must be made known [...] if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood. The subjectivity of the observer, [Devereux] noted, ‘influences the course of the observed event as radically as «inspection» influences («disturbs») the behavior of an electron’.” (Behar 1996: 6; emphasis in the original) Behar goes on to state that “[t]hroughout most of the twentieth century, in scholarly fields ranging from literary criticism to anthropology to law, the reigning paradigms have traditionally called for distance, objectivity, an abstraction”, since “[t]he worst sin was to be ‘too personal’” (12-13). This thesis is a piece of research that, whilst gets framed in the domain of comparative literature, is of a transdisciplinary nature, as I shall further explain; a piece of research that I, too, have written in a vulnerable manner. The way I conceive vulnerability, as tied with the universe of the academia, “doesn’t mean that anything personal goes”, to quote Behar (14), but requires “a keen understanding of what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world, and, more particularly, the topic being studied” (13).

I would like to inscribe such an understanding in these pages, for I believe that the text that follows is also informed by it. Growing up in L’Hospitalet de Llobregat, a city that forms part of Barcelona’s metropolitan area and which has traditionally been populated by migrants –either internal migrants from Spain, in the sixties, or international migrants from the decade of the 1990s onwards– made me pay attention to the specificities of the migrational experience from an early age. Myself the daughter of a migrant, I have always lived in between languages: the Catalan which I spoke with my father, and the Spanish that is my mother’s tongue. In the constant switching between these two linguistic codes and the cultural sets of references that vertebrate them I find my own “Bordertongue”, to use Gloria Anzaldúa’s terminology. Such a tongue draws the MeriTxell(s) that are within me, sustained upon a digraph that I experience

like a border.¹ I was born of a migration, the one initiated by my late maternal grandfather, who passed away whilst I was deciphering the universes of El Hachmi and Kerchouche, and my own at the same time. In the year 1974, he decided to leave his natal Extremadura to settle in Catalonia, and he embarked his family on the project.

My mother, at the threshold of her adulthood for she was 16 when she migrated, had to deal with that choice in which her mother, *mi abuela*, did not have a say. I was raised by my grandma's voice, her tales, the stories that she retrieved from her origins and that inform my imagination and my imaginary. I inherited her eyes, which have impelled people to read me as Maghrebi, because they most certainly speak the language of Al-Andalus. The works by Najat El Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche elicited many considerations to do with the way my familial community had been built, in between the different physical and symbolic spaces that conform it –which include Extremadura, on my maternal side, and Catalonia, on my paternal one. At the same time, their texts have triggered questions directly connected to my own process of subjectivity construction –which is also traversed by different spaces and cultural traditions– and have pushed me to understand myself as an interstitial figure, too. Their eyes have been my “I”s. And through my eyes I have tried to delve into their subjectivities and into those of their characters. What follows is the result of this two-fold search.

The Introduction of this thesis aims to explore the several theoretical pillars upon which this research work rests. It contains several sections, which describe the divisions in which the thesis is organized and also the theoretical frameworks that I have used in my analyses. I first dedicate a few pages to describe the corpus, briefly situating the works I study in their context of apparition and explaining the comparative lenses with which I approach them. I then move on to account for the methodology that has guided my research, to dwell on its theoretical framework afterwards. I refer to the theoretical considerations, by several scholarly voices belonging to different disciplines, that sustain each of the four chapters into which I have organized the text. Finally, I have found it relevant to include a section to develop the way in which I understand the notion of identity, for it is of paramount relevance in this study. The

¹ *Meritxell* is a rather long name and no one really uses my full name to refer to me. In Spanish, names tend to be shortened by cutting their last syllables; in Catalan, on the contrary, they get shortened by the end. Thus, the people with whom I interact in my every-day life either call me “Meri” or “Txell”, mainly depending on whether they speak to me in Spanish or in Catalan –hence, *tx*, is a border of sorts.

last pages of this introduction relate why I have chosen to write in the English language, a choice connected with what has been explained above.

Through two specific case studies, my dissertation aims at putting forward a thorough reflection of contemporary processes of identity constructions that are criss-crossed by experiences of migration and that claim fluid subjectivities. Such processes, which will be considered both from individual and collective lenses, represent a precious guideline of sorts in comprehending the intricacies of our world, inextricably holistic and shaped by mobility, which has become a way of inhabiting it. I will take literary texts, presenting different factual dimensions and textual fabrics, in order to filter my explorations on this topic. The attentive regard that literature enables, away from pretences of objectivity, allows for analyses that consider the manifold and multi-layered consequences triggered by population movements.

Taking the Mediterranean space –which will be heterogeneously considered and problematized– as a framework and articulating the research upon a comparative analysis of certain literary works by Najat El Hachmi (Beni Sidel, 1979) and Dalila Kerchouche (Bias, 1973), El Hachmi and Kerchouche’s life coordinates, as well as their literary pathways, are similar, as we shall see, which allows for the comparative exercise to be well-balanced. They both have Maghrebi origins and they reach adulthood on the Northern rim of the Mediterranean: in Catalonia and in France, respectively. El Hachmi arrived in the Catalan town of Vic when she was 8 years old, due to a process of family reunification initiated by her father. The author’s subjective negotiation is punctuated by the fact that the El Hachmi family epitomised alterity in their new European surroundings, which had direct effects on how they were perceived by the autochthonous Catalan population. Kerchouche’s father was also the initiator of the familial migration from Algeria to France in 1962, once the Algerian war was over, a war in which he participated as a *harki* (a term that, as it shall be further analysed, will refer in this research to those Algerians who somehow participated in this war alongside France). That explains the fact that Dalila Kerchouche was born in France, but she spent her first year as a baby within a camp for harki families, on the margins –physically and societally– of the French society, and surrounded by families that also arrived in France coming from

Algeria. As an adult, she travelled to her parents' country of birth in order to look for answers she was not able to find within her familial surroundings.²

Regarding their professional careers, both El Hachmi and Kerchouche participate in the societies where they have grown up as journalists (in Kerchouche's case) or as public figures, which marks the way their works circulate in these spaces. Furthermore, the literary journey of both women follows the same pattern, for they start by reflecting upon their own identity constructions from the autobiographical terrain and then jump into fiction as a way to further explore them; this gesture will also be studied in the chapters that follow, as fiction is used by both authors as a way to complement and problematize their initial reflections. Thus, in the different chapters that articulate the thesis their works will be individually examined with the purposes of focusing on specific topics, but also considered as a whole –each of the author's oeuvre a manifestation of their manifold and nuanced voices. Understood as such, the ensemble of their works represents the tool that El Hachmi and Kerchouche use in order to enter into a dialogical relationship with their European societies. From this conception, the texts that make up the corpus will be analysed from their literary dimension but because they are cultural constructs inscribed within their respective societies, El Hachmi and Kerchouche's works will also be considered as informing the authors' agency and, as such, as political artefacts.

The corpus of this dissertation is made up of those works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche that have a direct relationship with the topics of migration and identity, that is: *Jo també sóc catalana* (2004), *L'últim patriarca* (2008) and *La filla estrangera* (2015), by Najat El Hachmi; and *Mon père, ce harki* (2003) and *Leïla: Avoir dix-sept ans dans un camp de harkis* (2006), by Dalila Kerchouche. Other works by the writers that fall out of the scope of this thematic universe, as well as El Hachmi's 2018 novel *Mare de llet i mel*,³ will also be considered, but less thoroughly. My analyses take into account the gender perspective, since the works by both writers are traversed by issues related to the body and sexuality; the fact that both of them recognise themselves as women informs their reflections and their writing process. In this

² It is worth noting that neither El Hachmi nor Kerchouche spent their childhood or their teen years in big cities, like Barcelona or Paris, the capitals of their European societies and where they now live. I venture to posit that their societal inscription in Catalonia and France respectively would have been different had they grown up in these spaces, which have a different social tissue from the places where they grew up.

³ This novel represents a different gaze with which to approach the migration experience of a Moroccan family that settles in Catalonia. In this respect, it functions very well as a complement to El Hachmi's *L'últim patriarca* and *La filla estrangera*, which revolve around this same topic (see Joan-Rodríguez 2018). However, for reasons of time, I have not been able to include a thorough analysis of *Mare de llet i mel* in this dissertation, since the text got published when I had already written the bulk of the thesis.

respect, I have tried to put forward an intersectional regard that considers the many subject positions that these writers and their multiply-rooted characters occupy, bearing in mind, thus, the contexts of where they come from and where they grow up, including the class axis that articulates these. As I shall later explain, I believe that they portray an idea of identity that, following the theoretical cue led by the Chicana movement, understands subjectivities as informed by many affiliations that can be activated in different scenarios. As such, I conceive El Hachmi, Kerchouche and their characters as subjects in a process of “translation”. From this particular point of view, the texts I analyse call for an understanding of translation that is not subjugated to the idea of the original; when conflated with reflections on the identitarian terrain, this means that our authors allow us to comprehend that there is no “original” or “pure” identity that is clear cut and well-defined. Conceiving subjectivities and collectivities from the understanding that they are always in the making and in a constant process of (potential) transformation brings us closer to a better comprehension of today’s world and facilitates social cohesion.

0.2 Why this Corpus

The corpus that I have chosen aims at highlighting the complexities that surround us, in terms of cultural diversity. By way of dwelling on the common ground that conforms the works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche, it is also possible to carry out a much nuanced reading of the differences that traverse the experiences these writers account for in their texts. At the same time, read collectively, their works speak of the heterogeneity that informs the fabric of the Mediterranean space, which sometimes is thought of as monolithic, especially from the Northern rim, permeated by an imaginary that celebrates an unproblematic and all-encompassing Mediterranean identity; this construct is put into question and contested by the authors.⁴ Thus, from the texts chosen arises the realisation of the impossibility of tracing “pure”

⁴ For readings that critically consider the complexities of the so-called “Mediterranean space” see Elhariri and Tamalet Talbayev 2018. In her doctoral dissertation Edwige Tamalet claimed: “If one is to use the denomination ‘Mediterranean’ as a heuristic category, [...] one is to embrace its [...] irreconcilable nature as a space marked by ambivalence and discrepancy. This space-in-movement attracted the interest of many critics, who have taken to task the Southward-looking dominant historical framing of the ‘Mediterranean’. Several difficulties await any epistemological inquiry into the contradictions of the Mediterranean. The necessity to conceive concurrently of the region’s unity and heterogeneity, of its reality and mythical nature places any investigation under the sign of paradox, even aporia. However, despite its resistance to fixed determination, the very category of ‘the Mediterranean’ construed as a single entity remains remarkably persistent” (2009: 7). Such an understanding informs my analyses in this thesis.

origins –i.e. “pure” or “untainted” cultural traditions; difference and diversity are somehow ontological. The choice of analysing the texts by Kerchouche and El Hachmi was also determined by the fact that their works represented landmarks of sorts, in their respective spaces of initial circulation, in allowing for such a realisation.

El Hachmi’s *Jo també sóc catalana* symbolized, as shall be later discussed with more depth, the beginning of a paradigm shift when it came to learning about the international migrations that were shaping the Catalonia of the turn of the century, via the voices of those subjects that were directly connected to those migrations.⁵ Similarly, *Mon père, ce harki* connects Dalila Kerchouche with a genealogy of so-called “harki daughters” who, with their texts, all published in 2003, strengthened the shift in the way France was dealing with its Algerian past and contributed, at the same time, at changing the way the harki community was perceived both in France and within their own collectivity. Because of this, Kerchouche is also a representative of a paradigm shift of sorts. And because both El Hachmi and Kerchouche speak to their European societies in Catalan and French, respectively, theirs is a unique gateway in understanding how Catalonia and France interact with subjects that fall at the heart of the tension coming from the play of sameness and difference that both Kerchouche and El Hachmi, and their characters, epitomise. Due to the life and literary coordinates that Kerchouche shares with El Hachmi –which, I have already pointed out, facilitate a comparative approach to their works– but also because of the nuanced accounts that Kerchouche puts forward, which gather several voices belonging to different generations and very different in nature, I believe that her works allow for a more acute understanding of the permeability of the *harki* term and of the intricacies of the harki subjective universe than the works by the other harki daughters that started publishing, like her, in 2003 –namely Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, Zahia Rahmani and Hadjila Kemoum.

I have tried to benefit from the enrichment that accompanies a comparative –hence dialogical– approach by taking all the aforementioned into account. Putting in parallel the very different gazes portrayed by the two authors when considering their particular in-between, which is a common thread between the two authors, sets the ideas of ambiguity, of ambivalence and of

⁵ In 1996, journalist Miguel Bayón wrote, in relation to the kind of invisibilization that *Jo també sóc catalana* helped to undo: “los inmigrantes –tan en la calle, tan en los bares, tan en las conversaciones, tan en las noticias y los reportajes–, no aparecen apenas en los productos culturales de la España actual.” (1996: 238) El Hachmi’s works, together with the works by other authors who understood themselves as defined by an experience of migration, contributed to change this.

multiplicity at the core of my reflections. At the same time, it allows for the realisation that any experience of migration is unique in its own way, as the consequences that they unfold, whilst they might touch upon similar issues, affect differently those subjects that (in)directly undergo such displacements. The migration experiences that articulate the case-studies of this thesis are very different in nature, despite the shared point of origin –the Maghreb– and the common destination –Europe–, very prominently because of the strong colonial leas at the bottom of the relationship between France and Algeria. In what follows, I shall situate the works by Najat El Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche in their contexts of appearance in order to account for these differences.

The interstitial space that both writers inhabit is connected with the fact that they are caught up in a tension of sameness and difference both within their familial communities and with the European societies where they live. They are tied to their families and to the cultural traditions these have passed on to them, but at the same time their parents and relatives are different from them because they do not have the cultural codes that vertebrate the European societies where the writers live, codes that they do have. At the same time, Catalonia and France, as I have already expressed, urge these writers to identify themselves as citizens from those territories but keep regarding them as Others.⁶ These particular intricate contexts push the writers to acknowledge their cultural inheritance, to question the role this inheritance plays in their subjectivity and to put it in dialogue with what they learn at the northern rim of the Mediterranean –all of which gets translated into how they build their texts.

0.2.1 Explaining the Maghrebi Immigration to Catalonia

Najat El Hachmi's first published book, *Jo també sóc catalana* represents the author's attempt at explaining her own process of subjective construction within Catalonia, where she settled as a child after leaving her small native village within Morocco's Riffian region of Nador. Confessedly autobiographical, El Hachmi's text is a gateway for reflections of wider scope to do with the fitting in of immigrated communities on Catalan soil. Because of its economic importance –inside Spain, Catalonia always functioned, together with the Basque country, as

⁶ Throughout this dissertation the capitalisation of the word *Other* and its derivatives is borrowed from Lacan, and designates an other subject, entity, that is perceived as different to our self. See, for example, Lacan 1966.

one of the state's economic gears— Catalonia was, throughout the twentieth century, the end-point of many population displacements, and remains so to this day. As described by Andreu Domingo in *Catalunya al mirall de la immigració: Demografia i identitat nacional*, Catalonia's contemporary social fabric can be explained by three different immigration “flows”⁷ which have greatly contributed to Catalonia's demographic growth (see Domingo 2004: 19-43). The first “wave” spanned from 1901 to 1930 and is connected to a phase of industrial expansion in Catalonia. The second and third ones are of great relevance for this research. Between 1951 and 1975, Catalonia witnessed an episode of rural exodus, coinciding with the *desarrollismo* period during the Franco regime, which also favoured the industrial expansion of many Catalan cities. This led many people from impoverished regions in Spain to migrate to Catalonia in search of jobs. Entire families and whole villages settled in Catalonia, particularly in Barcelona and its metropolitan area, especially during the decade of the 1960s. This immigration will be partially portrayed in the works by El Hachmi, as shall be later analysed.

The migration that the El Hachmi family undertook, which the author dissects in her autobiographical essay, is inscribed within the third “wave” identified by Domingo, which has a marked international character and which peaked in the first decade of the new millennium. Described as highly heterogeneous, this third “wave” brought an array of cultural, ethnic and religious traditions into Catalonia and, as pointed out by Domingo, “[l]a definició de l'estatut d'estranger que s'aplicarà a l'immigrat cal considerar-la com la primera gran diferència respecte a les migracions anteriors procedents de la resta d'Espanya.” (28) International migrants started to be perceived from the lenses of alterity and, in this respect, the importance of Morocco in terms of figures but also in terms of historical relationships, explains why, from the times of the so-called “Reconquista” the *moro*—a name that referred to the Muslims of Al-Andalus— is taken “com l'altre per antonomàsia” (264).⁸ This construct also conforms the imaginary of the society with which El Hachmi interacts.⁹

⁷ Whilst I understand that sociological studies favour the terms *flood* and *wave* to refer to movements of population, I nonetheless mark them in inverted commas in order to inscribe my uneasiness with these words, which somehow link immigration with the idea of invasion.

⁸ We must take into account that precisely because of its nature as a construct, “moro”, like “harki” has ended up functioning like an all-encompassing category. Thus, it might be used to refer to those subjects that are read as belonging to the Maghrebi space, or even at a wider scope, to those that belong in a Muslim context.

⁹ For a study of the postcolonial relationship permeating the Spanish-Maghrebi space see, for instance, Cañete and Fernández Parrilla 2018, Mateo Dieste 1997 and Martín Corrales 2002.

In an article that traces the different visions that have articulated the Spanish historiographical material to do with the period of Al-Andalus –which sets the beginning of a series of intense exchanges between what are now Morocco and Spain–, Eduardo Manzano Moreno explains that the new millennium brought about new angles of enquiry, enticed by the increase of population displacements from Morocco to Spain.¹⁰ This, according to Manzano, revealed “las dificultades que la sociedad española encontraba para hacer frente a la diversidad cultural, algo que en el caso de la inmigración de origen árabe se acentuaba por la persistencia de un discurso histórico tradicionalmente hostil y generador de una dialéctica de confrontación.” (2010: 87-88) Contrarily to those people arriving from Latin-American countries, who share one of the languages of Catalonia with its local population, Moroccan migrants –and Morocco was the first nationality in terms of figures after the countries in Latin-America when El Hachmi family settled in Vic– speak Tamazight or Moroccan *daríja*, the dialect of Arabic spoken in Morocco which has a marked oral component, and belong for the most part to the Islamic religious tradition. Islam was perceived as a “foreign” religion in Catalonia by the bulk of the local population,¹¹ which affected the way the Moroccan newcomers related to their religious practices. As signalled by Jordi Moreras, “[e]l proceso migratorio imprime un carácter especial a las manifestaciones religiosas. Prácticas que en la sociedad de origen se inscribían en la cotidianidad, ahora, en el contexto de la sociedad de acogida, son reivindicadas en un plano identitario.” (1996: 234-235)

The importance of Morocco as a country of origin gets explained by two very important contributions that, published in 1996 and 2004, seek to account for the imprint that the migrations from Morocco to Spain have had and have both in Morocco and in Spain (and in Catalonia). The two *Atlas de la inmigración marroquí en España* present facts, statistics and multifarious analyses that aim at offering a wide glimpse at such a heterogeneous phenomenon, very often oversimplified, in order to foster a better understanding of “our neighbours”, as the

¹⁰ Manzano Moreno also lists “international terrorism” as a cause in the shift of vision to which he refers, which “vino a agitar en la interpretación de algunos ideólogos conservadores una simplista asimilación el célebre ‘choque de civilizaciones’, con el objetivo poco disimulado de volver a reverdecer la idea de un enfrentamiento multiseccular entre España y el islam, que se remontaría hasta la época de la Reconquista, y que se habría mantenido hasta nuestros días.” (2010: 88)

¹¹ There has been much literature produced about the presence of Islam and Islamic practices in Europe. Olivier Roy has written many works on the topic, focusing also on the French scenario (see, for instance, Roy 2002, 2004, 2005, 2011). In Catalonia, some scholars, such as Abdennur Prado have studied the new layers that Islamic practices acquire whenever they unfold in contexts where Islam is not the major religion (see, for instance, Prado 2012). To this respect, Barcelona’s Centre for International Affairs dedicated a special issue of its journal to this issue: *(Re)interpretando el islam en Europa* (Moreras 2017).

editors refer to Moroccan people –and understanding that the alterity logics to which they are subjected hinder their fitting into the cultural space of the Spanish state. Much more so than the inhabitants of other Maghrebi countries,¹² Moroccans started to settle on Spanish soil as early as the 1960s, at first stemming from the Northern regions of Morocco but later from all over the country –Moroccan immigration to Catalonia, which was markedly Berber,¹³ was, from that very beginning, coated with a specific profile “bien distinto de los correspondientes a la asentada en otras comunidades, lo que evidenciaba la existencia de unas redes concretas y diferenciadas” (López García 1996a: 8).

In the 1996 volume of the atlas we are informed that the Moroccan “colony” residing in Catalonia is the oldest and the most numerous in Spain. “[A] los asentamientos provisionales de la década de los 60, siguió el establecimiento de individuos, primero, y de grupos familiares a partir de los 70; posteriormente, desde la segunda mitad de los 80 se registró el mayor flujo de ingresos.” We also learn that Moroccans in Catalonia make up almost “el 30% del conjunto de la inmigración extranjera en Cataluña y es la principal colonia extranjera en cada una de sus cuatro provincias.” (Ioé 1996: 146) Such a portrayal coincides with the portrayal made by El Hachmi, in which the kind of migrational experience that vertebrates the 2004 account but also her following novels stems from a situation of economic migration in which the male figure settles first on the northern rim of the Mediterranean and family reunification follows.¹⁴ We know that already between 1970 and 1990 and unlike what happened in Madrid –where immigrants tended to concentrate in the capital–, in Catalonia there exists a tendency to

¹² Algerians would of course favour France in their displacements, because of the existing ties between the two countries as a result of France’s colonial past. Furthermore, France has always maintained strong economic ties with its former colonies, expressed in the form of economic treaties. On another note, Mohammed Berriane and Bernabé López inform us of the importance of population displacements from Morocco to several European countries other than Spain, which started around mid-19th century. Thus, emigration has become “un factor clave en la estabilidad económica y política del Marruecos actual. [...] Desde los primeros planes quinquenales de desarrollo al inicio de los sesenta se tuvo presente que la emigración podía aliviar la presión demográfica de algunas zonas. De ahí la concertación de acuerdos con países de la Comunidad Europea (Francia, Holanda o Bélgica) para el reclutamiento de trabajadores marroquíes.” (López 1996b: 46; see also Berriane 1996: 51-52)

¹³ This can be at least partially explained by the fact that the Riffian region was under the Spanish protectorate between 1912 and 1956: “la provincia más importante de procedencia es Nador, que en los dos periodos ronda el 30%” (Moreras 2004b: 314).

¹⁴ Ángeles Ramírez highlights the increasing feminization of Moroccan immigration to Spain. Catalonia is said to be a bit different in this respect, as the presence of migrated Moroccan women in this territory tends to be tied to processes of family reunification (1996: 76). Dolors Bramon, has noted that, in the particular case of the Catalan territories in the Iberian Peninsula, “en general les migracions de les dones musulmanes d’origen han estat mediatitzades pels homes. En altres paraules, la seva sortida no acostuma a ser espontània, sinó que surten dels seus països com a membres d’una unitat familiar: són esposes, filles, mares o tenen altres lligams de parentiu amb el cap de família. [...] Sovint [...] és molt possible que les emigrants ni tan sols hagin decidit la seva pròpia emigració.” (2010: 81)

“desconcentració” when it comes to the settling of migrated populations (López García 1996c: 68). Taking the example offered by El Hachmi as a cue, this explains why Catalan regions like Osona, which is far from any of the Catalan provinces’s capitals and is, ironically, heavily dependent on the porcine industry, are the chosen destination of many Moroccan immigrants.

When they arrive in Vic, the capital of Osona, in the decade of the 1980s, Najat El Hachmi and her siblings are amongst the first Moroccan children to be part of the Catalan classrooms, embodying difference in a very graphic manner. The othering regard that this triggers and to which El Hachmi accounts in *Jo també sóc catalana* does not disappear despite the fact that more and more families settle in Catalonia. In the 2004 version of the *Atlas*, Jordi Moreras remarks that “[e]l ciclo migratorio marroquí” is the most important international migrational transit that Catalonia received in the 20th century:

[L]os marroquíes son los inmigrantes más asentados en Cataluña, con una trayectoria migratoria más larga y ampliamente representada en el territorio, pero sobre ellos recaen las principales dudas en torno a su integración social. Es el primer colectivo extranjero en número de nacimientos en Cataluña, con un porcentaje de la población menor de quince años por encima de la media catalana, y, a pesar de ello, se sigue hablando de “segundas generaciones de inmigrantes”.

(2004a: 305)

Attesting to its importance, the Museum of History of Catalonia dedicated a special exhibition, curated by Moreras, to offer an in-depth analysis of those people who live in Catalonia and have Moroccan ties. The texts conforming the exhibition, entitled “Del Marroc i de Catalunya: Memòria viva entre emigració i arrelament”,¹⁵ traced the presence of “marroquincatalans” in Catalonia:

el tancament de les fronteres europees a finals dels anys seixanta va provocar que els primers marroquins s’instal·lessin provisionalment a Catalunya, a l’espera de poder reprendre el viatge vers la destinació triada. La demanda de mà d’obra provocada pel creixement de l’economia catalana va fer que oblidessin aquest objectiu inicial, la qual cosa va obrir el camí de l’assentament d’aquesta població al nostre país.

¹⁵ The texts gather the conclusions voiced by Jordi Moreras in 2004a: 305-312.

La cronologia que descriu les migracions marroquines a Catalunya s'inicia l'any 1967 [...] Aquell any es va produir una forta crisi laboral a Europa, que va provocar l'expulsió des de França d'emigrants marroquins. Així, els primers treballadors marroquins que van arribar a Barcelona procedien d'Europa i no del seu país d'origen. A partir d'aquell moment, s'obre un cicle migratori que ja perdura des de fa més de mig segle.

(Museu d'Història de Catalunya 2017)

The texts remark the importance of the heterogeneous “Morocco-Catalan” community not only because of its significant presence in the Catalan territory –in 2016, around 300,000 people living in Catalonia could be described as such, and a fifth of them were born in Catalonia (see Museu)– but also due to its cultural imprint, which manifests itself in a visible manner in the form of a very rich associative tissue. The exhibition also highlights the importance of the Amazigh component of this population: more than 60% of Moroccans in Catalonia come from regions informed by Amazigh cultural traditions, according to the Museum.¹⁶ Although Tamazight is now an official language in Morocco, Amazigh culture was for a long time repressed, unrecognized and invisibilized in the whole of the Maghrebi region. This is important because at the time of Franco's dictatorship, Catalan language was also oppressed by the fascist regime, leading to a situation whereby the Catalonia of the turn of the century was very much immersed in issues to do with how to deal with the consequences of such oppression. The particularities of both the Amazigh and the Catalan cultural traditions, understood as somehow minoritized, bridging the evident gap that exists between both contexts, will also conform El Hachmi's considerations, as we shall see.

Despite the enrichment that the contact between Morocco and Catalonia has set forth, which is displayed in many various forms, the exhibition informs us that in the first decade of the new millennium, 31% of the local Catalan population identified “immigration” with the figure of a Maghrebi. In the aforementioned article written by Moreras in 2004 he points out that “[e]n una encuesta sobre los valores de los catalanes, elaborada en 2001, el 63% de los encuestados consideró que lo preferible sería que ‘los inmigrantes no mantengan sus costumbres y tradiciones, sino que adopten las del país’.” (2004a: 312) Moreras also analyses such discontent and argues that the opening of places for worship for Muslims was met with much distrust in

¹⁶ In this thesis, I use *Amazigh* and *Berber* synonymously. In my analyses of the works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche, as well as those by other writers such as Laila Karrouch's, I use one term or the other following the authors' own formulation.

several Catalan towns. Somewhere else, in trying to elucidate the discomfort expressed by the locals, the author states that

[e]l hecho en sí de habilitar un nuevo espacio de culto musulmán en la sociedad a la que se ha emigrado, aparte de responder a una demanda religiosa determinada, incorpora otras razones mucho menos piadosas y que hay que entender dentro de un contexto comunitario. Sabemos que la mezquita es, por definición, un lugar de encuentro comunitario.

(1996: 234)

As such, the building of a mosque outside a Muslim society is, following Morera's view, a strategy of visibilization with which the migrated community aims at reaffirming its presence in its new society. El Hachmi's works allow us to delve deeper into the attitudes displayed by the Catalan population in regard to how they interact with newcomers from Morocco and also to understand to what extent the customs and every-day practices that inform a collectivity get transformed whenever they are displaced to another context. In this respect, the displaced individuals understand themselves in-between a tension that ties them to their past but also to the changes they are pushed to embrace in their new surroundings. El Hachmi's portrayal of the migration experience of an Amazigh family into Catalan territory at the end of the twentieth century is paradigmatic of the kind of migration movements that have contributed to shape the Catalonia in which the author now lives, but of course the value of her portrayal lies in the greatly elaborated and nuanced reflections that she puts forward, to do with the consequences of those displacements. In displaying a series of windows that allow us to observe the behaviours and thoughts of the heterogeneous groups that conform a society, the author invites us to question how collective identities are conformed and how we understand ourselves in relation to the O/other.

0.2.2 Explaining the Case of the Harkis

The title of Dalila's Kerchouche 2003 account, *Mon père, ce harki*, gives us the key to understand the intricacies of her process of subjective negotiation. Such a process is criss-crossed by the harki element, which is tied to the paternal figure. The term *harki* finds its etymological roots in the Arabic word *haraka*, meaning "movement". During the Franco-Algerian war it would make reference to those Algerian subjects that were members of *harakas*, mobile units created by the French army consisting of "supplétifs", "les gens du pays,

des autochtones dont la capacité réside dans leur connaissance du pays et des habitants.” (Hamoumou 1993: 113) However, by the end of the conflict, its scope had widened to include all those Algerians that somehow found themselves on the French side during the war, although not all of them were harkis, strictly speaking:

les *harkis*, membres d’une *harka*, ne forment qu’une des catégories de “supplétifs musulmans” recrutés par l’armée française pendant la guerre d’Algérie. À la différence des forces “régulières” (soldats sous contrat ou appelés), les forces “supplétives” étaient rattachées à des unités militaires sans en avoir cependant le statut. L’histoire n’a pas retenu cette définition restrictive et, aujourd’hui, le terme “harkis” désigne de façon plus large l’ensemble des “musulmans” –on disait aussi “Français de souche nord-africaine”– enrôlés dans les forces régulières et supplétives de l’armée française. La distinction est de taille: fin 1960, le premier groupe, qui compte environ 60.000 hommes, représente seulement un tiers du second. Par extension, le terme en est parfois venu à désigner l’ensemble de ceux qui durent, après l’indépendance, quitter l’Algérie et s’installer en métropole.

(Charbit 2006: 9)

Figures regarding the total amount of harkis that stayed in Algeria and/or ended up in France remains a contentious issue. Abderrahmen Moumen affirms that between 1962 and 1968 20,6000 former auxiliary soldiers (66,000 if their families are taken into account) fled to France from Algeria (2014: 5). Jean-Jacques Jordi claims that around 85,000 “Français musulmans” embarked in France; in 1968, the official census listed 138,724 “Français musulmans”, of whom 88,000 were born in Algeria (2003: 13).¹⁷ In tracing the origins of *harki* in the Algerian context, we learn that the term has always been surrounded by terminological mixing. Pierre Daum informs us that “[d]ès 1955 et les premiers recrutements d’auxiliaires algériens par l’armée française”¹⁸ *goumi* was favoured as a term. The author remarks that lexical differences

¹⁷ Claire Eldridge offers other figures: “William Cohen claimed that government organised repatriation programmes brought 25,000 *harkis* and their dependants to the French mainland between 1962 and 1967, while a further 68,000 entered the country by unofficial means, frequently with the assistance of their former officers. This is broadly in line with figures provided by Hautreux, who lists 12,000 transferred to France by July 1962, rising to 20,000 by December with a further 6,600 arriving in 1963. [...] [T]he most commonly cited figure is drawn from the 1968 census, which listed 138,458 ‘French Muslims’, the contemporary administrative label for *harkis* and former Muslim notables, of which 88,000 had been born in Algeria.” (2016: 24)

¹⁸ Abderahmen Moumen states, however, that “les premières harkas sont constituées en avril 1956” (2003: 12). In *From Empire to Exile* Claire Eldridge writes: “Ethnologist Jean Servier created the first *harka* in the mountainous Aurès region, but it was the minister resident, Robert Lacoste, who, in February 1956, regularised and institutionalised their use as mobile units to undertake offensive military operations. By September 1957, there were approximately 10,000 *harkis*. This figure then rose to 61,600 in January 1961, before dropping back down to 5000 by April 1962.” (2016: 23)

were then important, because in certain regions *goumi* was used in opposition to *harki*: “le premier terme, aux connotations plus sympathiques, désigne les fonctionnaires des SAS (sections administratives spécialisées), les mokhaznis, tandis que le second correspond aux ‘méchants’ combattants.” (2015: 15) The multiplicity of nomenclatures noted by Daum and Charbit was translated into the French context after the conflict was over. Thus, Abderahmen Moumen explains that the former combatants, and their families, would be referred to as either FSNA (Français de Souche Nord Africaine), FRCI (Français Rapatriés de Confession Islamique), FSIRAN (Français de souche indigène rapatriés d’Afrique du Nord) –a denomination used in the mid 1970s– or as RONA (Rapatriés d’Origine Nord Africaine) (2003: 13).

Kerchouche’s autobiographical work is prefaced by a text by historian Jacques Duquesne that allows us to comprehend to what extent this ocean of categorizations, which as noted by Charbit is encapsulated in the all-encompassing label of *harki*, affected not only those subjects that participated in the Franco-Algerian war, but also their families. Thus, as highlighted by Duquesne and as shall be later explored, most particularly in the last chapter of the thesis, *harki* refers also to the relatives of an auxiliary soldier (2003: 10). In France, *harki*, like the other denominations, encloses the logics of alterity to which the people that are read as harkis fall subject by the French administration and the local population. In *Les Harkis, une mémoire enfouie*, historians Jean-Jacques Jordi and Mohand Hamoumou, himself the son of a harki, comment on this issue:

Qu’il s’agisse d’eux-mêmes (harkis proprement dits) ou des autres “musulmans profrançais” (moghaznis, membres des groupes mobiles de sécurité ou des groupes mobiles de police rurale, élite francisée, militaires de carrière, caïds, anciens combattants...) toutes les définitions proposées montrent davantage ce qu’ils ne sont pas que ce qu’ils sont. Ils ne sont pas français comme les autres (à cause de leurs origines musulmanes), pas vraiment rapatriés, pas immigrés (par rapport aux Algériens), pas traîtres à l’Algérie, pas forcément tous engagés par patriotisme français pour autant, pas intégristes, pas toujours intégrés... Comme s’ils n’existaient finalement que par opposition!

(2008: 12)

The word *harki* has come to refer to people that understand themselves in relation to a date, that of 1962, and to a place: Algeria. That the label was born inside the war which ended in 1962 is of much significance and is translated in the fact that most of the literature produced

about this topic, in France, makes explicit references to it. Commenting on this realisation, Nina Sutherland argues that this “montre à quel point les lecteurs sont considérés comme ignorant les complexités de l’histoire des harkis.” (2013: 233) To this respect, the work by Dalila Kerchouche, which includes historiographical material and citations belonging to different sources, is a useful tool in understanding the manifold meanings of the word *harki* and shed light on how this label has circulated, by exploring how it is passed on from generation to generation, and why the author chooses to identify herself in connection with it. The very first lines of the autobiographical book connect with the two meanings, as they read: “Je suis une fille de harkis. J’écris ce mot avec un petit ‘h’, comme honte.” This confession is followed by this other one: “Pendant la guerre d’Algérie, mon père, un Algérien, s’est battu dans les rangs de l’armée française contre le FLN, le Front de libération nationale du pays.” (2003: 13) Thus, her father’s participation in the war led to the situation whereby his wife, too, would be considered a harki, hence the plural in Kerchouche’s formulation: “Je suis une fille de harkis”, in plural. And because she is their daughter, she, too, will inherit from that identity marker, which she will unravel throughout her account.

As I shall later explore in more depth, in her work, Dalila Kerchouche will spell *harki* in different ways, which account for the different manners in which she conceives her harki legacy throughout the trip, both physical and subjective, that she undertakes across France and Algeria. The works that deal with the harki universe unfold many spellings of the word, both as a noun and as an adjective. In the texts that are written in French and English the word is sometimes capitalized, sometimes marked in italics; it might sometimes admit plural (gendered) suffixes and some scholars and authors use it with no variations. Following the criteria displayed by Kerchouche, in this thesis I write *harki* with a lower-key “h” and do not mark the word in any way, except to highlight metalinguistic considerations. Considering that the English language does not have gender marks for adjectives, I shall not add an -e at the end of *harki* whenever I am referring to a woman. Kerchouche’s 2003 book also allows us to understand that the reasons that led many Algerian men (in my research I have had no access to harki women) to participate in the war alongside the French side were indeed multiple and cannot be easily perceived as a political choice.

Historian François-Xavier Hautreux notes that “l’engagement se comprend comme un acte collectif, subordonné à la décision d’une autorité familiale reconnue.” (2013: 238) The line between the individual and the collective, within the harki universe, is very thin indeed, as we

shall see in further analyses of Kerchouche's works. The conflation already permeates the definition of the term in itself and explains why the term also mixes political and cultural components. What started off as a categorization to refer to a specific role played by certain people in the Algerian war ended up becoming an identity of sorts, which was received differently by the different generations to which it applied and still applies. The fact that those men who, like Kerchouche's father, took part in the conflict chose not to speak about their participation led to a lack of transparency that informs the label harki. Hence, we understand why it is only after she travels to her parent's native Algeria that Dalila finds out about the reasons that led her father to enrol with the French army. A thorough research on this matter reveals that, as explained by Saïd Boualam, the FLN would push some men to become harkis, which would see their enrolment as "a matter of survival" (1963: 38). On another note, in *Oublier nos crimes. L'amnésie nationale: une spécificité française*, Dimitri Nicolaïdis explains that

pour un paysan des Aurès, lorsqu'on a un siècle et demi de présence française, l'armée est un facteur de promotion normal: le père a fait la guerre de 1939, le grand-père celle de 1914, il est normal qu'on lui donne un fusil, qu'il devienne harki.

La pénétration française, la dépersonnalisation, culturelle, politique, idéologique, a contraint les nationalistes algériens à se battre contre des gens qui n'avaient plus de conscience d'appartenance nationale. La guerre civile algéro-algérienne a donc représenté un passage obligé pour la création de la Nation algérienne.

(2002: 127-128)

The participation of the harkis in the war was made into a taboo of sorts, in the historical discourses of both France and Algeria, as epitomised by Michel Roux's title *Les Harkis ou Les Oubliés de l'histoire*, and will be tackled in depth in subsequent chapters. It is a topic of paramount importance in order to understand the fitting of this heterogeneous community of people on either side of the Mediterranean. The harkis were constructed as traitors from the very beginning, an idea to which both the French and the Algerian administrations contributed. In order fully to grasp the fabric of this label, it is important to note that its construction is deeply embedded in what Benjamin Stora calls a "war on memory" both on the Algerian and the French sides. With the notion of "cloistered remembering" Stora refers to the partial memories that each of the participant groups in the conflict had built of the representations of that time in order to account for their own points of view (1998: 249).

The harkis represent a fracture within the historical discourses of both France and Algeria and this lets itself be imprinted in the title of the works produced around the harki universe. As expressed by Jordi,

Dès juillet 1962 [...] [u]ne cape de silence les enferme dans une non-histoire, dans un refus de la mémoire. En Algérie, reconnaître l'histoire des musulmans profrançais revient à relativiser l'élan du peuple uni sous la bannière du FLN contre le colonisateur. Mieux vaut là aussi s'abandonner à l'oubli et se mettre à l'écriture d'une histoire officielle.

(2003: 12)

The pain that comes from that fracture resonates very profoundly in those who are somehow touched by the harki label. Thus, for instance, Boussad Azni, the son of a harki, entitled a work that he published in 2001 as “Harkis, crime d’État. Généalogie d’un abandon”. Azni became the president of one of the many associations presided by harki descendants that sought some sort of compensation for the treatment received by the harkis in France, a compensation that was punctuated by the formal complaints voiced by some of the associations against France, for crimes against humanity, in 2001. During the conflict, the French administration had promised to relocate the harki families in France were the war lost for France, but ultimately abandoned them to their own fate, which led to the situation whereby entire families were massacred on Algerian soil, especially by the so-called “Marsiens”, the last people to join the FLN who committed brutal acts to prove their engagement with the winning side.¹⁹

In an article entitled “Du désarmement à l’abandon”, Jean-Jacques Jordi explains how this shift was orchestrated by De Gaulle, who in July 1962 declared: “on ne peut pas accepter de faire venir tous les musulmans qui viendraient à déclarer qu’ils ne s’entendront pas avec leur gouvernement. Le terme de rapatrié ne s’applique bien évidemment pas aux musulmans, ils ne retournent pas dans la terre de leurs pères. Dans leur cas, il ne pourrait s’agir que de réfugiés.” (in Jordi 2014: 88) De Gaulle’s thought reflects to what extent the French colonial scenario was traversed by multiple regards that compartmentalized the population who lived at the

¹⁹ Historians argue that these massacres left between 50,000 and 60,000 people dead (see Jordi 2003: 11). In 2015, journalist Pierre Daum published *Le Dernier Tabou. Les “harkis” restés en Algérie après l’indépendance*, which suggests that contrarily to popular belief, many harkis and their families who decided to stay in Algeria were able to lead normal lives in newly independent Algeria. He bases his statements on numerous interviews he conducted in Algeria over the years, and acknowledges that some families were indeed massacred. It is worth noting that there are no official figures explaining the actual number of harkis that stayed in Algeria or left for France.

southern rim of the Mediterranean –logics of fragmentation informed by a religious component and which had legal effects, for the Jewish population in Algeria did not receive the same treatment as “les musulmans”. In her 2003 text, Kerchouche notes that the French press would never refer to the harkis as French despite the fact that, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, the majority of them adopted French nationality (2003: 66). The author also notes that the pied-noir community that settled in France would treat the harkis as “indigènes”, thus reproducing the colonial power dynamics that sustained French Algeria (68). Hence, borrowing Jordi’s words, “alors que les harkis proprement dits n’existent plus, ce mot continue à désigner des Français en les stigmatisant.” (2003: 5)²⁰

The othering regard disclosed above was translated into a physical strategy of exclusion. Most of those who were able to arrive in France ended up in camps set up by the French government in order to deal with the settling of this community, which as Kerchouche points out was of major significance for France, for the harkis were the first large community of Muslim families to settle in the country, bringing with them a set of cultural traditions that was considered foreign to the Hexagon (2003: 188). This is echoed in her novel, where the harki community is described as “la première minorité issue des anciennes colonies” (2006: 10).²¹ The camps are an enormously significant space in the processes of subjective constructions of the different harki generations. They occupy a great deal of space in Kerchouche’s texts and will be further explored below. It is important to note, however, that some of the camps were active until 1975, year in which a series of riots led by the harkis themselves ended with their closing. In *Destins de harkis: Aux racines d’un exil*, a work in which Kerchouche also collaborated, Jordi states that:

depuis 1962, les gouvernements successifs ont mis en place tout un système de relégation qui visait à exclure les supplétifs réfugiés, plus que rapatriés, des autres Français. Camps de regroupement, hameaux forestiers, cités HLM sous contrôle militaire, rien n’est vraiment laissé au hasard pour que l’on ne s’aperçoive pas que la France, après avoir abandonné les supplétifs qu’elle avait recrutés, les parquait désormais dans des conditions inimaginables [...].

(Jordi 2003: 7)²²

²⁰ This echoes back to Hélène Cixous’s words in *La Jeune née*, where she writes: “La paradoxe de l’altérité, c’est bien sûr qu’à aucun moment dans l’Histoire elle n’est tolérée, possible, comme telle. L’autre n’est là que pour être réapproprié, repris, détruit en tant qu’autre. Même l’exclusion n’est pas une exclusion. L’Algérie n’était pas la France, mas elle était ‘française’.” (1975: 130)

²¹ Eldridge states that “some of the estimated 42,500 people who passed through the camps between 1962 and 1969 remained there only briefly before being dispersed into the wider populace. Others, however, were not so lucky.” (2016: 24)

²² In *Treize chibanis harkis* we read that within the camps “on a séparé soigneusement leur sort de celui des Européens rapatriés comme des ‘Français de France’. En effet, sur le sol français, on a continué à leur faire subir la discrimination colonial.” (Assas, Besnaci-Lancou and Manceron 2007: 6)

On the same note, historian Jean-Pierre Rioux contends that “as it regarded the Harkis as uncivilised and uncivilisable, the French state therefore decided that they would be lodged out of sight, out of mind.” (in Enjelvin 2006: 116) A photographer and also a collaborator of the collective volume *Destins de harkis*, Stéphan Gladieu laments that the harkis, who, in his view, “devaient être le trait d’union entre deux communautés”, were in fact stigmatized and pushed to the oblivion by both the French and the Algerian administrations,²³ something that started to change at the turn of the century thanks to, amongst others, the works by Dalila Kerchouche and the volume in which the photographer took part (2003: 19). The stigma that permeates the harki label is of great importance and affects the way the former combatants and their families articulate their position in France; as I have already stated, the harki label is rooted in the Franco-Algerian conflict and, thus, in the colonial experience. Despite the fact that the relationship between France and its colonial past has changed considerably since the end of the Franco-Algerian war, as shall be explored, Kerchouche’s work let us understand that colonial logics remained operational when the harkis first settled in France and are still palpable today.

The settlement of the harkis and their families in France was seen as irreversible, which effaced the idea of a potential return to the land of origin, the possibility of return being one of the components that categorizes many diasporic communities (see Clifford 1997 and Cohen 2010). The decision to leave Algeria was seen, by many families, not as much as a choice but as the only valid option to escape from a certain death by massacre, and this idea of no-return would punctuate the link of these families with their land of origin. The kind of displacement epitomised by El Hachmi’s family is inscribed within different parameters, which include the possibility of return to the origin (momentarily or permanently). This affects the way in which the land of origin is constructed and therefore how the individuals who have migrated (or who somehow inherit an experience of migration) relate to the artefacts that conform their original cultural tradition. The pages that follow analyse how the authors’ works, both autobiographical and fictional, put forward an in-depth understanding of different processes of identity construction. The texts allow us to comprehend how subjects that understand themselves as inscribed within a migration process navigate their own sense of subjectivity, which includes a consideration of the different communities that also configure them.

²³ Anne Savigneux remarks the stigmatization that continues to operate in French society regarding the harki population: “nous avons été aveugles au drame des harkis... Nous avons été complices de l’étiquetage honteux qui circule de part et d’autre de la Méditerranée y compris dans nos collèges et nos lycées, où des élèves, quelle que soit leur origine, s’insultent dans les cours de récréation en se traitant de harkis.” (in Pervillé 2013: 116)

The comparative approach of the works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche is facilitated by the fact that they allow for multifocal analyses of processes of subjectivity construction and also by the realisation that both harkis and migrants enable a theorization of how logics of alterity operate. The harkis's case perfectly epitomises how social Othering strategies unfold in human collectivities. Through the realities portrayed in Kerchouche's texts, we are able to understand how they were used as scapegoats of sorts, exemplifying to what extent human groups need a common (and homogeneous) "we" in order to constitute themselves as a community. This process passes through constructing an Other –sadly, ever so often considered as an enemy– against whom that "we" can be made up. Taking on Bonnie Honig's reading of the book of Ruth (2001), we will see how the harkis were somehow turned into demons, for, like the Biblical demon, they were constructed as having turned their back on their own people. Even if the inscription of the migrants in their new surroundings is, as pictured by El Hachmi, of a different nature, they are nonetheless constructed as that figure of alterity and hence demonized in a way, turned into enemies of the nation where they decide to settle, as we shall see in more depth.

0.3 Why this Methodology

Regarding the structure of the thesis, the work is divided into two big sections, each containing two chapters. As I mentioned, all of the chapters are consecrated to disentangling in which ways the texts that I study put forward a complex understanding of what it means to inhabit an in-between position, facilitated in this case by the Mediterranean sea. Conceived almost like a physical landmark, the Mediterranean symbolically delimits the different cultural realities that offer the characters studied the several values, customs, languages and texts with which they juggle upon constructing their identities. The first section of the thesis is dedicated to analysing how El Hachmi, Kerchouche and their characters understand themselves through the way they are read both in Europe and within their family circle, which in Europe functions as the Maghreb they left behind. In the second one, I focus more specifically on their writing exercise, which puts forward a conception of the "in-between" as an empowering position and which calls on the construction of European imaginaries that incorporate the experiences of those subjects that El Hachmi and Kerchouche put at the centre of their work –this gesture of revindication rests upon an exercise of historical rewriting and contestation of the stigmas and stereotypes that lie at the core of the way "immigrants" and "harkis" are constructed in Catalonia and France.

I find it important to note that whilst I consider the authors' texts on the basis of the common reflections that they enable, I nonetheless pay attention to the specificities of their content and the different textual fabric that informs them, as I mentioned. Thus, whilst Kerchouche's work is much more embedded in a communal dimension and very much tied to the rewriting of the stigma that, up to this day, is associated to the term *harki*, El Hachmi's is more focused on familial relationships and allows for a much more nuanced gendered reading –all this shall be taken into account in the way that I lay out my analyses. Of course, the contexts in which these texts circulate and the collectivities with which the authors dialogue are also different. Kerchouche is directly interpellating France, the country in which she has always lived, whose autochthonous population, she assumes, is not familiar with the *harki* universe –and this would explain why inside her texts she incorporates material that dissects the meaning of *harki*. El Hachmi's reflections are inscribed within the Spanish scenario but are more specifically directed to the Catalan society, to which she “speaks” in Catalan, one of its languages.

In this respect, all of the works that conform my corpus call for an understanding of migration that is attentive to its long-term consequences and allow us to reflect upon to what extent these consequences –which are somehow “inscribed” within the generations that did not directly experience a migration *per se*, as the authors epitomise– must be understood as an enriching phenomenon, for it enables critical and nuanced reflections. Thus, for example, a topic as complex as the inscription of Islam and islamicate practices in Europe, which has received much critical attention in the continent, can be more deeply approached if we consider the perspective of those voices like the ones offered by our authors, whose takes on the topic problematize straightforward understandings of the matter. As in-between figures, the main characters built by the writers indicate how different societal agents relate to this issue, including how it affects the every-day life of neighbourhood associations, how it informs the (mis)conceptions to be found within the countries' classrooms, and how the characters' own views are multifaceted and might change with time.

The authorial figure of the writers that I study is of a different nature, which is directly connected with the fact that Dalila Kerchouche is first and foremost a journalist and El Hachmi understands herself and is read as a literary author. Thus, the journalistic tinge that permeates Kerchouche's text is translated into a polyphonic fabric; El Hachmi's much elaborated literary dimension is expressed in the deployment of certain strategies, which will be further analysed below. Because of the many layers that, I understand, inform the texts by both authors,

throughout this research work I will consider specific episodes recounted by the authors from different perspectives. Thus, for example, the pairing “women-nation” will be differently studied in the first two chapters. Hence, although each of the chapters of the thesis functions autonomously, the reader will perceive a dialogue of sorts if the chapters are considered collectively, a dialogue that aims at offering a multifocal approach of important topics and that speaks of the complexity of the subject matter, since it allows for multiple readings. In the creation of this dialogical dynamics, I open the door for alternative and complementary approaches and perspectives. In this respect, I have included an extensive amount of footnotes throughout the thesis, which aim, too, to hint at alternative dialogues that this text can elicit.

In the following chapters, I will also pay attention to the different language uses that the authors utilise in order to construct meaning. Both El Hachmi and Kerchouche deploy different strategies to problematize certain ideas, benefitting from the writing medium and using inverted commas or capitalizations and certain spellings to convey their messages. They both construct characters that function metaphorically to represent specific realities to which they want to refer. Thus, for instance, Kerchouche uses the figure of the “chef-du-camp” to make reference to the French administration, and El Hachmi uses her neighbour Cati as a representation of the autochthonous Catalan population, as shall be further discussed. In their autobiographical works, the authors make these characters, which function eponymously, “speak”, dialogue with their narrative selves and in this gesture they erect themselves as interlocutors with what these characters represent. In their fiction they elaborate much more on the internal monologues of the protagonists, which speak of their internal subjective turmoil. It is worth pointing out that all of the novels of the corpus could be read as *Bildungsroman*, as they put forward characters that are on the threshold of their adult life. This is significant, as it strengthens and intensifies their subjective reflections.

Also of much relevance are the intertextual references that both authors inscribe within their works. They will also be discussed in the second part of the thesis, as they illuminate and add nuances to my analyses. The paratexts of the works by the two authors will be critically considered, too, inasmuch as they determine their circulation. We will see how they have an effect on how the works are categorized, and how the publishing houses launch a certain image of the authors that responds to the socio-political situation of the time when the works were published. Thus, it is significant that El Hachmi’s *Jo també sóc catalana* was published at a time when Catalonia was heavily enmeshed in processes of its own definition, revolving around

the fact that Catalonia was the end-point of many international migration processes. Similarly, Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki* got published the year that the celebrations of "L'Année de l'Algérie" were held in France.

Albeit collectively, all of the works here considered allow for a nuanced understanding of the complexities of the migrational experience, and enable us to understand the different dynamics that are at play in processes of subjective negotiations that are tied to population displacements, they also call for situated and contextualised readings. Thus, I have said that both authors write about processes of Othering that operate, in Europe, in regard to how their characters are read because of their skin and their names, because of their customs. However, the different (post)colonial relationships that vertebrate the spaces that characterize the works by both authors are fundamental in understanding how these Othering regards are differently constructed. In this sense, whilst it is true that the comparative analyses that I unfold are facilitated by the fact that the two authors are inscribed within the pairing Europe-Maghreb –spaces that are sometimes constructed from totalising labels–, an attentive reading of the texts allows us to realize that these scenarios are in fact traversed by particular cultural realities that call for analyses which consider such heterogeneity.

0.3.1 Explaining the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical references that have helped me to fashion this thesis and to frame my analyses belong to many disciplines and can be mapped in different geographies. They also belong to different temporalities, for I have included references that although they may seem outdated nonetheless belong to the time when the action of the texts is set and thus seek to offer a close rendering of that specific context –thus, for instance, in chapter two some of the references that offer insight on the concept of the family in Arabo-Muslim contexts would not be valid if we considered familial communities nowadays. I believe that such a hybridity of sources ties in well with the hybrid nature of the texts considered and translates the multi-layered reflections that can be deduced from them. I also think that a transdisciplinary dialogue enriches the analyses and calls for the inclusion of other voices that can add nuances to the analyses here presented. Having noted this, I have paid close attention to the specificities of the secondary material that I have used when laying out my methodological framework. The literary texts by Najat El Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche are the primary source of this dissertation and they

have guided my reading process and the structuring of the thesis, which aims at covering what I believe to be the most significant aspects vertebrating the texts, or at least the ones on which I wanted to dwell and that I wanted to problematize. Each of these aspects, each of the thematic pillars of the thesis activates a different theoretical framework that I believe is the best suited to comprehend the intricate fabric of the works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche, frameworks which I will briefly present.

In chapter one, entitled “Understanding imposed categorisations: What lies behind the labels ‘immigrant’ and ‘harki’”, I pay attention to what in this research I call the “labels” that vertebrate the process of identity construction of the characters studied, which are that of “immigrant” –connected to the work of El Hachmi– and of “harki” –regarding Kerchouche’s. I make use of this particular word, *label*,²⁴ as a way to showcase the rigidity and the constructed nature of these categorizations. These labels translate the distance from which El Hachmi and Kerchouche and the characters they write are perceived in relation to their inscription in Catalonia and France –which in some cases will be expressed in the shape of an “animalistic”, or de-humanized, regard. The authors’ works give us insight in understanding how these categories are constructed, how they circulate and operate and how they are sustained upon homogenization logics that are at play in the way European societies read our characters. The body is used as the locus for this stereotyping regard, because strictly speaking neither the authors nor their protagonists are “immigrants” or “harkis” –it is the paternal figure that inaugurates these genealogies of sorts. However, because of their skin colour and the habits that are somehow inscribed within their bodies they are considered as belonging somewhere else.

The racism that criss-crosses these perceptions will be considered vis-à-vis the mobilization of transcultural and multicultural ideas brandished by the European societies in which these authors live. Following the cue on Homi K. Bhabha’s theorization about the construction of the Other in colonial contexts and discourses (2004), I will analyse the logics of dis-identification that our characters experience, paying particular attention to the gendered regard to which the main female characters are subjected. As theorized by Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1989), women are conceived as the epitome of the nation, which in this context means that Europe reads the characters portrayed by our authors eponymously as the Maghreb

²⁴ As I will explore in Chapter 1, El Hachmi herself uses this term to write about her own process of subjective construction (2004: 12, 25). In Chapter 4, we shall see how the author also mobilizes this word to refer to the circulation of works within the literary industry.

they inherited from their parents. Otherized in this way, they are perceived as “strangers” –following the works by Julia Kristeva (1988) and Bonnie Honig (2001)– and as such fall subject to a tension that on the one hand pushes them to inhabit the margins of their European societies, because they are “the other”, and at the same time pushes them to “assimilate” to this space –because they are now in Europe, which means letting go of any cultural traditions or traits that might be connected to their land of origin. The ambivalence between the desire for a recognizable Other and the fear that this Other arouses will be translated into the subjective turmoil and the ambiguous relationship the characters have with Catalonia and France and their local populations.

The chapter also explores the intrinsic violence that informs this kind of regards –which gets blatantly expressed in the suicide of Dalila’s brother, a death that she links to the uneasiness that his harki condition provoked in him due to his non-belonging in France. Activist Houria Bouteldja has analysed the role played by racial considerations in French territory, which is vehiculated through the use of certain labels, too, such as that of “indigène”. I consider Bouteldja’s theorizations (2016a) in order to better understand the fitting of the harkis within the French context. Both authors portray characters that reproduce these violent and stereotyping regards but they also introduce other figures that problematize these constructions and confront the homogeneization logics that the first epitomise. These nuanced and complex “problematizing” characters, such as Juliette or Jérôme in Kerchouche’s work or the figure of the teacher in El Hachmi’s first novel, somehow function as a redemption for the otherwise racist Catalan and French population the authors showcase, and also contribute to the characters’ self-exploration. Furthermore, this first chapter highlights how, at the northern rim of the Mediterranean, the characters are read both as individuals and as belonging to a larger Maghrebi community, a community that also determines the characters’ subjectivity construction, as it is explored in the last chapter of the thesis’s first section.

The second chapter, “Understanding the inherited Maghreb: on family and community”, focuses on analysing the role played by the authors’ original cultural traditions in the characters’ self-understanding. By *original* I refer to the cultural tradition that they inherit from their families, which is directly connected to the Maghrebi space and the first set of values and customs they interact with, because they find these at home –understood from a spatial perspective as the house where they physically live. This intangible inheritance will dialogue with the sets of European habits and traditions that the characters will get to know in the societal

spaces where they grow up, at the Northern rim of the Mediterranean, which symbolically distance them from the spaces that very much define the every-day life of their families. The family is presented as a generator of subjective meaning, for the ones portrayed in the texts studied somehow ask the protagonists to define themselves as belonging to their familial genealogy, which passes through understanding themselves as part of a larger (Maghrebi) community. This community is differently shaped in each of the cases, as the texts also allow us to understand the complexities of a geographical area that is criss-crossed by many different cultural practices and identity revindications, as evinced by Abdelkebir Khatibi's seminal work *Maghreb pluriel*.

Following Judith Butler's theorization on the notion of kinship (2002), I aim at disentangling how the notions "family", "kinship", "community" and "nation" dialogue. I pay attention to the generational ties that sustain the familial communities portrayed by El Hachmi and Kerchouche, how they are traversed by gender roles, and how the migration experiences that are at the core of the familial collectivity also alter the codes that regulate their dynamics. Sometimes considered from homogeneous standpoints, an attentive reading of the texts studied allows for the realisation that there is no one familial model within the so-called "Arab world", as the latter, too, is a construct. In this respect, the family is erected, following the characters' considerations, as the stronghold for belonging and the source of the idea of home. However, our writers problematize straightforward and monolithic ideas of home and instead they find theirs in writing. Following on Iveković and Mostov's considerations (2002), El Hachmi and Kerchouche's texts also point at the idea that the migrated female body is a potential threat to the nation, to the Catalan and the French European nations, in these cases –as it is the biological reproducer of the family and hence the guardian of a national community that is read as foreign in the so-called "host society".

Throughout the chapter, the notion of the body will be used to tackle the construction of the characters' inherited cultural tradition and hence considered from multiple perspectives. El Hachmi and Kerchouche showcase familial units that are sustained upon patriarchal dynamics –and El Hachmi also reflects on the patriarchal regard that traverses the Catalan scenario–, whereby the male subjects hold the symbolic power –which will have effects on the mobility of the female bodies–, and the female ones are very much connected with their potential role as mothers. Using the work by sociologist Fatima Mernissi, I will examine the importance of the menstrual blood and the notions of virginity and marriage in the familial codes that

vertebrate the families constructed by our authors. Mernissi's theorizations (1979) will be put to dialogue with the idea of the wound as discussed by Hélène Cixous (2015) and Marta Segarra (2014, 2008), whose lenses I will use to put forward a regard of the body that pays attention to its sexuality and to its different parts. The different kind of bodies that we find in El Hachmi and Kerchouche's texts, secluded, (un)veiled, free to move around, practicing anal sex, are also the bearers of certain inscriptions that can be read as marks of belonging –such as circumcision or the female Berber tattoos. This second chapter considers, thus, the claim for belonging that is born within the familial units of the characters analysed, which somehow roots them to Morocco and Algeria. Together with the European call that wants Kerchouche and El Hachmi's characters to “assimilate” to their Catalan and French contexts –albeit never fully procuring their complete belonging to these spaces–, they are pushed to a subjective in-between that is the substance for the bulk of the considerations they unfold in their texts.

As already discussed, the second section of the thesis further explores the idea of the in-between, tackling it from its written dimension. The first chapter is entitled “Borderland as Home: Writing beyond Victimization Discourses” and dwells on the consequences of the two-fold outer gaze to which our characters are subjected. The in-between is understood as a position that allows the writers to present a mode of dwelling that is connected with the literary field and that eschews the physical logics of the centre-periphery dichotomy. As such, it activates a sense of agency that also comes from the critical distance these writers can adopt in regard to the different cultural spaces with which they interact. Because the writers and the characters are the embodiment of difference at either end of the Mediterranean space considered in this research work, they foster valuable reflections that contribute to the rethinking of their societies. In this respect, I read them as intellectuals, following Edward Said's considerations (1996), for I believe that their texts put forward important questions and problematize dichotomous understandings whilst piercing through societal taboos and shedding light on specific issues, such as the harki universe, a topic that remains somehow invisible both in France and Algeria. Hence, the hybrid literary texts that the authors construct, which feature hybrid subjectivities, act as a revindication of a social space for their characters and are a call for visibilization –a visibilization that is activated via the naming that is attached to the written exercise.

The chapter also explores the languages in which these texts are written, which translate the polyphonic nature of this in-between. Writing in a language other than the one they inherit

from their families –a choice that problematizes the notion of “mother tongue”– in their work El Hachmi and Kerchouche include metalinguistic references and display a French and a Catalan that bear the marks of the linguistic traditions that traverse their inherited Maghreb. Thus, they incorporate an oral dimension to their written documents, they bend the language in which they write, which is rendered Other; they inscribe words in different kinds of Arabic and Tamazight –languages that are also to be understood from heterogeneous standpoints– and in this gesture of hybridization they call for defiance to the norm and to static understandings of any sort. Kerchouche and El Hachmi write in a language that is the language of the Other in their original communities in order to allow for the survival of certain realities –via the “solid” dimension that the written field allows– that they received orally. Literature serves to build belonging and to give visibility to the irreducible plurality of any subjective identification. Following on from Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay “The Task of the Translator”, I understand the characters studied as the epitome of what Benjamin theorizes as translation. Just as translation makes us aware of the impossibility to reach “the absolute”, the “pure language” –to which the source text aspires–, our characters help us envision the futility of understanding identities as monolithic.

Always in a constant process of interrogation, our characters present us with fragmented subjectivities which I read from a positive standpoint. As we are reminded by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993), no one single individual is a whole example of a culture, because cultures, inherently collective, cannot be understood as self-enclosed constructs. I conceive identities from the same lenses, and the texts studied galvanize us to understand them this way. The self, and the collective, must break the rigidity of monolithic understandings of identity by entering into dialogical dynamics and abandoning the quest for origins or “originality”, for dialogism is perceived as the most valuable tool towards (self-)knowledge. The notion of the fragment and the idea of the dialogue also vehiculate the way Chicax²⁵ understand the logics that traverse subjectivity constructions. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa puts herself at the core of an exercise of fragmentation that aims at presenting the self as built upon multiple affiliations, which might sometimes collide. Relying on the identity theorizations of other Latin American scholars –such as María Lugones’ idea of *mestizaje*, which favours ambivalence (1994); or Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s *chi’xi*, which problematizes felicitous understandings of “hybridity” (2014)– I analyse the texts by our authors as presenting the same

²⁵ The x is used as a strategy for inclusive language.

kind of reflections. Understanding that the characters studied inhabit what Anzaldúa called a “Borderland” (2007), what Homi K. Bhabha refers to as a “third space” (1990a), or what Avtar Brah theorizes as a “diaspora space” (2003) arises a vision of the in-between as an empowering site that allows one to eschew those visions that set displaced communities (and, especially, women within these communities) in subaltern positions.

The closing chapter of the thesis, “In-between Reception and Action: The Witness as Mediator”, is built around the idea that both writers decide to tackle, in their works, the intangible inheritance that they receive –born of the familial migrations which condition their subjectivities. In this section, I read the writers and their protagonists as mediators, for they allow for the unveiling, the survival and the circulation of a series of memories, tied to that originary experience of migration. As inheritors of their fathers’ decision to migrate, they retrieve the past that configures them but which they did not experience and allow for its critical consideration. Because of such gestures of retrieval, the writers and their protagonists belong to a somewhat “in-between” generation in this respect. They decide to take on the role of what François Hartog called “vicarious witness” (2001), which manifests itself in the inclusion of a polyphony of voices within their texts, filtered by the gesture of writing. Kerchouche and El Hachmi deploy different strategies in order to give words to a series of memories and call for a space of recognition, an exercise of defiance that will take many forms.

In her autobiographical essay, El Hachmi positions herself as an immigrant: “vull ser com tots els immigrants, mentre algú els discrimini.” (2004: 91) She uses her novels as a way to inscribe, within Catalonia, the every-day life experiences, fears and hesitations of those who, like her and her family, are read as immigrants, whilst at the same time presenting characters that break with “the established order/mandates” –very much connected with the patriarchal regime in which her characters live. Kerchouche’s exercise of defiance is directed at resurrecting a “dead” past, which her family constructed as untouchable –the phrasing “*li fat met*” (“the past is dead”) is pivotal in her first published account. In the resurrection facilitated by the author, she is not only shaking and redrawing her familial narrative, but putting forward a historical rewriting that aims at un-silencing the voices of those read under the harki umbrella. Because the works of both women contest the imaginaries that the local Catalan and French population have of the subjects conceived from the labels analysed in the first chapter, I understand their texts to be at once artefacts presenting counter-memories and rewritings of historical discourses that aim at undoing the silence that those labels impose. Constructing their texts as

megaphones, El Hachmi and Kerchouche gather many voices in order to present a vision of the migrated and the harki subject as agents that contribute to the rethinking of such categorizations.

More so than the other three, this fourth chapter will thoroughly consider the extra-literary layers that inform the texts, for the claims that I believe vehiculate the works of both authors are very much connected to the specific contexts in which they are born. Hence, the chapter aims at presenting a radiography of Catalonia and France at the turn of the century. Precisely because of this approach, this closing chapter will be differently articulated than the previous ones, in which the discussion of the different issues conforming each chapter were built upon interwoven analyses of the works by the two authors. In this closing section, I focus on the works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche individually.²⁶ In these individualized explorations, I touch upon the analyses drawn in previous chapters. As a result, the distinct nature of this chapter gets translated into the fact that it is lengthier than the other three. I believe that despite the sort of imbalance this might entail, the issues that I analyse in this last chapter necessitate a retracing of all the other questions on which I dwelt previously.

The Catalonia in which El Hachmi publishes her first account is heavily enmeshed in debates about its social fabric and its relationship with the idea of multiculturalism, as epitomised by the fact that Barcelona was the site for the 2004 edition of the Fòrum Internacional de les Cultures. With her text, El Hachmi erects herself as an interlocutor in a country that for many decades has been at the receiving end of population movements, but which has never really been able to build a collective memory based on immigration. Our author's text represents what Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla identifies as a new paradigm (2014), whereby those subjects like the immigrants that El Hachmi portrays in her texts go from being narrated to narrating. In her 2004 account, and in the subsequent novels, El Hachmi offers a multiaxial portrait of Maghrebi and more specifically Amazigh immigrants to Catalonia, although her works lend themselves to being read transgeographically; literature becomes a tool to speak of power relations, of logics of alterity, to problematize linguistic and cultural considerations. By incorporating female characters who are showcased from their role as storytellers, women who are illiterate and have been kept outside the written narratives, she is also tensioning the relationship

²⁶ Part of my analysis of Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki*, inscribed in the framework that I deploy in Chapter 4, has appeared in the issue 18:1 of the journal *Expressions maghrébines* (Joan-Rodríguez 2019).

between orature and writing, as acknowledged by Campoy-Cubillo (2012), and compelling the Catalan cultural scenario to engage in an intertextual dialogue that includes the literary heritage of subjects who were not born on Catalan soil but who now configure it. Her nuanced and gendered exercise of retrieval calls for a reconsideration of the way we relate to our societal past. Clearly positioning herself within a genealogy of “immigrant writers” in Catalonia –namely alongside Francesc Candel’s seminal work *Els altres catalans*–, El Hachmi, “la mora” as she is read by some in Catalonia, writes back at a Catalonia that would do well to acknowledge her plea and benefit from the tool that the author offers in order to construct a collective discourse that is honestly inclusive.

Coinciding with the celebrations of “L’Année de l’Algérie” in France and with what Mohammed Harbi and Benjamin Stora signal as the end of the silence regarding the war on memory that until the new millennia vertebrated the discussions about the Algerian war (2006), Dalila Kerchouche’s texts signify an active contestation of an exercise of memory reconstruction regarding the harki population. Her works not only facilitate a nuanced understanding of the heterogeneous nature of the harki label but also aim at erasing the stigma that constructed the harkis as traitors, which has resisted the passing of time. Built around what Mohand Hamoumou identifies as a triple silence –that of France, that of Algeria and that of the harkis themselves– (1993), Kerchouche learnt to construct the harki identity that she inherited as shameful. Through writing, she travels back to the source of that multi-layered silence to name the experience of the harkis and to denounce the treatment they received in France where, put in camps –which become *lieux de mémoire*,²⁷ in Pierre Nora’s terms (1984)– and thus physically and ontologically imprisoned, their voices were silenced and their role during the war constructed from biased standpoints or directly erased. Benefitting from the critical distance that her position as daughter of harkis allows –which enables her to have a nuanced historical comprehension of what her father and her relatives who lived in camps went through– Kerchouche, like other harki daughters, ends up creating counter-narratives that put forward the construction of an alternative “savoir historique”, to use Françoise Collin’s words (1993). Kerchouche’s individual quest, her “quête harkéologique”, as she puts it, ends up being a collective gesture of re-remembering (through the appropriation of other harkis’ memories and experiences, an anthropophagic gesture of sorts that I filter through Marianne Hirsch’s notion

²⁷ “A *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community” (Nora 1996: xvii).

of “postmemory” [1996]) that gives the silenced generations a new and positive standpoint from which to relate to the harki label, as the author’s final capitalization of the term showcases.

The different theoretical concepts on which I have built my multifocal analyses belong, thus, to several disciplines, namely: cultural and postcolonial studies, philosophy, sociology, translation studies, cultural anthropology, and gender and sexuality studies. Put in dialogue, they allow, I believe, for much nuanced reflections about the complexities that unfold from any experience of migration, the consequences of which, as my case studies illuminate, reverberate for a long time, touching upon several generations. This thesis aims at serving as a tool to problematize rigid constructions and conceptions of identities, whether individual or societal. It is my contention that if as social individuals we are willing to eschew monolithic interpretations of identity, the way we interact as collectivity and also our own self-understanding will be certainly more enriching and we will be better prepared to interact socially and to incorporate difference as a key element that vertebrates us in this syncretized world.

As it has already been stated, the processes of self-understanding that the works produced by Najat El Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche allow us to follow from up close are sustained upon the migration experiences that criss-cross the different familial units they portray. These migrations have handed them down bodies and cultural traditions that the European societies with which they interact are at odds to fully consider as “genuinely” European. The inherited harki and immigrant condition that these authors receive and into which they decide to delve in their texts make us wonder about the circulation of such categorizations. Talking and writing back at the Catalonia and the France where our authors have grown up and where they decide to inscribe their literary texts, the works analysed in this research function as considerations of larger scope, aiming at opening the door to problematize “identity”.

0.3.2 Explaining which Identity

In what follows, I shall tackle the concept of identity in more depth, articulating my considerations from the lenses offered by postcolonial and decolonial studies. This notion was made into one of their disciplinary pillars as both postcolonial and decolonial studies seek to undo the fixed notion of identity on which the colonial discourses are pinned down. Identity was and remains a contentious issue. As acknowledged by Avtar Brah “[i]dentity [...] is an

enigma which, by its very nature, defies a precise definition.” (2003: 20) At least in what we know as the Western part of the world, new technologies and new forms of mobility are enabling the apparition of more and wider chinks to accommodate and to act as loudspeakers for a series of voices that, up until very recently, were absorbed or silenced by monolithic and homogenizing hegemonic discourses. These spaces facilitate the juxtaposition of different ways in which identity can be conceived and make room for a series of claims that seek to change the discourse on identity –and here discourse is understood, following Foucault (1969), as the mechanism that produces knowledge, which is enmeshed/embedded in a series of power relations and forms of subjectivity. I read the texts I study as artefacts that enable such a shift, as tools that, at once, deepen the enigma of identity and also offer new entries to its meaning, therefore illuminating it.

Postcolonial studies,²⁸ which take over from the *élan* of the anticolonial struggles and hold onto the textual character of cultural studies, signified an important halt in the way we think about identity and represent an important landmark in the discursive shift that I just mentioned. That is why I will be filtering my readings of the corpus through the lenses of this multi-layered field of enquiry. As we shall see in the chapters to come, by means of using the same tools employed by the colonial endeavour to subjugate the colonised, postcolonial scholars, such as Gayatri C. Spivak or Homi K. Bhabha, put forward thorough revisions of the colonial narratives that established clear-cut dichotomies between coloniser/colonised, thus problematizing their relationships. I will argue that the texts I have chosen function in much the same manner and present us with complex ways of understanding how France and Catalonia establish their national identity discourses.

²⁸ I conceive “postcolonial” to be not about the end of the colonial regimes but understanding that colonial practices and dynamics continue to be at the core of previously colonised territories, traversing also spaces that might not have had a direct experience of colonization. An important contribution to reflect upon the problematics embedded in the post-colonial scenario, and the different ways in which the prefix post(-) can unfold, is Ella Shohat’s “Notes on the post-colonial”. Shohat remains wary about the term *post(-)colonial*, for in her view it “comes equipped with little evocation of contemporary power relations” (1992: 105). In the same essay she also calls for an attentive and contextualized usage of other terms favoured by postcolonial studies, such as *hybridity*, which, “if not articulated in conjunction with questions of hegemony and neo-colonial power relations, runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the *fait accompli* of colonial violence.” (109) Whenever I have used this term in my thesis, I have done so from a clear acknowledgment of the problematic usages it might unfold. Furthermore, I agree with Shohat that this notion “allow[s] negotiation of the multiplicity of identities and subject positionings which result from displacements, immigrations and exiles without policing the borders of identity along essentialist and originary lines.” (108)

Sharing with postcolonial studies the revisionary gesture that articulates them, the decolonial school, too, invites for a reconsideration of the colonial heritage, which means putting into question dynamics and behaviours that had until quite recently been uncontested. As noted by Gurminder K. Bhambra, who studies the “postcolonial and decolonial dialogue”, postcolonialism and decoloniality diverge in their geographic “origin” and focus on different contexts. Thus, whilst “[p]ostcolonialism emerged as a consequence of the work of diasporic scholars from the Middle East and South Asia and, for the most part, refers back to those locations and their imperial interlocutors (Europe and the West)”, Bhambra notes, “[d]ecoloniality similarly emerged from the work of diasporic scholars from South America and, for the most part, refers back to those locations and their imperial interlocutors –again, primarily to Europe although addressing a much longer time frame” (2014: 115).

In its beginnings, the decolonial branch focused heavily on Latin-America²⁹ –a denomination that also gets problematized– and is founded, amongst other pillars, on Enrique Dussel’s theorizations about the “sistema-mundo” and his notion of “transmodernidad” –Dussel’s ideas are, in their turn, born of Wallerstein’s theorizations. This school focuses on the Latin American scenario to understand to what extent the heritage of the Spanish colonial endeavour –that tends to fall out of the scope of postcolonial theorizations due to the different temporality that it represents when compared with the French or the English cases– is still very much alive.³⁰ Its consequences have to do with how epistemological certainties are established and

²⁹ Decoloniality unfolds in other contexts, too. In France, those who understand themselves as “decolonial scholars” theorize on the ongoing presence of French colonialism, and base their analyses on francophone voices, such as that of Frantz Fanon’s –also a fundamental pillar of postcolonial studies– or Elsa Dorlin’s and Françoise Vergès’s. The division between decolonial and postcolonial studies is not so easy to establish, for, as noted by Bhambra, both fields seek to “challenge [...] the insularity of historical narratives and historiographical traditions emanating from Europe” so that arguments that consider “the emergence of the modern world in the broader histories of colonialism, empire, and enslavement” are taken into account (2014: 115). Both represent a thorough revision of “the broader politics of knowledge production and both emerge out of political developments contesting the colonial world order established by European empires” (119).

³⁰ In “Disoriented Postcolonialities” Fernández Parrilla gives an overview of works that have dealt with how postcolonialism has been understood in the contemporary Spanish scene, where “[s]omehow decontextualized, dissociated from its original formulation, postcolonial studies were received more as a way of dealing with ‘new literatures in English’ than as a critical tool.” (2018: 232) Fernández Parrilla tries to elucidate the multi-layered “silence of postcolonial studies on the subject of Spanish colonialism in Africa” and also the fact that “poscolonialismo” is defined in the Spanish-speaking world “as a theoretical corpus bound to French and British colonization in the nineteenth century” or, if related to Spanish and Portuguese colonization “limited [...] to the period stretching from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries.” (*ibid.*) To do so, he highlights a series of “disorientations” –i.e. “exceptionalities and entanglements of the Spanish case”. These have to do with how Al-Andalus has been constructed in modern Spanish historiography, as a “domestic Orient” (233) (which in its turn had effects on the constructions of so-called “Spanish Orientalism”) and also with how modern Arabic literature has circulated in Spain.

have permeated the way interactions and also processes of subjectivity-formation are understood. I believe that the postulates of both postcolonial and decolonial studies lend themselves to being applied to the Mediterranean context, as it is also connected with colonial practices and for centuries has been a space of crossings of many sorts.

In *El giro decolonial*, whose title resonates with the idea of shifting, different voices belonging to the group “latino/latinoamericano modernidad/colonialidad”,³¹ such as Ramón Grosfoguel, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Walter D. Mignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres or Aníbal Quijano resist stating the end of colonial regimes: “Asistimos, más bien, a una transición del colonialismo moderno a la colonialidad global, proceso que ciertamente ha transformado las formas de dominación desplegadas por la modernidad, pero no la estructura de las relaciones centro-periferia a escala mundial.” (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007: 13) Aníbal Quijano favours the notion of “colonialidad” rather than that of “colonialismo” in order to

llamar la atención sobre las continuidades históricas entre los tiempos coloniales y los mal llamados tiempos “poscoloniales”; y [...] para señalar que las relaciones coloniales de poder no se limitan sólo al dominio económico-político y jurídico-administrativo de los centros sobre las periferias, sino que poseen también una dimensión epistémica, es decir, cultural.

(in Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007: 19)

The authors belonging to the decolonial school adopt the notion “colonialidad del poder” to speak of what they refer to as the “segunda descolonización” or “decolonialidad”, which alludes to the multiple relations “raciales, étnicas, sexuales, epistémicas, económicas y de género que la primera descolonización dejó intactas” (17). Thus, despite the fact that the different empires were enmeshed, in the last two centuries, in processes of decolonization, “el mundo de comienzos del siglo XXI necesita una decolonialidad que complemente la descolonización llevada a cabo en los siglos XIX y XX.” “Decolonialidad” is understood to be “un proceso de resignificación a largo plazo, que no se puede reducir a un acontecimiento jurídico-político” (Grosfoguel in Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007: 17). Such a process of redefinition is facilitated by language, which must be resignified in order to account for the

³¹ In “El giro decolonial. Consideraciones críticas desde América Latina”, Claudia Zapata Silva explores the critical contributions of “autores y autoras para quienes la crítica al colonialismo es central en sus proyectos intelectuales, pero que sin embargo no se reconocen en estas perspectivas que hoy dominan la escena, principalmente las del grupo Modernidad-Colonialidad, que es el que está más vigente”, mainly Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s, Ochy Curiel’s and Aura Cumes’s (2018: 53).

epistemic turn the decolonial school advocates for, which aims at enabling a reconceptualisation of how power dynamics and economic constructs function. In this respect, the “decoloniality” that these scholars seek could be described as a decolonization of the mind, to use Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s phrasing (wa Thiong’o 1986).

I believe that the texts analysed in this thesis can be perceived as sites from which counter-hegemonic knowledge is produced, hence as tools that contribute to the epistemic turn the aforementioned authors claim. The works by Kerchouche and El Hachmi call for a discussion of notions that fall under the umbrella of identity –always paired with processes of mobility– and in enabling such a discussion, and presenting the intricacies of several processes of subjectivity and community construction, they reflect on how the formation of knowledge operates in the (normative) Western world. The windows that they open, via their texts, present us with realities that speak of that unaccomplished “descolonización” described earlier. In the pages written by our authors we attest to different societal contexts that all seek to construct subjects who are clearly delimited and whose subjectivities are well-defined. Because they disrupt this way to conceive their own subjectivities, which in turn pushes them to offer collective identities that eschew the monolithic and rigid logics that regulate them, I believe that our authors are contributing to the *giro decolonial* and to an understanding of reality that is in tune with the postulates of postcolonial studies.

The works by Kerchouche and El Hachmi allow for the realisation that subjects perceived as embodying non-normative subjectivities –that is, subjectivities that are engaged in a constant process of resignification and do not fit into the patterns of hegemonic discourses– fall into the trap of the centre-periphery logics denounced by both postcolonial and decolonial studies, and push us readers to reflect on them. Our authors, using their texts as a cue, are offering a gateway to a better understanding of how the consequences of these logics unfold, because their texts allow us to have direct contact with the consequences of those dynamics. As cultural artefacts, literary texts represent a precious source of information in the sense that, as epitomised by my case studies, they constitute sites for (self-)interrogation. Furthermore, as we shall see, the study of the circulation of the texts by Kerchouche and El Hachmi speaks of power dynamics and represents a nuanced view on the Othering strategies that traverse the European space that the authors portray.

Commenting on identity, and in line with the postulates of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Stuart Hall claimed that,

far from the simple thing that we think it is (ourselves always in the same place) understood properly [identity] is always a structure that is split. It always has ambivalence within it. We now have to reconceptualize *identity as a process of identification*, it is something that happens over time, that is never stable, that is subject to the play of history and the play of difference.

(Hall 1996a: 222; emphasis added)

Inasmuch as Hall's call for a reconceptualization of identity is attentive to the play of difference and bears into account contextualized readings of history, his ideas are in line with what has been hitherto explored. I believe that if, following Hall, we understand identity as a process rather than a fixed construct or a pattern that creates rigid categorizations, the epistemic turn of which decolonial scholars speak might become a reality. The focus on the process means accepting the possibility of ambivalence, of transformation. This, in turn, deconstructs hierarchized understanding of knowledge production, which at the same time shakes the centre-periphery logics that criss-cross the texts studied. If subjectivities are always tied to a process of construction, if collectivities are always open to the potential of transforming themselves, no single centre of production of knowledge can be favoured. Geographies like the Latin American spaces or like the Maghreb, which have traditionally been dis-placed at the margins in the Eurocentric logics of knowledge production, become hence as valid as any other discursive space. More valid, if anything, for because of their positionality, within those epistemic margins, the subjects that are traversed by these spaces do reflect upon the hegemony of knowledge that has traditionally been located in the "West".³²

Along the same lines indicated by Hall, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui –whose work on “discursos descolonizadores”³³ is very attentive to language practices, as she understands that “en el

³² Maria Tymozcko is wary about notions like “the East” or “the West” because they imply “perspective and position”. The author argues that, “[a]t this point in time, [...] when Western ideas have permeated the world and there is widespread interpenetration of cultures everywhere, the terms ‘East’ and ‘West’ are increasingly problematic.” (2006: 13)

³³ Cusicanqui's work has always been very critical of the power dynamics that also inform the academic world. Thus, in her text *Una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos descolonizadores* she warns against certain linguistic usages that articulate the decolonial group Modernidad-Colonialidad: “Neologismos como ‘de-colonial’, ‘transmodernidad’, ‘eco-si-mía’ proliferan y enredan el lenguaje, dejando paralogizados a sus objetos de estudio –los pueblos indígenas y afrodescendientes– con quienes creen dialogar. Pero además, crean un nuevo canon académico.” (2014: 64) Whilst I acknowledge the truth that lies behind her statement, I also understand the need to, within an academic context, resort to the creation of new terms, considering the theoretical and epistemological complexity to which these words refer.

colonialismo, las palabras [...] encubren” (2014: 19)– favours the term “identification” over that of “identity” as a way to highlight the processual and contingent nature of that which we understand as “identity” (2016). In this research, whenever I use *identity* I do so understanding it from these lenses shared by Hall and Cusicanqui, conceiving it not as an all-encompassing and rigid categorization but as the framework individuals or societies use in order to allude to their *process* of self-understanding, which incorporates the possibility of transformation.

Hall and Cusicanqui’s remarks are of much relevance, for language is, indeed, a major concern for both postcolonial and decolonial scholars, as it is also traversed by power dynamics and logics of hegemony. In the collective volume *Genre et postcolonialisme* –which, as noted by Anne E. Berger, aims at contributing to postcolonial debates in France, rather scarce until the new millennium³⁴– Jacques Coursil comments on the linguistic problematizations that are at the core of postcolonial studies:

Le trope postcolonial désigne [...] une crise du dire. Le langage, est-il souvent souligné dans ce paradigme, est un lieu obligé parce que le processus colonial est inscrit lui-même dans le langage. [...] Certes de la colonisation, on retient que tout était meurtre, viol, exploitation forcée et coups de chicote, mais il y a pire et qui perdure, et c’est là l’héritage du discours de Frantz Fanon sur l’aliénation coloniale: la colonisation s’est toujours redoublée d’une dimension psychique dont le langage est le lieu. Ce qui s’inscrit ainsi dans la langue, la poétique de Césaire le nomme “blessure sacrée”, la clinique de Fanon “plaies indélébiles” et le Discours Antillais de Glissant, “névrose” qui perdure d’une histoire coloniale cinq fois centenaire.

(2011: 154-155)

The works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche make us understand to what extent the concepts that we use to refer to the realities we experience are the indicators of a net of references and discourses that operate within logics of power that might escape our reflections. Coursil also writes about Burkina Faso to note that “la décolonisation d’un territoire n’a pas nécessairement sa colonisation comme préalable” (154). In the case studies chosen, the imprints of colonial practices let themselves be felt very differently. What it is worth highlighting is that both

³⁴ See Berger, 2011: 4 for a summary of important publications tackling the issue of postcolonial studies within the French-speaking contexts. On another note, Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla has stated that “[i]n *Post-coloniality. The French Dimension* (2007), Majumdar explores the indifference towards postcolonial theory in France, despite the pioneering contributions of Francophone thinkers such as Frantz Fanon” and notes that “[c]ritics such as Mellino wondered if the postcolonial had become ‘Anglo(Euro)centric’ (2008: 17; see also Aboul-Ela 2010: 733).” (2018: 230)

authors present us with works that put forward nuanced understandings of linguistic practices –both written and oral–, which in their turn set up a wider reflection of language as a construct that builds meaning and as such determines our self-understanding and the way we interact with others. They do so by using different strategies that allow them to conjugate the different linguistic realities with which their characters interact in their European surrounding. Thus, the in-between space that our authors inhabit, which as has been stated, problematizes language(s) and favours juxtapositions and syncretic practices of a different nature, is, in my view, a privileged site from which to rethink the role played by language in our societal and individual construction.

Reading about the different unfoldings of this multi-layered in-between is a good tool to delve into the “otredad epistémica” to which the decolonial group refers, which is described as “formas de conocimiento intersticiales, ‘híbridas’” that allow for the construction of a “resistencia semiótica capaz de resignificar las formas hegemónicas de conocimiento desde el punto de vista de la racionalidad posteurocéntrica de las subjetividades subalternas” (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007: 20). The authors refer to these as “epistemes de frontera” and locate them in what Mary Louis Pratt named “contact zones”; they function as “una crítica implícita de la modernidad, a partir de las experiencias geopolíticas y las memorias de la colonialidad.” (*ibid.*)

Because I understand the characters presented by El Hachmi and Kerchouche as inhabitants of a “contact zone” of sorts –although in this research work I will use other denominations when theorizing about the in-between occupied by the characters studied–, I believe that their reflections are to be understood as belonging to these “epistemes de frontera”, because they galvanize us to think from a non-normative space, built around hybridized and interstitial practices of knowledge and the logics of ambivalence that this entails. If we take Boaventura de Sousa’s theorizations as a cue, who speaks of “epistemologías del sur” to refer to the “otredad epistémica”, it follows that the geopolitical construction of our Western-centred world is sustained upon logics of (in)visibilization. Hence, our authors help us undo such Eurocentrism and think beyond the centre-periphery paradigm (see de Sousa Santos 2016).

As we shall see in the chapters that follow, El Hachmi and Kerchouche name and thus give visibility to a series of (oral) languages, customs, every-day practices and processes of self- and collective understanding that are not part of the hegemonic discourses that sustain the

European societies where they live; these languages and practices could be described as those “memorias de la colonialidad” to which the decolonial scholars refer. By giving entity, via their words, to their own subjectivities and to a series of subjectivities that belong to these epistemologies that are not present, in written form, in the Europe in which they grew up –and hence, are non-existent– our authors contribute to this process of creation of a counter-knowledge. As signalled by Doppelbauer and Fleischmann, “[t]omar conciencia de estos procesos y abrir espacios analíticos en los que se produzcan conocimientos científicos no solo sobre, sino también desde las subjetividades que emergen de estas realidades epistemológicamente ‘no-existentes’, como postula Sousa Santos, es un camino largo cuya mayor parte aún queda por andar.” (2011: 8)

Montserrat Galcerán’s *La bárbara Europa: una mirada desde el postcolonialismo y la descolonialidad*, which studies in which ways Europe –the heart of the Western world– constructed its centrality in the epistemological realm, sheds light on how to deconstruct that narrative:

La cuestión de la alteridad y las relaciones con la misma son constitutivas del modo de entender la subjetividad en la cultura europea eurocéntrica, centrada en un pensamiento por oposiciones entre las cuales las que se establecen entre el yo y el otro/a ocupa un lugar relevante.

La práctica política de los grupos subalternos introduce elementos de nueva composición que permiten pensar la diferencia no como alteridad u otredad, es decir marcada por un signo negativo, dado que “lo otro” es aquello que no es lo uno, sino como resultado de un diferir o de un distanciarse, no de un oponerse. Esa transformación categorial aportada por las teorías de la diferencia es un aporte imprescindible para repensar la acción política compartida.

(2016: 299, 301)

As signalled by Galcerán, taking into consideration the voices of those who were traditionally set aside, relegated to the margins, forces us to rethink the pillars upon which Western identity discourses of all kinds (individual, national, societal) were built, thus questioning any sort of universal truth. That is why she also speaks in terms of political action, a gesture shared by Brah and by many other scholars who understand that discussing issues to do with identity means entering the social and the political realm. Through this lens, the works that I analyse in this thesis transcend the purely literary terrain. Using art as a platform, both El Hachmi and

Kerchouche insert strong and powerful messages into the societies with which they interact. Their works and the ideas they contain turn them into active participants in the different debates going on in Catalonia and France to do with issues about migration. The voices that arise from their work bear witness to the long-term consequences of migration, thus facilitating a nuanced understanding of this very complex phenomenon.

In this work, I understand the characters portrayed by El Hachmi and Kerchouche to be part of non-dominant groups, understanding the dominant as the site of power that aims at the establishment of fixed, monolithic and normative constructs. I believe that the authors' voices, as well as the voices of their characters, can pass on several lessons on how to think encounters in terms of difference and not opposition. In the pages that follow, I will study how both authors and the characters they put forward are assigned to an oppositional logic of identity –for it is an external gaze that puts them within such logic. I will elucidate how they were made to be the “radical other” (that which the dominant group will never be able to be – Galcerán 2016: 300–, which is in tune with the logics of demonization that I mentioned earlier), both individually and as part of a collective. I will also analyse how such an acknowledgment galvanizes them to envision other ways of understanding their place, and that of the communities they belong to or to which they claim to belong, in their new societies.

The fact the authors and their protagonists are women is also significant. Their bodies, read as female bodies, also determine their inscription in their European (and Maghrebi) surroundings and thus position them differently than if they embodied one that was read as masculine. Because Kerchouche and El Hachmi's texts are peppered with passages that allow us to engage with this issue, their works are also a tool to reflect upon how the logics of difference to which I just referred are also gendered. In the Western world, traversed by patriarchal logics of functioning, the body is used as a filter to read subjects with coercive aims. As noted by Rada Iveković,

Dans les circonstances de la modernité alternative, le sujet (“subalterne” ou en tout cas “autre”) se construit différemment que le sujet dominant (blanc, mâle, majoritaire, actif, occidental ou de l'hémisphère nord), mais aussi diversement que l'assujetti. Il y a une coupure dans la modernité non seulement en ce qui concerne des sujets extra-européens, mais aussi en ce qui concerne les femmes, et depuis plus longtemps encore. Cette coupure regarde le temps, l'espace, les corps, les esprits. [...] C'est structurel, symbolique, et perdure encore. L'Europe

s'est elle-même confectionnée en parallèle son autre, son non-sujet extérieur (les colonies) et intérieur (les femmes).

(2011: 230)

Presented with characters that are the embodiment of the colonial gendered difference –which following the ideas put forward above does not necessarily pass via a direct experience of an actual colonisation understood as an occupation–, we can use the different passages described by our authors to engage in a better understanding of ourselves as societal beings, by plunging with them into their reflections and adopting their critical gaze in regard to the realities they experience. In this respect, I read my corpus as “dispositifs théorico-poétiques”, following Nadia Setti’s formulation, because I consider them “comme récits et en même temps configurations [qui] permett[ent] de travailler sur le croisement des notions d’identité, d’écriture et de migration.” (2011: 134) An attentive reading of the different texts by our authors allows for the realisation that they too consider them as artefacts built upon an exercise of a multifarious interweaving, as indicated by the many voices, languages and considerations they inscribe within them. This is yet another invitation to understand them from a dialogical perspective, hence eschewing any kind of vertical reading. This horizontal logic ties in with the role that the authors themselves play in their European societies, a role that to a greater or a lesser extent has been modified by the publication of the texts analysed here. In this sense, they act as interlocutors, in Catalonia and France, in debates that concern the social groups in which they are read as belonging, as we shall see.

0.4 Why English

Throughout the thesis, whenever I have introduced citations from the texts by El Hachmi and Kerchouche, I have maintained them in their original phrasing to highlight the literary dimension of the works studied. Likewise, unless otherwise stated, the theoretical considerations that I have used as a cue to construct my discourse have also been incorporated, when the source was available, in the language in which they were originally written (except for those in German). The aim of this code switching and of the interweaving of different linguistic codes –literary and academic– has been to create a piece of work that also speaks of hybridity. I understand the hybridity of the text that follows to be not just about a mere juxtaposition of words belonging to different languages but to be found in the dialogue that

such a mixing enables. Despite the hampered reading experience this might entail, I have found it important to literally inscribe in this thesis the different languages that have guided me in the articulation of my own analyses. They translate the intricate patterns of thought to which the works by Najat el Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche have led me. At the same time, this exercise seeks to problematize straightforward conceptions of languages, in line with what I believe the authors themselves call for.

I have chosen the English language as the thread with which to tie in the different and multilingual academic and literary fragments for different reasons. English is not my mother's nor my father's tongue. Writing the thesis in Catalan or Spanish, the languages that I inherited from my parents, would have led to the production of another different kind of text, of that I am sure. By choosing to write in English I sought to impose upon myself an experience of displacement of sorts, via the linguistic milieu. Such a gesture aims at rendering myself closer to the subject-position from which El Hachmi and Kerchouche experience the realities they account for in their texts. Their works are criss-crossed by an original experience of migration that, as I will theorize in the following pages, situates them at a multi-layered in-between, displaced from rigid –central– understandings of subjectivities, languages, and even temporalities. The English language has been my particular migration. Furthermore, by writing in none of the languages that were “given” to me by my parents –to use Arendt's formulation³⁵–, I sought to eschew any kinds of biased theorizations, considering that, because of her language of writing, Najat El Hachmi is closer to my linguistic reality than Dalila Kerchouche.³⁶ Inasmuch as this research project has been, apart from an academic search, a search of my inner self, too, writing in English has proven difficult at times but has facilitated an exercise of self-de-centering that I value deeply and that I believe has added nuances to my analyses.

I would like to use this introduction also to state the subject-position from which I have conducted this research because it conforms the research itself. I experience the world around

³⁵ In her analysis of Arendt's work, Fina Birulés speaks of Arendt's idea of “nuestra condición de natales” as “el hecho de que siempre habitamos y nos movemos en un mundo heredado, que no hemos hecho, y donde actúan y reaccionan siempre los otros” (2014: 87).

³⁶ I find it important to state that throughout the time that it took me to complete this thesis, I have met with Najat El Hachmi on several occasions. Some of these encounters happened after I attended a talk or a book presentation in which she was present, and others occurred at more informal settings. I deeply value the insight that these meetings provided, as they allowed me to better understand the authorial figure of Najat El Hachmi in the Catalan scenario. However, and despite my proximity to her, I have maintained a critical distance when analysing her works.

me from a body that in Europe is read as that of a white woman. Furthermore, I have had the privilege to access several spaces belonging to the so-called academic Western world. The tangible material that I have used as a framework to write the different chapters of this thesis, some of which is specified in the Works cited list, I gathered through my role as a researcher in different institutions. First, as part of the research team at ADHUC–Research Centre for Theory, Gender, Sexuality, at the University of Barcelona, the site of my academic affiliation. During the years that it took me to complete this doctorate, I conducted two research stays, at Harvard University and at the Laboratoire d'Études de Genre et de Sexualité (LEGS) (CNRS, Paris 8, Paris Nanterre), in Paris. Besides the academic material and the enriching academic debates that the stays provided, these experiences allowed me to further dwell into the very acute vertical power dynamics that vertebrate the Western-centric system of knowledge production.

As a PhD student I have also been a member of the transmediterranean network RUSEMEG (Réseau universitaire et scientifique euro-méditerranéen sur le genre et les femmes), which has put me in contact with professors and researchers from France, and most notably from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Some of my thoughts are embedded in the exchanges that I had with some of them, who shared with me their academic reality and the academic context in which they worked. In these gatherings I learnt about the centre-periphery logics that, as remarked by Cusicanqui, also vertebrate the configuration of academic canons. I also understood the need to constantly question our work as researchers in order to avoid reproducing power logics that sometimes sustain the works of those who tackle spaces that the Western-centric view has put in the margins, such as the Maghreb. Throughout my research years I have been confronted with voices that questioned my legitimacy to discuss the work by women who, like El Hachmi and Kerchouche, are deeply connected to the Maghrebi space, of which I have only an acquired partial knowledge.

Whilst I understand the concerns that inform such a questioning, I have sought to produce a situated piece of academic writing that is born from a close reading of the texts that conform the corpus of my study. I confess that I have experienced this research as an arduous exercise at times, which forced me to be always alert in order to avoid conceiving the literary texts by Kerchouche and El Hachmi as sociological tools and interpret the experiences and relationships conveyed in their texts as anthropological truths. Instead, I have aimed to comprehend them as gateways to open discussions and considerations that seek a better understanding of the times

in which we live. The result is an academic text that speaks different languages and is attentive to different accents. A piece of writing that will circulate in the spheres of the academia but which is rooted in different spaces that are not traversed by the logics of the academic world.

For the duration of the thesis, I have complemented my readings of academic material with activities of all sorts in order to build my analyses. I have attended talks, participated in gatherings and assemblies which revolved around the experiences, recounted in person, of subjects that understood themselves as “migrant women” or as inheritors of a migration. I considered it crucial to write about issues that resonate with those that were voiced by these women, precisely to eschew any kind of top-down approach whilst analysing the texts studied. On another note, I also intensively studied classical Arabic, an experience that has most certainly shaped my research for it has allowed me to access a set of cultural references that have helped me to better understand the intricacies of the experiences and realities recounted by both El Hachmi and Kerchouche . The chapters that follow are informed by all the above-mentioned considerations.

FIRST SECTION: IN BETWEEN LABELS

1. UNDERSTANDING IMPOSED CATEGORISATIONS:

WHAT LIES BEHIND THE LABELS *IMMIGRANT* AND *HARKI*

Although not all of the works by Najat El Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche focus on the consequences of a displacement, this topic does represent the skeleton of their oeuvre. Both started their literary journey by putting themselves at the core of their writing exercise. As a result, the first text they each published –El Hachmi’s *Jo també sóc catalana* (2004) and Kerchouche’s *Mon père, ce harki* (2003)– were autobiographical accounts that focused on their own processes of subjectivity-formation, criss-crossed by, I argue, two very particular labels: that of “immigrant”, for Najat el Hachmi, and that of “harki” in Kerchouche’s case. These will be tackled differently throughout the work of both authors, who will start by focusing on how such labels affect themselves –and in this respect autobiography can be conceived as a tool of exploration–, to then move to fiction, a gesture that aims at adding nuances to the understanding of processes of subjectivity construction that are somehow connected with population displacements. The fictionalisation of certain aspects presented in their autobiographical texts functions as a complement to their initial reflections, allowing for deeper considerations of how the past plays a major role in their sense of belonging, or for imagining different familial relationships, also of paramount importance when touching upon these issues.

The following pages will pay attention to how our two authors get acquainted with these two labels and how these affect their relationship with the societies where they live. Thus, I shall analyse how El Hachmi and Kerchouche come to terms with the fact that, as they learn, both the Catalan and the French society understand their position in these places using such labels as a filter, which assigns them –and those that are also under the umbrella of the categorisations– a monolithic identity. “Immigrant” and “harki” will be contextualised, which will help us to get to know how, even though they operate upon the same fragmentary basis, each unfolds differently, because the fabric of the societies that mobilise them is necessarily different. We will see how already in their autobiographical work, the authors discuss the way they interact with such categorisations, how they register their meaning whilst problematizing it at the same time by incorporating the labels in different manners into their process of subjectivity-understanding. An analysis of their fictional works will allow us to envision in which ways the rigidity that informs each of the labels is further put into question.

If we consider the definitions of the two labels to which I pay attention here, we see that strictly speaking neither of them applies to our authors. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, an immigrant is “a person who *comes* to live permanently in a foreign country” (emphasis added). As we learnt in the Introduction, Najat El Hachmi left Beni Sidel for Vic at the age of 8, following a process of family reunification that was initiated by her father, hence a process for which she should not be given any credit. The usage of the verb *to come* in the definition of *immigrant* is worth noting, for it indicates the directionality upon which such categorisation is articulated. The label is created at the country where the migrant decides to establish him/herself, somehow revealing a kind of claim over the land. Behind such a definition there seems to be a dualistic understanding of how the identity of a country operates: there is a “we” and there is a “them”, the kind of oppositional logic towards which Montserrat Galceran pointed in her work. As it shall further be discussed, the work by Najat El Hachmi problematizes such logic and calls for a reconsideration of the way the label *immigrant* circulates.

Regarding the other label considered in this thesis, I already explained the intricacies that revolve around the word *harki*. Used as a noun, *harki* applies to the military men who were members of a *haraka*, in the Arab countries a militia drafted by either a political or a religious authority. In the context of the Franco-Algerian war, *harakas* were formed as supplementary forces to help the French army against the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN, the armed wing of the Front de Libération National).³⁷ However, as we learnt above, its usage as a noun has been expanded and it functions as an adjective too, to describe a member of the family of a *harki* or his descendants. Much as if it were a nationality or a physical trait that can be passed on from one generation to another, the category of *harki*, like that of *immigrant*, is very problematic, especially as both categories are wrapped in value judgments, and caught up in power dynamics, as I shall examine.

Both El Hachmi and Kerchouche receive this “heritage” from their fathers, who each seem to inaugurate a particular genealogy, further strengthened by the fact that the authors’ mothers, too, share the same cultural milieu as their partners. These categorisations mark Kerchouche and El Hachmi out in France and Catalonia, singularise them in a way that, at first, they deem

³⁷ It is worth noting that references to the FLN tend to be articulated from the group’s French denomination, and not using its originary Arabic name, Jabha al-Tahrir al-Watani.

as negative, although the authors will end up resignifying the labels' meanings. As (the daughter of) an immigrant, El Hachmi is a foreign thread within her new social fabric and is forced to explain herself, to convince those that “welcomed” her into their country that she can stay –and further down I shall comment on the problematic welcoming that, as evinced by the quotation marks, Catalonia had in store for the El Hachmi family. As (the daughter of) a harki, Kerchouche is a living reminder of a black chapter for France, and is also the daughter of a traitor, which following the expanded definition offered above makes of her a traitor, too, in both Algerian and French eyes.

The focus on these denominations is, in my view, of major importance, as language is a powerful tool in knowledge production and in the construction of imaginaries, which articulate how societies function and how communities interact. It is worth repeating here that the label *harki* is inextricably linked with the idea of treason, from the moment Algeria (re)gains its independence. As we are reminded by Mohamed Kara, the son of a harki,

la guerre se conduit aussi par les mots, qui en l'espèce, se sont avérés [...] quelque trente quatre ans après les événements algériens, autant destructeurs que les armes. À côté des conflits militaires, se joue toujours une “guerre des mythes” [...]. Invectiver le Harki, lui assigner cette place haïssable de traître c'est avant tout user d'un procédé commode pour se dispenser de faire la part des choses. On ne discute pas avec un traître; on le blâme et rien ne saurait être plus approprié que la réprobation. [...] Qualifier péjorativement c'est finalement un principe d'économie “intellectuelle” universellement répandu. C'est enfermer l'individu ou le groupe stigmatisé non pas dans une problématique spécifique et précise, mais dans un précipité de sentiments et de valeurs bricolées, entérinés et faisant office des paroles consacrées.

(1997: 117)

The stigma assigned to the word *harki* also punctuates the “welcoming” of the Kerchouches in French territory, and because of that Dalila Kerchouche will elaborate on it in both her autobiographical and fictional works.

The two authors inherit the *immigrant* and *harki* labels from their fathers but neither El Hachmi's father nor Kerchouche's pass them on to their daughters explicitly. It is the Catalan society that will make El Hachmi feel like an immigrant, those who keep asking her about her origins, thus making it clear that she is a displaced subject. Kerchouche will only learn about

the harki universe as a grown-up child, when she walks pass a former camp for harkis with her sister Kheira, who starts telling Dalila about the Bias camp. Her family, she realises, took advantage of the fact that she was only one and a half when the Kerchouches left the camps for good –hence she could hold no memories of that time– and did not tell her about their camp years. But the camps hold the key to understanding how the harki community was perceived in France.

Overcrowded, meeting no sanitary requirements, the camps concentrated the harki families in spaces that were, literally and symbolically, at the margins of French society. Mostly ruled by former pied-noirs, they represented the perpetuation of the colonial regime in France, which takes back the kind of oppositional articulation that I signalled before as being at the core of the definition of *immigrant*. Within the harki community there exists the feeling –explored by Kerchouche in her oeuvre– that the French state³⁸ should have protected their families; instead, they were either abandoned in Algeria –where many were massacred, although as I pointed in the introduction this conception is contested by Daum (2015)– or put them into camps once they got to France, camps that were functional until 1976.³⁹ Aside from French towns and cities, concentrated in enclosed spaces, those in the camps were signalled out, their process of “integration” into France, suspended.⁴⁰

³⁸ In *Moze*, Zahia Rahmani inscribes a telegram issued by Louis Joxe, a minister in charge of the “Affaires algériennes”, the 16th of May 1962, which reads: “demande à haut-commissaire de rappeler que toute initiative individuelle tendant à installation métropole Français musulmans est strictement interdite. En aviser d’urgence tous chefs SAS et commandants d’unités” (2003: 42). Upon reading this, the author reflects on the hypocritical attitude adopted by the same army that benefited from the help of those who, like her father, somehow joined the French army during the war: “Moze n’était plus français et les autorités algériennes l’avaient assigné comme ‘Étranger à la nation’. Il l’ont interné. Mis dans un camp. N’est-ce pas encore une folie que d’être un détenu sans titre, sans nationalité et sans pays? [...] Il n’a pas été jugé. Ni même condamné.” (44) Worth noting is the fact that stripped from their French identity after 1962, the harkis were not recognized as French again until 1989. In the volume *From Empire to Exile*, an important contribution in the so-called “harki studies” because of the amount of bibliographical material it gathers, Claire Eldridge claims that “[t]aking charge of the processes of protection and transfer in May 1962, the army placed *harkis* under armed guard in a series of holding camps in Algeria to keep them safe while transport to France was arranged. However, the numbers seeking refuge quickly overwhelmed these facilities. The same was true of transport vessels [...] A concern to ‘maintain order’ and to filter out undesirable elements or ‘false refugees’ produced a series of administrative controls that have often been interpreted as an active attempt to prevent the *harkis* leaving Algeria, fuelling claims that the French ‘abandoned’ their auxiliaries in 1962.” (2016: 25)

³⁹ As remarked by Claire Eldridge, “[t]here is no agreement on how many *harkis* and family members were killed. Violence began in April 1962, but the intensity of the massacres varied from region to region and also chronologically, with July and August constituting the most acute months. The earliest casualty estimates came from *Le Monde* journalist Jean Lacouture who advanced a figure of 10,000 on 13 Novembre 1962. Thirty years later, he revised his calculation upwards to 100,000. This is also the statistic quoted by the majority of *harki* and *pied-noir* associations, although some claims go as high as 150,000.” (2016: 25)

⁴⁰ The quotation marks aim at signaling the problematic use of the concept “integration” –the terminology used by the French administration–, which implies that the social fabric into which the harki families enter is already fully-formed and complete.

There seems to be an element of suspension within the category *immigrant*, too. Its definition points towards the future, to the will to settle in a place, but will someone who is perceived as an immigrant ever be able to claim affiliation to that place, or will they be forever suspended in that will? This question is what conforms El Hachmi's 2004 autobiographical essay. *Jo també sóc catalana* is presented by the author as a response to her son Rida, who as a child asked her whether he was Catalan, even though he was born in Catalonia and Catalan is his mother tongue –despite his parents' attempts to talk to him in Tamazight (2004: 13).⁴¹ Regardless of whether this was a true question asked by Rida or a poetic license used by El Hachmi, the author's account revolves around identity constructs as tied up with appearances. Thus, El Hachmi believes that, because her son is the child of two people who were born in Morocco, “els seus cabells rinxolats i la seva pell, encara una mica més fosca que la dels autòctons, sempre el delatarà.” (55)

In order to answer to her son, El Hachmi feels the need to revisit the migration process into which she herself was enmeshed. Thus, the further we read, the more we dig into El Hachmi's past, a gesture that reveals the importance of the past in her understanding of her own subjectivity. The author is aware that all the cultural and physical traits she inherited from her parents –and that somehow her son has also inherited– scatter doubt within the Catalan context where she lives, a context which cannot seem to quite get her will to ascribe to multiple identity sources. Thus, she asks herself: “Quin futur l'espera [al Rida], farà sempre de pont, com he fet jo, o sabrà arrelar definitivament?” (54) Comparing herself to a bridge, suspended into space and connecting different routes, the author lets us know how her roots are to be found at either end of the bridge she feels she is, and throughout the text we understand how this realisation has proven hard at times.

The text turns out to be a revindication on the part of El Hachmi to include her attachment to Catalonia as one of her multiple affiliations, as demonstrated by the title itself, which could be translated as “I am also Catalan”. But the Catalan phrase *Jo també sóc catalana* could also translate as “me too I am Catalan”; it could as well be read as El Hachmi's response to the

⁴¹ In *Lettres parisiennes*, an epistolary exchange between writers Leïla Sebbar and Nancy Huston where the authors dissect their own exile in Paris, Huston acknowledges that despite the fact that English is her mother tongue, she cannot talk to her daughter in English, in the same way that she cannot write in English either: “Comme quoi le lieu commun selon lequel faire des livres c'est comme faire des enfants se trouve, dans mon cas, corroboré: les livres, les enfants, je ne peux les faire que dans une langue non maternelle” (1986: 131). The linguistic intergenerational logics that operate within familial structures in contexts of displacements will be considered in chapter 3.

Catalan society, which, we learn, struggles to fully understand her as part of its social tissue –as noted in the several passages where the author informs of racist attitudes, sometimes somehow veiled, with which she has to deal. As explained by Stuart Hall (1996b) racism operates on the basis of reductionist practices that condense the complexity of someone’s subjectivity into a fragment of what they are. Following this logic, categorising someone as an “immigrant” can become a violent gesture. El Hachmi is aware of such symbolic violence, as evinced in the following passage:

Us penseu que no sentim les paraules que ens fereixen només perquè les dieu en català. Tant és, nosaltres sempre fa poc temps que som aquí, no fa res que hagi viscut vuit anys al Marroc i setze a Catalunya, sempre em mires com qui acaba d’arribar i no és capaç d’aprendre la teva llengua, fet i fet, parlem-los en castellà i que aprenguin el castellà. Només demostres no conèixer-me a mi ni a tots els immigrants que hi ha a la ciutat des de fa anys.

(2004: 50)

In this quote, El Hachmi complains about the fact that, exactly as it happens with her son, people have tended to talk to her in Spanish, rather than in Catalan, and this in Osona, the Catalan region where she grew up, which is known for being mainly Catalan-speaking. This attitude exemplifies the reductionism that vertebrates any label. In the Catalan context, where cultural identity is very strongly connected to the Catalan language –something which I will further explore in Chapter 4–, the gesture of talking to someone perceived as a newcomer in Spanish might deny them the opportunity of entering the Catalan community. Here, it is worth noting that El Hachmi uses the first person plural, hence identifying herself as an immigrant, understanding herself as part of the “immigrant community”; they are united in the disregard they receive from the autochthonous population and in the fact that they are perceived as inhabiting the suspended space of the immigrant.

Already in the prologue, El Hachmi makes it clear that her understanding of her place in Catalonia (and arguably the way she understands herself) is mediated by labels, and most particularly by that of *immigrant*: “el meu [somni] és poder deixar de parlar d’immigració algun dia, no haver de donar més voltes a les etiquetes, no haver d’explicar per enèsima vegada d’on vinc o, si més no, que aquest fet no tingui el pes específic que té.” (12) The author is very much aware of the fact that at the northern rim of the Mediterranean she is read as an immigrant, a regard that imposes enclosed and hermetic categorisations. That is why, for instance, when she

is invited to the university to give a talk about her experience as a student, her audience interacts with her not based on the content of her talk, but approaching her as a Moroccan immigrant, an episode that the author coats with a dose of mockery (61). Indeed, and as it shall be later discussed, the author makes use of a diversity of tones to convey her messages, directed to different audiences, too.

Throughout the text, we learn how El Hachmi proves to have broken through those rigid constructions and in that way fights the stereotypes that are linked to the label *immigrant*. In the 2004 account, El Hachmi presents herself as an excellent student with brilliant marks, which, together with her perfect command of the Catalan language, make of her an exception within the immigrant community, in the eyes of the Catalan society: “Sempre hi ha algú que et deixa anar la frase, feridora: és que tu ets diferent.” (91) However, such a remark does nothing but strengthen her will to claim the importance of fighting stereotypical conceptions, which in situations like the one described above pass through identifying herself with that precise label, to highlight the fallacious ground on which it stands. “Jo no sóc diferent, no ho vull ser, vull ser com tots els immigrants, mentre algú els discrimini. Quan en fereixes un, denigres el seu nom i el tipifiques, m’estàs ferint a mi, m’estàs denigrant.” (*ibid.*) El Hachmi also understands herself as being on the side of the discriminated when it comes to the languages she considers as her own, as we shall see. In her text, she believes Tamazight and Catalan to both be “oppressed” languages, which renders the fact that she writes her books in the latter more significant.

In *Jo també sóc catalana*, the author declares that writing has played a major role in her process of getting to know the labels that have somehow been imposed on her –either externally or internally. And through getting to know them, she can undo them, deconstruct them. Writing becomes a space of liberation, a critical tool that allows for attention to the nuances and complexities that are denied in a label. “Ho confesso: Escric per sentir-me més lliure, per desfer-me del meu propi enclaustrament, un enclaustrament fet de de nominacions d’origen, de pors, d’esperances sovint estroncades, de dubtes continus, d’abismes de pioners que exploren nous mons.” (14) Hence, it does not come as a surprise that a few pages further along she declares the University of Barcelona –a space that is portrayed as a site of open-mindedness and critical thinking–, as the physical place where she can understand herself as mediated by no labels of any kind and truly be herself:

En aquest racó de món, amb el brogit esmorteït del trànsit a l'exterior [...], la mare deixa de ser mare, esposa, filla treballadora, mestressa de casa, immigrant, marroquina, berber o amazic. La mare, fill, es despulla de totes les etiquetes i és només ella mateixa.

(25)

El Hachmi's conception of the university space responds to the idealized construction she has of this place. As a cultural institution that somehow epitomises the Catalan society, the faculty to which the author is referring is traversed by more-or-less veiled logics of racism, classism and sexism, which inform the heteropatriarchal regime that lies at the core of Western societies. However, the above-mentioned citation allows for the realization that the author feels the need to construct the space that she identifies with the epistemological universe as embedded with positive qualities.⁴² Hence, the university relates with the other spaces with which El Hachmi interacts on a dichotomous basis. The author's world is sustained upon spaces that operate on the ground of labels and those which are not vertebrated by them, namely the university, which has provided her with the tools and strategies to better understand herself.

Like El Hachmi, Dalila Kerchouche also understands the writing exercise as a tool to navigate her sense of identity. In her case, the process of self-understanding is very strongly connected with the fact of revisiting her relationship with her father, who has always been a silent figure for her, unable to answer the questions that disrupted her to the point where, at 29, she literally put her job on hold to find out about the consequences of her father's participation in the Franco-Algerian war. At the end of her first book, she comes to understand “pourquoi j'ai écrit ce livre: pour parler à mon père.” (2003: 276) Kerchouche's questioning –the unfolding of which is captured in her book– begins by interrogating the reasons why someone like her father, a shepherd in rural Algeria, would get involved with the French army, thus, by unravelling the label *harki*: “Comment a-t-il pu soutenir la colonisation contre l'indépendance, préférer la soumission à la liberté? Je ne comprends pas. Il ne m'en a jamais parlé.” (13)

Silence is an important *topos* in Kerchouche's work, one which will be tackled from different perspectives in this research work, from the point of view of the construction of identities and

⁴² It is worth noting, however, that a paragraph earlier El Hachmi reminisces about the time when she was a student and pregnant with Rida. Whenever she was on campus, she would sit at the university benches, which “[s]egur que no es van fer pensant en embarassaes, és clar” (2004: 25). With this statement El Hachmi might be problematizing the idealized conception she herself puts forward about the academic space. Under gendered lenses, this phrase points to the idea that the space of the university is in fact constructed upon logics that do not take into account subjects that are not “neutral”, like a pregnant woman.

also read along the lines of historical narratives. In the preface that accompanies Kerchouche's autobiographical text, her fellow journalist and writer Jacques Duquesne points to the fact that "le silence tue parfois plus sûrement que les balles" because "il nie l'existence elle-même" (2003: 9). Duquesne goes on to signal that harkis remain the main victims of the silence that surrounds the way France has approached the issue of its war with Algeria, and the consequences that followed, because harkis, he claims, have been systematically relegated to the margins –physically, as it has been already noted, via their inclusion in camps; and historically, for up until very recently the role they played in the war had not been properly analysed and the treatment they received after the conflict ended had not been sufficiently acknowledged. In fact, this lack of acknowledgement finds its parallel in the lack of literature regarding the theme of the harkis, as I will better analyse in Chapter 4.⁴³

Constructed as traitors at either end of the conflict, this prejudice ended up piercing all the way through the harki community itself. As Kerchouche explains in her work, silence also settled in the harkis' households. Consumed by a feeling of guilt, many former soldiers were determined not to speak about the war, thus annihilating the possibility of undoing misconstructions, making it difficult for the family members who had not fought in the war to understand what was hidden behind the term *harki*.⁴⁴ This was the scenario in the Kerchouche family. In this sense, silence played a meaningful role in Kerchouche's identity construction. The *non-dit*, that which was not said, the blanks in her father's narrative made of him an elusive and ambivalent figure, puzzling her and ultimately pushing her to travel across France and all the way to Algeria to undo those silences. We know that, unlike her father, Dalila's mother would often talk about her country of birth, but the stories she shared with her daughter were not sufficient for her to fully comprehend her inherited condition as a harki.⁴⁵

⁴³ In *Et ils sont devenus harkis*, a book that was born out of a doctoral dissertation and one of the first academic works to tackle the issue of the harkis, Mohand Hamoumou consecrates half of the text to talk about the topic of silence, signalling that there exists a three-fold silence to which the harki communities are subjected: that of France, that of Algeria and that of the community itself. Along the same lines, Claire Eldridge notes that "[i]t took several decades for scholars to turn their attention to the *harkis*. Like memory activism within the community itself, this was also a development that owed much to the impetus of *harki* descendants" (2016: 27). This shall be further discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

⁴⁴ Particularly interesting is the fact that after they abandoned the camps and settled in French towns, some harki parents would tell their children not to talk about their harki identity to anyone, for fear they would be mocked or prejudged (see, for instance, *Amère patrie* or the interview with Saïd Merabti on *Odysseo.Generiques.org*).

⁴⁵ This does not mean that Kerchouche dismisses all the stories her mother shared with her. On the contrary, the author is very much in favour of resurrecting the testimonies, the voices of the harkis' wives, who, according to the author, are the victims of an even a denser silence than their husbands, especially because most of them did not really get to learn French, following a double cloistering: inside the camps and inside their households. The multi-layered silences that surround the women within the harki universe shall be discussed in subsequent chapters.

In *Mon père, ce harki* we accompany Dalila Kerchouche along her journey, in which she discovers the many-fold reasons why someone would decide to become a harki in the first place, how it is received differently in different contexts and, ultimately, how it intersects with other categorisations. Such a complex understanding of the term *harki* is mirrored in the fact that Kerchouche herself interacts with it differently throughout her text, as she gathers more and more in-depth information about her father's past. Her relationship with the label will change, as she will connect it with different feelings, and even the way she spells it –the way she incorporates it in her narrative, both literally and symbolically– will transform. The different spellings of the word *harki* that Kerchouche displays in her 2003 text, as well as the different concepts with which she pairs the term, will be considered from multiple angles of enquiry in this research.

At the beginning of her exploratory journey –understanding, as we saw, that her father preferred the French side during the war, thus favouring French colonization over independence– she will write *harki* with “a petit ‘h’, comme ‘honte’” (13), demonstrating a rejection towards it. The author acknowledges that such a rejection is somehow imposed: “Voilà ce que l’Histoire m’a appris: à détester mon père” (24). However, after her “quête harkéologique”, as she calls it, once she has visited Algeria and has filled in the silences permeating her father's life and the historical silences surrounding the participation of the Algerian combatants within the war, she will spell it with a capital ‘h’, “comme honneur” (277); she realises her father is a regular man, which, in her words, made him “ni un grand héros ni un traître infâme” (*ibid.*). He did not enrol in the French army because he felt disconnected from Algeria or to claim a French identity; he did it because he felt it was the best way to protect his family. And, as Dalila learns whilst in Algeria, he even collaborated with the FLN, making his participation in the war even more ambiguous.⁴⁶

There is, however, another phase for Kerchouche in her transition from shame to honour, and that is hatred. “Je suis une fille de *harkis*. J’écris ce mot avec un ‘h’, comme haine” (180). This

⁴⁶ Mohamed Haddouche, himself an inheritor of the label *harki* and the former president of Association Justice Information Réparation, admitted that there had been some discomfort amongst the harki community for the way Kerchouche incorporated her father's alleged collaboration with the FLN into her narrative. Kerchouche ends up feeling pride for what her father did during the war-time period, but it is true that one could say that her pride stems from the fact that he secretly collaborated with the FLN, which would reinforce the idea the FLN was the righteous side in the conflict and, thus, strengthen a dichotomous understanding of the conflict, whereby the harkis, because they collaborated with the “wrong side”, somehow deserved the treatment they received in Algeria and France. [Personal interview]

harsh statement comes after the author has visited one of the camps where her family lived, which allegedly had a strong impact on her brother Moha. The figure of this sibling is of much significance in Kerchouche's story, because he committed suicide. The suicide of Moha has to be understood not in an isolated manner, but as one of the consequences of the treatment of the harki community in France. Like Kerchouche's brother, many harki families have ended up with at least one relative taking their own lives.⁴⁷ Kerchouche learns about the way power relations in the camps were played out, and how they literally broke the families that had to endure them. In Chapter 4, where I shall further dwell on the spellings of the word *harki* by Kerchouche, I shall use the image of the wound to articulate my reflections, an image that gets associated with the camps. More so than the war, a context where one expected to find suffering and emotional instability, what really hit the harkis (and what they demand compensation for) lies in the reality of the camps.

Throughout her journey across the camps, Dalila Kerchouche will learn that in some of them the harki children were treated as outcasts in the schooling system, that they were taught to perceive themselves as different from the other (French) students, that because of their background they would not be given the chance to advance to university and would be directed towards vocational training. She will be shocked to learn that a space to which the harkis would refer as "the centre" ever existed: at this centre, all the harki children that according to the camp administration were behaving inappropriately would be sent to spend time with ex-detainees, as if they themselves were criminals. This will lead our author to claim that the French state programmed the social death of the harkis (183). She comes to the realisation that the Republican values she learnt at school –which she had hitherto held very dear– are a lie, as proven by the treatment her family received for years. She feels disgust towards Charles de Gaulle and the cynicism he demonstrated in his visit to Algeria in 1960; she learns "la honte d'être française" (180).

The different ways in which Kerchouche incorporates her harki condition into her identity also pass through her relationship with France. The more she learns about how the harkis and their

⁴⁷ A thorough reading of works gathering the testimonies of harki families evinces the fact that suicides were something sadly known inside many of these families upon their arrival in France. The starting point of Zahia Rahmani's *Moze* is the suicide of the author's father. In the last section of Kerchouche's novel, the narrator reflects upon the terrible health issues of the harkis: "Ils sont régulièrement internés dans les hôpitaux psychiatriques, où ils suivent le chemin de leurs pères. Ils s'autodétruisent, terminent le long travail de sape commencé dans les camps. Dans quasiment toutes les familles de harkis, un fils s'est suicidé." (2006: 145)

families were treated once on French soil, the more her sentiments towards a land that at the beginning of her journey she considered unambiguously her own develop. In Marseille, the first stop of her journey through the camps, for it was there where her parents set foot in France for the first time, she foresees that the trip she is embarking upon will forever alter the way she understands herself: “Ici, je dis adieu à la jeune femme insouciant que j’étais avec la promesse d’une identité neuve à redessiner.” (34) After the visit to the first camp where her family spent some time, she starts questioning her feelings towards France, for France, epitomised in the French administration, clearly rejected her parents by not protecting them the way they were supposed to be protected, by cloistering them and putting them aside. Hence, she understands herself as in the same genealogical line as that of her family. And by the time she visits the second camp, when she has a clear idea of the consequences of being considered a harki in France, she declares: “Moi qui ai aimé passionnément la France, cette culture, cette langue, je me sens trahie. Je ne peux plus être française, pas après ce que j’ai appris. La colère m’a envahie.” (72)

After she has visited all the camps that sheltered her family, the question that initiated her quest –which had to do with interrogating the reasons that lead her father to fight for France– has transformed to yet a bigger question, “POURQUOI?” (182), as signalled by the capitalisation of the whole word. As seen with the different ways in which she spelt the word *harki*, spelling becomes a strategy deployed by Kerchouche to reinforce the content of what she writes,⁴⁸ Kerchouche also uses personifications in her work, to convey her messages. Thus, she directs her question straight to France, as if it were another character in her narrative, one playing a major role in it. She wonders why France would be complicit in what happened to her family and the rest of the harki families, and talks to it about her parents:

“Tu veux savoir? Parce que les Français n’aiment pas les Arabes. Voilà pourquoi, *benti*.”⁴⁹
 “C’est vrai, ajoute mon père. Un Arabe n’aura jamais raison en France”. [...] Non, je ne savais pas. Racisme... Voilà ce que je n’entendais pas depuis le début de mon aventure. Voilà ce que mon frère Moha avait compris. Voilà ce qu’il n’a pas supporté.

(183)

⁴⁸ In the abovementioned interview Mohamed Haddouche stated that in the decade of the 1990s, the harkis association started spelling the word with a capital H, as a way of signalling that they accepted their condition of harkis with pride. It is worth noting that this rewriting of sorts, of the label *harki*, falls on the generation of harki descendants that did not have a direct experience with the war, as Kerchouche’s case illuminates.

⁴⁹ In chapters 3 and 4, I shall analyse with more depth the linguistic reality to which Kerchouche’s (and El Hachmi’s) texts account. Suffice it to say here that the code switching in this citation translates the multi-layered cultural universe inhabited by the author and the characters that she portrays in her work.

As evinced in El Hachmi's earlier citation, which showcased how Catalan society received people they read as immigrants as perpetually "acabats d'arribar", Kerchouche's parents, too, feel they are perceived from a biased approach. Troubled by her parents' response, Dalila Kerchouche uses several media, besides interviews with her family and those people who she finds in her trip to the camps, in order to reach an answer about the attitude of the French state towards the harkis. She comes across a very valuable report by two sociologists, dating from 1985, where they described in great detail how "la France n'a pas abandonné les *harkis* à leur triste sort, mais que, au contraire, le gouvernement s'en est 'trop' occupé", by creating a totalitarian microcosmos, a dispositive of social desintegration and socio-political marginalization of the "communauté française musulmane rapatriée" (184-185). These works also make the author aware of the fact that the French administration displayed different "repatriation" procedures according to the different communities that arrived on French soil, coming from Algeria –i.e., the pied-noirs were not taken into camps or *hameaux forestiers*, unlike the harkis; and not all of the subjects read as local Algerian were treated the same way.

Kerchouche incorporates whole passages from this report into her own text, as they help her elucidate her doubts. Particularly revealing is the following extract:

En même temps que le discours officiel [...] les confirme dans le statut de "Français à part entière", le traitement et le destin qui leur sont réservés font paraître un autre statut, celui de "Français entièrement à part", assignés à des "espaces hors la loi" où règne le non-droit, voire le contre-droit.

(in Kerchouche 2003: 184)

The above quotation confirms the marginalisation to which I referred earlier and explains the feeling of abandonment enclosed in the words of Kerchouche's parents. The "harki identity", as felt within the own community, translates that sentiment of abandonment and injustice. In her visit to the camps, Kerchouche ends up finding a Frenchman who worked as a doctor at Biais –which is portrayed as being one of the worst camps where harkis could be sent to–, who reinforces that idea. He confesses to our author that after a few years working there, he ended up becoming a harki himself, because: "je réagissais comme eux, j'avais complètement intégré leur sentiment d'injustice" (161). The incorporation of all these different voices and sources into Kerchouche's text translates her willingness to put forward a portrayal of the harki scenario that is attentive to its many layers and nuances. At the same time, she galvanizes us readers to

accompany her throughout her quest, as we find out, at the same time as she does, about the intricacies of her complex journey. Thus, we are able to understand the importance of incorporating sociological reports into her familial story –which adds a factual dimension to the text and turns it into a historical artefact, as well as a literary product– and the different spellings of *harki* reveal themselves as particularly relevant in understanding Kerchouche’s subjective negotiation.

1.1 Religion as a Marker of (Not-)Belonging

Already during the 19th century, and when Algeria had become a French colony, the Crémieux Decree made it clear that the French administration reserved different treatments for the population they laid claim to. Unlike the Jews, who received French citizenship, Muslims did not get naturalization and were constructed as the minority group (understood here as that which does not have access to power circles). In a chapter consecrated to population movements from Algeria to France between 1946 and 1962, within the volume *Algériens en France*, it is made clear that this non-dominant position was translated into juridical ambiguity:

les difficultés habituelles à dénombrer les migrants sont compliquées, dans le cas des Algériens, par les ambiguïtés et fluctuations de leur status juridique. L’appellation “Algériens”, bien qu’utilisé avant 1962, ne correspond pas à une catégorie juridique avant l’indépendance. La population d’Algérie est en effet subdivisée en catégories qui évoluent durant la colonisation: au découpage entre “Européens” et “indigènes” succède, après 1946, la distinction entre “musulmans” et “non-musulmans”. [...] Classés avec les étrangers, ces sujets français disposant de la nationalité mais non de la citoyenneté ne sont pas identifiés par la question sur la nationalité, mais par un reclassement effectué à partir des noms et prénoms.

(Kesztenbaum and Simon 2012: 16)

Such a dichotomous division would be subject to further subdivisions on the part of the French administration, which would construct the cultural differences between Amazigh and Arab peoples as insurmountable differences in order to divide the Muslim populations. However, they were united in the fact that none occupied a dominant position within French Algeria. As Laure Blévis informs us,

[p]endant toute la période colonial, les Algériens jouissent d'un statut juridique particulier au regard des principes en vigueur en France métropolitaine. L'annexion de l'Algérie, terre ottomane, par les Français a supprimé *de facto* l'ancienne nationalité. Les habitants de l'Algérie sont dès lors français, mais ils conservent le libre culte de leur religion, soit leur statut civil religieux.

Le sénatus-consulte du 14 juillet 1865 affirme que les "indigènes" de l'Algérie sont français mais pas citoyens, conservant leur statut personnel religieux.

(2012: 22)

This leads Blévis to refer to "le sujet colonial" as a "national diminué" (*ibid.*). It is worth noting that, to this day, the term *indigène* hints at France's recent historical memory, as proven by the existence of the political group *Les Indigènes de la République*, whose mobilization of the term will be considered further down.

Almost a century later, post-1962, those harkis settled in France could apply for French citizenship. However, as noted by the sociologists whose voices Kerchouche recuperates, the second-class treatment persisted and, as it happened before, religion was used to mark that distance:

L'État français a donc programmé la mort sociale des harkis. L'État français les a psychologiquement détruits. Pourquoi? Parce qu'ils étaient musulmans. Les autorités de l'époque ne pouvaient concevoir qu'ils puissent être "français" et "musulmans". Dans la France chrétienne, c'était un non-sens.

(188)

Fear of Islam settling in France is what is argued to have triggered the commissioning of the dispositive of social disintegration and socio-political marginalization within the camps. As I already stated, the harki community were the first big settlement of Muslim families to ever install themselves on French soil, according to our author's enquiries.⁵⁰ To set a strategy of acculturation in practice, the French administration decided that they were going to put pied-noirs in charge of this "microcosm", for they spoke *darija* and understood the "Muslim mentality". We see yet another reductionist categorisation unfold, in such a scenario. The

⁵⁰ Abderamen Moumen notes the "aspect massif" of "l'exil des rapatriés d'Algérie [...] En quatre mois, il y eut autant de réfugiés qu'en 5 ans pour les précédentes migrations liées à la décolonisation française." (2003: 14)

harkis were singled out because of the religion they allegedly practised, regardless of the importance that such credo had in their lives or the different ways in which they understood it.⁵¹

Another “fille de *harki*”, Zahia Rahmani, consecrated her second book, “*Musulman*” roman, to this phenomenon. In the prologue we read: “Sur moi s’est abattue une entente entre des hommes. Je suis devenue, redevenue ‘Musulman’. // De cette folie, de cette contrainte, je n’ai pu m’échapper.” (2005: unnumbered) A few pages later, we learn that the father of the protagonist, who had been a harki, kills himself, like the father of Rahmani did. The narrator, who understands herself from that point onwards as having “ni père, ni patrie, ni religion” hopes that such an uprooting will be enough for her to lay claim to the European continent. However, that is not the case; she learns that she will be forever tied to the alleged trait that signalled her father out: “il n’en fut rien. Au moindre petit accroc, on me soupçonna. On me désigna. On me redonna un père, une religion et une vocation; un Nom. ‘Musulman’, je sais que c’est sans fin.” (38) The restrictive gaze that Europe imposes on the harki community does not leave room for the subjects within that community to choose the way they want to understand themselves in their new context.

Kerchouche and Rahmani describe a French society that tags the harkis using categorisations they claim to know, like that of religion, unwilling to accept the idea that a new context resignifies the way individuals and communities relate to the elements that defined them at other times. Such process of recognition, via stable and homogeneous identifications, aims at “fossilizing” that community, which thus becomes easier to comprehend. In his work *Routes*, James Clifford states, echoing Benedict Anderson’s seminal formulation, that “[t]he imagined communities called ‘nations’ require constant often violent, maintenance” (1999: 10). Using this statement as a cue we can understand the setting of the camps as a strategy employed by the French nation to maintain its identity well drawn. The camps are a very graphic metaphor to discuss the violence to which Clifford is pointing. They were (re-)activated⁵² after a very

⁵¹ It is worth mentioning that, on the other hand, the FLN would use Islam as an identifying trait that would unite all those fighting against France.

⁵² Six camps became operational in 1962 in order to “welcome” the harkis arriving from Algeria, those of Rivesaltes, Bias, Bourg-Lastic, Larzac, Saint-Maurice-l’Ardoie and La Rye. As signalled by Moumen, those of Bias and Saint-Maurice-l’Ardoie would specifically be for “chefs de familles âgés ou de familles nombreuses, les handicapés physiques ou les personnes démunies de ressources difficilement reclassables dans la société française.” (2003: 20) Some of the harkis were placed into *cités de transit* and others in *hameaux forestiers*, located mainly in the South-Eastern region of France. Furthermore, “ensembles immobiliers urbains ont été spécialement conçus et réservés pour les familles dont leur adaptation au contact de la ‘cité’ pouvait se faire assez

violent experience, that of the Franco-Algerian war, and represent a symbolically violent gesture that denies the subjects enclosed within the camps the possibility to develop their own relationship with France.

Reading all the harkis bypassing their differences and grouping them as “Muslim” makes it simpler to construct them as the Other,⁵³ a figure that, as explored above, was central to the colonial Manichean narratives and that tends to be at the core of the dominant ways to understand identity discourses. In the Franco-Algerian context, as we already learnt, religion was used as a tool to divide the former colony into two groups: those that were “fully” French –who were not Muslim– and those that were not, the Muslim population. With the end of the conflict categorising the harkis proved difficult, since they had fought for France, for which the combatants and their families could ask for their nationality, but at the same time they did not let go of their habits, which had rendered them Other in French Algeria. Read along these lines, the camps can be understood as representing a “space-Other” aiming to eliminate the ambiguity that might be derived from the harkis. It is also a space that turns them into passive subjects, a space in which their voice is significantly removed, since the administrative structure that is behind the camps takes advantage of their illiteracy and, because of that, they end up not complaining about it and perpetuating their subjugated position, just as it happened in Algeria.

In a pioneer work that intersects a discussion of identity with that of migration processes, Iain Chambers theorizes the figure of the stranger in the following terms:

the stranger is an emblem –she or he is a figure that draws our attention to the urgencies of our time: a presence that questions our present. For the stranger threatens the “binary classification deployed in the construction of order” and introduces us to the uncanny displacement of ambiguity.

(1994: 6; inside quotation by Zygmunt Bauman)

rapidement” (17). As Kerchouche learns during her search, many camps where the harki families and individuals were placed had already been used previous to the arrival of the harkis as temporary logements for Republicans who fled from the Spanish civil war or for those Jewish people who, during the Vichy era, ended up being sent to Nazi camps.

⁵³ In the Introduction we learnt about the different designations that the French administration reserved for the harkis and their families.

As presented by Kerchouche, the harki community is constituted by subjects that materialise a set of differences that threaten the homogeneity from which labels draw their operational power. The label *Muslim*, thus, is deployed in order to maintain a clear-cut duality between France and its Other. In El Hachmi's work, too, the author talks of religion as one of the columns that vertebrates the label *immigrant*.⁵⁴ We saw earlier how she spoke of suffering as one of the consequences that the usage of that category might unfold, which connects it to the dimension of symbolic violence detected behind *harki*. In her autobiographical text, the author declares that those she considered her neighbours started to organize themselves in opposition to the idea of building a Mosque in the town where she lived, for the Mosque was perceived as a threat –something that El Hachmi considers a xenophobic outbreak which, actually, makes her feel “més musulmana que mai” (2004: 118). The following extracts showcase how Islam is perceived as a problem by the neighbours –and wrongly interpreted as inseparable from the so-called “Arab world”– and also how they utilise religious affiliations as the ultimate yardstick to measure someone's belonging to a country:

–Tots sabem els problemes que porta la religió musulmana arreu del món: només cal que mirem cap als països àrabs i ho veurem. Si no, guaitau el cas d'Algèria, les morts que hi ha.

[...]

–Sí, sí, sí! Que se'n vagin *al seu país* a fer-hi una mesquita, que si nosaltres anéssim allà segur que no ens deixarien construir-hi una església.

(118-119; emphasis added)

This last intervention displays, yet again, the “‘us’ vs. ‘them’” construction signalled before, whereby alterity is built on religious grounds, and proves to what extent there is generalized misinformation about the “Arab world”, where churches do exist. It is worth repeating that the El Hachmi family arrived in Catalonia during the 1980s, at a time when the social fabric of

⁵⁴ In one of her columns in the Catalan newspapers *El Periódico*, in which El Hachmi is a regular collaborator, the author identifies herself as a pioneer in relation to a new generation of Muslim young women who grow up in Catalonia of Maghrebi origins. El Hachmi finds it worrisome that, in her view, many of these women attach themselves really heavily to Islam and islamicate practices in order to navigate the complex subjective turmoil to which they are subject because of their interstitial position in Catalonia (see El Hachmi 2017c). In *Jo també sóc catalana*, she consecrates one of its five chapters to explaining how she, too, went through a religious phase in order to fill in what she felt “was missing”, at a time when she understood religious practices as a way to reaffirm her Moroccan identity –which El Hachmi perceived as getting diluted: “Havia de començar un camí de perfecció per esdevenir una creient més autèntica, estava segura que m'havia integrat tant al nou país que havia deixat de ser una bona musulmana.” (2004: 108) After her aunt died, however, she started questioning her faith, not wanting to believe that God would have wanted for her to be torn between two spaces, rootless. And so all the religious practices that she kept started feeling illogical and ridiculous to her and hence she abandoned them.

Catalonia was very different from that of today. Even if the first migrants from Morocco established themselves in Catalonia already in the decade of the 1960s, as made clear in the Introduction, those first displacements were of individuals –mainly men– that arrived on their own and it was not until years later that they started asking for family reunification processes.

The perception of Maghrebi migrants by the local population has significantly changed from then to our days, as people with attachments to the Maghrebi region have become more visible and have shared with their non-Maghrebi neighbours their traditions and customs. However, during the decade of the 1980s, there were still not very many families that decided to uproot to Catalan soil, which is why El Hachmi family represented difference in Vic.⁵⁵ In this sense, the testimony that the work by El Hachmi represents is of much significance to understand how Catalonia has coped with the recent shift in its social fabric. The growing Maghrebi community started to be constructed as the “radical Other” in Catalonia, and religion was brandished as an element that enabled that Othering process. As expressed by Arnau Domingo in *Catalunya al mirall de la immigració*, the Maghrebi subject was “com l’altre per antonomàsia” (2014: 264). In the Introduction I explained that Catalonia had been the end-point of significant migration processes before, but mainly from Spanish regions. By the end of the 20th century it was those that were coming from North Africa, who spoke another language and practiced another credo, that came to represent alterity. Thus, the figure of the “immigrant” started to be epitomised by the Maghrebi migrant, who was inseparable from Islam, an image accentuated by a historical discourse.

Indeed, Catalan historiography has obviated the primary role Islam and Muslim culture has played in the development of Catalonia, over many centuries, following the Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula, including parts of Catalonia, from the 8th to the 15th century. However, the idea that Catalonia –and Spain and Europe for that matter– have Christian roots has contributed to the widely held view that Christian values are part of Europe’s cultural fabric and has led to the situation described by El Hachmi, whereby Islam was perceived –and it is

⁵⁵ In *The Mediterranean passage*, Russell King explains that the decade of the 1980s represented a turning point in the configuration of the migration processes in the Mediterranean area, because the northern rim of the Mediterranean started to receive people from many different parts of the world (2001: 4-5).

still perceived, to a large extent– as an unknown religion.⁵⁶ This image is reinforced by the mass media, for they present all Muslims as a homogenised group, inclined to extremism and highly misogynistic, a powerful discourse, galvanized by some loud voices, such as those of the late Samuel P. Huntington (1993) or Giovanni Sartori (2000).⁵⁷ As hinted by Moreras, despite the fact that the Spanish constitution of 1978 defines Spain (and hence Catalonia) as a secular non-denominational state, which guarantees the religious rights of all its inhabitants, the Catholic church receives the most privileges, the most funds and even has a say in the functioning of politics. As a result, people who confess other religions, such as Islam, have to comply with having less spaces for worship, for instance, which in its turn contributes to the establishment of logics of (in)visibilization that put forward the idea that islamicate practices do not “belong” to the national territory in the same way Christians ones do (Moreras 2017).⁵⁸

El Hachmi’s 2004 essay offers us insight on how to understand the way in which religious practices can get redefined within a context of migration, since, as she acknowledged, their religious basis might get transformed into a cultural coating –thus, for example, she now celebrates Ramadan more as a cultural practice than as a religious festivity (110). This idea ties in with what was presented in the introduction by Moreras, who signalled that “[e]l proceso migratorio imprime un carácter especial a las manifestaciones religiosas”, which go from vertebrating every-day life to framing processes of subjectivity construction (1996: 234-235). In order to better dwell on this kind of transformation, literature proves a much valuable source, because as has already been signalled, its focus on certain specificities facilitates the attention to all the nuances that inform the intangible consequences of processes of population displacements.

⁵⁶ Eloy Martín Corrales notes that “España es el único Estado europeo occidental que, en buena parte de su territorio, en el transcurso de tres a ocho siglos, según regiones, perteneció –política, social y culturalmente– al ámbito de los países islámicos, [...] y que, a su vez, en una especie de desquite histórico mantiene durante cinco siglos una presencia controvertida en el norte africano.” (2002: 17) By analyzing the iconographic production in Spain from the 16th to the 20th century, Martín Corrales seeks to analyze the subjective conceptions that permeate the Spanish imaginary in regard to Muslims in general and Moroccans in particular and worries about the fact that, as an alterity figure, the Moroccan subject is seen, contrarily to what happened during the Renaissance, as “más como una amenaza que hay que atajar” than as a potential source for discoveries (25).

⁵⁷ For a discussion on how the image of the “moro” has evolved in the last few centuries inside the Spanish territory see Martín Corrales 2012. Corrales explains that the Spanish society (Catalonia included) maintains a very negative image, shaped throughout several centuries, of Muslims in general and Moroccans in particular (2012: 55). The author goes on to dissect in which ways, for centuries, two colliding discourses co-existed in regard to how the Moroccan (male) was constructed, as a figure eliciting both fear –which would explain what he terms *maurofobia*– and fascination –hence his reference to *maurofilia*.

⁵⁸ Houria Bouteldja speaks of France –which could arguably refer to Europe as a whole– as “terre catho-laïque” to point out the idea that, despite the fact that France brandishes its “laïcité”, Christian values are very much constructed as informing the “true nature” of France (2016: 52).

At the beginning of the new millennium, the reflections voiced by El Hachmi which circulated in Catalonia were complemented with those of other Moroccan-born authors whose insights offer new angles to understand the intricacies of having being raised a Muslim and having grown up in Catalonia. In 2008 Saïd El Kadaoui Moussaoui published *Límites y fronteras*, a novel that offers a psychiatric reading of the consequences of migration. In 2011, he published *Cartes al meu fill: Un català de soca-rel, gairebé*, which echoes the literary mechanism used by El Hachmi in 2004.⁵⁹ El Kadaoui writes to his son to make him understand that the transcultural inheritance he has received from his parents (a father born in Morocco and a Catalan-born mother), will make some people with whom he will interact read him as not “fully” belonging to the Catalonia where he has grown up.⁶⁰ However, El Kadaoui, like El Hachmi, understands his identity as conformed by manifold affiliations eschewing monolithic understandings and it is in these terms that he wishes his son to understand his subjectivity: “Fill, pren-t’ho com un privilegi també. Ets català, espanyol i europeu. I tens l’oportunitat de sentir-te també marroquí, magribí i africà.” (2011: 67)

Both El Hachmi and El Kadaoui problematize straightforward understanding of identity construction processes and interpellate Catalan society to critically engage in debates about its transcultural fabric. The works by Laila Karrouch, of an attempted autobiographical nature and a more felicitous, less critical tone than the works by El Hachmi and El Kadaoui, also shed light on the long-term consequences of those first migratory settlements that paved the way to how we understand the place of the Moroccan community in Catalonia today. Karrouch, a nurse by profession, arrived in Catalonia in 1985, when she was 8, and like Najat, moved from autobiography into fiction in her literary journey. Karrouch has published several works, some of which turned into films, based on her own migration experience.

De Nador a Vic is her first work, whose publication coincides with El Hachmi’s essay, and it is also an autobiographical account where she explores her memories of her Morocco and those

⁵⁹ Castellano Sanz has noted that this literary device has been used by other authors: by Tahar Ben Jelloun in *Le Racisme expliqué à ma fille* (1987) or by Agnès Abgoton in *Més enllà del mar de sorra* (2005) (2018: 161).

⁶⁰ El Kadaoui also uses irony as a strategy to tackle the racist undertone that informs many societal practices in Catalonia, in regard to how its inhabitants treat those read as not fully belonging to it: “En diríem Associació dels marroquins que no ho semblen i dels europeu que, en haver nascut al Marroc i/o essent fills de persones nascudes al Marroc, no ho són. Sí, ja ho sé. És un nom massa llarg, però no sabem trobar-ne un altre que expressi tota la nostra realitat.” (2011: 29) In chapter 4 we shall see how Zahia Rahmani, too, uses phrasal constructions to give name to realities that are not named.

from when she first arrived in Vic.⁶¹ It is worth pointing out that the geographical specificity of the title can be read as a willingness to escape from homogenizations. She highlights her Berber cultural background, but she realises that on the other side of the Mediterranean that trait of her identity gets dissolved, for she is read as a Maghrebi woman, and more specifically as a Muslim. She acknowledges that as a child some people would call her a *mora*, which in the context described by Karrouch is used as a pejorative word to designate a Muslim woman. As I explained above, in its origins, *moro* (or *mora*, in its feminine form) designated a person from Al-Andalus. The Encyclopaedia of Islam notes that despite the fact the origin of the term remains unclear, it was used until the 19th century “in virtually all Western European languages, to indicate the ancient Muslims of Spain and the inhabitants of the Mediterranean ports of North Africa.” (Gibb *et al.* 1986b: 235) We learn that after Carthage was destroyed, the Latin *Mauri* was used to designate sedentary tribes in certain Roman provinces and later “*Maurus* passed into Greek [...] and both terms were then used to indicate, in a rather general way, the Berbers. In Spain, *Mauri* became *Moros*, and it was under this name that the inhabitants of the Peninsula designated the Muslim conquerors during the whole period of the Muslim domination (711-1492).” (306)

In the Encyclopedia we read that the term has a geographical meaning, and not an ethnographical one, “for the conquerors were Arabs and Berbers”. We are also made aware of the fact that despite the symbiosis that existed between Roman and Arab elements in what today is the Spanish state “the *Moros* were in general considered as conquerors, and the religious differences have contributed to a rather hostile attitude on the part of the inhabitants of the Peninsula.” As a consequence, “the term Moors, in the various Western languages, was not dissociated from a certain depreciatory connotation” (*ibid.*). The usage of *moro* or *mora* insultingly is quite extended in Spain and resurfaces the imaginary of what has come to be known in Spanish historiography as the “Spanish Reconquista”, where the Christian Spaniards fought the “Muslim invaders” and ended up expelling them from the Peninsula, in 1492.⁶²

⁶¹ Karrouch obtained the Premi Columna Jove for this novel, a literary award within the young adult literary circuit. The prize contributed to the relative fame that the author gained in Catalonia, where she was asked to give many talks and attend many conferences. Nine years after the publication of *De Nador a Vic* Karrouch published *Petjades de Nador*, in which she keeps exploring the same topics that vertebrate the 2004 text and where she “dóna resposta a totes les preguntes que els lectors li han anat formulant durant aquests anys en les conferències que ha impartit als centres escolars” (Castellanos 2018: 119). This proves to what extent she, like El Hachmi, became an interlocutor of those read as immigrants in Catalonia, as shall be explored in Chapter 4.

⁶² The incursion of the far-right party Vox in the Spanish political scenario has awoken the imaginary of the so-called “Reconquista”, for its leaders –and, due to an echoing effect, Pablo Casado’s Popular Party–, have alluded to it quite often in the 2019 campaign for the Spanish general elections.

Najat El Hachmi is well aware of the fact that such an imaginary persists in the Catalonia that she has encountered, and incorporates it into her book to criticise the hypocrisy of her new society when it comes to the way it interacts with the religious apparatus:

I els que tenen por de perdre aquest estatus de país laic, els que es deixen endur per un subconscient col·lectiu ple de batalles de moros i cristians i reconquistes del Cid Campeador, obliden sovint que diumenge han d'anar a la comunió de la filla petita de la germana de la Paquita, que el maig es casaran aquells cosins segons a la parròquia del Remei o que porten flors cada u de novembre al cementiri per recordar tots els morts de la família.

(2004: 127)

The (re)introduction of Islam into the Catalan territory is collectively perceived as a threat that might endanger the non-denominational character of the Spanish state, but those who understand things this way forget the syncretism at the heart of any cultural tradition. Letting themselves be guided by the often ill-considered ideas in the press about Islam,⁶³ the population of Vic that El Hachmi and her family encountered used the pretext of religion to reinforce the Othering process of the Muslim “immigrants”, obviating the heterogeneity at the heart of the North African geography when it comes to the way religion is understood and practised, and the historical nuances that separate Morocco from Algeria, Tunisia or Mauritania. But the author exhibits an idea of Islam that is very complex and not at all monolithic, stating for example that the way she understands it is very different to how her parents understand it. She herself went through several phases in her personal connection to the religious tradition she inherited, and at one point, when justifying why she has not raised her son in a solid religious milieu, she states that those traditions the Catalan society perceives as problematic are but “pretexts d’identitat” (*ibid.*), pointing to the idea that religious beliefs might transform themselves into cultural markers, an idea that she will further develop in her fiction.

Religion, and the traditions, behaviours and codes by which it is informed, are also considered as potentially problematic in the camps where the harki were put. Kerchouche gets to learn that the camp-chiefs, together with their wives and a net of social workers, launched themselves into persuading the harki families to either abandon their customs –which had to do with

⁶³ The Observatorio de la Islamofobia en los medios, a web-based platform that is supported by many organizations, was created in 2017 with the aim of identifying information that is biased and Islamophobic and also as a guide of good practices. It analyzes the main journalistic publications in Spain (see <http://www.observatorioislamofobia.org/>).

cooking, the way they dressed or the celebrations they practised— or to adapt them. Kerchouche repeatedly talks of the eagerness shown by the officials in charge to unveil the harki women, which, again, places us back in the narrative of the colonial dynamics put in place in French Algeria. The question of the veil is a very complex and nuanced one that demands very attentive and contextualised interpretations, which this research is not going to tackle thoroughly.⁶⁴ I shall focus on the way the veil is portrayed in the works that I study only.

1.2 Gendered and Biased Readings of the Other

In a visit to one of the camps, Dalila Kerchouche has trouble finding the courage to call the camp-chief, of whom she speaks as a “dictateur”, because she knows he forbade all the women in the camp to practise their Arab and Kabyle habits, like henna, and pulled off her mother’s foulard (2003: 105). The author understands that gesture as a strategy to impose assimilation on the harki women and perceives it through the colonial lenses when she claims that, through that attitude, the goal of those in charge at the camp was to “civilize” the harki families, who they perceived as “primitifs” (106). In the camps, where the harkis are disconnected to both their French surrounding and their native land, elements like the veil are constructed with deep meaning, for they are very much connected with one’s sense of identity. That explains why Dalila’s mother is so upset when the officer tears off her foulard; a memory that she transmits to her daughter, who also interiorises the humiliation behind such an act. This gesture lends itself to being read as yet another example of the violence of the former colonial regime that sees itself perpetuated in the camps.⁶⁵

The fact that women were targeted more so than men in regard to this “forced assimilation” detected by Kerchouche is worth highlighting. In a volume entitled *Gender and Migration in Southern Europe*, sociologist Floya Anthias points at the genderdisation of the migrant Other:

⁶⁴ Particularly relevant because of the echo it has had in both academic and political circles is Frantz Fanon’s “Algeria Unveiled”, which points at the dynamics of (in)visibilisation put in tension by the element of the veil, and how it relates to identity issues (in Fanon 1959).

⁶⁵ In her important novel *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* Leïla Sebbar introduces the violence of the colonial experience through a collection of pictures, *Femmes Algériennes 1960*, portraying unveiled Algerian women “devant l’appareil photographique que manipulait le Français soldat-photographe, pour le recensement de plusieurs villages de l’intérieur”; women whose faces “avaient toutes devant l’objectif-mitrailleur, le même regard, intense, farouche, d’une sauvagerie que l’image ne saurait qu’archiver, sans jamais la maîtriser ni la dominer.” (1982: 220) The pictures had to function as a complement for these women’s identity cards, aimed at controlling their displacements.

Whilst nationalism, as Benedict Anderson notes, constructs imagined communities with a sense of belonging, it also requires from an “other” from which it can imagine itself as separate. The migrant “other” is gendered as well as racialized and classed. Gender is a significant component of ethnic landscapes. Cultural groups, nations and ethnic groups are imagined as woman [...] and women are particular objects of national and ethnic discourses and policies in terms of the bio reproduction of the group/nation.

(2000: 24-25)

The genderisation of the Other is also something that Edward W. Said discussed in his seminal work *Orientalism*, where he claims that the Orient was constructed as a woman, made docile and easy to penetrate (2003: 206). This idea of the Orient could very well be equated to that the chief of the camp has of the harkis, particularly women, when he believes that they have to be civilized, thus reinforcing the Manichean and homogeneizing discourse that also vertebrates the Orientalist vision Europe has held of the Oriental world for centuries, as noted by Said.⁶⁶ In *Woman – Nation – State*, Anthias, together with Yuval-Davis, understands that women have been made into a symbol of the nation; and as such they are literally and symbolically its perpetuators, because biologically they give birth to the future national subjects and they pass on to them the cultural artefacts attached to it (1989: 8-9). Thus, it is not a surprise that the apparatus that vertebrates the camps targets the wives of the former combatants, for they are seen as holding the ultimate responsibility in passing on Algeria to their descendants.⁶⁷

In *Jo també sóc catalana*, Najat El Hachmi also speaks of the added pressure she feels the autochthonous Catalan population puts on her because of the fact that she is a woman. They will keep telling her to “free” herself from her origins, thus putting forward an idea of El Hachmi’s native cultural tradition as backwards and misogynistic. But because the author is

⁶⁶ In *Mujeres argelinas en lucha por las libertades democráticas*, Carmelo Pérez Beltrán traces the many roles played by Algerian women in the country’s contemporary history, discussing how they fitted into the academic, labour and political spheres, and focusing on them as active agents in History, throughout the colonial and post-colonial period. Pérez Beltrán signals that the French colonial administration made an effort in enacting practices of acculturation that focused on un-veiling women. In his contribution, he also problematizes the image that is associated with women’s participation in the Algerian war, especially from the anti-colonial side, for he shows how the FLN, too, would make an instrumentalized use of Algerian women. At first, the FLN would be reticent to allow women into the ALN and when integrated as part of the armed struggle, they would most often be tied to practices connected with their role as caretakers as it is assigned in the Algerian familial code. Most importantly, once the conflict was over, the protagonism that some of them did achieve was not maintained once Algeria got its independence (see Pérez Beltrán 1997).

⁶⁷ On the same line, Winifred Woodhull points out the fact that French society conceives Maghrebi girls at once as docile and “the most assimilable” of all the “minorities” and as a threat for the continuity of the French nation (1993: 48).

able to acquire a nuanced insight on what she terms as Western feminism, she will get to problematize it, thus, undoing yet another Manichean construction.⁶⁸ El Hachmi's work gives us insight into how the migrant Other is constructed as being gendered, as signalled in Anthias earlier quotation. The liberation to which El Hachmi has to aspire, according to the Catalan women she deems at first as truly feminists, has to do with abandoning the idea of the hijab.⁶⁹ We learn that she starts using it at a time when she is navigating her sense of identity, and this piece of clothing connects her with the women in her family. By succumbing to the demands of these women and voluntarily giving up on it, she aims to strengthen her links with the community of Catalan women to which she wants to belong, who are part of the Western modern world that she has learnt to construct from a positive standpoint.

Vaig aprendre a sentir vergonya de la pròpia procedència, a menystenir la imatge de la mare, de l'àvia, només perquè no s'adeien al model de vida que jo volia: una dona lliure, independent, com creia que era la dona occidental. I d'aquesta manera, durant anys vaig perdre'm la saviesa de totes aquelles dones, l'experiència adquirida a l'altra banda de l'Estret no era del meu interès.

(2004: 155)

Already as a teenager, El Hachmi is really drawn to feminism, a preoccupation that impregnates all her work, both journalistic and literary. In her first autobiographical account, we learn how the feminist cause is mobilised by the autochthonous Catalan population as a tool that ultimately deepens the binary discourse separating the “immigrants” and the “true” Catalans. By equating liberation with the loss of the hijab, those who launch this message towards El Hachmi are, hence, implying that the hijab –and consequently Islam– equals submission, which does not correspond with the idea of being an independent woman that El Hachmi seeks. The veil functions as a very graphic metaphor that makes difference visible, more so than skin

⁶⁸ In the framework of the 2019 edition of the literary festival Kosmopolis, Najat El Hachmi held a conversation with Mona Eltahawy about Eltahawy's book *Headscarves and Hymens* (2015), which drifted to a debate about so-called “Islamic feminism” and its articulation within Western contexts. This is a topic of interest for El Hachmi who, as I am submitting this thesis, is about to publish an essay on the matter. The text will appear simultaneously in both Catalan and Spanish under the titles *Sempre han parlat per nosaltres*, and *Siempre han hablado por nosotras*, respectively (2019). Out of the scope of this research work is a discussion of “Islamic feminism”, which is described by Valentine Moghadam as a “Koran-centred reform movement by Muslim women with the linguistic and theological knowledge to challenge patriarchal interpretations and offer alternative readings in pursuit of women's advancement and in refutation of Western stereotypes and Islamist orthodoxy alike.” (2004; online) For a discussion about the importance of “Islamic feminism” in European and most particularly Catalan contexts see, for example, Prado 2010. The volume that includes Prado's essay also incorporates a transcription of a debate held by Ndeye Andújar, who has organized several conferences on the matter and belongs to the Junta Islàmica Catalana, and Wassyla Tamzali (Andújar and Tamzali 2010: 139-148).

⁶⁹ In this thesis, *hijab*, *veil*, *foulard* –following the denomination used by Kerchouche–, and *scarf* are used synonymously to refer to the piece of clothing that covers the hair of some Muslim women.

colour. According to this logic, if El Hachmi aims at losing her “immigrant” status and claiming her Catalanness, she has to unveil, which means losing her Muslim attachment –again, we see the fallacious grounds on which stereotypes and prejudices are set; this idea obviates the fact that a woman can understand herself as Muslim without wearing any kind of veil over her hair, in the same way that some women might be veiled not for religious reasons.

In his study of the Algerian scenario, Carmelo Pérez Beltrán has explored the opposing meanings with which the veil was constructed in French Algeria, by both colonial and anti-colonial forces.

El velo durante la ocupación colonial se ha convertido en un verdadero caballo de batalla, especialmente a partir de los años 30. Para la administración colonial, el hecho de desprenderse del velo significaba un importante paso asimilacionista y aculturizante. Se trataba en definitiva de utilizar a las mujeres como instrumento para minar las estructuras de la sociedad tradicional argelina con el fin de salvar las distancias más patentes entre ambas poblaciones. Los nacionalistas, por el contrario, defienden a ultranza el uso del velo; [...] durante la época colonial su uso se convierte en símbolo de resistencia de un pueblo oprimido contra su opresor y símbolo igualmente de identidad cultural y religiosa de la población musulmana en general que lucha por conservar sus raíces, sus leyes, su lengua y su idiosincrasia.

(1997: 92)

As signalled by Pérez Beltrán, women were at the core of the colonial tensions and their bodies were used as an instrument to implement dichotomous readings of reality. Along the same lines, in *El velo elegido*, Lena De Botton, Lidia Puigvert and Fatima Taleb believe that what they term “Western feminism”, constructed as canonical, ignores or looks down on those transformative practices arising from veiled women, because they are deemed as being subjected to a strong patriarchal tradition (2004: 69). They call for a revision of such biased conceptions, which are based on an essentializing idea that does not account for the diversity that traverses those women who define themselves as Muslim, some of whom are not veiled:

El verdadero ataque a la libertad de las mujeres no es el hijab, sino interpretar que la opción de llevarlo supone una agresión. La jerarquía de poder en la que se basan la obligatoriedad, la prohibición y el no-reconocimiento de las opiniones de esas mujeres son la verdadera concesión

al régimen patriarcal, de ahí que necesitemos huir de los planteamientos de poder donde se asienta el patriarcado y aceptar una libertad de opciones de manera reflexiva y opcional, no impuesta.

(78)

De Botton, Puigvert and Taleb's reflections aim at dismantling the false binarism upon which the issue of the hijab is sustained in the contemporary European context, whereby, according to the authors, the notion of gender equality is mobilized at the expense of the freedom of choice of women who identify as Muslims:

Lo que aquí nos encontramos es con dos conceptos opuestos de igualdad. Por una parte, uno vinculado con la homogeneidad, donde las diferencias no deben manifestarse. Por otra parte, una idea de igualdad donde las diferencias identitarias deben estar representadas en la construcción del estado y ser visibles en el espacio público.

(54)

In *Jo també sóc catalana*, El Hachmi follows the same line of argumentation. The author remarks that the veil changes the bearer's outward and corporal appearance, which is important to the extent that it determines the way someone is perceived by others. In the following quote, El Hachmi highlights the difficulty she had whilst growing up of finding clothes that adjusted to her body well enough to please both the Catalan society and her community of origin:

I ara el gran repte de triar-te la roba, no pas per molt presumida, no. Has de trobar la mesura justa de les coses: que els pantalons no siguin massa ajustats als ulls dels marroquins, però tampoc massa amples als ulls dels autòctons [...] En definitiva: has de fer els malabarismes que calguin per anar decent per a l'estètica nord-africana i alhora no semblar una pobra noia reprimida davant dels originaris de Catalunya.⁷⁰ Perquè la imatge, ja se sap, és molt important en aquesta societat. Per segons què, compta més un 90-60-90 que unes quantes matrícules a la universitat, sort en tenim que som dones alliberades i no pas esclaves dels homes.

(134-135)⁷¹

⁷⁰ Anthropologist Yolanda Aixelà remarks that the usage of certain pieces of clothing amongst men and women, and she focuses on the *hijab*, in Europe “forma parte de una tradición cultural en los países de origen que, en contextos migratorios, homogeneiza al colectivo árabe y beréber musulmán sin distinción de nacionalidad, y que se interpreta como un seguimiento fidedigno del Islam.” (2012: 20)

⁷¹ As noted by Marta Segarra, El Hachmi's “virulent attack on European women's lifestyles ultimately shows a great discomfort she feels both for this model and that of the traditional women from her homeland. As she says,

El Hachmi's final remarks, the ironic undertone of which reinforces their demanding nature, challenge the "ethnocentric" –as the author herself describes it– vision Catalan society seems to have of her native background. Just as she pointed to the double standards of her neighbours when it came to the way they judged religious beliefs, here, too, she criticizes the fact they construct veiled women in a hegemonic way as submissive beings and the Western women as the opposite, when in reality women on the Northern rim of the Mediterranean are subjected to a very mischievous beauty standard, regulating how their body should look (having close-to-impossible measurements and hairless, in El Hachmi's opinion, 156). The authors of *El velo elegido* insist on the need to deconstruct such stereotypical reading of "the Muslim woman", in singular.⁷² Using the veil as the source of their arguments, they claim that this piece of clothing,

en muchas ciudades occidentales [...] constituye la afirmación de un tipo de feminidad y de identidad cultural diferente a la hegemónica. En las actuales sociedades europeas, el hecho de que muchas mujeres musulmanas decidan llevar el velo se convierte en una reivindicación no tan sólo de sus derechos como mujeres musulmanas, sino también de sus derechos como mujeres.

(2004: 21)⁷³

This same thought is voiced by the Parti des Indigènes de la République, whose spokesperson, Houria Bouteldja, firmly states that the French state uses the veil in coercive ways. Thus, she claims that the French administration:

castiga les dones amb vel pel fet d'haver desobeït el projecte integracionista, que projectava convertir les dones magribines (i africanes) en el que anomenem *beurettes* (femení de *beur*: terme creat a partir de la inversió de les síl·labes del mot *arabe*, emprat pel jovent d'origen magribí a partir de la dècada de 1980 com a estratègia d'apoderament): dones emancipades que

she feels 'right in the line of fire' [...] This attitude is echoed in the name *Not Whores Nor Submissive*, chosen by the French political association in defence of women's rights (<http://www.npns.fr/>)" (Segarra 2015: 78).

⁷² They aim, too, to enable a rethinking of what Islam and islamicate practices mean in different scenarios: "A menudo, se identifica el Islam como causante directo de todas las desigualdades sociales que se originan en el seno de estas comunidades, mientras se minusvalora el papel activo que ejercen los actores sociales en la construcción de la historia. El Islam es hoy lo que las sociedades musulmanas han hecho de él, al igual que sucede con el resto de religiones y teorías políticas. Se ignora así la gran complejidad de una realidad tan amplia como el espacio social y político del Islam." (Botton *et al.* 2004: 113)

⁷³ Along the same lines, Bramon notes that in European contexts "moltes musulmanes reivindiquen lliurement el seu dret a mostrar que pertanyen a una altra cultura i no sempre es cobreixen per motius de religió, sinó com a afirmació cultural i nacional i, sobretot, com a mostra del seu rebuig a la cultural dominant i avassalladora." (2010: 86)

es caguen en l'islam, en les seves famílies, que s'alliberen, que diuen que els homes de la seva comunitat són una merda, etcètera. Aquest és el projecte colonial integracionista, que demana que ens postrem davant dels valors de la República, davant del feminisme republicà, davant de tot el que ens aporta França, com a eines d'alliberament i emancipació. Ara bé, les dones amb vel rebutgen aquest projecte. I, de fet, el simple fet de dur el vel és una provocació enorme, perquè les converteix en *antibeurettes*.

(2016: 15)

Bouteldja believes the veil is the expression of collective resistance. Understanding herself as a postcolonial subject, she believes that “[l]’Estat francès racista i imperialista vol despullar-nos, allunyar-nos i arrencar-nos de les nostres solidaritats familiars.” In response to that attitude, the social body’s reaction is to refuse to go through with it, a reaction that Bouteldja values deeply. However, she remains wary of some of the interpretations –especially those coming from the left– of the reasons behind the veiling of Muslim women: “És un tema molt i molt difícil d’explicar.” (*ibid.*) Along these same lines, in *The Politics of the Veil*, Joan Wallach Scott explores the ways in which “the representation of a homogeneous and dangerous ‘other’ secured a mythic vision of the French republic, one and indivisible.” (2010: 10) She argues that the contemporary identity of the French nation, structured around the values and beliefs of the republic at its highest form, is mythical and based, in large part, on “its negative portrayal of Islam” (7). In order for that portrayal to be effective, the political discourse –which Scott understands in terms of interpretation, “the imposition of meaning on phenomena in the world” (*ibid.*)– has built a series of dichotomous pairings that foster the image of a very narrow and retrograde image of Islam.

Yolanda Aixelà notes that Muslim women who reside in Europe (and she focuses on the Spanish scenario) began to veil in the last decade of the twentieth century in order to “contrarrestar las críticas que recibe el Islam en las sociedades receptoras de migración: su presentación social del cuerpo es una toma de posición frente a la estigmatización que el Islam viene sufriendo, y su elección de vestir velos las aleja del preponderante discurso que anteriormente se hacía de su situación.” (2012: 21) Knowing that El Hachmi has “unveiled” the questionable grounds that sustain her female neighbours’ claims, the fact that she ends up dismissing the hijab should not be read as if she followed their predicaments, but as a much more nuanced choice that translates the complexity of her process of self-understanding, a

process that passes through comprehending how her manifold native cultural background is (mis)understood in Catalonia.

In *Recasting Postcolonialism: Women Writing Between Worlds* (2001), Anne Donadey uses the work of two Franco-Algerian women, Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar, to deploy postcolonial reading strategies, hitherto mainly applied to works issued from the Anglophone world, to the Mediterranean context, namely the Franco-Algerian scenario.⁷⁴ When discussing Sebbar's novel *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts*, she describes what, according to her, is the assimilation policy put in practice in France with regard to immigrants: "What is most representative of other cultures must be cut off for the other to be accepted and assimilated into the fabric of French life [...] Thus what could be viewed as the richness of cultural difference is instead rejected as unnecessary excess." (Donadey 2001: 133) Donadey's ideas seem to fit not only the context described by Kerchouche within the camps, but the Catalan situation, too, considering El Hachmi's earlier insights.

Donadey's reflections are triggered by the name of Sebbar's protagonist, which in France transforms from Shéherazade to Shérazade, therefore losing the "he", "la syllable la plus suave, la plus orientale" (in Sebbar 1991: 164). Such a transformation is read by Donadey as a cultural loss, which she will consider together with the protagonist's other change of names throughout the novel. Shérazade becomes Camille or Rosa in different situations, a gesture that will be useful to the runaway in order to "pass" as an autochthonous subject and hide the first name her family gave her, a name that together with her green eyes, awakens exotic readings within those who understand themselves as "Français de souche". The question of names as elements connected to that idea of "passing" is also present in the work of the authors whose work I consider.

I already noted that in her 2003 account Kerchouche explains that the public workers attempted to regulate the harki customs within the camps. Particularly significant was the insistence of these French representatives on convincing the harkis to give French names to their new-borns. Names are always an important marker of one's identity, but they are particularly charged in

⁷⁴ In "Contesting Contexts: Francophone Thought and Anglophone Postcolonialism" John McLeod notes that it was not until 1997 that Alec Hargreaves and Mark McKinney "published what they believed to be the first collection of essays devoted specifically to minority postcolonial cultures in France", where they would highlight the fact that although postcolonial studies were widely present in the English-speaking work, in France "the post-colonial problematic [was] seldom encountered in political or cultural discourse" (in McLeod 2003: 192).

contexts of displacement, for they might be a link to a certain cultural identity, too. Names play a relevant role in how the subject is perceived by others, and that is why social assistants claimed that French names –and not Arab ones, which in a Europe that tends to equate “Arab” with “Muslim” are linked to the Islamic tradition– would make it easier for the new generation born inside the camps to interact with French society, a society that hoists high its secularism. However, Kerchouche reads that persistence along the lines of the colonial dynamics she identifies at being operative within the camps –she even talks of “forced assimilation” (2003: 85)–, and, on their part, harki mothers (for the gesture of naming a baby is linked, in the reality unfolded by Kerchouche’s work, to the maternal realm) are reticent to give in to this petition.

Zahia Rahmani has also paid a particular attention to names and surnames in her work, which she speaks of in terms of “événement” (see Rice; online). Indeed, names might punctuate an individual’s sense of belonging, they might be mobilised as a political act. In Rahmani’s first work, *Moze*, the author came up with the title by contracting her father’s name with her own, thus showcasing the importance of the paternal figure in her subjectivity. We have seen how that relationship is also central in Kerchouche’s work; furthermore, our author gives a lot of space to the figure of her mother in her first published text, too.⁷⁵ We learn how Dalila’s mother struggles in her new context and how she understands the fact of naming her babies as tied to Algeria. Kerchouche, who is the one who filters both her mother’s memories and feelings, writes that denying her mother the naming of her babies felt as if she was being denied her maternal role, for naming her babies would be like tracing a line connecting her descendants with her origins. This kind of reflections allow us to understand the importance of familial genealogies in the cultural tradition inherited by Kerchouche, and El Hachmi, too, as shall be explored in the following chapter.

Names also play a significant role in the work by Najat El Hachmi, in which we come across consecrated family names, names that transform themselves and others of which we never get to know –here we also see absence as a marker of meaning. As I pointed out at the beginning of this section, the fictional works of the authors I study complement the reflections they put across in their autobiographical texts. Whilst in the Kerchouche case her novel *Leila* gives

⁷⁵ Another writer that understands herself as being the daughter of a harki, Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, published in 2006 a book entitled *Nos mères, paroles blessées*, a collection of stories as told by the wives of the harkis who settled in France. It is worth noting that despite the fact that all these authors put their fathers in the frontline of their oeuvre, they all, by different means, leave room so the voices of their mothers are heard, too.

names the same value they have in *Mon père, ce harki* –the protagonist informs us of how the social workers pressured her mother and other harki women to name their babies after French references (2006: 62)–, El Hachmi’s fiction develops an issue she did not really touch upon in her first work –we only know that it was her father, who already lived in Catalonia by the time Najat’s mother was pregnant with her, who decided upon the name of the baby (2004: 174)– and helps us understand the value names might have to an individual identity, and how they are conjugated with regard to labels.

In El Hachmi’s first novel, *L’últim patriarca*, we never get to know the name of the protagonist, a lack of name that contrasts very sharply with the way her father is presented. The novel starts with the inscription of Mimoun, to whom the title of the novel refers, into a big chain of patriarchs; such an inscription makes of him the inheritor of that whole genealogical line. Being named, thus, is equated with inheriting a past, an already-formed identity that needs to live on. Because he is responsible for continuing that line, he is destined to be the next patriarch within his family, but his migration to Catalonia will alter the way reality will unfold. It could be suggested that the transformation of his name once he sets foot in Catalan territories signals the modification of the patriarchal order for which the novel accounts. A relative of Mimoun who already lived in Catalonia suggests to him that he should transform his name into one easier to pronounce for Catalan speakers, following the example of other Maghrebi men working in Catalonia, and so Mimoun becomes Manel on the other side of the Mediterranean.

Such a change marks the acquisition of a new identity for Mimoun, as if he needed another self in order to build a life in Catalonia. He always believed that he was destined for something better than what he had in Morocco, and his search for his rightful life is listed in the novel as the primary reason for his migration. As soon as he sets foot in Catalonia, he becomes Manel, a baptism that is, in fact, presented as a masquerade. He claims he is 18 in order to be able to work, when in fact he is 16; he starts eating pork, despite the fact that he is Muslim; the way he relates to women also changes, for he starts having vaginal sex with them (El Hachmi 2008: 83-86). Despite this metamorphosis, the narrator, his daughter, will always refer to him as Mimoun, which can be read as a sign that she sees through the Catalan Manel and has learnt to understand that despite this new self, the capricious, violent, volatile and misogynistic person he was in Morocco ended up resurfacing in Catalonia, too. It should be noted that, when compared to the importance they have in the Western world, names are particularly relevant within the Arab world. All names with Arabic origins are either connected to the Islamic

tradition or have a particular meaning, a meaning that is believed to forge the character of the person who bears them. Mimoun means “the happy one, the fortunate one”; the character we are introduced to will make it his mission to seek that fortune, his *maktub*— an Arabic term that encapsulates the idea of destiny, as it translates as “it is written”⁷⁶—, but the narrator will be the ultimate culprit for the breaking of the order he represents.

In El Hachmi’s first novel, therefore, we are presented with a woman who is not entitled to a name, who is not destined to be inscribed within the chain of names that is reserved for the great patriarchs but who ends up putting a conclusion to it. That is why her anonymity strengthens the significance of that rupture. The narrator’s anonymity is spread to the circle of people for whom she cares. We never learn her friends’ names —who are referred to as “friend number 1”, “friend number 2” and so forth—, nor the name of the teacher that introduces her to a set of cultural references completely different from the one she inherited from her family. We do not learn the name of the man she ends up marrying or that of her uncle, whose familial ties to the protagonist are crucial to understand the significance of the sex act at the end of the novel. On the contrary, the narrator’s father, his friends and the lovers he has whilst in Catalonia are all named throughout the text. By creating a very clearly dualistic universe of characters, whereby one side is named and the other one remains unnamed, Najat El Hachmi stresses the irreconcilable distance between father and daughter.

Despite the fact that El Hachmi’s fiction does tend to avoid proper nouns, something that holds true also in her second novel, *La caçadora de cossos*, every work activates different meanings in regard to such absences. In *La filla estrangera*, the author builds a feminine universe that remains unnamed and whose backbone is also a parent-child relationship, but this time we never get to know the names of either the narrator nor that of her mother, whose significance is paramount in understanding not only the thoughts that the narrator formulates, but also the title of the novel and what it conjugates.⁷⁷ The use of the adjective *estrangera* to refer to the protagonist lends itself to being read in multiple ways. On the one hand, the narrator is a

⁷⁶ The significance of this term will be discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

⁷⁷ As readers, this is something that shocks us, for the names of the characters also help in developing a sense of empathy towards them. We learn that in the characters’ original cultural tradition, it was customary to wait for seven days before naming a baby, because new-borns, just like newly married women, find themselves in a position of vulnerability (El Hachmi 2015: 97). Because naming is so strongly connected with acknowledging someone’s existence, it was necessary to wait until the baby was strong enough not to die. “Sense nom encara no s’és persona i així la pèrdua és menys dolorosa? Ho és el record de la mare que ha perdut el fill pel simple fet que no el pot fixar en la memòria com fixaria un fill registrat?” (98)

stranger to her mother, something the reader fully comprehends after finishing the whole text. By the end of the novel we understand that what we just read is in fact the life her mother envisioned for her, a life that she ultimately dismisses. Throughout the text, the protagonist narrates all the concessions she makes to her mother: she gives up an academic career, she gives in to her mother's will to marry her off to a cousin and she even starts wearing the veil following the strong suggestions by her mother and her new husband –to whom she refers as either her cousin or her “cosí-marit”, as if to problematize the nature of their relationship and somehow discredit their marriage. The fact that the narrator ultimately runs away from that life signals her distancing from the path her mother projected for her.

Like in the previously discussed novel, in *La filla estrangera*, too, the narrator's sense of identity has to do with navigating the manifold cultural elements that are presented to her. In this text, the mother of the narrator is very strongly linked to Morocco, almost as if her character was a personification of the country: she has maintained her cooking habits, which in the novel function as a very strong marker of identity, her clothing is the same she had in North Africa and the people with whom she interacts are mainly Maghrebi women. Because of that, we understand that the life she envisions for her daughter is the life that she believes a Moroccan woman would lead in Morocco. However, the fact that the protagonist grew up in another context makes it impossible for her to “perform” fully and satisfactorily her Moroccan identity, something which proves true every time the narrator and her mother visit their land of origin: “Aquí al poble, però, no puc evitar posar-me nerviosa per cada cosa que faig, com si estigués a prova” (2015: 40). Her shakiness when cooking fried potatoes, which she has cooked many times without further complications, for example, a shakiness that is both physical and emotional, stems from her realization that she filters the reality she finds in Morocco with the ontological and thought-patterns she has acquired in Catalonia.

In line with what happens in her other works, in narrating the process of subjective construction of her main characters, El Hachmi builds the Moroccan and the Catalan scenarios in a rather binomial way, whereby both spaces are constructed in a relationship of opposition –a dichotomical understanding that at times fails to point to the nuances that traverse these spaces and which would blur the marked contrast established by the author. Thus, when the narrator of *La filla estrangera* finds herself in Morocco, she feels she is not at ease, for she lacks the intimacy she so cherishes in Catalonia, where she can masturbate every night to fall asleep, a practice that has ended up being part of her own habits: “que jo tinc uns costums propis de fa

anys que no puc deixar així de sobte” (48) –of course, in Catalonia, there would be situations where she would not be able to masturbate as she can do in her room. In her native village, however, she does not have the space to relate to her own body the way she does in Catalonia, a significant fact inasmuch as many of the thoughts that trouble the narrator refer to the body. She is, thus, a stranger in the land of her mother, a land that is supposed to be her land, too, although she cannot quite make that assumption –she will always use quotation marks whenever using expressions like “casa nostra” or “la nostra terra”, when referring to Morocco, marking them somehow, signalling the distance she feels towards a clear idea of home. And by being a stranger in Morocco, she is also a stranger to her mother, who is the personification of Morocco in Catalonia.

El Hachmi further emphasizes the estrangement the daughter feels towards her mother by attenuating the mother’s voice within the text. *L’últim patriarca* is divided into two sections: the first one spans from the birth of Mimoun until the arrival of his family to Catalonia, and all this gets filtered by the narrative voice of Mimoun’s daughter, to whom the second part is dedicated, for in it we learn about her process of subjectivity construction in Catalonia. El Hachmi thus dedicates half of the novel to Mimoun, to build the dualism and the clash between him and the narrator. *La filla estrangera* is more of an internal monologue in which the protagonist acknowledges the weight her mother has had throughout her life and how it has determined her existence, but the mother’s voice is never directly heard, her actions are not presented separately from her daughter’s, as they were in *L’últim patriarca*. El Hachmi enmeshes the two voices to signal to what extent the daughter has become a continuation of her mother. By the end of the novel, once we know that the narrator has broken that string, we learn that the writing exercise of the protagonist is indeed a gesture to undo such an enmeshment and regain the reins of her existence: “Escriuria la seva història [her mother’s] i així podria destriar-la de la meva. Escriuria la seva història i així podria ser jo sense ser per ella però també ser jo sense ser contra ella.” (213)

In this novel, too, there ends up being a fracture in the parent-child relationship, as was the case in *L’últim patriarca*, but contrarily to what happens in the other novel, here we are presented with a scar more than with a total rupture. The genealogical line is also halted, for the protagonist cuts any contact with her mother, but she ends up giving birth to a baby, a baby-boy she will give to her mother as a “penyora”, which in Catalan can either mean punishment or guarantee. That child, who the narrator describes as incestuous because it is born out of her

love for her mother –and since he is born only because the daughter follows through with her mother’s will to marry her to her cousin–, will be named by the mother, “[u]n fill noi a qui ha volgut posar el nom del Profeta.” (204) This last deed is very different from the vengeance the narrator enacts in *L’últim patriarca*, which clearly signifies a gesture of opposition by the narrator towards her father. The daughter in *La filla estrangera* wants to own her life, but in order not to be against her mother; she accounts her mother responsible for naming the baby, thus for providing him with the foundations of his identity.

1.3 The Internal/External Stranger

The closing sentences of the novel, in which the narrator opens up about her story, hold the key to knowing about yet another meaning for *stranger*. We understand her final escape and her revision of the part of her life she accounts for as a way for claiming her own subjectivity, separating it from that of her mother. By giving in to her mother’s wishes and letting her own self be conflated with and even absorbed by her mother’s the narrator becomes a stranger to herself. In *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, Julia Kristeva points out the fact that we are all conformed by a “face cachée de notre identité”, the *étranger* that inhabits every one of us (1988: 9).

For Kristeva, acknowledging the stranger in us is crucial in order to transform the way the figure of the stranger, as associated with the other, is perceived collectively in the West, within societies that were already diverse at the time Kristeva wrote her book and are even more so nowadays, for it dilutes the binaristic mechanisms based upon “we vs. them” dynamics, because it renders “le ‘nous’ problématique, peut-être impossible, l’étranger commence lorsque surgit la conscience de la différence et s’achève lorsque nous nous reconnaissons tous étrangers, rebelles aux liens et aux communautés.” (*ibid.*)

According to Kristeva, the stranger is in possession of enough critical distance as to observe and see through him/herself and the others (16), which is of great value in order to make things

relative, to make him/herself relative and thus question fixed ideas of truth.⁷⁸ In such disposition, the stranger inhabits a suspended space, like the one I argued both El Hachmi and Kerchouche occupy. “N’appartenir à aucun lieu, aucun temps, aucun amour. L’origine perdue, l’enracinement impossible, la mémoire plongeante, le présent en suspens. L’espace de l’étranger est un train en marche, un avion en vol, la transition même qui exclut l’arrêt.” (17-18) Illuminated by Kristeva’s words, the authors present us with characters and autobiographical accounts that put forward their own strangers, which in turn facilitates a thorough examination of issues to do with both individual and collective identities.

The following quotation reflects upon some of the questions that the protagonist of *La filla estrangera* asks herself in regard to her own process of identity-formation:

C’est dire qu’établi en soi, l’étranger n’a pas de soi. Tout juste une assurance vide, sans valeur, qui axe ses possibilités d’être constamment autre, au gré des autres et des circonstances. *Je fais ce qu’on veut, mais ce n’est pas “moi” – “moi” est ailleurs, “moi” n’appartient à personne, “moi” n’appartient pas à “moi”,... “moi” existe-t-il?*

(19)

In one of his letters to Paul Demeny, Rimbaud wrote the celebrated formula “Je est un autre”, whose echo resonates in Kristeva’s words. Rimbaud made use of the literary field to expand upon that idea; similarly, an analysis of the texts produced by the authors on whom I focus allows for a nuanced understanding to how one’s sense of identity is connected to others, how it is shaped by others’ subjectivities –realisations that put into question the existence of a core self.

The protagonist of *La filla estrangera* ends up complying with her mother’s wishes and veils herself, because the mother worries about what people in Morocco would say if her married

⁷⁸ In discussing the importance of the figure of Ruth as a (re)founder of the Israelites as a people, Bonnie Honig claims that “[h]er ability to [inspire and reenchant a jaundiced nation] is in direct proportion to her distance (conceptual, epistemological) from the people she joins.” “Foreignness as distance” plays a role in Ruth’s abilities (2001: 42). Kristeva has also studied the figure of Ruth and the value of the kind of otherness that she personifies: “Kristeva argues [that] Ruth’s great service to the Israelites [is the fact that] she disabuses them of their fantasies of wholeness and makes them more open to difference and otherness, preparing the way for a welcome cosmopolitan identity” (in Honig 2001: 45). Using Kristeva’s theorizations as a cue, Ruth Tsoffar has studied the figure of Ruth from the “gendered foreignness” she plays out in the Bible. Tsoffar reads Ruth as the possibility of inter-cultural hospitality and the enabler for the unfolding of new ontologies (2007).

daughter did not veil (El Hachmi 2015: 181). It is worth stating here that the Morocco she refers to is a village in the Riffian region of the country, and not a big city like Rabat or Casablanca; a contextualised reading of the main family of the novel, which considers the class axis, is of major importance in understanding how the characters interact with their different spaces of socialization. Upon veiling herself, the *filla estrangera* looks at herself in the mirror and she does not recognize herself in the image the mirror returns. The mirror functions as her own *stranger*, reflecting a truth she is at odds to digest: “en mirar-me em veig una altra, em veig que no sóc jo i me’n faig vergonya de ser la que hi ha al mirall.” (178) The scarf is an equalizing element, which renders her equal in appearance to her mother; however, whilst wandering in the street with it on, the narrator will confess: “em sóc estranya a mi mateixa” (179). The adjective encapsulates her ambiguity, the hesitancy that wearing the scarf makes her feel, which translates the difficulty she finds in inhabiting such an ambivalent position. The scarf crystalizes all the elements that she has incorporated into herself but not of her own volition.

When describing the *stranger*, Kristeva points out that they are always ready to flee, recognizing an intrinsic sense of nomadism within them, an uprootedness that is connected to the suspended space discussed earlier.⁷⁹ This lack of roots, of a place to call home, hence of origins is connected, in Kristeva, with the loss of the mother (1988: 14), a connection Yuval-Davis and Anthias also explored when analysing the feminine figure as tied with that of the nation.⁸⁰ In El Hachmi’s 2015 novel, too, the impossibility of the protagonist to weave her life with her mother’s wishes is symbolized with her becoming a runaway. But before she takes the initiative, she dwells on her hesitation and points towards the idea that, in addition to being a stranger to her mother and her land of origin, and a stranger to herself, she feels like a stranger in Catalonia.⁸¹ After she puts the scarf on and sees her image in the mirror, she wonders:

⁷⁹ It would also be interesting to tie in this analysis with with Rosi Braidotti’s idea of the nomadic, “nonunitary” subject as explored in her seminal work *Nomadic Subjects* (1994).

⁸⁰ Julia Kristeva uses Albert Camus’ novel *L’Étranger* to back her ideas, connecting the numbness and disarray of the protagonist with his inability to be moved by his mother’s death. In 2014, Algerian writer Kamel Daoud published *Mersault, contre-enquête*, a rewriting of *L’Étranger* that puts the focus on the Arab character in Camus’ novel, who is never named, thus shifting the meaning of the source text’s title. The protagonist of this novel is resolute to name the anonymous character, to provide him with an identity.

⁸¹ In Catalan, the expression “daughter/son of a place” reveals the idea that someone is from that place, is attached to it, can claim affiliation to that space. The title of the novel, reminiscent of such an expression, accentuates this idea of the protagonist being a stranger in Catalonia, where she cannot lay claim, fully, to anywhere.

S'han complert totes les profecies que penjaven damunt meu, damunt totes les filles de les marroquines aquí: no val la pena que us esforceu a educar-les, li havia sentit dir a algú, que tan bon punt creixin una mica les casaran al seu país i au, mocador, casa i vinga tenir fills. Però és clar, la gent que pensa així no hi pensa mai, en la solitud, no fan cap proposta alternativa, no ens ofereixen, a canvi de revoltar-nos contra les nostres famílies, un lloc alternatiu on arrecerarnos. No us deixeu dominar, rebel·leu-vos contra les tradicions ancestrals i primitives del vostre poble, fugiu de la discriminació i el masclisme. Si creuem el pont, què ens hi espera, a l'altra banda? Una abraçada reconfortant i totes les facilitats per les exiliades o bé una indiferència gèlida d'espavila't que aquí no regalem res?

(178-179)

She transfers her hesitancy to the text by formulating clear and explicit questions, directed in this passage to the society in which she lives. According to this passage, the scarf is read, as was the case in *Jo també sóc catalana*, as a foreign element in Catalonia. The choice of a woman who, like the protagonist, has Maghrebi origins and grew up in Catalonia to veil herself is considered a backward attitude reinforcing patriarchal values, because it is equated with the stereotyped image that people in Catalonia have of Morocco and of the women whose origins are to be found there. In Catalonia, wearing the scarf is read, in the narrator's view, as a clear sign that the bearer does not belong there, but to "el seu país"; she will forever be a stranger, an immigrant. This is shown, for example, in a passage when the veiled protagonist comes across a former teacher of hers, and she has to endure the teacher's expression of disgust upon looking at her; the teacher does not even speak to her former student, who feels as if the veil has rendered her invisible (186). A gesture of ignorance that reveals a lack of recognition towards the subject that is the narrator.⁸²

The logic behind the question of the scarf as described in El Hachmi's texts is similar to that set forth by Kerchouche, when she explains that Arabic names are read as foreign elements within the French context. In *Mon père, ce harki*, Dalila Kerchouche writes that, despite the fact that she abhors the method by which harki babies were named after French references, she does acknowledge that bearing "un prénom à consonance maghrébine" is a handicap these days, as attested by both *harki* and "immigrés" (2003: 85). In her novel, Kerchouche digs

⁸² These pages were written right after the terrorist attack perpetrated by individuals who claim affiliation to Daesh in Las Ramblas, in central Barcelona. In the aftermath of the attack, the element of the scarf became a target for Islamophobic attitudes, which mushroomed in Catalonia and Spain, as some people equated this kind of attacks with an Islam that is made visible by the scarf (see El Hachmi's column "Jo sí que tinc por", 2017b). The motto "No tinc por" spread widely in the days following the attack.

deeper on other markers that might prove disadvantageous for people read as harki when it comes to their life on French soil. The narrator explains that one day one of her brothers, Omar, arrived to the family hut in the camp, covered in white sand, something he did in order to be able to play with the civil servants' children:

–Je voulais être blanc! Pour qu'ils m'acceptent!

[...]

Nos parents nous ont toujours dit que nous étions français. Mais la réalité et surtout le regard des autres nous prouvent le contraire. Oui, il y a les autres et il y a nous. Et notre différence nous sépare autant que les grillages du camp. Il existera toujours un décalage entre nos cartes d'identité et la couleur de notre peau, et on nous le fera toujours sentir. Il faut vivre avec; nous n'avons pas le choix.

(2006: 54)

In this passage, the narrator mentions identity cards as elements that are not valid when it comes to conforming people's construction of the other. As Najat El Hachmi explained in *Jo també sóc catalana*, her neighbours in Catalonia, too, would consider her son's skin colour as a mark of (not) belonging, dismissing the fact that he was born in Catalonia. In her first book, Kerchouche pointed out that harki children, contrarily to the children of those who migrated to France, who tend to be bi-national, have only the French passport (2003: 207). In the legal sphere, many harki children hold French citizenship, which excludes them from the definition of *étranger* (Kristeva 1988: 61). The stranger discussed in Kristeva's text is also the figure of the collective other. This other stranger has no filiation, does not speak the language of the land where s/he lives, has no social relations –hence no possibility of his/her voice being heard, of his/her message being introduced in the society that hosts them. Under this light, neither El Hachmi's nor Kerchouche's narrators are *strangers* in their host societies, either. However, all of them give testimonies that proof how they are being constructed and read as epitomising the figure of the stranger in both Catalonia and France. In what follows, I shall try to consider their ambiguous positions in each of the European countries.

1.3.1 The Ambiguity of the Stranger

As already hinted in the earlier passage, harki children were different to the children of Maghrebi immigrants in France, not only in regard to their legal relation to Maghreb, but also to the way they were read by the larger Maghrebi community in France. In the following passage of *Leïla*, Kerchouche writes up a conversation between two teenagers that confront the protagonist of the novel outside school, a passage that sheds light on the liminal position of the harki children in regard to how they are perceived. A girl that is described as blond, calls the attention of Rachida, “fille d’immigrés”:

–Regarde, Rachida, elle a mis les chaussures de son père!

[...]

–La regarde pas. Je la connais, elle est du camp. C’est une fille de traître. Son père a vendu son pays.

La haine me brouille les yeux. Je vais la tuer.

(2006: 49)

The anger the narrator feels is accentuated by the fact that she thought Rachida, “[u]ne Maghrébine”, could be able to understand her and become an ally “parmi tous ces Français” around whom Leïla does not feel at ease, because she is used to living in the camps and, before that, in Algeria (*ibid.*). The way this thought is presented, inside a casual dialogue amongst teenagers, gives us an idea of how this construction of the harki as a traitor spread to the northern rim of the Mediterranean and permeated the imaginary of whole communities, which did not care to consider its nuances.⁸³

The fact that this comment was made within the school terrain is also significant. Schools are an important social institution, a horizontal space that holds the potential for erasing, or at least

⁸³ In *Fille de harki*, Fatima Besnaci-Lancou points out that Rémi, her 17-year-old son, is “obsessed” with Algeria, an obsession for which she partially blames herself. The author, the daughter of a harki, never really told her children the whole picture. When her son meets a student coming from Algiers at school, he hopes to initiate a friendship with someone that comes from her mother’s country of birth. However, the Algerian student, just like Rachida, does not even give the friendship a chance, for he considers Rémi a “traitor”. Because Rémi does not really know about the harki universe, he has no arguments to counteract the stereotype. See Besnaci-Lancou 2003: 115. In *Mon père, ce harki*, Kerchouche speaks of the “drame des harkis” understanding that “les seuls qui se souviennent d’eux sont ceux-là mêmes qui les insultent.” (2003: 69)

eroding, socio-economic differences.⁸⁴ In her texts, Dalila Kerchouche describes the reality of the schooling system for the harki children. In some camps, like the one in Bias, for example, there were schools built within the camp themselves specifically for the children of the former combatants. In the *hameaux forestiers* and other camps, like the one that is portrayed in Kerchouche's novel, the harki children would go to the village school, where they would meet local people for the first time in most cases. Many times they were put in classes especially for them –“classes poubelles”, as they came to be known in the terminology of the camps (Kerchouche 2006: 48). However, because of her brilliant marks, the protagonist of *Leïla* has access to the regular school, where she feels like she is alone because she is not accompanied by any of the children of the camps. On the bus that takes her to school, she confesses: “Je m'exaltais devant ce monde qui s'éveille doucement et dont je me sens si étrangère.” (*ibid.*)

This feeling of alienation adds up to the ambivalence she feels she embodies, of which she gained awareness upon arriving in France, in 1972. Unlike Kerchouche, who was born inside a camp, the protagonist of her novel has recollections of her life in Algeria, which is portrayed in her memories as very separate from France. The narrator experiences France and Algeria very differently, as two opposite realities. From the very beginning we learn that such a dichotomy has conditioned the way she perceives her own subjectivity, which she understands as placed at several crossroads:

Je vis dans l'entre-deux. Entre l'Algérie et la France, entre le Moyen Âge et le XX^e siècle, entre l'enfance et l'âge adulte, entre la survie et la révolte. Ni algérienne ni française, je ne sais plus qui je suis. [...] Une adolescente qui porte sur ses flancs ses frères et sœurs comme ses enfants, mère avant d'être femme? Ou une fille de harkis enfermée telle une paria dans des camps grillagés au fin fond de la France? Je ne sais plus. Je suis fatiguée de vivre. J'ai 17 ans et n'ai qu'une envie: m'allonger dans le fossé et mourir.

(15)

⁸⁴ In *Jo també sóc catalana* El Hachmi discusses a racist outbreak in her town related to the schooling system. At the time she was a student, two schools were swamped, whilst the other two, which absorbed all the newcomers, had less and less students, because “[e]ls pares catalans no volien portar els seus fills a les escoles dels immigrants”. El Hachmi wonders: “On eren aquells altres autòctons que ens deien ‘vosaltres ja sou d’aquí’? O només era una manera de tranquil·litzar-se a ells mateixos, de calmar la por a l’altre, al desconegut, la por que el propi país es pogués omplir de més famílies amb cognoms plens de guturals i aspirades, persones que no sabien ben bé en quin calaix de la memòria s’havien d’ubicar pel fet que ni tan sols sabien com eren, quines coses menjaven i què els passava pel cap quan es trobaven cara a cara amb ells.” (78-79) The author portrays the school terrain as a micro-society with well-drawn boundaries.

Kerchouche emphasizes the feeling of “entre-deux” in which the narrator claims to live not only by choosing a character that has memories of her land of origin, but also by choosing a teenager as her protagonist, for adolescence is an age at which individuals are particularly prone to reflect on their own subjectivities. Furthermore, Kerchouche’s protagonist is aware of having inherited an in-between position from her condition as daughter of a harki:

Nous, ses enfants, payons aussi le prix de son engagement au côté de la France pendant la guerre d’Algérie. Son choix a bouleversé nos vies. [...] Ma famille n’en finit pas de payer ce “crime” imprescriptible –aimer la France– qui a fait de nous des âmes errantes, des exilés indésirables, des déracinés. Parce que nous sommes harkis, les Algériens nous considèrent comme des traîtres, et les Français comme des parias.

(16-17)

Kerchouche decided to portray a harki status that stems from a feeling of love for France, when we know, because she explained so in her previous text and because of the nuanced bibliography on the topic, that the reasons for becoming a harki were manifold and not always connected with supporting France. Presented this way, the realization, on the part of the protagonist, that her family is treated “comme des parias” in France adds to her feeling of bewilderment. The very first pages of the novel are set at the time when the novel was published, in 2006. We meet with a female narrator –who, as I shall examine in Chapter 4, could be read as Kerchouche herself– at an official dinner, where she has been invited to give her opinion on how France should treat “minority groups”, how to deal with “discrimination” –words that, literally, “gash” the narrator, who is aware of the hypocrisy lying behind that sort of discourse (9). When she speaks up, during the dinner, pushed by the echo of the sentence her parents would tell her when they lived in a camp –“on ne nous considère pas comme des Français”– she defines herself as French, but first and foremost as “fille de harkis”, a community that, she claims, is still perceived as if they were traitors. Such a stereotype ends up functioning like a stigma that continues to be operative intergenerationally.

As Madan Sarup signals, “stigma is a convenient weapon in the defence against the unwelcome ambiguity of the stranger. The essence of stigma is to emphasize the difference”, which in principle is beyond repair, in order to justify permanent exclusion. “Unlike an alien or a foreigner, the stranger is not simply a newcomer, a person temporarily out of place. S/he is an eternal wanderer, homeless always and everywhere.” (1994: 101) This first narrator of *Leïla*

tells the crowd she is facing that her father felt “profoundly French” –a statement she makes because of his decision to fight for France, following his father’s choice, who fought on the French side during World War II– but despite such feeling, and despite the fact that he would salute the French flag every morning in the camp, and sing *La Marseillaise*, “au-delà des barbelés, il était un étranger dans son propre pays.” (Kerchouche 2006: 10)

The image of barbed wire is used by the author to reinforce the idea of exclusion that the protagonist is expressing. In fact, Kerchouche’s texts are filled with images that establish analogies between the external reality and its metaphorical representation within the characters’ feelings and selves. Thus, for example, after Rachida looks down on her, Leïla wonders why she said nothing to defend herself: “Cette question me trouble. Peut-être ai-je intégré moi aussi cette insulte... Peut-être qu’à force de vivre dans les camps, j’ai baissé les bras.” (50) Right after she formulates these thoughts, the concierge of the camp shuts the lights down, leaving the narrator “dans le noir complet” (*ibid.*). We find examples of such a procedure in El Hachmi’s works, too. After the narrator in *La filla estrangera* decides to go through with the arranged marriage her mother has devised, they start looking for a bigger flat that can accommodate them and the narrator’s husband-to-be. She narrates, with frustration, that the minute “[la] detecten com a estrangera” the search gets interrupted. They will end up at the outskirts of the town; like Kerchouche’s characters, excluded from the centre, literally and metaphorically.

And like Leïla, the narrator of *La filla estrangera* also wonders at her own silence against these prejudiced attitudes on the part of her Catalan neighbours. She used to be always ready to raise her critical voice as a student; however, after her formative years, and once she accepts her mother’s path, her voice dissolves. Her escape from that path parallels her search for a town that is not the one where she lived with her mother, in which bumping into former teachers, or her mother’s friends, or neighbours that label her is always present. When she visits Barcelona, she has the feeling she could live there, where people do not know each other or control each other’s lives (El Hachmi 2015: 101). She equates that kind of anonymity with the possibility of choosing her own pathway, and indeed she ends up going to Barcelona, which oddly enough does get mentioned as such in the novel –El Hachmi does name the place where one can live without a name.

In Barcelona, the narrator is not the embodiment of difference, she is not marked, hence, she is not read as a stranger either. Only after realizing this, can we go back to the initial remark of the novel, which is shaped as a resolution by the narrator, and understand that she is directing it to both her mother and the Maghrebi community –at either end of the Mediterranean– that has tried to have a say in her life, and those neighbours in her town that approached her from stereotypical conceptions: “No seré més per vosaltres. Des d’ara seré per mi. Per mi o per qui vulgui, però ja no per cap dels que em voleu esbiaixada, escapçada” (9).

The choice of the adjectives is noteworthy, for it hints at the idea that, just like Kerchouche’s accounts explain, she has been perceived from a fragmented perspective by the two large communities that we know have shaped her identitarian quest: the Maghrebi and the Catalan one. This idea of fragmentation is also put forward in El Hachmi’s first novel and, again, the presence/absence of names sheds light on understanding its dynamics. I already stated that Mimoun, the father of the narrator, becomes Manel in Catalonia. By becoming Manel, Mimoun transforms and even gives up some of the affiliations/components that conformed his identity of origin; his new name encapsulates all that. On the contrary, by keeping the narrator nameless, the author might be signalling a new way of dealing with the amalgam of cultural elements that ensue from the familial migration. By having anal sex with her uncle, a practice she identifies with her cultural tradition of origin and that she performs with a family member in the apartment she has acquired due to her personal efforts, the narrator is showing her father that there is a way to conjugate all the fragments that compose her without having to renounce them, without the need to become *esbiaixada* or *escapçada*. She does not have different names that correspond to identities she performs. By having none, she can be formed by many selves.

The two adjectives chosen by El Hachmi belong to the terrain of fragmentation, but separately they point towards two ideas that also lie at the core of the construction of the stranger, as explained above: that of ambivalence and that of displacement. Whilst the meaning of *esbiaixada* is “cut in an oblique way”, it can also mean “biased”, thus referring to the field of interpretation. I have already established that the processes of identity construction unfolded in both El Hachmi and Kerchouche’s texts are erected around the labels of *immigrant* and *harki*, respectively, labels that are built in Catalonia and France and that encapsulate how the author’s main characters are read and perceived in these societies, as strangers within them, as the bearers of difference.

In “Of Mimicry and Man”, Homi K. Bhabha discusses the concept of “mimicry” as inscribed in the colonial sphere. Bhabha relies on literary examples and on the ideas of Edward Said, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, amongst others, to construct a theoretical reflection on the dynamics established in those binaristic contexts, like the ones arising out of a colonial endeavour, in which there is a dominant group and a dominated one. According to Bhabha, mimicry is articulated around the idea of desire, and works as “a gaze of otherness” (2004: 126) whereby the colonial mimicry is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.” (122; emphasis in the original) This idea of mimicry is played out in the texts by the authors studied.

In *Jo també sóc catalana*, the author dwells on her frustration provoked by the fact that even though she and her family lived in Catalonia for many years by the time she writes her book and have learnt Catalan, their neighbours still consider them as if they just arrived, just like the eternal wanderer Sarup identifies with the stranger; as if their migration to Europe just happened. On the other hand, she signals that those same neighbours keep telling her and her siblings that “ja són d’aquí”, so that, for instance, she will be urged to unveil as a proof that she is breaking free from the backward ways the Catalan women identify as connected to El Hachmi’s culture of origin. El Hachmi interprets this insistence as an attempt to negate the migrated family a past that ties them to their origins –if the family belongs to Catalonia, if they claim affiliation to that land, their identity construction is disconnected from their Maghrebi past. Hence, there is no risk of them “contaminating” the Catalan identity discourse, whatever that might be.

Quan algú et diu que t’integris, el que en realitat t’està demanant és que et desintegris, que esborris qualsevol rastre de temps anteriors, de vestigis culturals o religiosos, que ho oblidis tot i només recordis els seus records, el seu passat. Perquè no hi ha por més terrible que la por al que és desconegut, és millor que tots siguem iguals per no haver-hi de pensar gaire.

(2004: 90)

El Hachmi finds herself in a society that, in her view, clearly understands itself as occupying a dominant position, thus in its moral right to ask those considered as the Other to adapt to their new surroundings, as much as necessary, so that they resemble, in this case, “els d’aquí”. The

figure of the Other, as epitomised by El Hachmi, becomes thus *the same but not quite* to the Catalan population. We see how El Hachmi's neighbours want to render her equal to the local Catalan women –“és millor que tots siguem iguals”– but at the same time she, like her son, will always be the stranger. The process of othering to which El Hachmi and those who, like her, are read as the bearers of difference is based on logics of recognition. Bhabha claims that the colonial discourse projects a recognizable Other, because, El Hachmi reminds us, the greatest fear stems from that which is unknown to us.⁸⁵ By setting strategies of recognition based on appearances, be it the skin or certain pieces of clothing or even a certain accent, the Catalan population is pigeonholing as the Other those who look or speak “not quite the same” as the local –constructed as static/stable and unchangeable.

However, Bhabha notes that this idea of mimicry, as he understands it, holds the potential to subvert the authoritative dynamics that operate within the colonial discourse. “The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.” (2004: 126; emphasis in the original) Authority is always granted by an other that bestows on someone –or something, like an institution– the capacity of becoming a guide in a particular matter, that recognizes in that figure a higher form of knowledge. By disclosing the double-standards on which her Catalan neighbours approach her, El Hachmi is blurring their ability to be erected as the authoritative voice granting who can access the realm of “Catalanity” and who gets labelled as the Other, the stranger, the immigrant that is perpetually on the brink of arrival and never settled. That is why she claims “jo també sóc catalana”, a statement with which she dismisses her neighbours as the source that can authorize her or give her permission to affiliate herself with a cultural tradition to which she feels she belongs. Bhabha pointed out that mimicry renders “the very notion of ‘origins’” (127) problematic, and this is what El Hachmi is doing with her statement, problematizing notions of authenticity, questioning the meaning “d’aquí”.

Similarly, in Kerchouche's accounts, we are told that once the Franco-Algerian war was over the French government ended up granting the harki combatants and their families the

⁸⁵ In *Les Blancs, les Juifs et nous*, Houria Bouteldja believes that the logics of colonialism very much permeate the present of France –and Europe. She claims that those who belong to the universe of “les blancs” fear every not-white subject, for they see in them “un rescapé de l’entreprise coloniale et en même temps *la possibilité* d’une vengeance” (2016: 36; emphasis in the original). Later on, she points out that “les contours existentiels [des Juifs et des Indigènes] sont tracés”, highlighting that those who are marked outside the realm of the white, which represents “l’absolu, le centre, l’universel” and has been constructed as the guarantor of innocence and humanism, are dyked, swaying in-between auto-inflected lack of affection and self-affirmation (49, 50).

possibility of getting “l’option de nationalité française”, which was created specifically for them (2003: 65). In *Mon père, ce harki*, the author mentions numerous times the Republican values, which collect the inheritance of the motto of the French Revolution –*liberté, égalité, fraternité*– as something she has learnt to appreciate and acknowledge. These are brandished as the pillars on which French identity stands. However, despite the fact that Kerchouche’s family does opt for French nationality –as pretty much all the harkis did–, which makes of them Republican citizens, they are not treated as equals to their peers, even though the judge reminds them that they have “les mêmes droits que les Français” (66). This is symbolized, most blatantly, by the camps into which they were put upon arriving in France –separating them physically from the rest of the French population.

1.3.2 The Marked Stranger and their Potential to Mark Out Stereotypes

Despite granting them the possibility of becoming French on a legal level, the administration of the camps failed to perceive the harkis as their equals.⁸⁶ Kerchouche tells us that to celebrate all the harki “conversions” (the author herself encloses the term in quotation marks), those in charge of ruling the camp decided to throw the harkis a party by organising a Christmas celebration –having forbidden the construction of a mosque and the celebration of the Eid, a very important day for Muslims (*ibid.*). Thus, in the aftermath of the Franco-Algerian war, and within the French context, religion was used not only to define the boundaries of the label *harki*, but taking this meaningful example as a cue it seems that it also served to delimit the construction of true French citizens vs. strangers. The conversion of the harkis into French citizens had to be accompanied by their acquisition of a new set of traditions and customs.

⁸⁶ Historian Mary Nash has written about the different ways in which several mechanisms shape the social construction of the other, describing the disparity between what she calls the mechanisms of formal social control and those of informal social control. She acknowledges that “los mecanismos de control social formal, las leyes, las disposiciones de las comunidades autónomas, del Estado o de la UE tienen una gran incidencia en la trayectoria de vida, en las opciones y en las vivencias de hombres y mujeres inmigrantes en la sociedad europea actual. La situación legal y la legislación vigente influyen en la percepción colectiva de la noción de extranjera y la de inmigrante” but she focuses on “los mecanismos de control social informal”, “las pautas culturales no reglamentadas que marcan la visión del otro y, de esta forma, el itinerario de vida, las perspectivas, las opciones de las mujeres inmigrantes y las relaciones de inclusión/exclusión que se establecen en la sociedad.” (2000: 276)

Furthermore, the author points out that within the press, the harki community would always be referred to as “rapatriés européens” or “réfugiés musulmans”, but never just “French” (*ibid.*).⁸⁷ These formulas not only show that the harkis were characterized as not quite French, but because such categorisations focus on the fact that they had undergone a displacement, they signal that the harkis’ situation in France was constructed as not settled; they were perceived as the “eternal wanderers” (on Sarup’s terms), as a rootless nomadic community. Upon realizing the treatment that the harki community received within the press, and understanding how there were engraved in the collective imaginary of the French population, Kerchouche unveils the hypocrisy of the Republican discourse championed by France: “En les considérant comme des citoyens de seconde zone dans l’Algérie coloniale et des réfugiés ici, la France prônait donc un faux modèle de République.” (*ibid.*)

The author will insist on this idea that the camps were but a continuation of the colonial dynamics put in place within French Algeria, and not only because of the fact that, as I already pointed out, the French administration would generally put pieds-noirs in charge of the ruling of these structures, but also because of the treatment that these pieds-noirs and their colleagues reserved for the harkis. In the trip that took her to all the camps in which her family lived, Kerchouche ended up meeting with one of the camp-chiefs that was supposed to have treated the Kerchouches very badly. Upon meeting him, a man who would not acknowledge any of the deeds that Dalila’s mother attributed to him, our author understood that his denial was born out of his feeling of superiority, with regard to the harki families. In the following quotation Kerchouche unpacks such an idea, in a thought that very much resembles the one formulated by El Hachmi in her autobiographical text, where she discloses the subtle politics of assimilation played out by her neighbours. Talking about the camp-chief, Kerchouche writes:

⁸⁷ In *Inmigrantes en nuestro espejo: inmigración y discurso periodístico en la prensa española*, Mary Nash focuses on Spain as the end-point of a very intense set of migration movements during the decade of the 1990s in order to analyse how the treatment the migrants received within the press determined the way they were perceived collectively. Nash argues that such a portrayal set forth a biased, stereotyped and homogenized image of the migrants that permeated the Spanish social imaginary and hindered the new populations’ settlement in Spain. Furthermore, she argues that migrant women –more present every day; she talks about the “feminization of immigration”– faced a two-fold mechanism of invisibilization, because of their condition as migrants and as women. She also pays attention to the fact that the newcomers’ place of origin determines the way in which they are presented discursively; namely as “immigrants” (if they come from North Africa, mainly) or as “foreigners” (if they come from the EU). The role played by the media in the construction of collective imaginaries, and the importance of language in shaping them is particularly relevant here, inasmuch as both of the authors I study participate in the media, something that will be explored below.

Il incarne, à mes yeux, cette administration dictatoriale qui a voulu régenter l'existence des harkis et *modeler* jusqu'à leur manière de penser. Il ne s'agit plus seulement d'imposer un prénom français aux enfants, mais de changer, coûte que coûte, le mode de vie des harkis, considérés comme des "primitifs" qu'il faut civiliser. De les couper de leurs traditions, après les avoir coupés de leur pays. Il s'agit d'assimilation forcée.

(106; emphasis added)

The vocabulary used by Kerchouche takes us back to Bhabha's formulation, when he recognizes the desire, on the part of the colonial powers, for a "reformed", "recognizable" Other. Following Kerchouche's remarks, the French administration within the camps had the objective of "converting" the harkis on manifold levels, and not only in regard to their faith. Because they wanted to "civilise" the harkis, and "mould" them to their way of thinking, it could be argued that they were perceived as possessing no human-like traits, almost as if they were animals that one can tame and teach how to behave. The space of the camps, as a closed structure in which the families have little space for themselves, contributes to this idea of animalisation, which gets emphasized by some practices deployed by the administration within the camps and that reveal a veiled mechanism of control and punishment.

Kerchouche herself makes use of this kind of metaphorical language to describe the reality of the camps: "Ainsi, pendant la guerre, la France avait déjà parqué des Algériens dans des camps. Comme elle le fera, plus tard, avec les harkis en France. Je comprends mieux. Pour le gouvernement, supplétifs et Algériens n'étaient que du bétail." (2003: 261)⁸⁸ The human quality of the harki community gets displaced, and in that way it gets easier to treat them with the brutality and the violence with which some of the subjects were treated, regardless of their rights as French citizens. Kerchouche understands that such a dehumanization was transmitted to her generation, as signalled by the following thought: "Les enfants de harkis ne sont pas considérés comme Français [sic]. On est sortis de camps mais on est restés derrière la grille." (28) The image of the bars functions as a powerful metaphor to condense the caging of the harkis.

The author notes that the chiefs of the camps would distribute the social allowances to which the harkis were entitled depending on their willingness to give part of that money to the chief themselves. Because Kerchouche's father would not be complicit with those dynamics, his

⁸⁸ In her novel *Moze*, Zahia Rahmani writes that the harkis were but "chiens maltraités au soleil" (2003: 45).

family received a very small sum of money: “Le chef du camp fait payer à ma famille son esprit d’indépendance. Pour lui, un Arabe doit être soumis.” (2003: 165) Later on, we learn about the existence of a centre called “La Candélie”, a psychiatric hospital to which the harkis who misbehaved would be sent –always according to the camp-chief, who held the power to establish what constituted misbehaviour. The chief would use the existence of such a place as a threat towards the harkis, who as interns there received medical treatment for their temperament (166-167). Dalila Kerchouche meets up with a man that spent 30 years at Bias and confined to La Candélie, experiences that turned him into someone “intérieurement éteint, abruti par les médicaments” (168). According to the author, the man can no longer produce coherent sentences and his memory has escaped him. The centre, the camp ended up “moulding” him, indeed, displacing his subjectivity, and inasmuch as language is perceived as a human ability, they eroded his humanity, too.

Whilst not all the people who wound up at La Candélie got “transformed” to such an extent, the centre and the camps did have a serious impact on those who spent some time in them, and the prospect of going there –that meant being a subject of yet another exclusion– incited fear in every person living in the camps. The idea of displacement explored here is also present in El Hachmi’s work. As I said earlier, the use of the adjective *escapçada* in the very first thought we read in *La filla estrangera* is of great significance, because it explains the multiple fragmentations the narrator has endured and ultimately rejected. *Escapçada* is used to refer to objects and bodies that have had their head, their upper part removed. The head concentrates all the elements that constitutes us as individuals and that identify us: the brain that preserves our memories and connects us with a past that defines our affiliations, the mouth through which we express ourselves, the eyes with which we recognize others. By opting for this word, the protagonist expresses the feeling of having been reduced to a headless body, devoid of her human qualities.

And the head is also the part that some Muslim women decide to veil, which makes their credo visible and recognizable for other people. In the previously analysed moment in which the narrator decides to veil herself for the first time, we know she does not feel like herself. The narrator actually compares herself to a “xaïet amb el coll estirat a punt de ser degollat” (2015: 178). By resorting to the imaginary of animality the author is strengthening the idea that the protagonist is not in charge of her life, but subjugated to other people’s choices and gazes. The choice of a lamb is not a petty one, since lambs are highly embedded within the religious

imaginary –for Christians, it is a way to refer to Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for the people; for Muslims, it is the animal they sacrifice during the ‘Eid al-Kabir celebrations.⁸⁹ Furthermore, they have come to be constructed as docile animals regardless of the religious connection. It is common that in Catalan, more so than in other languages, people use the word *xai* to refer to someone who is seen as docile. The protagonist of El Hachmi’s text has surrendered to her family’s wishes, which in turn, as we saw, has effects on the way she is perceived by her Catalan neighbours –most significantly as exemplified in the encounter with the teacher, who does not “see” her former student.

In both Kerchouche’s and El Hachmi’s texts we are presented with societies –the French and the Catalan one, respectively– that at one point or another have considered the characters that the authors portray from biased standpoints, displacing their “humanness”, fragmenting them and enclosing them within labels and stereotypes. And I have already discussed how such an Othering gaze is founded upon markers that can be perceived corporally, with the senses. In “Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism” Homi K. Bhabha discusses the intricacies of the stereotype understanding it as the major discursive strategy of the colonial discourse, which, as we already established, aims at getting a fixed image of the Other that can function “*at any one time*”, as a “*secure point of identification*” capable of producing the colonized “as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (2004: 94, 99, 101; emphasis in the original).⁹⁰

Bhabha defines the skin as “the key signifier of cultural and racial difference in the stereotype” (112), an idea that also permeates his discussion about the concept of mimicry. In describing the way mimicry operates within colonial contexts, epitomised in his text by the binaristic contrast between the coloniser (white) and the colonised (black), Homi Bhabha notes that “[i]n the ambivalent world of the ‘not quite/not white’ [...] [b]lack skin splits under the racist gaze, displaced into signs of bestiality, genitalia, grotesquerie, which reveal the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body.” (131) Such processes lie at the core of the stereotype also:

⁸⁹ Both the Bible and the Quran describe the passage in which Abraham (Ibrahim, within Islam) was eager to sacrifice his son as a proof of his faith for God, and God replaced his son with a lamb the moment Abraham was about to behead him. The word *escapçada* might be read along the lines of this sacred reference, too. It is also worth noting that God’s people are referred to as a flock of sheep, whenever one gets derailed, they must find their way back to the group, guided by their shepherd.

⁹⁰ Bhabha theorizes about the stereotype in terms of fetish, too, backing his ideas on Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalytic queries. I shall not consider this perspective in my analysis.

Stereotyping is not the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices. It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, over-determination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of “official” and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse.

(117)

I already suggested that by asserting her will to affiliate herself with Catalonia, Najat El Hachmi was questioning the existence of Catalan purity, uncontaminated by foreign customs and beliefs⁹¹ –the “undifferentiated whole white body” to which Bhabha refers. Likewise, Dalila Kerchouche’s texts problematize the Republican values that were supposed to secure a place within the French society for her family and the other harki families that opted for French nationality. Because the administration “split” them, “displaced” them under their biased gaze, the place they did acquire remained symbolic and did not render them equal to the rest of their neighbours that lay outside the harki universe. The biases supporting such a gaze ended up, as we have seen, permeating the way families like the one epitomised by Rachida, with Maghrebi origins, conceived the harkis.

However, despite her realization that the harki children, like their parents, were not conceived as French by the majority of their neighbours in France, by the end of the book Kerchouche declares to her father that she is French. The declaration comes after her dad tells her that he has always considered himself like Algerian, and Kerchouche’s words function as an indication of the differences that exist between both. The use of verbs is significant, as it can be interpreted under the light of what has been explored above:

“Moi, je n’ai jamais choisi la France: **je me suis toujours considéré** comme algérien.”

“Pourtant moi, ta fille, je **suis** française, *apa*. Voilà le résultat.” “Peut-être. Mais au fond de ton cœur, je sais qu’il reste une petite part d’Algérie en toi. Tu **es** française et musulmane. Tu n’es pas obligée de choisir. Tu peux être les deux.”

(2003: 275; emphasis added)

⁹¹ As Bonnie Honig points out in *Democracy and the Foreigner*, “[i]n classical political thought, foreignness is generally taken to signify a threat of corruption that must be kept out or contained for the sake of the stability and identity of the regime” (2001: 1-2).

Like El Hachmi, who used the copulative verb – “jo també sóc catalana”– to showcase to what extent she claimed belonging to Catalonia, Dalila Kerchouche writes that she *is* French and not that she *feels* French or that she *considers herself* French. She is stating a fact and belittling those who state otherwise. The fact that she directs her words to her father is also of major importance, for he is the one to be held responsible for the label *harki* that her daughter has inherited. Through her statement, Kerchouche is separating her own identity from that of her father’s (the same way the narrator in *La filla estrangera* asserted hers by running away from her mother⁹²), albeit that does not mean that she does not understand herself in connection to her father –after all, the very last thought within her book encapsulates the pride she feels in being a “fille de harkis”: “Oui, je suis une fille de harkis. J’écris ce mot avec un grand H. Comme Honneur.” (277)⁹³

The response of Dalila’s father parallels the declaration made by El Hachmi, too –she is *also* Catalan–, and offers a gateway so that her daughter can conjugate all her affiliations without having to succumb to the fragmentation by which others have tried to read her. By dissecting all the process through which she came to understand her complex subjectivity, Kerchouche is intervening within the very same discursive practices that have tried to exclude her. Homi Bhabha’s own thoughts on the matter help elucidate in which way Kerchouche accomplishes this: “My reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse.” (2004: 95; emphasis in the original)

What is relevant about the examples analysed from the authors’ texts is that they do not merely signal the stereotypes that the characters have to endure, but show ways to deconstruct them and expose their fallacious grounds. Again, the ambivalence from which they draw their force holds the potential to destabilise them. According to Bhabha, the form of knowledge and identification that is the stereotype “vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.” (*ibid.*) In the texts analysed, we know

⁹² It is interesting to note that, contrarily to what happens in El Hachmi’s novels –the protagonists distance themselves from their relatives in order to assert their self-constructed subjectivities–, Kerchouche, who started her journey of discovery very distanced from her father –a silent figure–, finishes her book with a conversation with her father, indicating their (re)union.

⁹³ In the text, “fille de harkis” is spelt with a lower case *h*; the “writing” to which Kerchouche is referring is thus of a symbolic nature.

that both the Catalan and the French society have tried to read the different generations portrayed in the works by Kerchouche and El Hachmi in the same way. However, the daughters of those who migrated have proven to have a different relationship with the societies that have witnessed their process of reaching maturity.

Even though, because of their inherited labels of *immigrant* and *harki* the relationship they have with Catalonia and France passes through their Maghrebi origins, they both have a much more distant relationship with their origins than their parents, which hinders the repetition that is necessary to “fixate” the stereotype and make it work. The first chapter of Kristeva’s *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* is entitled “Toccata et fugue pour l’étranger”. The musical reference might hold the key to understand how the protagonists of our texts produce variation within the realm of repetition. A fugue is a composition that unfolds upon the same musical theme, which gets modified in every repetition, complemented by several voices that ultimately end up transforming the theme into a variation that resembles very little the one it originated from, albeit containing it within. A toccata is a composition that is characterized by its free style. Both kinds of composition account for a lack of fixity and rigidity that can be applied to the way the characters studied can be read.

1.4 The Foreign (of the) *Immigrant*, the Foreign (of the) *Harki*

In “The Foreigner as Immigrant”, the third chapter of Bonnie Honig’s *Democracy and the Foreigner*, the author considers the readings made by different scholars –amongst whom Julia Kristeva’s, whose considerations I briefly presented earlier–, of the book of Ruth. Honig perceives this as a “foreign-founder text”:

A foreigner arrives and her presence among them works to effect two significant changes. Ruth, the Moabite, is the vehicle of a regime change from rule by judges to rule by kings. In that sense, she is a kind of founder, even if not exactly a lawgiver. But Ruth is also a (re)founder in Rousseau’s other sense: she (re)found a “people.”

(Honig 2001: 41)

Contrary to what it occurs with other foreign-founders, Honig claims, Ruth’s status is not just that of a foreigner, but she is also an immigrant, for “she does not leave when her work of

refounding is done” (42). This fact leads her adopted community to consider her from a position that is never clearly resolved: is she a friend or an enemy, is she a foreigner or a founder? The way Ruth is read resembles the way the protagonists I study are read in Catalonia and France. Kristeva sees Ruth as “both a supporter and a disrupter of the regime she (re)founds” (in Honig 2001: 56) and reads the otherness she personifies as a warrant to avoid the kind of identitarian nationalism that she opposes. Similarly, El Hachmi and Kerchouche’s protagonists are caught up in the tension that is born out of the way they feel they (and their families) are treated within their host societies, treatments that showcase a desire to assimilate them and erase the difference they might represent (a threatening difference, as we have already discussed) and an (un)consciousness willingness to mark them out.

However, precisely because Ruth holds the key to the *refounding* of the people she decides to join, she highlights the fact that a people’s self is indeed a construction that, following the same dynamics upon which the colonial discourse is based, has need of an external element to keep reassessing itself.⁹⁴ I argue that El Hachmi and Kerchouche’s protagonists function in much the same way. They push those societies that mark them out but that want to assimilate them, to rethink themselves. And they put themselves at the core of that exercise. The ambivalence that articulates the figure of Ruth relies heavily on the fact that she decided to willingly join her new people as an adult, a decision that will lead to her being “absorbed”, in Honig’s words, by the people she (re)founds (2001: 59). El Hachmi and Kerchouche’s protagonists did not really choose to join the Catalan and the French people they have come to pair themselves with. However, like the Biblical character, they are continually pulled by the (contradictory) forces, in those same societies, that at once hope to erase the particularities that tied them to their origins and keep making those particularities resurface as markers of difference.

The authors present us with examples that prove that these ambivalent positions cause discomfort. Najat El Hachmi resorts to very specific examples, extracted from the everyday life, to show to what extent the discourse expressed by her Catalan neighbours –“ja sou d’aquí”– is a hypocritical one. Catalonia brandishes the idea that it is a welcoming land. In *Jo també sóc catalana* Najat El Hachmi reproduces a conversation she had with a friend, Cati,

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida pointed out that “dans bien des Dialogues de Platon, c’est souvent l’Étranger (*xénos*) qui questionne” (in Derrida and Dufourmantelle 1997: 11). Derrida’s formulation reinforces the idea put forward by Honig. He studied the figure of the stranger as that external ens that fosters questions and enables the apparition of enriching debates. It is worth mentioning that, as Kristeva signalled, the first foreigners in Greek mythology were women (1993: 17).

which provokes the end of their friendship and which shows the limitations of the welcoming discourse that Cati represents. During a random encounter in the street, the two women discuss the right way to pronounce a word that many Catalan speakers mispronounce:

–No, es diu incens.

–No, es diu encens. Incens ho diem normalment per influència del castellà, però està mal dit.

– Sí home, m’ho diràs a mi que sóc catalana.

[...]

–Si vols et porto un diccionari.

–No cal, tota la vida que he dit incens i no vindràs tu, de fora, a dir-me com haig de parlar la meva llengua.

(2004: 53)

El Hachmi explains that her friend was happy to discover how well she had learnt the Catalan language, which led her to state: “tots hauríeu de ser així” (*ibid.*) –and by “tots” she means Moroccan migrants, considering them from a homogeneous standpoint–, meaning that it would be desirable that every newcomer in Catalonia learnt the Catalan language the way El Hachmi’s narrator did. Read as a representative example of the idea that Catalonia wants to foster –that it is, indeed, a society that welcomes newcomers– Cati, or the autochthonous Catalan population, is asking of those who come “de fora” to get acquainted with the Catalan language, but at the same time, and despite all the efforts that such a learning entails –Najat comes to be “obsessed” with the Catalan language (54)–, having a perfect command of the language is not sufficient for the newcomers to be perceived beyond their foreign status, as indicated in Cati’s words. Cati is able to let Najat into her life to the point where they end up becoming friends; however, and despite the degree of closeness that this entails, she does not hesitate to establish the boundaries of that relationship, which can arguably be read in relation to how El Hachmi fits in Catalonia. Cati’s self-defended moral superiority resides in the fact that she has been in Catalonia “tota la vida”, which makes of her a “catalana”. Being born in Morocco, El Hachmi’s claims to Catalanness are hindered and, like her skin or her name, her origins will function as a marker to establish her position in the society in which she has decided to live. Once again, we see how by reproducing a casual conversation the author is showcasing the disconnection between the values that Catalonia wants to send as a society and how they are integrated by its people.

Similarly, we saw how the examples chosen by Kerchouche questioned the Republican values that lie at the core of the French nation. An important character in Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki* is that of her lost brother Moha, whom she describes as "le déraciné, l'exilé" (2003: 233). We know that Moha, who grew up in a camp, committed suicide, and after figuring out the dynamics that vertebrated the everyday life of the camps, Dalila, who at the beginning of her journey could not figure out the source for her brother's "mal-être" (31), seems to understand the reasons why he did so. Changing the narrative voice, Kerchouche speaks to her brother through the text in a gesture that indicates understanding: "Tu poursuivais des chimères, tu rêvais d'un monde sans racisme, sans agression, sans haine. Enfermé toute ton enfance dans le camps, tu n'étais pas prêt à affronter une société où tu te sentais rejeté. Tu as fui" (233). Kerchouche blames the French society for her brother's dissolution, a reproach that adds to the one her own brother confessed to his sister before committing suicide: "Regarde ce qu'*ils* nous ont fait". Moha would always use "ce *ils* mystérieux" (32), which pushes his sister to set herself a goal: "je regarde, Moha, et je vais même le dire, l'écrire, le graver, le crier. Hurler ce qu'*ils* m'ont fait." (*ibid.*)

The last sentence of Kerchouche's resolution adds strength to the set of verbs that she enchains in a powerful promise to her brother. She understands that the mysterious *they* affects also her own self, somehow indicating that her brother's fate could have been her fate. And by the end of her journey –which coincides with the end of her text– Kerchouche has unravelled what lay behind the pronoun. It should be noted that Moha's words imply that, amongst the harki community, France, or rather the French people, was constructed homogeneously, as a collective character. The logic of alterity, based on dichotomous relations, vertebrating the colonial discourse put at play within the camps affected the way the harki families understood their new place in France. The usage of the pronoun for the third person plural indicates distance and unfamiliarity, even alienation.

When Honig discusses Ruth's foreignness, she claims that,

[a]s a foreigner [Ruth] could be many things: exotic, desirable, mysterious, wise, insightful, dangerous, objective, treasured, and so on. Foreignness will signify different things depending on what work it is being made to do, depending on what goal the community is trying to achieve through the foreigner.

(2001: 71)

Perceived as a figure and encapsulated in that mysterious *they*, France is read as a foreigner by the harki community, which constructs its new identity in France through an exercise of opposition against foreign, violent France.⁹⁵ Another particularly poignant example showcasing the way the *ils* circulated within the Kerchouche family is set at the time when Dalila's mother loses her unborn baby. The family lives at the Bias camp at the time and when the baby they are expecting is born dead, no one at the hospital can explain to Dalila's mother what happened, because of the linguistic barrier separating the staff and the harki family. This will lead Kerchouche's matriarch to state: "ils ont tué mon bébé" (2003: 155).

In *L'Amour, la fantasia* Assia Djebar constructs a palimpsest of voices to explain the formation and the evolution of French Algeria's social fabric, resorting to the two events that punctuated it: French colonisation and the war for independence that put an end to the colonial military regime. Like in Kerchouche's first text, Djebar's novel incorporates different narrative voices and different kinds of testimonies to produce a complex and multi-layered picture of the 132 years of French occupation. Some of these voices are of Amazigh women that participated in the insurrection against France who Djebar interviewed. By adding these voices to her text she is effecting a two-fold gesture of translation: she is using writing to give solidity to the spoken word, and she is translating their stories –told in Tamazigh– into French, the language of the coloniser. These women speak of France as a character,

VOIX

Mon frère aîné, Abdelkader, était monté au maquis, cela faisait quelque temps déjà. *La France* arriva jusqu'à nous, nous habitions à la zaouia Sidi M'hamed Aberkane... *La France* est venue et *elle* nous a brûlés. Nous sommes restés tels quels, parmi les pierres noircies...

(1995: 167; emphasis added)

The same way Kerchouche's brother and her family have come to perceive the French people with whom they relate grouping them in a category that erases their particularities, the voice recovered by Djebar talks of the foreign enemy in the same terms. In contexts like the ones described by both Djebar and Kerchouche, whereby there is a binaristic clash between groups,

⁹⁵ Within the chapter "De la violence", in *Les Damnés de la terre*, Frantz Fanon explains that "le manichéisme du colon produit un manichéisme du colonisé. À la théorie de 'l'indigène mal absolu' répond la théorie du 'colon mal absolu'." (2002: 89)

reaffirming one's identity passes through constructing the other in a solid and closed categorisation. However, despite the fact that France is generally portrayed as a single character, epitomised in the use of the *ils*, throughout Kerchouche's text we encounter different characters that reconcile the author with the country she has always lived in and that prove that she can see beyond the categorisations her own family has had to endure.

1.4.1 The Foreigner in the In-Between

In *Mon père, ce harki* we encounter Juliette, a peasant from Lozère who claims that the harki families are the first Arabs she has ever seen. She is described as a generous person, ready to let the new community of harkis be part of her daily life. Not only does she interact with them by selling them produce from her farm, but she also makes a point of helping them in whatever way she can. In *Leïla*, the figure of Juliette gains in importance, acting as a secondary character in the text. The author gives this character a lot of space and an relevant role in the novel, as a way to strengthen the idea that despite the fact that some of the protagonist's French neighbours adopt a hostile attitude towards her and her family, there are others that adopt hospitable manners contesting the stereotyping and generalizing strategies of the former.⁹⁶

Juliette could be read as Leïla's French mother (although she is at times equated with Leïla's grandmother; she caresses her hair the same way her grandmother did, a gesture denoting intimacy; Kerchouche 2006: 86), and plays the role of a protective figure that is also the protagonist's confidant, someone she can count on and turn to whenever she is figuratively lost. In one of the bleakest passages of the novel, Leïla, who has a hard time navigating her life in the camp, fitting within the reality her family offers and the one she finds outside the familial milieu, decides to commit suicide – a gesture with which Kerchouche could be bringing in the story of her brother Moha.⁹⁷ She has made up her mind to drown herself, but in the end she cannot go through with it, resorting to visiting Juliette after she decides not to drown.

⁹⁶ Following Levinas cue on matters to do with the ethics of hospitality, Derrida created the neologism *hostipitalité*, with which he encapsulates the uncanny closeness between *hospitality* and *hostility*, two different responses that the figure of the stranger can trigger. Derrida connects *stranger* with its Latin root, *hostis*, which can either mean “guest” or “enemy” (see Derrida and Dufourmantelle 1997: 43-67). The examples described above illuminate the unfolding of Derrida's concept.

⁹⁷ In *Mon père, ce harki*, it is Dalila's father who tries to put an end to his life.

As she goes into the water, Leïla repeats to herself the questions and realisations that pushed her to her suicidal attempt:

À quoi bon vivre ainsi? À quoi bon se battre quand le sort s'acharne? Je renonce. Comme tant d'enfants de harkis, d'hommes et de femmes qui ont tout donné à la France, je baisse les bras. Jamais on ne nous laissera vivre en paix. Jamais on ne nous considérera comme de vrais Français. Nous serons toujours différents.

(124)

The protagonist of Kerchouche's novel understands her condition of different as a "double malediction", understanding that even if her ancestors fought and died for France, "nous, les harkis, n'avons jamais cessé d'être considérés comme des indigènes, des êtres inférieurs." (*ibid.*) In *Les Blancs, les Juifs et nous* Houria Bouteldja points out that "entre les Blancs et nous [les Indigènes⁹⁸], il y a la race. Elle est constitutive de cette république." (2016: 115) She understands that skin colour is determinant in order to construct perceptions within France. Thus, she calls attention to the fact that Italian, Portuguese or Poles need one generation to become "*vrai Français*", whereas Antilleans are likely to remain "stagiaires à vie" because they are "trop métis, pas assez blancs" (114). And this is precisely what she believes conditions the fitting in of the harki population in France, whose problem "ne sera jamais un problème algérien", but French (115):

Quelle qu'ait pu être leur adhésion au projet de l'Algérie française (volontaire ou contrainte), les harkis ne sont jamais devenus français, luxe que seuls les Européens pouvaient se payer. L'histoire ne ment pas. L'homme du 18 juin les a abandonnés et livrés désarmés aux indépendantistes algériens. Quant à la métropole, elle les a parqués dans des réserves avec leurs enfants. *Trop arabes pour être français. Trop indigènes pour être blancs.* [...] si les harkis qui se sont sacrifiés pour l'idée de France n'ont pas réussi à devenir blancs, [si] leurs enfants n'ont à ce jour jamais été "intégrés", qu'en sera-t-il de nous?

(114-115; emphasis added)

⁹⁸ Houria Bouteldja expresses herself "dans l'histoire et le présent de l'immigration maghrébine, arabo-berbéro-musulmane" and mobilises words such as *indigène*, *blanc* or *juif*, which she understands as social and political categories. She believes that "la raison indigène" is "la résistance" (2016: 47), a resistance that has to counteract the fate that, according to her, the "white prophecy" reserves the indigenous: "devenir des non-êtres ou des barbares [...]. Nos complexités et nos nuances se sont volatilisées. On nous a désépauissés, confisqués à nous-mêmes, vidés de toute substance historique." (101)

Juliette is an important character in the novel because she problematizes this kind of assertions and the dualistic articulations that conform them. She is an in-between figure whose status allows her greater mobility than any of the harki women ever had. She transitions from the masculine to the feminine world established in the camps, very compartmentalized, talking to both men and women about such delicate issues as arranged marriages or about the importance of literacy –which, she feels, is the only real escape they have from their multi-layered cloistering, more profound for the harki women.

In her autobiographical text, Kerchouche presents Juliette as someone who has somehow reconciled the harkis with France, and Kerchouche herself with the “partie française d’[elle]-même” that she started to dread: “elle m’a redonné confiance dans ce pays” (2003: 87). Furthermore, because of all the memories she has, Juliette holds the key to the past for many children of harkis that, like Dalila, go to see her in their exploratory self-quest, acting as a transgenerational figure. In the 2006 novel she is presented as someone who pushes the protagonist to change the narrative about French people. Juliette will be the first French person to treat Leïla like a “human being” (71) –which differentiates her from the people within the French administration, as we saw– and she will be the one that will inform Leïla of events like May 1968, of which the protagonist, like those who live in the camps, knows nothing, triggering in the protagonist the realisation “à quel point nous vivons en marge de la société, déconnectés du monde en marche.” (72) Furthermore, in the novel Juliette is Jérôme’s grandmother. Jérôme is also signalled out as an important local French character. Like Juliette, he is willing to know Leïla for who she is, and does not read her through the stereotypic glasses her school companions use.

Kerchouche builds a romance storyline between the two characters to tackle the collision France-Algeria –whereby Jérôme represents France and Leïla, Algeria– from a non-conflicting perspective.⁹⁹ Jérôme and Leïla go to school together, the space that allows them to interact,

⁹⁹ Kerchouche’s work seems to be conversing with Sebbar’s *Shérazade* trilogy, with which one can trace many intertextual connections, starting with the first book’s title. In it, the protagonist has a relationship with Julien, the children of pieds-noirs that introduces Shérazade to an intricate world of Orientalist references, helping her in her learning process about Algeria. Winifred Woodhull sees in Julien a symbol of France and reads Shérazade as “the Algeria the French thought they had won but which they lost” (1993: 40). On her part, Anne Donadey insists that we should read their relationship “as the realization that the colonial encounter, in its violence, created a hybridization that can never be erased. Such a métis history must be dealt with, and the search for one’s roots and identity must, of necessity, pass through this crossroads.” (2001: 126) Kerchouche uses the figure of Jérôme to help the protagonist understand that her relationship with France does not have to necessarily be one based on an exercise of opposition, but that she can learn to grow fond of the Frenchness that configures her.

besides Juliette's house, but Leïla understands their relationship as sustained upon unequal terms. She will feel they belong to two separate worlds, always aware of the fact that she lives behind bars, unable to break through "ce grillage qui nous sépare, ce fossé entre nos vies", in her words (116). Once again, Kerchouche resorts to visual images that help her translate the interior reality of the characters she portrays.

When Jérôme declares his amorous interest for Leïla, she expresses that their relationship is quite impossible, something Jérôme does not understand:

–Je ne comprends pas. Ton père s'est battu avec la France. Pourquoi refuserait-il que tu fréquentes un Français? Ça n'a pas de sens!

–Ce n'est pas lui. C'est moi qui ne veux pas. Je suis arabe et tu es français. J'aurais l'impression de trahir les miens.

(117)

The fact that Kerchouche decides to dedicate her novel to portraying the life of a young adult is of paramount importance, inasmuch as two thirds of the population inside the camps were youngsters under 20. By making room for the conflicting thoughts with which Leïla deals, Kerchouche is opening the door to understanding a whole group of people that, by the time her novel is published, are part of France's social fabric, as made clear by the introductory section of the novel. In creating a love-ridden relationship that is ultimately capable of surmounting the divisions that at first seemed to prevent it –not only the physical barriers, but Leïla's self-imposed reticence, born of the values that her family have passed on to her–, Kerchouche constructs a gateway to the reality drawn by the camps, in which, as we have seen, the power dynamics that conformed French Algeria were still present.

Jérôme signifies the possibility of envisioning an escape from the cloistering in which the protagonist feels trapped, which has to do not only with the physical space she occupies in the camp, but also with her familial inheritance. From an early age, the narrator has come to integrate the idea that the way she relates to others –particularly men– has to be in accordance with what her family deems right. We learn that her mother would care about her daughter's reputation above all things, that she would advise Leïla not to talk to boys, wanting to choose the correct husband for her, warnings that have an impact on the narrator: "Au fil des ans, j'ai intégré ses interdits, ses tabous et j'ai fini par construire ma prison intime, en m'autocensurant." (41)

Kerchouche uses the love narrative between her protagonist and Jérôme to tackle the ways in which a new context activates a revisitation of those taboos and interdictions that are part of the harkis' cultural tradition.

Jérôme helps Leïla resignify spaces to which her family ascribed very particular meanings, which in turn facilitates reflections of a wider scope. Thus, for example, she was always told by her parents that she should not go to bars, for only prostitutes go there. However, after Jérôme takes her to have a drink at a bar close to the local library and she sees that different people occupy that space without resorting to any kind of sexual activity, she starts questioning that idea that had hitherto gone unquestioned within her familial milieu (88). Jérôme relates to Leïla as if she were any other of her French peers, without taking her past into account, which gives Leïla the idea that she might be able to weigh differently all the thoughts and conceptions that she has received throughout her life, the questions that nag her so.

Juliette's grandson also acts like the figure of the stranger in the sense that he represents an external gaze, unrelated to the cultural tradition into which the protagonist was born, that pushes Leïla to ask herself questions which lead her to have a clearer sense of her subjectivity. Leïla's following thought is particularly revealing. After Jérôme finds her at Juliette's house, before they get to know each other, he says he claims to know that she is from the camp. Unaware of the reality that the camp conceals, he asks her what in another context would be a simple question: "Tu viens d'où?" (73), to which Leïla admits: "C'est compliqué..." Jérôme cannot quite make where the complication lies, for he equates a birthplace with "being from somewhere". But Leïla is bothered by the question: "Sa question me fait mal parce que je ne sais plus où sont mes racines. Je me vois difficilement lui raconter que je suis algérienne mais que mon pays ne veut plus de moi, et qu'en France je ne me sens chez moi nulle part, à force de changer de camp tous les ans." (*ibid.*)

By adding the internal monologue of the protagonist within the dialogue, Kerchouche builds a contrast between the persona Leïla is towards others and what she does not exteriorize, a contrast that translates her difficulties to navigate her situation as a daughter of harkis living in a camp. And as readers, it helps us understand what it is that part of the harki community grabs hold of after their arrival into France. Thus, for example, we learn that whilst the past is important for a character like Jérôme inasmuch as it indicates the place where one is born, for Leïla the past is an ever-present element permeating all the corners of her current reality,

because her harki identity is very much rooted in an event that happened in the past –the Franco-Algerian war: “Je n’arriverai donc jamais à discuter simplement avec quelqu’un sans que mon passé ne vienne tout polluer?” (75) Realisations such as this make Leïla think that her and Jérôme do not speak the same language (*ibid.*), as if their grammars, the way they conjugate the different elements that configure them, were different.

1.4.2 The Foreigner as a Friend

By creating the character of Jérôme and by giving Juliette more space in her fiction, Kerchouche arguably makes a point against generalizations and homogeneous gazes. Kerchouche’s first work was much more descriptive; seen this way, objectively there were not many people within French society that were eager to help Kerchouche’s family and the harki families in general. However, the impact of those who did help them was large, hence the bigger presence of Juliette in the author’s novel and the importance of Jérôme in the protagonist’s process of self-discovery. In Najat El Hachmi’s fictional work we also find a figure, one of her teachers, that is similar to what Juliette represents in Kerchouche’s text. Read together with El Hachmi’s autobiographical text, it is a character that somehow redeems Catalan society and helps the protagonist navigate her subjective exploration. We learn, in *Jo també sóc catalana*, that many people El Hachmi encounters in her Catalan environment approach her from stereotypical conceptions; but she explains that the academic milieu represents an escape from all of that. In *L’últim patriarca* it is within the academic world where the protagonist comes upon a teacher whom she ends up befriending and that opens a new window for her. Not only does she connect her with a genealogy of female writers that introduce the narrator to the terrain of Catalan culture, but the teacher also introduces her to the world of writing, in which she will find comfort and that she will use as a way to further understand her own subjectivity formation.

In the novel, the narrator’s transition to her new environment is epitomised by her learning of the dictionary. At the end of each of the chapters that conform the second part of the novel, she writes down the new vocabulary that she is learning and that she uses to interpret her new reality, which has to do not only with the new Catalan context, but with the familial tensions

she encounters at home.¹⁰⁰ Despite the little space that the author dedicates to the figure of the teacher, it is a very relevant character, for, just like Juliette rescued Leïla at her most difficult moments, the protagonist's teacher saves her from what she defines as an internal death (El Hachmi 2008: 254). The teacher's lessons help the protagonist to widen her horizons and provide her with tools to face the situations she encounters in Catalonia that are not coded in her original cultural tradition. That the teacher is a woman is of major importance, for as in all of El Hachmi's text, the fact that the protagonist understands herself as a woman conditions her voyage of identity. Faced with a mother that does not understand the codes that regulate how a teenager in Catalonia should dress or interact with her own body (when she has her period, for example), the protagonist resorts to her teacher, who is able to provide her with the answers she is seeking.

Their friendship –indeed, the narrator refers to this figure first as a friend, then as a teacher (253)– surpasses the academic terrain, and she is the one that gives the protagonist readings and musical rhythms that help her define who she is, books that the teacher puts the narrator's way and the literary references of which will be the ones she uses to filter what she experiences, “que explicaven altres significats de la vida” (*ibid.*) –that is, the narrator's friend-teacher is tantamount to a world of possibilities, she encapsulates the impossibility of a closed and fixed meaning. Furthermore, the teacher is the only person who remembers the narrator's birthday, at a time where she goes through changes that, in retrospect, she realises were “identity crises” (268-269). She is the one who will see her as an individual, and not as a part of a group, where one's specificity becomes blurred.

The friendships portrayed in the texts by both Kerchouche and El Hachmi act as gateways to the protagonists' processes of self-definition. Juliette, Jérôme and the teacher in El Hachmi's novel come from the world that, in the protagonists' cultural traditions of origin, is constructed in terms of alterity. However, the narrators interact with them not in dynamics of opposition, but using the component of difference that they represent as a benefit, in their favour. In the introduction to *Repensar la comunidad desde la literatura y el género* Marta Segarra goes over some of the major contemporary contributions, in the Western-academic world, to the concept of community, which is thought of “desde la heterogeneidad y la distancia, y no desde la

¹⁰⁰ Each chapter of the second section tackles some of the vocabulary that the narrator is learning, grouped by words starting with the same letter in each case –which follow the alphabetical order. All the letters of the Catalan alphabet, except for *a* and *b*, are included.

homogeneidad y la adhesión fusional” (2012: 8). Segarra understands that literary texts, due to their irreducible singularity, allow for this angle of enquiry and enable critical reflections on both collective and individual identities.¹⁰¹ The texts I study lend themselves to being read this way, and the friendships that I highlighted epitomise the concept of community as studied by Segarra.

Segarra’s text introduces us to several proposals that conjugate the idea of friendship from a non-hierarchical understanding and open to the possibility of respecting the specificity of all those subjects who see themselves enshrined within a friendship; an idea that, I believe, is also present in the texts by Kerchouche and El Hachmi. Segarra uses the works by Maria-Mercè Marçal and Hélène Cixous to explore the notion of desire, a concept with which, Segarra suggests, both authors put forward a revisitation of the subject in relation –which is also a creative subject, a writing subject–, in the sense that desire implies a redrawing of the boundaries of the subject, inasmuch as desiring subjects open themselves to others, understanding their own subjectivity in regard to an other (18-19).

Homi Bhabha, too, mobilised the notion of desire when explaining the logics that vertebrate the colonial discourse and the way the colonised other is constructed –from the projection of the coloniser’s self. In the contexts that I study, the friendships in which the protagonists and the local French and Catalan populations get involved represent a model of relationship that might be key to the construction of democratic societies, freed from stereotypical conceptions and racist attitudes (epitomised, as we saw, by the way Cati related to Najat El Hachmi’s narrator in *Jo també sóc catalana*). In her ongoing investigation about the notion of community, Marta Segarra, together with Joana Sabadell-Nieto, has explained elsewhere that

Hélène Cixous (*Volleys*) as well as Jacques Derrida (*The Politics of Friendship*, among other texts) have also related community –without generally using this term– to sexual difference and desire, since “love” (for Cixous) and “friendship” (for Derrida) epitomize the tension between singular and plural, distance and fusion, problematizing the limits of the subject and its unity.

(2014: 9)

¹⁰¹ Similarly, Paul White understands that “creative literature contains some of the most effective explorations of identity issues” (1995: 2).

In order to explore “the subversive and enriching potential of the concept of community” (10), Segarra and Sabadell-Nieto also resort to Esposito, who

also implicitly relates community with love, for instance, when he states that a community does not “protect” the subject but exposes it to the extreme risk of losing, not only its individuality, but also the limits which define the subject (*Bios*). The sense of community would precisely lie in the consciousness of these limits, understood not as a border but as a “threshold” [...].

In this sense, the “body” of community –still following Esposito– is opened by a “wound” [...] which exposes us to the “contagion” of otherness.

(9)

In what follows, I shall analyse how the texts by El Hachmi and Kerchouche present us with characters that understand their subjectivities not only in regard to the labels that arise from the Catalan and the French context, but also as being part of different communities, which shape the way they relate to their own bodies –their own “wounds”, understood, following Esposito, as inscriptions marking their relationship with otherness– and the way they relate to others. These considerations will allow for a problematization of the limits between the individual and the common that I believe will help us understand our current ever-globalizing world, too.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE INHERITED MAGHREB:

ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

A thorough analysis of the selected texts indicates that the authors and their protagonists understand their subjectivities not only in relation to those that also comprehend themselves through the labels discussed above –those of *harki* and *immigrant*–, as we shall see, but it allows for the realization that they dedicate a fair amount of space to reflecting upon their subject position as members of their respective families. The familial community is portrayed, in the works by Dalila Kerchouche and Najat El Hachmi, as an important marker of identity. This is due not only to the fact that, as has already been explained, the paternal figures in each of the cases initiated the familial migrations to Europe. The main characters of the works studied, and their authors, navigate their place in Catalonia and France by coming to terms with the complex and more-or-less alienating gaze with which Europe reads them, and with the inherited values and narratives passed on to them by their families. And just as their texts can be read as a tool to problematize the homogenizing and at times stereotyped European gaze, they too allow for attentive considerations of notions such as those of “family”, “kinship” or “community”.

The familial structures that are portrayed in the texts studied are deeply rooted in the Maghrebi contexts where they were constituted and to which the families presented by El Hachmi and Kerchouche remain heavily attached even whilst in Europe –Maghrebi contexts on which the imprint of Islam is very present. To this respect, and as I already stated in the Introduction, the authors, through their works, allow us readers to dwell on these particular cultural frameworks, tied to specific places and time periods –which, of course, present differences when compared to the familial structures that we find in Morocco, Algeria and the Maghrebi diaspora today. Thus, they foster an understanding of the transmediterranean space that is dynamic and eschews the monolithic regards with which this geographical space is sometimes considered –especially from the Northern rim of the Mediterranean.

Algerian sociologist Nadji Safir states that the Maghreb¹⁰² is shaped by norms and value systems belonging to several “identitarian logics”: Arab, Berber, African, Mediterranean and Islamic ones, the latter listed as the first of these logics (1997: 266). In a preface to a volume consecrated to discussing the plurality of the Maghrebi region,¹⁰³ Paul Balta writes that despite its internal diversity, the Maghrebi region is sustained by the same pillars, and quotes a statement by Ibn Badis—a key figure in understanding the role played by Islam in Algeria—that he believes is translatable to the whole of the North African Maghrebi territories: “La personnalité algérienne repose sur un trépied: l’ethnie berbère, la langue arabe et la religion musulmane” (Badis in Balta 1996: 8).

The Maghreb that is described within the works I study corresponds to the cartography drawn above, albeit the situations of the migrated families put forward by El Hachmi and the ones imagined by Kerchouche differ in many respects on what concerns their connection with North Africa. As already noted, El Hachmi’s familial communities move freely between the town where they live, in Catalonia, and their land of origin, in Morocco. Furthermore, the author sets the action of the novels *L’últim patriarca* and *La filla estrangera* within a time frame that parallels her own story, thus describing a Catalonia whose social fabric is different from the one there is now, one in which there were not as many families with ties to Morocco as there are now.

For her part, Kerchouche has written texts that have the harki camps as their main background. Although the author herself travelled to Algeria and reunited with some members of her biological family there, and despite the fact that both *Mon père, ce harki* and *Leïla* present us with families that have made their way out of the camps, the reclusive spaces remain highly

¹⁰² Sometimes referred to as “the Great Maghreb”, because in Arabic Maghreb is the name of Morocco; see Balta 1990. It is also worth noting that “Great Maghreb” might be used to refer to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, together with Libya and Mauritania—in contrast with “Maghreb”, which does not tend to include the latter, and which means “the West” in Arabic. Egypt, whilst belonging to North Africa geographically, tends to be considered as part of the so-called “Mashrik” (the East). As stated in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, “for the Arab world, the Maghrib embraces all the lands to the west of Egypt, and the Mashrik all those to the east. Nevertheless, the parallelism is not absolute; whilst the term Maghrib is particularly applied to either to the grouping North-Africa-Tripolitania or to the North Africa properly so-called or to its most western part, Morocco [...], the word Mashrik seems to cover the Orient in general, without reference to any one country or another” (Gibb *et al.* 1986a: 720).

¹⁰³ The volume, entitled *Las culturas del Magreb*, was commissioned by the Institut Europeu de la Mediterrània, a Barcelona-based entity whose aim is to create networks between all the Mediterranean territories and to foster a better understanding of the intricacies of this plural space. The editor of the volume, anthropologist Maria-Àngels Roque, notes the lack of interest towards the southern rim of the Mediterranean within academic circles up until the last decades of the twentieth century. Publications like this one, which includes voices from both sides of the Mediterranean, account for the willingness to explore the Maghreb from critical and nuanced perspectives (See Roque 1996: 11-40).

significant throughout the narratives. In the camps, we know, they were surrounded by other harki families, who shared the idea that a return to Algeria was tantamount to massacre or death. This idea permeated the imaginary of the adults that experienced the war first-hand. It is worth noting, however, as we learnt in the introduction and as it is recounted by Alice Zeniter in her novel *L'Art de perdre* (2017), that in these camps there were also families that arrived on French soil long after the end of the Franco-Algerian war –sometimes due to familial rivalries.

As a result of the described differences, the families in the works by both authors ascribe different weights to the elements that they identify with their cultural tradition. Both authors display familial realities in which the Berber component is present, where the Arabic language is significant –something which will be explored in the following chapter– and in which Islam and islamic practices and customs play a major role. In this sense, this realisation complies with the idea that despite the many political, social and cultural differences that traverse the Maghrebi space, the area identified under this denomination has common foundations,¹⁰⁴ but because each of the contexts described by the authors reshapes how these elements are conjugated, we are able to pay attention to the “Maghreb pluriel”, to use Abdelkebir Khatibi’s words (1983), and escape the reductionist gaze that is sometimes used when approaching this space. Similarly, the idea of the family within Arab contexts tends to be a homogeneous one. When Tahar Ben Jelloun claims that within Arab societies the individual is subjugated to the clan, the family, the tribe, the community and that his/her existence can only be explained inasmuch as it distinctly belongs to a group (1997: 249), he omits nuances that we are, however, able to unpack through the works by our authors.

The texts by El Hachmi and Kerchouche engage in a dialogue with this rather hermetic idea to prove that the familial units that find their roots in Arab societies are undergoing a series of transformations, for the autobiographies and the novels pay close attention to how different generations interact with each other, and how their relationships evolve –on both rims of the Mediterranean. The connections that the protagonists and the authors have with their parents,

¹⁰⁴ The nation-states conforming the Maghreb share the fact that they all had a colonial relationship with the French Empire. The imprint of this link lets itself be felt in the common language they all share, French, whose introduction on African territory was of course accompanied by manifold consequences. However, these nations are at the same time very different to each other in certain respects, such as in the political structure that sustains them, the relationship they had with the Ottoman empire or in the ways in which they reached political independence.

but also with their siblings and their descendants, and the evolution these relationships follow are important because they nurture the processes of subjectivity formation of both El Hachmi and Kerchouche, and of their narrators. In her seminal essay “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?”, Judith Butler mentions generational ties as part of the “kinship practices” that “emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency”, defining kinship as “a set of practices that institutes relationships of various kinds which negotiate the reproduction of life and the demands of death” (2002: 14-15). In the texts conforming the corpus of this thesis, we encounter a series of main characters that are very much aware of the dynamics that vertebrate their particular kinship and, because of that, whenever they reflect upon their processes of subjective construction they do so by considering these logics. They have a deep knowledge of the gender roles that criss-cross their familial structures, which regulate their (re)production, as we shall see.

In *Jo també sóc catalana*, Najat El Hachmi understands herself as part of a transgenerational structure that ultimately determines her behaviour, and imposes upon her the obligation to keep the structure intact for the generations that will follow: “A la mare la neguitejava especialment que jo no pogués continuar la tradició. Si jo fracassava, si em casava i encara no sabia fer res del que ella m’hauria d’haver ensenyat, la culpa només seria d’ella, de ningú més.” (2004: 150-51) The blood ties that unite El Hachmi with her mother, or rather that unite her mother with Najat, are seen, within the El Hachmi familial milieu, as the means that sustain the keeping-up of tradition, which comprises all those practices and customs that regulate how the individual must behave towards others. In this quotation, El Hachmi notes that she is aware of the fact that her mother feels responsible for Najat’s role in securing the continuation of that tradition, which creates a bond of “human dependency”, in Butler’s words.

In El Hachmi’s autobiographical essay we read how the migration that her father undertook –which meant that he was absent for part of the author’s childhood– slightly altered the kinship practices that came to be constructed as natural –rooted in a patriarchal and heteronormative regime as can be deduced from the author’s portrayal–, but did not prevent Najat from being brought up in the values and practices of the cultural tradition that she was always meant to inherit as a member of the El Hachmi family. The author tells us that her family was very much structured around a regime that marked the roles that her father, the patriarch, and her mother, the guardian of tradition, should adopt. Thus, for example, it was her father’s duty to cut baby Najat’s hair so that her hair would grow strong and thick, but because he was not there, it was

her grandfather who ended up doing the task, “fent de patriarca” (190), a grandfather that has died by the time Najat completes her account and to whom she connects her native Morocco. The importance of the grandparents is also signalled in El Hachmi’s first novel –and in Kerchouche’s texts, where the migration of both the biological and the fictional families described by the author will lead to alterations of the established familial codes, too. In *L’últim patriarca*, when Mimoun’s first baby is born, it is Mimoun’s father who buys him clothes, when, the narrator explains, the natural order of things would have been for the grandfather to receive presents such as clothing, and not the other way around (2008: 117).

In *La filla estrangera*, on the contrary, the figure of the grandparents is not (as) present, because we know that the narrator and her mother were abandoned by the protagonist’s father, a gesture that completely ruptured the bonds that establish in which way the “reproduction of life and the demands of death” function. I already explained that the narrator’s final distancing from her mother signifies a knot within the family’s genealogical line,¹⁰⁵ but it could be argued that the beginning of such a knot was traceable to the paternal abandonment. The narrator gives a clear idea about the fact that she was raised in accordance to the logics that regulate her mother’s world, and we learn that these regulations have to do with how women are to follow norms that are distinct to those of men, when it comes to marriages, for instance. The will of the protagonist’s mother to marry her daughter off to a relative can be seen as a search for a male figure able to restore the rupture provoked by the abandonment of the father, in order to strengthen her daughter’s ties to her origin for, as the narrator points out, the goal of the Maghrebi mothers she knows is “conservar les tradicions i que els fills no abandonin l’origen” (2015: 182).

El Hachmi’s exploration of the tacit consequences of motherhood permeates her autobiographical account, too. In the chapter entitled “Dones d’aquí, dones d’allà”, El Hachmi gives voice to the reality experienced by her aunts, who live in Morocco. She writes about her aunt Jamila, who, in a scene that the author states has happened before, runs away from her husband’s family home because she cannot find her place amongst her new kindred, “que li

¹⁰⁵ In a work entitled *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State*, sociologist Halim Barakat writes that despite the fact that marriage is becoming more of an individual choice, disconnected from paternal approval –a disconnection that we can firmly assume has only escalated since the publication of Barakat’s work, which coincides chronologically with the context in which El Hachmi’s protagonists are situated– traditionally it “has been seen as a family and communal or societal affair more than an individual one.” (1993: 107) He also points out that the main advantage of marriage practices lied “in the strengthening of kinship solidarity, in preventing the separation of the bride and her immediate kin.” (109)

havia tocat” (2004: 143) –again, the author displays the idea of the *mektoub*.¹⁰⁶ Jamila’s father reacts with anger to her daughter’s escape, for she must comply with “el lloc que li pertoca” (144). To his lack of understanding, Jamila reacts by faking to end her own life, which triggers the departure of the father and provokes uneasiness amongst her mother and sisters. El Hachmi reveals such uneasiness within her work with the following series of questions, which we know come from Jamila’s feminine relatives: “Però què fas? Quin dret tens a manllevar-te la vida? És que et penses que és propietat teva, potser? I els teus fills? No penses que tens dos fills de qui t’has de cuidar?” (*ibid.*)

It is worth noting that El Hachmi does not write a dialogue between Jamila and her mother or sisters, but presents us only with rhetorical questions that are left unanswered. She does not even mention whether it is the mother or one of her daughters who formulates the questions; it does not matter. They could all have asked them, because, we could argue, they have all been raised to believe that motherhood signifies that there exists an unquestionable and unbreakable bond between the mother and her children, a bond that makes the mother’s life dependant on her descendants. Such a way of thinking, which would ratify Ben Jelloun’s statement, signals the importance of familial structures within the context described by El Hachmi, but it does not mean that her female relatives do not question the foundations that vertebrate these structures. El Hachmi explains that whenever her aunts are together, they become “invincible” in the sense that they are able to challenge the authority from which their father benefits –an authority that, more or less directly, they consent to bestow (145).

We mustn’t forget that the cultural reality depicted by El Hachmi is enshrined in a very particular Morocco. The family portrayed by the author is rooted in a Riffian village, which determines their adscription to a class axis –something that plays a role in the weight that is given to what is understood as tradition. In order to better comprehend the socio-cultural and familial dynamics to which the author attests it is also necessary to bear in mind the migration undergone by part of the El Hachmi family, as the need to preserve “traditional values” might

¹⁰⁶ This corresponds to the practices that, according to Barakat, make up the patriarchal tradition of the Arab family. “In the traditional Arab family, the father has authority and the responsibility. The wife joins his kin group (patrilocal kinship) and the children take his surname (patrilineal descent). The father expects respect and unquestioning compliance with his instructions.” (1993: 100)

become more pressing once these values are somehow displaced and relocated in a context different than their originary one.¹⁰⁷

El Hachmi's works also bear witness to the importance of feminine gatherings, such as the one analysed above, in the displaced community, for they act as an alternative kindred. When the narrator of *L'últim patriarca* reunites with her father at the other side of the Mediterranean, together with her mother and siblings, we learn that she acts as the link between her mother and her mother's new reality –an image that echoes that of the bridge as presented by El Hachmi in *Jo també sóc catalana*.¹⁰⁸ More than that, she becomes her mother's translator and her confessor, too, for she has no other familial network to help her through her process of adjustment. However, once a family from the same Maghrebi village arrives in town, that role is played by the mother of the newly arrived family, which alleviates the narrator: "Les tardes eren més lleugeres amb totes dues explicant-se històries i trobant antecedents comuns de coneguts o familiars, recordant un passat que no era el mateix ni s'hi assemblava." (2004: 213)

The communal Maghrebi origins act as a strong attachment between the two women, further emphasized by their condition as women. They share their role as care-givers for their families and their houses, which gets translated into a shared way of living their every-day life and the way they relate to their every-day spaces. That is why when the narrator's mother has to be hospitalized Soumisha, the neighbour, acts as a substitute mother for the narrator and her siblings and tries to pass on to the narrator the codes that regulate the familial life, the enforcement of which would imply that she quits reading the dictionary and what it represents –the possibility of envisioning new codes. "Ja sé que a tu t'interessa més llegir aquell llibre tan gruixut que tens, però allà, no hi aprendràs res de la vida. La mare tornarà i necessitarà que la

¹⁰⁷ Along these same lines, in a work that analyses the societal dynamics of "Franco-maghrébins", focusing on the case of the harkis, Mohamed Kara notes that "certaines institutions culturelles telles que le mariage ou le baptême, se célèbrent parfois, chez les Harkis vivant reclus dans les sites réservés, aux plus près de la tradition; bien plus près que lorsque ces mêmes cérémonies sont fêtées chez les immigrants [tout court]" (1997: 134).

¹⁰⁸ The metaphor of the bridge is a recurrent one in discussions that have to do with the navigation of cultural spaces constructed upon multiple affiliations. A significant example is the volume *This Bridge Called my Back*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. In the essay "La Prieta", Anzaldúa describes what she calls "el Mundo Zurdo", a space that is reminiscent of the description of the in-between scenario inhabited by El Hachmi. "El Mundo Zurdo" is Anzaldúa's self-constructed universe that counteracts the "overwhelming oppression" that is born from the fact that people like Anzaldúa "do not fit" and because of that they are read as a threat. "In El Mundo Zurdo", Anzaldúa has only to belong to herself. This space mixes bloods and affinities and, because it places the focus on the self, holds the potential to expand. "I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet", Anzaldúa claims, for el Mundo Zurdo's path "is the path of a two-way movement –a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society." (1983: 208-209) By presenting her particular experience –which gets expanded in her fictional works– El Hachmi, too, is inviting the Catalan population to rethink itself.

cuidis, només et té a tu i ja ets prou grandeta per fer algunes coses.” (221) The fact that Soumisha tells the narrator that she is the only one her mother can count on emphasizes to what extent the family portrayed by El Hachmi is structured upon very solid gender roles that establish different feminine and masculine genealogical lines –the narrator has siblings, but they are not constructed as being able to perform the task of care-givers that the narrator, because she is a woman, must necessarily embrace in Soumisha’s eyes.

When discussing her own motherhood, in *Jo també sóc catalana*, El Hachmi has already put us in context and we know that her son Rida¹⁰⁹ will be raised according to values and customs belonging to different cultural traditions, because as a child who grew up in Catalonia but of Moroccan parents, she, too, experienced a betwixt upbringing. Such an upbringing has led her to question, in a deeper way than her relatives in Morocco, her familial inheritance when it comes to the way she should understand her kinship’s regulations. However, despite the fact that we know she is not as constrained as her aunts in matters of tradition, she does acknowledge that her behaviour as a mother has to be understood in connection with her origins. “Com a mare tenia el deure de fer el que s’ha de fer, en això consisteix la maternitat” (2004: 126), she will assert, letting us know, again, she was raised to believe that motherhood goes accompanied with certain obligations. She tells her son that she decided to circumcise him because she understood it was a “necessity”, a necessary procedure in order to render him equal (or, as she says, so that he would not be different) to his father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather and not solely a religious-based practice. The patrilineal line, then, is understood to be not only a matter of values and customs, but also a corporeal one. Furthermore, El Hachmi uses suspended dots when listing her masculine ascendants to whom her son will be connected to highlight the solid quality of such a patrilineal line.

2.1 The Body within the Familial Unit

Taking Foucault’s reflections as a cue, in *Teoría de los cuerpos agujereados* Marta Segarra uses different kinds of texts to delve into the idea that bodies are subjected to discourses and instrumentalized in every historical moment. Paying attention to this thought, we are able to

¹⁰⁹ It is worth noting that Najat El Hachmi dedicates *La filla estrangera* to Anaïs, her daughter and Rida’s sister. The fact that Rida is an Arabic name and Anaïs is not could be read as a proof of the mixing of cultural traditions that, judging by what is described in El Hachmi’s works, traverses the author’s own family.

detect how bodies are constructed within the contexts in which the works by Najat El Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche are inscribed, and how they help us reflect on wider notions of identity and alterity. Segarra describes the figure of the scar as a “recordatorio del carácter agujereado del cuerpo y de la fragmentación del sujeto” (2014: 85). Earlier, we saw how the circumcision of Najat’s son –a procedure that would mark him forever, both physically and symbolically– was thought of by El Hachmi as a means to inscribe him within the solid patrilineal line of the family. However, when put in dialogue with other ideas about the body and about subjectivity put forward by the author, we are able to comprehend that, indeed, and as Marta Segarra signals, the marks that can be traced on the body announce the impossibility of conceiving the subject who “bears” the body as a complete and solid being.

In his text “Circonfession”, Derrida refers to the notion of circumcision both as a physical wound and as a metaphor that links the circumcised being with his community of origin –an idea echoed in the gesture of which El Hachmi is in charge and that is performed on her son’s body. Commenting upon “Circonfession”, Hélène Cixous notes that the circumcision and the confession to which Derrida refers in his text places the body of the newly born in a particular ontological terrain whereby he is “pas encore et déjà lui-même” (Cixous 1994: 38). Cixous writes about the circumcision as a gesture of engraving, and refers to the part of the baby’s skin that is removed in the procedure in these terms: “‘la membrane en moins comme addition’. Le-plus-de-prépuce.” (39) –what gets taken away is thus a fragment of skin that becomes enlarged and turned into a manuscript that can be drawn and re-drawn, which takes us back to the idea of incompleteness to which I referred earlier.

Derrida’s work signals towards the source of this original wound. Cixous elicits an answer, which in its turn evokes other questions:

Blessure infligée par qui? [...] la mère. Avec circoncision apparaît, entre, ayant toujours été là bien sûr, la marque de la mère sur le fils. La mère qui coupe? C’est la mère qui scie, la mère/scie. [...] Et si nous étions tous un peu signés sans le savoir consciemment? [...] Un peu ouverts par –l’autre– [...] Le circoncis est explicitement différent. Donc “se sent différent”. Différent d’avant. Et des “autres”.

[...] Dans le corps même est taillée la limite entre le moi et l'autre. Ce qui fait la différence, c'est-à-dire l'entaille d'union, est ciselé dans la chair même de ce moi.

(39-42)¹¹⁰

Following on from Cixous's considerations, we can go back to the circumcision and understand to what extent the meaning of the decision taken by Najat goes beyond a carnal inscription and can indeed be deemed a multi-layered gesture of belonging. Segarra has also discussed the notion of the "grotesque body" –borrowing the label established by Bakhtin in his considerations of the works by Rabelais– in reference to a corporeity that is organic and interconnected, open to the outside, too (2014: 26). Under this gaze, the circumcision that Rida endures –which is different from that endured by his relatives, for it happens in Catalonia, in a particular socio-cultural context– renders his body an open body in the sense that it articulates the position he occupies not only within his family but within Catalonia, too. The scar he "inhabits" connects him with a set of practices and cultural values that, as already examined, will condition the way he is read on the northern rim of the Mediterranean, a regard problematized by El Hachmi. Furthermore, El Hachmi uses her texts to question the idea of the body as a "natural" entity, and, just as pointed out by Judith Butler (1990), to develop the thought of the body as a cultural construct.

In all of El Hachmi's works, the author presents the body as a tool that regulates the functioning of the patriarchal system that she describes. The patriarchy that vertebrates the main families in the texts divides the community to which it applies into two groups, always according to their genitalia –hence, without problematizing such a dichotomous distinction, and without putting into question the constructed nature of sex, as an analytical category, as signalled by Butler (1990) and Monique Wittig (1992).¹¹¹ Segarra, who cites Monique Wittig and her idea

¹¹⁰ In an interview by Jessie Chaffee for the online magazine *Words without Borders* on the occasion of the publication of *La filla estrangera*, Najat El Hachmi claims that "the book's title is a reference to one of [the] poems [by Maria-Mercè Marçal], *The Sister, the Foreigner*, that addresses directly the issue of motherhood—the sudden strangeness of a newborn daughter, despite the fact that she had been part of one's own body." (Chaffee 2016) Marçal, to whom El Hachmi connects herself literarily, widely explored the female body in her work. This quotation allows us to understand that the "wounds" that are connected to giving birth not only leave an imprint on the subject that is born, as Derrida and Cixous explore, but also on the woman who gives birth –that somehow also becomes "open" by an other, to use Cixous formulation.

¹¹¹ This does not mean, of course, that within the Maghrebi space such problematization does not exist. Despite the difficulties of debating certain topics in societies that are very much dominated by a strong religious presence the aim of which is to regulate the discourse on sexuality, many artists and academics use their writing to disclose practices, within Maghreb, that question the heteronormative regime and the gender/sex binary. See for example the issue of the journal *Expressions maghrébines* dedicated to the cultural production ensuing from the Maghrebi

of the “straight mind” (1992) to try and deconstruct the gender-sex binary also challenged by Butler, points out that such binary has effects on the way the masculine and the feminine body are constructed. Thus, contrarily to what happens with the feminine body –perceived as “pierced and penetrable”, which echoes Edward Said’s remarks about the Orient–, the masculine body is thought of in terms of completion, as “impermeable” and “whole” –and Marta Segarra reminds us that, etymologically, *whole* means “intact” (2014: 91).¹¹²

The texts by El Hachmi bear account to how such a dichotomous distinction functions within the families that she portrays, a binary division that has to be understood in terms of power dynamics, too, whereby those subjects that are constructed as men hold the symbolic power and are the ultimate regulators of the basic patriarchal unit: the family. Such regulations have to do, as we saw, with how men and women –and boys and girls– must behave, with the spaces they can occupy and in which they can circulate, and with the kind of interactions that they can, and cannot, initiate and maintain. In *L’últim patriarca*, the text by El Hachmi that deals more directly with this topic, we learn that the line of great patriarchs to which her father belongs has remained unquestioned throughout generations. The beginning of the patrilineal line is untraceable, we read right at the very beginning, as if the author was pointing to the idea that such a fact would strengthen its unquestionability.

As we conclude from the account provided by El Hachmi, one is born inside this system and contributes to its maintenance regardless of his/her sex. Thus, we understand why, although we know that the narrator’s father was a whimsical and petty boy whilst growing up, his sisters loved him unconditionally and spoiled him and consented to his rages –because he was destined to be the patriarch: “Mimoun aconseguia sempre que les dones de la seva vida l’anessin

space and the diaspora, entitled *Mascunin/Fémilin. Sexte et revolutions* (Kassab-Charfi 2015) and the one coordinated by Domingo Pujante entitled *Désir et sexualités non normatives au Maghreb et dans la diaspora* (Pujante 2017).

¹¹² In her second novel, El Hachmi focuses more thoroughly on the body and on sexuality –the first section of the text is divided in chapters that account for the sexual experiences the narrator has had, each chapter consecrated to a different man. By dissecting these encounters, the narrator –whose experiences, El Hachmi has declared, are based on the ones she herself went through– dialogues with her own body and with how she conceives her relationship with sex, trying to dismantle socially-based impositions in order to be at peace with her own desires. The preoccupation on the body intersects here with another of El Hachmi’s unifying threads in her works: the issue of labels. Each of the chapters of the first section is entitled after a trait of the man with whom she shares the sexual relationship she is recounting –most of the times linking the men to a specific geographical location. We could arguably say that such a strategy is aimed at accounting for the diversity of experiences of the narrator. However, it does come across as a problematic gesture, inasmuch as it reduces the man in question to a characteristic that most of the times is not even significant in the unfolding of the events highlighted by the narrator.

convertint en patriarca.” (El Hachmi 2008: 99) His role as patriarch begins when he finds a woman he wants to marry, a woman who is worthy of starting a family with and with whom he can reproduce the kind of bonds that define kinship, according to Butler’s definition. The lives of women, in the narrator’s family, are utterly determined by men and their choices. We learn that the marriage between Mimoun and the narrator’s mother was born the moment he spotted her, a moment of which we know through the filter of the narrative voice: “va saber que aquella era la dona que podria domesticar, amb qui crearia uns lligams tan intensos que no podrien desfer-se mai, mai.” (53)

The sort of metaphors and vocabulary that the narrator uses in order to present the kind of union at the heart of her family allows for the realization that she is critical of its dynamics. She presents her father as someone who wants to tame, and even dominate, not only his wife but those women around him, like her sisters, for example: “pobra de tu que et trobi parlant amb algun noi... em conec els homes millor que tu i sé de què parlo” (54). Mimoun’s interaction with his sister here –which, as we will see, remains the attitude he will end up unfolding towards her daughter– is representative of the kind of authoritative behaviour that defines him as a patriarch. His control over his kindred is exerted beyond his presence, that is, even when he goes to Spain to seek the fate he feels he is destined to, he will threaten his wife and warn her that he will know of any misbehaviours on her part. Upon his return, people will tell him that she behaved like a slave whilst he was away, enchained to her bond with Mimoun.

This particular comparison, together with the vocabulary deployed by the narrator, gives cause to talk of the dehumanizing process which the narrator’s mother –and any women in her family– have to endure under the patriarchal gaze effected by Mimoun. Upon his return from Spain the first time, Mimoun will severely harm his wife, both physically and psychologically, which will lead the narrator’s mother to attempt to go back to her original family house, with her parents, to “la casa d’on vaig venir” (119) –it is worth noting that family is almost thought of spatially, as a secure place, a kind of shelter.¹¹³ This return, as we saw with Jamila’s case earlier, is not perceived as the “natural” order of things by the codes that regulate marriages in

¹¹³ Also worth mentioning is the fact that, as we find out in *Jo també sóc catalana*, in the originary language of Najat El Hachmi, “to go home” means to die, as we learn when the author speaks of her grandfather’s death, of which she learns whilst she is in Catalonia, in these terms: “I el moment havia arribat des de l’altra banda del fil telefònic, el teu avi *ha tornat a casa*, ja no és amb nosaltres.” (2004: 194; emphasis added) Earlier I already commented upon the importance of El Hachmi’s grandfather, who is described, together with his wife, somehow as the embodiment of Morocco for the author.

the Morocco of the protagonist. Following the naming logics analysed above within the works by Najat El Hachmi, the maternal grandfather of the narrator remains nameless and is only referred to as “grandfather number 2”, for the paternal family takes precedence in the kinship hierarchy. He agrees to take her daughter back: “a casa meva no tractem ni les bèsties així” (*ibid.*), he will say, thus indicating that the inhuman treatment he feels his daughter has received validates her return to her original household.

Other forms of dehumanization described by the narrator have the body as their locus –and the fact that she has internalized them to that extent of detail and the amount of space they occupy in her narration proves the importance they have in her account of how she ended the patriarchal regime within her family. When she recounts how her father chose a wife, what she ironically terms as “una bonica història d’amor”, we learn that he knew he wanted “molts fills d’una dona que havia de ser només seva i on no hi entraria cap més home que no fos ell.” (58) Irony is used by El Hachmi not only as a tool to give strength to what she is explaining, but also as a strategy that allows for the creation of a distance with regard to victimhood attitudes –the author is not leaving room for the reader to think that the novel is punctuated by characters who complain too much or take things too seriously. In the passage highlighted above, the male protagonist of El Hachmi’s novel thinks of the woman he seeks in terms of a vessel, an unpierced vessel, in a clear reference to her virginity. It is of paramount importance that she be a virgin, if she is to become his wife, and it is necessary that she be an honourable woman. Her honour, her manners are measured, to a great extent, by her gaze, which has to eschew impertinence. Mimoun ends up deciding that the narrator’s mother will become his wife because upon looking across to her for the first time, her eyes suggested no lust.

The eyes function as an important element in the construction of the (lack of) agency for women in the patriarchal regime that is portrayed in the novel. Thus, in an important passage of the narration, which becomes a transition between the two parts that conform El Hachmi’s text, we are told that a phone-call triggered the will of Mimoun to reunite with his family, in Catalonia –a family the boundaries of which were becoming blurry, as the children “gairebé no [sabien] què era un pare” (164). The idea for the phone-call was actually Mimoun’s father’s but the narrator became its most important interlocutor, for she was the one who triggered the familial reunification in Catalonia –and this particular moment, in which the narrator is constructed as the one actually responsible for facilitating the familial reunion in Europe, will create a special bond between father and daughter that makes the narrator’s final deed ever

more significant. During that conversation, the narrator's mother does not talk, she does not even dare to raise her eyes on her way to the phone-booth, for fear that they would cross the taxi-driver's eyes (*ibid.*).

The eyes as elements connected to the realm of desire –understood as the vehicle that vertebrates human interactions– have also been analysed by Marta Segarra, in *Traces du désir*. Segarra considers the idea of the gaze from an existentialist point of view, understanding, as Jean-Paul Sartre did, that the gaze functions as the realization that our position as subjects is fixated by an Other, who “reads” us in a certain way (2008: 38). According to Sartre, we are all “êtres-regardés” (in Segarra *ibid.*), even if the gaze itself is never materialized. Following such logics of alterity, the position of Mimoun's wife in the world is determined by her husband's omnipresent controlling gaze. When tackling the significance of the different parts composing the human body, Marta Segarra describes the gaze as “[el] eje sensorial de nuestra comprensión del mundo”, which becomes of great importance inasmuch as “en la mirada reside la identidad del sujeto” (2014: 9, 35). The eyes are important because they render the body “grotesque”, in the sense described above, thus connected to the reality that is outside the body *per se* and with which the body interacts. Such an unfolding could be equated with the idea of the wound, as expressed by Hélène Cixous, who understands the wound not as a superficial and dermal mark, but as a site of opening, an understanding that is linked with the idea of the scar put forward by Segarra (20).

In the second part of El Hachmi's novel, the image of the eyes as mirrors of someone's intentions or behaviour resurfaces. When the narrator's father asks one of his workers to return some tools to his daughter, the father identifies lust in his worker's eyes, which triggers a comment that parallels the one he directed to one of his sisters: “no vull que parlis amb cap home; si és moro encara menys, que ja me'ls conec, aquests” (242). We must bear in mind that at this point, the narrator is already a woman, meaning that she already has her period, which signifies that her body-vessel must remain intact. The period, Segarra writes, has long been assimilated with the blood produced by a wound (2014: 76). The image of the wound functions as a cue to delve into the idea of the feminine body as pierced and penetrable, for it strengthens the connection between the mouth and the vagina, “los orificios corporales [...] que más se suelen equiparar” (18); the bleeding vulva is a wound that “speaks” and that postulates the

incomplete character of the bleeding subject.¹¹⁴ The menstrual blood signals the “birth” of the feminine (and adult) subject –understanding that birth in Arendtian terms, as a principle of action (Arendt 1958)–, who enters the realm of conceivable maternity.

In a dialogue with Adriana Cavarero’s theorizations on vulnerability, Rosa María Rodríguez Magda traces an etymology of *vulnerability* as connected with the word *vulva*:

Sin intentar establecer una conexión etimológica, pero sí psicológica, se me ocurre que a lo largo de la historia encontramos también una interpretación patriarcal de la “vulva” como “vulnus”, herida, castración. Se ha querido ver a la mujer como un varón castrado, en contraposición con su verdadero sentido etimológico de “envoltura”; y, también, añado yo: apertura, parto y donación de vida. La sangre, en esta óptica femenina, no significa muerte, sino fecundidad y nacimiento.

(2014: 43)

The period represents the continuation of the feminine genealogical line for the woman who starts bleeding, because she is able, from that moment onwards, to enlarge that line, the thread that connects all the women within a familial community. Thus, not only will she be the object of the codes that regulate her kinship, but she will somehow become responsible for passing them on to the following generation. Furthermore, such a body, that becomes wounded with the arrival of the menstrual blood –and here we can connect the blood with what Rodríguez Magda identifies as a patriarchal reading of *vulva*–, holds the potential of being pierced, which also makes it the object of the patriarchal gaze that, in the novel by El Hachmi, is epitomised by that of Mimoun. Under this light, we comprehend why Mimoun forbids his daughter –whose body has been “feminized”– to talk to (Maghrebi) men, a command that strengthens the connection mouth-female genitalia, as discussed above. It is relevant to note the double-standards

¹¹⁴ On another note, Derrida connected the hymen with the imaginary of orature. In an article where she theorizes the hymen as a liminal space, Jessica A. Folkart gives us the keys to understand in which ways the hymen –which, when broken, causes blood to flow– also “speaks”: “[Derrida] expands the semantic echoes of the hymen by tracing its etymological roots, wherein ‘hymen’ is hypothesized to share the same origin as the word ‘hymn’: ‘traced to a root *u* that can be found in the Latin *suo*, *suere* (to sew) and in *huphos* (tissue)... Both words would have a relation with *uphaino* (to weave, spin –the spider web– machinate), with *huphos* (textile, spider web, net, the text of a work...), and with *humnos* (a weave, later the weave of a song...)’. The hymen, in its origins, seems to be not just a tissue, a permeable presence and nonpresence, but also a song, and both are rooted in sewing, weaving, ‘a sort of textile’, as Derrida calls it, even a text.” (2013: 355) This reading of the hymen by Derrida can be put in parallel with his conception of the notion of circumcision, following Cixous’s considerations, for she understands that the skin that is removed from the circumcised penis is a manuscript, a text of sorts.

to which Mimoun's order point, whereby women are asked to remain asexual until marriage if they want to be deemed worthy of starting a family, but it is accepted that men do not abide by the same patterns.

In an essay entitled "Virginité et patriarcat", Fatima Mernissi describes the logics of patriarchy that reign in the Morocco where she grew up, which parallel the ins and outs of many of the scenes I have discussed. These logics intersect, in Mernissi's account, with values associated with Islam. Mernissi published this text in 1979, in the journal *Lamalif*, a publication that was born to construct a critical voice within Morocco, at times of deep political turmoil. The fact that it was banned in 1988 shows to what extent its impact spread, and Mernissi's texts –for she contributed to the journal in 1980 and 1982, too– were to strengthen the alternative society the founders of the magazine wanted to create. Mernissi's outspoken feminism was deemed provocative by those who did not share her viewpoints (Rhouni 2010: 84). In this particular essay, she understands that in 20th century Morocco, virginity accomplishes a social function, explained by the "fondements idéologiques de la famille traditionnelle musulmane qui ne condamne que la femme à la monogamie et au contrôle de l'instinct sexuel. L'homme, au contraire, ne se voit imposer aucune limite" (Mernissi 1979: 28). The position of men within this structure is determined, according to Mernissi, "en contrôlant les allées et venues des femmes parentes, par sang ou par alliance, et en leur évitant tout contact avec des étrangers mâles." (25) The portrait offered by El Hachmi of the familial interactions within the narrator's family corresponds to the social analysis made by Fatima Mernissi.

The works of fiction by Najat El Hachmi allow for a thorough comprehension of how the lack of boundaries in regard to the behaviour of men, as described by Mernissi, unfolds. In *La filla estrangera*, we do not learn much about the father of the narrator but we are made aware of the fact that he repudiated her and her mother and formed another family, a gesture which leads the narrator to speak of Catalonia as the place in which her newly-drawn family (made up of her and her mother only) is born; Catalonia becomes the place of "el segon origen com a família" (2015: 133). The fact that the narrator does not refer to her father as such, but speaks of him as "el marit de la meva mare" –again, as with the epithet she uses to refer to her husband, she proves to what extent her linguistic usage vertebrates her problematization of somehow imposed communities–, she is distancing herself from the person that is no longer part of her family, in Catalonia. However, and despite the fact that the narrator might be content with her re-founded family, the strong will of the narrator's mother to find a partner for her daughter

—a process that takes up a lot of space within the novel, which speaks of its importance— can arguably be read as a sign that she considers the new family as somehow incomplete.

The mother's concern is to find a Maghrebi husband for the narrator, so that the Maghrebi community with which they interact —on both sides of the Mediterranean— approves of the union. The narrator insists on the idea of a greater community, which acts as a safeguard for those who are under its umbrella and as a keeper of the honour —a quality also discussed in Kerchouche's universe. We learn that such a safeguard has to do with making “the family” and “the traditions” prevail over the individual's wishes (117). This is exemplified by the fact that the narrator will get married to a man that her mother has chosen and not her teenage boyfriend, who does not belong to the cultural tradition of mother and daughter. Even if this relationship does not get discussed in the text, we could venture to posit that it would not be deemed right by the mother, who understands that the greater community will judge her according to her daughter's behaviour, which, again, signals the tensions between individual and communal dynamics.

2.2 The (Re)Foundation of the Community

In *La filla estrangera*, the narrator's mother wants a man from her place of origin to be incorporated into her family in Catalonia, so that he can secure its continuation. By escaping from the increased familial unity that ends up resulting from her marriage to her cousin, the narrator contests the symbolic structures that configure the man as the ultimate safe-keeper of the family —and, by extension, of the subject's existence. Her escape, considered together with the deed committed by the narrator of *L'últim patriarca* represent different ways to put into question the patriarchal regime in which both protagonists have been raised: putting an end to it, within the family, in the case described in *L'últim patriarca*, and escaping from it, as we read in *La filla estrangera*. These choices could be labelled as transgressive, for they evince the refusal of the narrators to the acceptance of such a regime.

The notion that only men can act as the true symbolic founders of a family is also considered in *L'últim patriarca*. The narrator knows that, in Catalonia, her father has relationships with autochthonous women, who she has learnt to construct as “Christian whores” that threaten to lure him into starting a new family, echoing the imaginary she has inherited from her Maghrebi

family. He even ends up establishing quite strong bonds with a woman named Rosa, something of which Mimoun's family in Morocco is aware. The relationship between Rosa and Mimoun continues even when the narrator, her mother and siblings establish themselves in Catalonia. They even get together with Rosa and her two daughters, going on a trip to the beach "com si fóssim una sola família", the narrator will say (195).

The pillar sustaining this composite is Mimoun, who is the one holding together micro-families that do not get along, as epitomised by the fact that they cannot even communicate, for they speak different languages. However, despite the efforts by Mimoun to try and build a wider family –which will lead him to bring the two parts closer spatially, by locating each of them in the same building, something the narrator will refer to as a "ordre nou" (200)–, the narrator's sense of identity passes only through the family with which she has lived both in Morocco and Catalonia: "el nosaltres sempre érem la mare, jo i els germans" (*ibid.*).

In the above-mentioned article, Fatima Mernissi speaks of patriarchy as a system in which men separate affection and sexuality, choosing to respect their wives –who, because they must remain honourable partners, men turn into "frigid" subjects–, and choosing women they deem inferior as their source of pleasure –equating physical pleasure with impurity, thus regulating the relationship a woman has to have with her own body (1979: 26). Marta Segarra also reminds us of "l'exclusion dans les marges du désir féminin, dans le sens le plus large du terme, ce qui provoque l'aliénation des femmes qui le voient contrarié" (2008: 31). I already explained how, in *La filla estrangera*, El Hachmi builds a two-fold universe, in which the protagonist's relationship with her own body can only be explored in the Catalan context. In the Moroccan side of that universe, in which her mother wants the narrator to inhabit, the female body's connection with sexuality is almost exclusively reduced to its maternity function.

Of course, this does not mean that Moroccan women are not able to find ways to contest and counter the patriarchal logics explored by Mernissi. In the volume entitled *Contes libertins du Maghreb*, translated into Catalan by Najat El Hachmi, Nora Aceval reunites popular stories that recount different (often funny and witty) strategies used by Maghrebi women to enjoy their sexuality outside the patriarchal boundaries. However, the relationship of El Hachmi's narrator with Morocco is mediated by the fact that neither her mother nor her live there –and hence it becomes somehow like a myth, constructed, in the maternal universe, as a monolithic entity sustained upon rigid boundaries. Likewise, when Dalila Kerchouche visits Algeria for the first

time in her life, she speaks of the country that both she and her family “porte[nt] contre [leur] cœur” describing it as a “mythe” –because her parents “[lui] en parlent depuis [son] enfance mais excluent toujours l’idée d’y retourner.” (2003: 205)

The distinction criss-crossing the patriarchal system analysed by Mernissi is hinted in El Hachmi’s first novel, for Mimoun is portrayed as fervently seeking an honourable and virgin wife but as someone who does not mind having sexual relationships with women, both in Morocco and Catalonia, prior to his wedding. Rosa could be read as the narrator’s mother’s *alter ego*; the narrator has learnt to construct her as inferior in regard to her mother, a construction to which even her mother, also a perpetuator of the patriarchal regime that the narrator reveals, contributes. However, when speaking of the confrontation between her mother and Rosa, the protagonist of the novel will write: “S’assemblaven en alguna cosa d’aquelles que no són mai evidents per a ningú. La manera d’abaixar la mirada, potser.” (197) The eyes are used again by El Hachmi as a way to mobilize the idea that the women that have bonds with Mimoun are all subjected to his patriarchal gaze.

The lowering of the eyes is tantamount to the “voice” these women have in their relationship with Mimoun. In *Le Maroc raconté par ses femmes*,¹¹⁵ Fatima Mernissi published a few interviews ensuing from a series of encounters with women who grew up in the twentieth century, belonging to several generations and social realities. The text is presented as an attempt to undo the silence of women who live in Morocco upon which, according to the sociologist, Maghrebi civilization has built its foundations. She believes that the era of secluded women, in which their bodies were seen as mere goods, has ended, and her book wants to contribute to such a goal. In this sense, the kinds of behaviour epitomised by El Hachmi and her protagonists give account to the end of the silence discussed by Mernissi, too.

¹¹⁵ In the Spanish edition of this work (Ediciones del Oriente y del Mediterráneo), the cover is the image of a veiled women whose only identifiable trait are her eyes. The eyes, centred in the image, look directly onto the reader, as if speaking to us, thus linking the eyes with the idea of agency.

Following this kind of logics, Mernissi speaks of the patriarchal discourses that have become the pillars of the Maghreb she describes not in terms of dominance, but of “sonority”.¹¹⁶ Thus, she identifies the existence of two antagonistic discourses: the feminine discourse and the masculine one, which is the one that resonates in the mass media and also in the legislations –she signals, for instance, that the *muduwana*, the law that regulates the marital status or the family code as it is known in Morocco, was elaborated exclusively by men, thus leaving women aside, one of the central elements of the familial unit. She refers to the masculine discourse as a “resounding” discourse and refuses to categorize it as “dominant” because that there is a dominant discourse implies the existence of alternative conflicting discourses –and such discourses, in Mernissi’s view, do not let themselves be “heard” in the Morocco that she depicts (1986). The written text assembled by Mernissi acts as a loudspeaker aimed at contesting the resounding masculine discourse that, according to the author, has silenced women. As I have analysed, El Hachmi has portrayed this multi-layered silence in different ways throughout her work, and not only via the (in)visibilization of certain proper nouns. A closer look at Dalila Kerchouche’s texts allows us to understand the specificities of the silences endured by those women who belong to the harki universe.

Whenever Kerchouche tackles questions to do with the situation of women in her texts, she does so considering the role they occupy in the familial communities to which they belong. The meaning of the family within Kerchouche’s texts is of paramount importance, considering that the works analysed here are inscribed within the harki universe and, as we saw, and as we learn from the first pages of Kerchouche’s autobiographical account, such a label permeates families as a whole. Thus, upon describing the social dynamics unfolding within the camps, and even when she analyses the social fabric of the Algeria her parents left behind –an analysis that is based on the memories she is able to recollect from her relatives and also on what she experiences when she travels there–, women are always considered from their position as wives

¹¹⁶ Karina Bidaseca uses the same kind of metaphorical imaginary in order to explore the colonial logics from a wider scope using the Latin American scenario as a cue. She writes: “comprendí que, como la mirada, la voz es efecto de poder. Las voces bajas que escuchaba en los viajes al ‘interior’ fueron marcadas por la colonialidad y el rol de la violencia estructural en el capitalismo. La modernidad y la monoglosia del colonizador condenaron a la población colonizada a ser pueblos invisibles, mestizados, y voces bajas. Al contrario, las voces que llamo ‘altas’ son las que organizan y controlan el campo sonoro y por ello detentan el poder de hablar por [...] Ello me ha llevado al convencimiento que las voces omnipresentes son significativas en tanto operan en la realidad y pueden transformarla.” (2010: 198)

or mothers. These positions stem directly from their country of origin, to which, according to Kerchouche's accounts, the harki families living in the camps remain very much attached.

In *Mon père, ce harki* we learn that the camps were structured around huts, in which one or two families would fit –the centrality of the familial structure of the camps is signalled by the fact that there is only one hut that shelters single men, who are considered to be like pariahs, like the “harkis of the harkis”, with whom the families do not interact normally (2003: 172).¹¹⁷ However, the French administration commanded that the big families, used to living in close proximity on Algerian soil, should be broken up and separated into smaller units, with the aim of “éviter que les douars ne se reconstituent comme en Algérie. Sous prétexte de favoriser l'intégration, il s'agit, en réalité, de briser les solidarités.” (55) Despite this rupture, which directly affects the process of adaptation of the harki families to their new milieu – Kerchouche's mother, for instance, will have to learn to put up not only with the uprooting from Algeria but also with the solitude that comes from being separated from her big family (60)–, the roles that vertebrate the relationships amongst the family members follow “[l]e même schéma qu'au bled”. As the author notes, “le mode de vie des harkis est resté typiquement algérien.” (29) In the Kerchouches' case this lifestyle that remains the same has to do with how the household chores are divided, and with the spaces men and women, boys and girls, occupy. Kerchouche's brothers are free to play outside the hut, whereas the girls have to be in charge of the cooking and the well-functioning of the hut, excluded from the outer space (*ibid.*).

The perpetuation of these gender biases, rooted in Algeria, within French soil is signalled by the author via the fact that she conflates her account of the reality experienced by the harkis inside the camps with the way her mother, who is her direct source of information about Algeria, used to live *au bled*. The continuous comparison between the present and that past, to which Kerchouche has only a filtered access but that gets presented in a factual tone, serves to comprehend to what extent the values and customs that conform the Algerian cultural tradition of the harkis keep playing a part in the new French context. Just as we saw in El Hachmi's portrayals, Kerchouche, too, highlights the idea that despite all the changes arising from the

¹¹⁷ The DVD version of the film *Harkis* is accompanied by a documentary entitled *Amère patrie* that further explores the life conditions of these single men within the camps. We learn, for instance, that harki girls were brought up to identify their hut as a forbidden place. Kerchouche also makes room in her novel to point out the marginality of all those people who could not claim affiliation to a family, which elicited rumours around them, of whom some said had killed and raped (2006: 92-93).

Algerian migration to France, the patriarchal regime that was operative before the migration was kept alive inside the camps.

2.2.1 Spatial Considerations

It is worth pointing out that Kerchouche's text unfolds upon a manifold comparative basis, which has the pairing French-Algeria amongst its pillars. We already saw, in the first chapter, how the process of subjectivity understanding of *Leïla*'s narrator passed through navigating the in-between situation she felt she lived in, caused by the contrasting realities she witnessed in Algeria and in France. Kerchouche had already explored such a contrast in her autobiographical account, when discussing the France her parents found upon arriving from their native Algeria: "En Algérie, ils vivaient au Moyen Âge. En France, ils débarquent au XX^e siècle. Ils ont fait un bond culturel de plusieurs siècles en avant. Vulnérables, désemparés, [ils] arriv[ent] dans un pays dont ils ne connaissent ni la langue ni les mœurs." (2003: 42) The contrast is maintained when the author explains the patriarchal grounds on which her family's every-day life seems to operate, for she constructs France as what seems like a space in which those inequalities do not exist. When she reflects upon the "Algerianness" of her family's customs, she writes: "j'aurais préféré que mon père choisisse la France jusqu'au bout. Jusqu'à nous élever comme des Françaises, à l'égal de mes frères" (29), thus failing to problematize the gender constructs that do exist within French society.

As signalled by Mernissi, patriarchy reveals itself in the form of a very sharp separation of the subjects based on their sex, which holds true in the case of the harki families. Such a separation manifests itself in a dichotomous manner and regulates the symbolic power of each of the groups. Thus, men are constructed as the dominant one and women get secluded, both physically and metaphorically. When talking of her mother, Kerchouche writes: "À l'instar des autres femmes, elle subit un double enfermement: dans le camp, d'où elles ne sortent jamais, et dans leurs tentes, où la pression sociale les cloître." (48) It is worth pointing out that Kerchouche expresses this idea in a rather solemn and straightforward tone, which strengthens the factual dimension that coats her reflections.

What is interesting in the reality explored by Kerchouche is that, when put in dialogue with the reality described by El Hachmi, the silence that cloisters women becomes heavily charged. As

I have already explained, one of the reasons that pushed Dalila Kerchouche –and, like her, many harki children– to explore her harki condition to the point of analysing it via a textual process, was first and foremost the silence with which her father would approach his participation in the Franco-Algerian war and also his life in Algeria. The fact that, on the one hand, Kerchouche’s father somehow conceals his Algerian every-day life but, on the other, the values that conform it are translated into the new French context, makes the lack of voice/agency which harki women seem to have to endure ever more complex.

When Kerchouche sets foot in Marseille as the first step of her “quête harkéologique”, she finds that the city she has visited before has changed, for she sees it, for the first time, accompanied by the familial story she is beginning to disentangle (35). By stepping into a familiar and yet hitherto unknown place, Marseille, she thinks of her mother, whose past she had never approached so thoroughly and the study of which will also make Kerchouche know her differently. In an exercise of reminiscence that transcends the page and becomes almost corporeal, Dalila writes as if she herself had lived through her mother’s existence, and we as readers get to know how she experienced her last days in Algeria and also the kind of life she led there, which followed the patterns sustaining the rural Algerian communities.¹¹⁸ The author understands that such a life was very different from the one she has, having grown up in France and away from the camps, unlike her siblings. “Ma mère partage le sort de toutes les femmes du djebel. Les femmes sont des bêtes de somme et les hommes, de rudes montagnards analphabètes.” (37)

The animal imaginary permeates Kerchouche’s work, too. The author resorts to it to highlight the idea that, in the Algeria in which her mother was brought up, the individual’s subjectivity would be subjected to a greater goal, that of the family, in this case. This thought is also explored by Alice Zeniter in *L’Art de perdre* in relation to determining what motivated some men to enrol in *harakas*. Ali, the protagonist of Zeniter’s novel, who lives in rural French

¹¹⁸ In *Le Déracinement*, authors Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad explore the changing dynamics in rural Algeria at the time of the war for independence, connecting those changes with the French colonial politics, which aimed to transform the economic, and as a result, the social fabric of “tribe-based” territories, via the notion of private property (1964). Kerchouche’s autobiographical account touches upon the fact that the French engaged in the creation of *harakas* mainly in rural areas of the country, a strategy that would complement the reality described by the authors. Sociologist Lilia Ben Salem elaborates on the reflections put forward by Bourdieu and Sayad, and claims that the colonial politics –which consisted of making European citizens settle in the Maghrebi regions and introducing with them the notion of private property– ended up weakening the communitarian bond that was, until then, very solid (1997). Under this light, colonialism is presented as an accelerating force affecting the transformation of social values to which every society is exposed.

Algeria, realises that his participation in the war that has begun to escalate will be ultimately determined by communal logics that minimize his saying on the matter: “Chez les Beni Boudouane, acquis au bachaga Boualem et à la France, il [Ali] a cru qu’il pouvait rester neutre. Il comprend que c’est impossible: la force de la tribu aura le dernier mot” (Zeniter 2017: 260). Ali ends up becoming a harki, a fact that will have consequences on his entire family, established in France after Algeria’s independence.

The same kind of communitarian dynamics are portrayed by Dalila Kerchouche in her texts. Thus, we know that her mother got married at 15 to someone that was chosen for her and, as signalled by the author’s account, she would dedicate her time to taking care of her husband and children. The cooking universe encapsulates this idea of nurture, and that is why throughout *Mon père, ce harki* Kerchouche’s mother will be identified with elements belonging to this world. In her visit to Marseille, Kerchouche’s mother gets linked with a *galette*, something she was preparing the moment the family had to hastily abandon their home and something she forgot in Algeria (43). In her trip to Algeria, Dalila manages to visit her parents’ former place, and she finds in it a couscoussier that belonged to her mother; like her mother, she will also forget it (276), a gesture that strengthens the mother-daughter identification explained above. Cooking –which is structural in *La filla estrangera*, where the vocabulary employed to refer to the culinary practices from the protagonist’s cultural origin translates her in-between situation, as we shall see– also plays a role in Kerchouche’s novel, in which it gets identified as a part of the net of traditions and customs that connects the protagonist’s family with Algeria and will serve to establish the gender roles to which I referred earlier.

Certain realities in Kerchouche’s work also get explained metaphorically, via the alimentary imaginary. Thus, we learn, almost as if we were reading a report, that during their time in the camps, the Kerchouche family would always eat the same menu, consisting of very humble ingredients, due to their lack of money and their lack of privilege, born out of their unwillingness to comply with the bribing structure put in place by the camp-chief (2003: 118-119). However, the day of the Eid, they are able to celebrate with dates and figs and couscous, offered by the harki families in their camp. On such an important day for Muslims, the Kerchouches are touched by the solidarity showed by their neighbours, which speaks of the importance of communal bonds within the harki universe. In the first chapter, I pointed out that the French administration wanted to regulate the every-day life of the harki families in what was claimed as a gesture aiming to aid the families’ integration into their new social milieu. In

practice, the harkis understood such regulations to be the signs of a forced assimilation, regulations that had to do with the clothes of the harki women, the names they put to their newborns and also the dishes they cooked.

In Kerchouche's text we read that the wives of the chiefs of the camps would try to teach the harki women "French recipes" as a way to dilute their strong attachment to their land of origin. This enables the realization that gender stereotypes operate at the heart of French society, too, which understands cooking as a feminine chore within the domestic space. However, despite the encouragement that the harki wives receive on the part of who they are galvanized to understand as their French "counterparts", they will not stop cooking chorba or celebrating the Eid. Kerchouche's works allow us to understand to what extent the harki families stuck to their way of doing things as a resilient strategy, something that Kerchouche expresses in the following terms: "Projetés dans un monde étranger, hostile, violent, ils ont érigé leur identité algérienne et musulmane comme un rempart." (29-30) Again, it is worth noticing the factual tone used by the author to describe the reality she is describing. In order to account for the symbolic violence that vertebrates the universe of the camps, not only does she string a series of adjectives to define that world –which resound almost as if they were blows– but she also accounts for such reality by making use of short sentences, which again take us back to the factual coating that permeates Kerchouche's work.

The resilience that the author connects with the harki families has to do with their maintenance of what they believe conforms their identity. Dalila Kerchouche uses fiction to delve into a series of practices and traditions that she considers to stem directly from Algeria. As I hinted earlier, in *Mon père, ce harki* the author describes the space of the camps as symbolically divided between the outside of the huts, and the huts themselves, constructed as the domestic space reserved to women –which leads Kerchouche to describe her mother's day-to-day within the camps as a "claustration domestique" (100). In *Leïla* we are able to plunge into the construction of that domestic reclusion and how it is connected to the perpetuation of the kinship.¹¹⁹ The protagonist of Kerchouche's novel not only inhabits an in-between space

¹¹⁹ Many authors connected to the Maghrebi space and writing in French, like Assia Djebar or Fatima Mernissi, have also explored such a dichotomous division, in a gesture that brandishes writing as a space for discussion and as a tool to problematize realities conceived as static and unchangeable. In her analysis of the literary voices arising from the Maghreb at the turn of the century, who take on the legacy of the generation epitomised by Djebar and Mernissi, Marta Segarra points out that literature is able to question the "division sexuée de l'espace", which this new generation of writers has inherited and that is translated into a division of culture, too, whereby women are seen as the keepers of the oral tradition, and hence, unable to take part in the written one (2010: 26).

because of the way she relates to Algeria and France, she is also an in-between character that the author claims to have built in large part thanks to one of her sister's memories, but who, if we read the novel in dialogue with *Mon père, ce harki*, shares many of the traits described by Kerchouche in relation to her mother.

Leïla is also portrayed as someone whose individual subjectivity is subordinated to the group(s) she has been raised to claim affiliation to. First of all, she is part of a family that regulates what she can and cannot do and the internal dynamics of which will get affected should she decide not to follow those guidelines. The narrator acknowledges that as a child she was able to enjoy her freedom, but as a grown-up who is aware of her harki condition and everything that it entails, and because now she “devien[t] femme”, her life is structured on interdictions (2006: 45). She cannot talk to boys, for her father forbids it, and she cannot eschew the traditions that her parents, and most particularly her mother, try to pass on to her. Her mother started teaching her how to cook (Algerian) food at the age of 8 (53), and she learnt what was meant to be her only right: to be “discrète”, “soumise” and “transparente” (45) –this description ties in with the patriarchal gendered division theorized by Mernissi. All these realisations will contribute to create a sense of suffocation in the narrator, who, as we saw, even contemplates suicide: “Les traditions m'enferment autant que les barbelés. Deux fois prisonnière.” (46) Kerchouche, who had presented her mother as someone enduring a two-fold oppression, transfers such a feeling to her protagonist. And we are able to notice that the author keeps using visual metaphoric images that translate the internal turmoil of the characters.

It is worth pointing out that women, who are described as more subjected to the kinship regulations, seem to be their fiercest guardians. Once they become mothers, they raise their girls according to certain standards that, in Kerchouche's opinion, transfer “the most conservative traditions from the bled” to the new French environment (2003: 148). Such a hermetic construction contrasts with the reality France is experiencing, in which the sexual revolution is making room for the apparition of critical voices to do with gender stereotypes. Enclosed in their camps, and in their huts, the harki women and girls are indeed at the margins of the country where they now live. Insisting on this idea, Kerchouche writes that they are “[e]nfermées dans un univers où l'honneur compte plus que le bonheur, ou le clan prime sur l'individu”; “elles subissent une forte pression sociale qui les emprisonne bien plus sûrement que les barbelés.” (*ibid.*) The social pressure to which the author refers has to do, mainly, with the continuation of the regime that operates within the camps. The marriages of the generation

growing up in the camps –and we already established that they conform their bulk–, understood as a social practice, are heavily regulated by the harki mothers.

Leïla's main narrative voice is constantly aware of the fact that her mother is very vigilant of her behaviour because “[s]a réputation lui importe plus que tout” (2006: 41). This filter completely alters the way the narrator processes her experiences. Thus, for example, the celebration of Eid is, for *Leïla*, not as much a moment where she can indulge in her identification with Algeria –which we know she cherishes deeply– but it is more like a test, in which she, like the rest of the girls of the camp, has to clean and prepare her hut, for it is a time in which the mothers take the opportunity to decide which girl they want for their sons, somehow revealing a sort of hierarchy amongst boys and girls. Upon such hierarchical structure, girls are the ones who take on the responsibility of caring for their siblings, as if rehearsing their future role as mothers. Kerchouche provides several examples that allow for a deep exploration on this idea. Thus, for example, as the oldest girl in her family, *Leïla* must remain in the hut taking care of her siblings when her cousin gets married, which is a big event in the camp¹²⁰ and she feels “mère avant d’être femme” (15).

The narrator, eager to attend such a celebration, decides to cover herself with a foulard –destined to hide her identity– and goes to the wedding, which has the camp “en ébullition” (42), an image showcasing the importance of this kind of celebrations within the social fabric of these spaces. The author, who mimicking her mother has put on some of her khôl and a dress –make up and clothes that, she writes, have previously transformed her mother (*ibid.*)–, takes advantage of the refuge she thinks the foulard offers and throws herself into the music. Kerchouche describes this moment with attention, signalling the importance it has for the narrator, who thanks to the music by Algerian singer Cheikha Remitti is able to experience a “[m]oment de pur bonheur”, in which “[l]e camp n’existe plus, les barbelés disparaissent. Seule subsiste cette liberté nouvelle qui m’enivre. Je m’oublie.” (44-45) The series of short sentences that describe *Leïla*'s thoughts translate her internal excitement and permeate the text with a kind of rhythm that transports us to the rhythm to which the character is dancing.

¹²⁰ Despite the fact that, as I pointed out earlier, the initial intention of the French administration was to break big families apart by dividing them into small units and sending each of these to different camps, we know, via Kerchouche's accounts, that sometimes these units would get reunited. In any case, the works by Kerchouche make it evident that the communal logics that vertebrated life in Algeria continued in the camps.

Such a passage is relevant in the understanding of the process of subjectivity formation of the narrator, for it indicates the attachment she feels towards those elements that, in the camps, are in direct connection with Algeria –such as the music, for instance–, but is also relevant at a more contextual level, inasmuch as it discloses the practices that are kept in those camps. We learn that at the wedding, just like they would do in Algeria, women and men have dinner separately, which reinforces the dichotomous spatial divisions explored above, and that the people who attend the wedding have to wait for the proof of the bride’s virginity –always tied to her honour. We also learn that the dances of the narrator, for her a liberating exercise, are read by her father much differently, as an affront to the family’s honour. Leïla’s father ends up finding out that behind the foulard, there is his daughter dancing, and doing so in front of men. The foulard is not capable, after all, of disguising Leïla’s identity.¹²¹

With this Kerchouche could be insisting on the idea that camps are like prisons in the sense that they are reclusive spaces in which one cannot escape their condition, a thought we already saw the narrator expressed when discussing the interdictions that her mother imposed on her, conducive to safeguarding her reputation.¹²² In *Destins de harkis: Aux racines d’un exil*, Dalila Kerchouche insists on this idea:

Les harkis et leurs femmes sont bel et bien prisonniers. [...] Dans cet environnement hostile, les chefs de camps écrasent les harkis, qui à leur tour oppriment les femmes, qui de leur côté emprisonnent les jeunes filles. Coupés de leurs racines et du reste de la société, les harkis s’accrochent à leurs traditions et se figent dans le passé.

(2003b: 89)

Reputation and honour –that of the family, more precisely– is what motivates the narrator’s father in reprimanding her. “Je dois baisser la tête et attendre que mes parents me choisissent un mari”, Leïla notes (Kerchouche 2006: 46). However, such a gesture of inclination towards her parents’ wishes will never be realized, just like we saw happened with the fictional protagonists of El Hachmi, who managed to eschew the familial obligations imposed by their

¹²¹ In the same novel we learn that before killing the harkis, in the newly independent Algeria, the FLN would dress them as women as a humiliating strategy (Kerchouche 2006: 131). This is yet another example that proves to what extent the Algerian societal rules that regulate the every-day life of the harki families is sustained upon very well-drawn gendered boundaries. Crossing them leads to punishment.

¹²² In this sense, the logics of surveillance that underpin the scene recounted by Kerchouche are reminiscent of the modern prison, as described by Foucault in *Surveiller et punir*, conformed around the panopticon –which signifies the possibility, on the part of the guards, of directing a controlling gaze at the prisoners at any given time (1975). In Kerchouche’s novel, Leïla cannot escape the controlling familial gaze.

elders. In the novel by Kerchouche we realize that the future Leïla's parents want for her, encapsulated in the idea of her foreseeable marriage, never materializes, and this is so partly due to the transformations that unfold inside the familial unit. As noted by sociologist Halim Barakat, whose work focuses on Arab societies,¹²³ the twentieth century has witnessed a severe acceleration of the transformations that reshape the family. Understood as the "basic unit of social organization" in these societies, the family is sensitive to changes in the contexts where they are inscribed, contexts which are fast changing. Under this light, "the family becomes one of the crucial social units to respond to, as well as to be shaped by, the changing social structure, the ongoing confrontations with value systems, and the struggle for social transformation in response to formidable challenges." (1993: 97) A thorough analysis of the works studied here allows for an unpacking of the familial transformations portrayed in the texts, which at the same time have an impact on the subjectivities of the protagonists and the authors considered.

2.2.2 Transgenerational Relationships and Narratives

As has already been established, Dalila Kerchouche's novel focuses on the life of Leïla and her process of entrance into adulthood, defined by the way she deals with the crossroads she feels she is at and that have to do with how she copes with her Algerian inheritance and her relationship with her new French context. One of those crossroads stems directly from the guidelines that regulate her every-day life inside the camps. We know that, as a woman, she is supposed to take care of her siblings, take care of the hut and learn how to cook properly. The protagonist finds a way to escape the cloistering she identifies with those domestic guidelines, via French magazines that she defines as "women's magazines", which allow Leïla "de [s]'évader de [s]on univers domestique étriqué et [lui] font rêver" (2006: 42).

Such readings translate the protagonist's wishes to escape the kind of life that her mother is passing on to her, and they somehow represent a defiance to her familial inheritance –that is why she has to hide them. Leïla's mother ends up finding them and upon seeing the prototype of women that they portray –"filles blondes bien habillées et maquillées [...] en minijupes et

¹²³ Despite the fact that Kerchouche is referring to migrated families, we have seen how the camps were sustained upon the same societal logics as those that regulated Algeria. We could arguably say that the harki families brought with them a trans-rooted Algeria, where the dynamics that articulated life on the Southern rim of the Mediterranean continue to play a part in the relationships sustaining life in the camps. Therefore, these families can be read as linked with the reality which Barakat accounts for.

décolletés”–, she decides to burn the magazines, afraid the images are going to corrupt her daughter (*ibid.*). The burning of the magazines speaks of the mother’s will to regulate the imaginary of Leïla, just as we saw happened in *La filla estrangera* or in *L’últim patriarca*, where we learnt that the protagonists are, upon maternal instructions, advised to dress a certain way and told how to behave towards their own bodies.

Leïla’s mother, however, wants her daughter to have the opportunity to go to school and study, something she was never capable of doing, and an attitude which will lead the protagonist to realize that her mother, too, is at a crossroads. Thus, Leïla will reflect on the idea that the familial settlement in France is changing what at first she thought were very strict cultural regulations: “Je la sens tiraillée entre son passé en Algérie et l’avenir en France qu’elle espère pour nous” (*ibid.*). And like her mother, we know that Leïla, too, is pulled by her Algerian past and the self she is defining in the camps, trying to surmount the dichotomous angle of vision she first adopted. The way she interacts with her family, and with the memories she has of those members of her family that are not in France, gives an idea of how she navigates her belonging to her family and her will to find her own voice:

Tous les soirs, avant de me coucher, je récite une sourate du Coran, comme ma grand-mère me l’a apprise en Algérie, et ces mots d’arabe dont je ne comprends pas toujours le sens m’apaisent, me bercent et éteignent mes angoisses. Je ne peux pas renoncer à tout ce qu’il me reste de mon pays natal, à tout ce qui me rattache à ma grand-mère, au risque de me perdre.

(56-57)

We realize, with this quotation, how Leïla understands herself as part of her family, and very much connected to it, for it is inside her family that she clearly finds essential parts of her identity. At the same time, however, she is aware of the distance that separates her and her grandmother, as signalled by the fact that she is not able fully to comprehend the Arabic words that her grandmother would use. In the following chapter I will further discuss language as an element that speaks of the interstitial position that both Kerchouche’s and El Hachmi’s characters occupy, paying attention to how it creates boundaries within the generations of these characters’ families. It is nonetheless surprising that, unlike other Franco-Algerian writers (Djebar, Sebbar, Negrouche), Kerchouche does not focus much on these linguistic boundaries –as evinced by the rather tangential comment with which she covers the topic. In Leïla’s mind, the figure of the protagonist’s grandmother is identified with the Koran, and she is constructed

as a fixed and stable source for tradition which, as can be deduced from the citation, is perceived as a source of comfort, too.

As we know, in *Mon père, ce harki*, Dalila Kerchouche confesses that she wrote the book “pour parler à [s]on père”, from whom she felt very distanced. She writes to bridge over his silence, which, in a way, symbolizes the familial past which Dalila never really experienced first-hand. She is distinctly different from her parents and siblings because she did not grow up in the camps and has no memories of them. Thus, her subjectivity navigation has to do with recovering those souvenirs that do not belong to her –of which *Leïla* is a culmination– in order to well integrate her Algerianness, that Algerian past that she goes in search of in a very material way, via her trip to her parents’ country of birth. In that sense, she, like Leïla’s protagonist and her mother, is very much “pulled” by her past, which is in fact collective and familial. Her siblings find Dalila a privileged member of the Kerchouche family, precisely for not having a direct experience of it, which to their view means she was spared the suffering of life within the camps. However, she has integrated that unexperienced past as a loss and an absence in her adult self precisely because of the distance that it creates towards her familial unit, and later on I will refer to it as a distance understood in “generational” terms: “J’aimerais pourtant, à travers ce livre, abolir cette frontière avec les miens, toucher du doigt ce passé que je n’ai pas vécu. Pour me sentir, enfin, membre de ma famille à part entière.” (2003: 25) The repetition of phrases like “les miens”, “ma famille”, “mes parents”, “mes frères et sœurs”, which punctuate the account, speak of Kerchouche’s wish to strengthen her identification with her familial community.

Writing becomes, for Kerchouche, a means to blur the boundaries she feels the past has built and that separate her from all the members of her family. Such a process has to do with delving into her family’s memories from the time when they lived in the camps, but also with finding out about Algeria. Direct experience about Algeria and the camps, Kerchouche realises, conform a narrative shared by everyone but her in the Kerchouche community: “J’ai grandi dans cette mythologie familiale, partagée entre la nostalgie de l’Algérie et la souffrance des camps, qui représentaient, dans mon imaginaire d’enfant, le paradis et l’enfer.” (*ibid.*) The fact that she uses the term *mythologie* to refer to the familial account is worth highlighting. On the one hand, it indicates the importance of stories passed on from one generation to another within the family, something that will be explored further down. On the other hand, it showcases the idea that adult Dalila felt the need to check, for herself, something that from her childhood was

presented as a tale. Her “quête harkéologique”, therefore, is two-fold and comprises her visits to the camps –constructed as the “enfer”– and her trip to Algeria –a dichotomy that is further emphasized by the fact that her account is divided into these two different spaces.

Her approach to these two realities manifests itself very differently. Both realities are similar to the extent that the 29-year-old who decides to write the book that we end up reading cannot go back, physically, to either of these two spaces –because the Algeria her parents and some of her siblings knew no longer exists and because the camps stopped being operative in 1975 after a riot her family did not directly experience but to which she refers in *Leïla*, stressing, once more, that her family’s experience is connected to that of many other harki families in France. However, how she copes with both sides of the dichotomous familial narrative –a narrative that, as we have seen, also haunts the protagonist of her novel– differs, as proven by the attention she dedicates to one and the other. The bulk of Kerchouche’s novel is dedicated to life in the camps. As for *Mon père, ce harki*, the account is divided into two chapters, which are entitled after these two sides: “France: La traversée des camps” and “Algérie: La quête harkéologique”. This division is not symmetrical, though, for the second chapter is much shorter than the first, a difference in length that points to the idea that the space of the camps remains, still, a significant element in unravelling the complexity of what lies behind the term *harki*.

The trip to Algeria allows Kerchouche to parallel the journey her parents made when they left their origins, in the guise of its negative photography. It is worth signalling that the hard cover edition of *Mon père, ce harki* includes a series of photographs. The series –33 pictures in total, along 12 pages–, summarises the content of Kerchouche’s work and represents a window to both her trip and her family’s life story. Thus, we see images that Kerchouche and Stéphan Gladieu have taken in Dalila’s voyage across France and Algeria and also images that belong to the family album. The pictures portray significant spaces in Dalila’s “quête harkéologique”, like the camps or the *wali* of Sidi Youcef where, the author informs us, she learnt about her father’s secret. In fact, the captions, which are written by Kerchouche herself, also summarise the most important pieces of information of the author’s account and gather important reflections that she formulates in the text. In the first page of photographs, for instance, we see the Kerchouche family reunited in June of 2002 and celebrating their anniversary in France, which the first caption describes as a “[t]riste anniversaire”. In the second caption, Kerchouche includes a statement by her mother which explains the reason behind such sadness: “Je n’ai pas

envie de fêter le jour où j'ai perdu mon pays". Underneath one of the pictures that portrays Dalila with one of her cousins in Algeria, she writes: "Si mon père n'était pas devenu harki et s'il n'avait pas quitté l'Algérie, je vivrais comme elles"; her female cousins, she informs us, "mènent une existence recluse, dans la maison".

The people that have played an important role in Kerchouche's process of (self-)discovery are thus further inscribed inside the book via these pictures. We see Dalila's father –who is present in the very first and the very last pictures of the series, a circularity that parallels that of the written account–, her mother, her siblings, and even Juliette. The series also includes a picture of her paternal grandmother, who Dalila never met but who somehow symbolises all the voices to which the author did not have access and had to retrieve by means of inherited memories. One of the pictures even shows the couscoussier that her mother would use in Algeria, an object of major symbolic importance that allows Kerchouche to acknowledge the significance of her Algerian visit. The penultimate picture shows the *haraka* of Moulay Abdaka, in which her father enrolled in 1960, there where the label *harki* initiated. In the last picture, we see a blurred image of the face of Kerchouche's father, who occupies most of the space, and behind him we presumably find Dalila –who is looking straight into the camera, something that I interpret as a sign for her agency– and one of her nephews. The fact that the images shows three different generations can be read as the realisation that the harki identity permeates entire familial units. Similarly, the fact that Dalila's father is blurred in the picture is connected with the fact that, the caption informs us, the picture captures the moment where her father confessed to her the secret he kept to himself for forty years. Like she does in her writing, in the pictures included in the book we see how the (material) images she is presenting to us translate the significance they have in the author's subjectivity.

The photographs strengthen the factual dimension of the work published by Kerchouche. At the same time, if we assume that their incorporation into the book is ultimately favoured by the author herself, these pictures can arguably be read as another strategy deployed by Kerchouche to further inscribe herself within the family to which, we know, she feels she does not belong in the same way as her relatives do; precisely because she did not experience the realities which some of the pictures represent. With her text, Kerchouche is fabricating her own pictures of sorts, in order to include them within the family album –in this sense *Mon père, ce harki* can be "regarded" as such. In her trips, Dalila is able to get access and formulate her own visual imaginary of the camps that she does not remember, and of the Algeria that she never knew.

In this respect, with her visit to Algeria, the author is able to gain some kind of closure because she manages to complete the voyage initiated by her parents. She herself expresses the same in the following terms: “en effectuant ce retour que mes parents n’ont jamais fait, je termine cette histoire.” (2003: 208) Thus, her trip is, like her text, a way to bridge over familial distances. By going to North Africa, Dalila re-maps the movement of the family on Franco-Algerian territory, by rendering it a circle –a figure that eschews directionalities and has no beginning nor end and hence holds the power to disrupt temporal coordinates, too. With her travelling and her writing about it, Dalila activates her agency within her family and is able to come to terms with a part of her past that, because it was constructed as a myth enshrined in Algerian territory –of which she speaks in terms of a wound, “la déchirure ancienne de l’exil dont j’ai hérité” (209)–, she had not been able to explore. Once in Algeria, she feels “[u]n bonheur intense, totalement inattendu”: “je ne me sens réconciliée avec mon histoire, avec mon pays, avec moi-même.” (*ibid.*) In a single sentence, she juxtaposes Algeria with her family and with her own self, encapsulating the idea that the physical trip to a country that was until then part of the familial imaginary but of which she had no direct experience enables her to realise that “[u]ne vieille brisure se répare” (*ibid.*).

However, before setting foot on Algerian soil, Kerchouche is hesitant and full of doubts and fears, which are expressed textually in the form of questions that the author puts to herself; questions that are connected with the way the harkis are constructed in the historical discourse of Algeria: “Devrai-je affronter la haine que mes parents ont fuie il y a quarante ans? [...] Les villageois vont-ils me chasser à coups d’insultes et de jets de pierres? Vont-ils rejeter la ‘fille du traître’?” (205) This interrogative chain is followed by further questions: “Vais-je rencontrer la même haine qui a jeté mes parents sur les routes de l’exil? La seconde guerre civile l’a-t-elle ravivée? Ou, au contraire, le peuple algérien, enlisé dans la lutte contre l’islamisme depuis dix ans, a-t-il ‘pardonné’ aux harkis?” (206). In this respect, and as I shall explore in Chapter 4, the works by Kerchouche function as historiographical material and put forward the idea that literature can function as a tool to problematize dominant narratives. The fact that Dalila learns the details about her father’s participation in the war and his enrolment in the *harakas*, and also about his collaboration with the FLN contributes to the positivity with which she ends up integrating the label *harki* as part of her subjectivity.

The time she spends in Algeria is useful for her also at another level, for it allows her to pay attention to the patriarchal guidelines and behavioural regulations that vertebrate, as she learns, the life of her family and others like it, within the camps. Regulations and codes of conduct that she dissects in her novel and that she connects with Maghreb. As soon as Kerchouche sets foot in Algiers, she notices the lack of women in the public space, which makes her feel like an intruder in what she terms a “monde masculin” (212). She learns that public space is constructed –in the Algeria she visits, which is immersed in the aftermath of a civil war scenario– as woman-free. Thus, men refuse to acknowledge her presence within public space, as if she were invisible, and no one speaks to her. She understands that in the country she is entering bodies are almost as if they were under surveillance and decides to follow a friend’s advice and cover her head with a foulard.

Kerchouche goes to Algeria with a male cousin of hers, which allows her to have mobility in a context where, because of her condition as woman and due to her lack of on-site knowledge to do with the conflict, she would not be able to visit certain places on her own. After her stay in Algiers, she is able to penetrate into the rural Algeria in which her parents grew up, and her visit to another one of her male cousins allows her to come to terms with the reality of many of the women in her Algerian family. Upon entering her relative’s house, she learns that her cousin locks in the women of the household whenever he is out, a gesture that accentuates the domestic space as the only location possible for them. “On reste cloîtrées ici toute la journée, dans la maison et dans la cour. On ne voit pas grand monde” (238).

The house is like a prison that encloses her relatives physically, and they understand that such impositions stem directly from the men within the family: “Ce sont nos hommes qui nous l’imposent” (239), men that are configured as the authoritative voices in the familial community, the ones with power to regulate women’s mobility. Kerchouche learns that this physical imprisonment pierces through the ontological terrain. Dalila witnesses how a 5-year old boy gets his way with a much younger sister of his, but the women do nothing about the boy’s misbehaviour, as if tolerating the asymmetry of the situation. Our author becomes frustrated with their passivity and understands that these women somehow represent her Other

narrative, the life she might have ended up having had her family not migrated to France, and stayed in rural Algeria, a life in which she would, at 29, be already a “grand-mère”.¹²⁴

The Algerian portrait she is able to get from up-close reconfigures the elements that Kerchouche acknowledges as being part of her self. “À cet instant, je me sens française, définitivement française” (*ibid.*), she declares, understanding that between her and her female relatives there is a “fossé”, a metaphor that makes the image of the wound resurface and that strengthens the feeling of not belonging “à part entière” to any of the familial units she interacts with throughout her quest.¹²⁵ This, which could be seen as disadvantageous, is in fact a privileged position that allows Kerchouche to carry out her investigation in a very thorough way. In the volume *Destins de harkis*, which got published the same year as *Mon père, ce harki*—therefore it is safe to say that both projects enrich each other—, Dalila Kerchouche and photographer Stéphan Gladieu worked together in an initiative that combines interviews and photography in order to describe the intricate, varied and multi-layered reality of many harki women today. In the introduction to this work, historian Jean-Jacques Jordi points out Kerchouche’s vantage point, upon committing such an enterprise:

Sans doute avait-elle sur les hommes, historiens-enquêteurs, des avantages: c’est une femme, elle n’a pas besoin d’un traducteur, mais surtout elle était à la fois du dedans et du dehors. Par

¹²⁴ The protagonist of the novel *No*, by Saïd El Kadaoui Moussaoui—a psychologist and a writer who, like El Hachmi, was born in Morocco but became an adult in Catalonia—, is a man who was born in Morocco but grew up in Catalonia, where he lives at the time when the action of the novel is set. He recalls the effects that turning 40 has had in his life, making special reference to his literary frustrations and to the lives of other people of Maghrebi origin who live in Catalonia and experience their connection with their native land very differently. His best friend, to whom he is writing the text we read, had the same kind of upbringing but ended up going back to Morocco as an adult. El Kadaoui constructs this dichotomical pairing that allows the protagonist to delve into his process of subjective construction, just as Kerchouche insists on exploring her own contingent lives as a strategy to analyse the intricacies of her own process of self-knowledge. This kind of thought is very much present in the life narratives of many adopted people, who, upon reaching adulthood, feel the need to revisit their country of birth, which represents for them an alternative narrative to the lives they end up having. The comparison between adopted people and people who are somehow connected to experiences of migration seems to me to be of relevance inasmuch as so-called “transnational adoptees” (Yngvesson 2010) are read as migrants in the societies with which they interact (see Joan-Rodríguez 2015).

¹²⁵ Algerian sociologist Abdemalek Sayad speaks of emigration in terms of rupture, using the metaphor of the *break* to signal the multi-layered transformations experienced by someone who leaves their familial territory: “Est-il besoin de rappeler que toute émigration est *rupture*? Elle est rupture d’avec un territoire et par là-même d’avec une population, un ordre social, un ordre économique, un ordre politique, un ordre culturel et moral. Mais avant cela ou, en d’autres termes, avant de voir dans l’émigration la cause phénoménale des ruptures, il faut la regarder comme le produit d’une rupture fondamentale [...] Et on sait que cette rupture initiale est, dans le cas de l’émigration algérienne vers la France (et, certainement, dans le cas de beaucoup d’autres émigrations), le produit direct de la colonisation.” (1993: 407) Under this light, we can arguably consider that Kerchouche’s trip to Algeria allows her to come to terms with her (symbolic) emigration from that land—we can understand Kerchouche as an emigrant from Algeria if we consider the fact that, as she herself notes, she was born into a family that raised her as if she was in Algeria.

sa famille, elle avait vécu ce que d'autres femmes lui racontaient; par sa profession, elle savait prendre le recul nécessaire; par sa jeunesse, elle avait échappé au confinement que beaucoup lui racontaient.

(2003: 12)

Jordi, who gives precise information and many figures about the situation of the harki community during the years that followed their arrival in France, signals the camps as a pivotal element in the identity narrative of the harkis. “Dans une certaine mesure, la mémoire collective va s'approprier cet espace de transit. [...] [C]e lieu éphémère va cristalliser le sentiment d'abandon” (13), he argues. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Kerchouche got herself immersed in the study of the camps as an identitarian element and as connected to her family's collective memory; a study that included several projects, besides the publication of *Mon père, ce harki* and *Leïla* –both works being explorations from very personal standpoints. She also published *Destins de harkis* and collaborated in the scenario of the film *Harkis*, based on her novel.

2.2.3 The Resignification of “Home”

Kerchouche's multipositionality and her thoughts upon meeting her relatives in Algeria allow for a revision of the idea of home, which, in Kerchouche's case, is constructed as a complex quest, almost like an ever-changing journey. There has been much literature written about displacement as a force pushing towards the reconfiguration of the notion of home; as we are reminded by the editors of the volume *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*, displacement might engender “new forms of imagined community or home” (Dawson and Rapport 1998: 13), which problematize the establishment of a straight-forward definition of it. Understood as a space that one recognizes as one's own, as a place “where one is compelled to find stability and happiness” (Minh-ha 1994: 13) and using Kerchouche's and also El Hachmi's work as a filter for these reflections enables us to understand to what extent those new forms of home that emerge from experiences directly connected with migrational movements remain very difficult to anchor.

This is so even for those subjects who did not initiate but somehow inherited those movements, as put forward by the authors that I study and their characters. Critical theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha

has explored the idea of home widely, both academically and through her art –which includes several media. She understands that for those people who fall into the vast-reaching universe of migration, home “can hardly be more than a transitional or circumstantial place, since the ‘original’ home cannot be recaptured, nor can its presence/absence be entirely banished” (1994: 14). In the case of our authors and their narrators, the transitional nature of home gets translated into the malleability of their connection with their origins and the place where they live. Such a (dis)connection is explored in El Hachmi’s work, both autobiographical and fictional.

In *L’últim patriarca*, the narrator expresses the gap between her idea of home and that passed on to her by her family. Upon travelling to her native village, she realises to what extent her migrated family is seen as the epitome of success: “haviem de ser uns reis mags, en arribar”; “[s]e suposava que érem rics” (2008: 248). She understands that whilst in Morocco, her parents, her siblings and she have to behave in a way that conforms to that idea, somehow as if they were performing a role, something strengthened by the particular image chosen by the narrator, that of the three wise men –who do not belong to the imaginary of the cultural tradition inherited from her context of origin. The protagonist has trouble integrating that inheritance into her self: “A mi tot allò em va fer gràcia al principi, però aviat ja vaig tornar a tenir ganes d’anar a casa. Se suposava que aquell era el lloc que m’havia de ser més familiar del món i a mi em venia aquell nus quan es feia fosc.” (249)

The narrator’s formulations, filled with conjectures in this particular passage, reinforce the message she wants to convey. Similarly, we already saw how the protagonist of *La filla estrangera* marks, in her writing, the distance she feels towards her place of origin, which her mother tries to pass on to her as her home. The fact that she uses quotations marks every time she writes the word *home* proves her uneasiness with such a concept. Similarly, in her autobiographical text, El Hachmi understands that, within her family, the idea of home is well established and fixed, and gets identified with their origins, whereas for her that connection is not as evident. When the author makes a visit to her grandmother in Morocco, she realises that the grandmother keeps envisioning Morocco as “home” for her granddaughter. “A [...] la meva àvia [...] el que més por li feia era que jo ja no estava preparada per viure al Marroc, que les meves qualitats ja no seguien l’esquema establert, *que si tornés a casa*, no sobreviuria, no

podria adaptar-me al medi” (2004: 73; emphasis in the original).¹²⁶ The italics, in the original, signal a difference in the way grandmother and granddaughter consider Morocco.

The fact that El Hachmi utilises graphic ways to mark the notion of home, in her autobiography and in her fiction, is noteworthy, for both El Hachmi’s own narrative voice and her protagonists understand writing as a means to foster their reflections. Thus, the text becomes not only a space in which these reflections get revealed and materialized, but also the formative space for these thoughts to construct themselves. As Minha acknowledges, languages, the same as home,

tend to be taken for granted, like Mother or Woman, they are often naturalized and homogenized [...] as an indisputable point of reference on whose authority one can unfailingly rely. Yet, language can only live on and renew itself by hybridizing shamelessly and changing its own rules as it migrates in time and space.

(1994: 14)

Like language, home, for our authors, is a changing conception that finds its meaning in its very unstable condition. “For a number of writers in exile, the true home is to be found not in houses, but in writing” (16), Minha continues.¹²⁷ Whilst it is true that neither El Hachmi nor Kerchouche are strictly exiled authors, nor are the characters they have created, they do experience a sense of alienation from the land they have been brought up to consider indistinctively their own. Edward Said considered that

[t]he exile knows that in a secular and contingent world homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience.

(2001: 185)

¹²⁶ The connection between the idea of home and the notion of the body has also been explored by Hélène Cixous. As Joana Masó reminds us, in the introduction to *La llengua m’és l’únic refugi*, “l’exili no és mai a l’estranger. Per Cixous el setge ja és sempre a dins de casa. L’exclusió el desterrament, *in situ* són les ferides internes de la cultura, tota ciutat i país porten les seves cicatrius en el propi cos. Aquí, la cicatriu és psíquica però també corporal, ja que el cos conserva les empremtes i la memòria, i té un paper fonamental en l’escriptura.” (2009: 11)

¹²⁷ In her analysis of the novel *Brooklyn Heights*, by Miral Al-Tahawy, Mònica Rius-Piniés explores how, following the title of her contribution, literature can become home for certain writers. She filters her reading through the notion of “intopia”, which is described as a “fenómeno textual del discurso utópico en el que los componentes sui generis se presentan como dilemas, como factores problemáticos del yo interno del protagonista” (Hadomi in Rius-Piniés 2018: 164).

I conceive the protagonists of the works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche from such lenses, understanding that the characters presented in them break away from imposed ideas of any kind to find their own sense of truth. The texts we read are not only the conclusions that authors and narrators have reached, but represent the gesture of rupture with those multi-layered barriers of which Said speaks, which construct fixed and contained ideas of belonging. Borrowing Raewyn Connell's words, home, belonging, are defined by that search for self-constructed meaning: "Only when we achieve a sense of personal integrity can we represent ourselves and be recognized –this is home, this is belonging" (in Rutherford 1990: 24). Home is, under this light, the place from which we speak, a place that as I have stated Kerchouche and El Hachmi build in writing. In that respect, their narratives could be read as their true "nation" –a concept that the authors's oeuvre helps to problematize–, following Homi K. Bhabha's formulation: "the nation as a form of a narrative" (1990b: 2).

I already pointed out that the way Kerchouche herself dialogues with the word *harki*, and with what it encapsulates, has to be understood in parallel with her interaction with what France and Algeria represent in different periods of her life –transformations that are indicated with the way she spells that word. Thus, upon starting her (re)search, Kerchouche had a stable idea of what France constituted for her, the source of those Republican values that she dissects and questions throughout her work. I believe that Joan Wallach Scott's reflections on the image of France as connected with Republican values is of great worth in understanding Kerchouche's own thoughts on the matter. Scott writes:

This image of France¹²⁸ is mythical; its power and appeal rests, to a large degree, on its negative portrayal of Islam. The objectification of Muslims as a fixed "culture" has its counterpart in the mythologizing of France as an enduring "republic." Both are imagined to lie outside history – antagonists locked in eternal combat.

(2007: 7)

The shift in Kerchouche's considerations towards France occurs once she gains access to how the French administration treated the harki families, constructed from fixed and stereotypical ideas and othering lenses. Thus, after having visited the camps and the Algeria where her family lived, what once was a clear idea becomes more blurry. Her relationship with France passes

¹²⁸ Scott refers to the idea of France being the realization of the principles of the Enlightenment in their highest, most enduring form.

through several phases, as does her relation to Algeria. We just noted how her visit to rural Algeria makes her frontally reject the mode of dwelling she finds there, but the Algeria she has inherited in France is different from the hermetic patterns she has found on the southern rim of the Mediterranean –of course, to that rather monolithic idea she has of Algeria and that she depicts in her text contributes the small amount of time she spent there and the limited access she had to a country whose cultural reality is very much diverse. After coming back from Algeria, Kerchouche is able to untie the silence that permeated the figure of her father, comprehending that this space holds the key to an understanding of the family's current situation.

In this sense, Kerchouche's autobiography can be read as a site of memory that sets forth a revisitation of the past as a healing strategy not only for herself, but also for her family, which is able to move forward by rethinking itself. The tacit father-daughter relationship is positively resolved, she is able to disentangle the silences surrounding her brother Mohamed's suicide. As Dalila herself writes, her relationship with her brother Kader, who accompanies her throughout her visits to the camps, also changes. Kader is eager to explore some of the places of his childhood and, Kerchouche notes, the physical visit to those spaces awakens his memory (2003: 90).¹²⁹ Dalila incorporates some of these memories into her text, which function as a complement to her experience and add layers to her narrative; memories that have to do with what he thought of the schooling system or the activities that he was able to do inside the camps.

Kader's voice also serves to gain insight into the familial dynamics of the Kerchouches. "[L]'affection entre frères et sœurs est une impudeur" (140), writes the author, but by the end of the first part of her voyage, she notices a slight change in the way her brother looks at her, somehow less distanced than how it used to be. She identifies that change in his brother's gaze with a change within her self –his external regard enables her to realize to what extent her quest is transforming her, too. She feels like a complete adult, understanding adulthood as the period of one's life in which we are able to grasp a nuanced understanding of our self. That realization is further underpinned with the experiences she collects in Algeria and the thoughts she formulates there. Once she has been to her parents' place of birth, Kerchouche realises that they might have never gone back there, perhaps "parce qu'ils ne l'ont jamais quitté, au fond" (201).

¹²⁹ Kader also makes Dalila reflect about the harkis fitting into the social tissue of France, as epitomised by the school terrain. Thus, she learns that Kader, "[à] l'école [où il prend conscience, à 6 ans, de sa différence], on lui fait comprendre qu'il est arabe, et pas français." (2003: 113)

2.3 The National Community

Much like Kerchouche, who puts forward the idea that her parents encapsulated their native Algeria whilst she was growing up –something that she transfers into her novel, too–, in her texts, El Hachmi portrays her parents and the parents of her protagonists as very much linked to their Maghrebi origins, an attachment that gets translated into the idea of the family as the epitome of Morocco in Catalonia. The relationship between kinship and the concept of nation has been largely examined within the anthropological field. The anthropologist Nita Luci, specialised in Kosovo, argues that the concept of family, just like that of “nation” or of “diaspora”, needs to be understood in terms of an imagined community –echoing Benedict Anderson’s seminal title (2005: 145). Luci’s analysis is mediated through the idea that a warlike situation, like that which redefined the fabric of the Balkans during the nineties, because of the series of transformations that it provokes, calls for a redefinition of those structures that had hitherto supported the society enduring the war context.

The texts that integrate my corpus of analysis do not focus on war as a transformative force, but consider population displacements as the engine that pushes the familial communities portrayed in them to rethink themselves, even if in Kerchouche’s work the Franco-Algerian war plays a major role in the migration processes described by the author and also in the new social situation of the harkis within the camps. Both El Hachmi and Kerchouche put forward a vision of the family as conflated with that of the nation. The interstitial position of the protagonists of their texts stems directly from their families, who are the ones that represent, in Catalonia and in France, the Maghrebi territories, encapsulated by the values transmitted to them by their relatives.

Thus, a reflection on the idea of family as presented by our authors is also a consideration of the national community, which has traditionally been understood as a distinct form of community, different from the familial one. Another anthropologist, Carol Delaney, argues that “nationalism must be primarily understood in terms of larger cultural systems (kinship and religion) from which [...] they derive” (in Luci 2005: 146), which as Luci herself agrees, would put into question the existence of “seemingly separate and distinct domains of family, nation, and other communities” (*ibid.*). Such a questioning is also found in David Schneider’s considerations on the notion of kinship –which are on the basis of Butler’s theorizations, too,

as we shall see–, for he signalled its slippery nature as an analytical tool, which led him to define it as a “non-subject” (1972: 51).

The understanding of family as the foundation on which the national community is sustained is explored by El Hachmi in *La filla estrangera*. From very early on in her account, the narrator highlights her awareness of being a part of a community, the Moroccan one, that reads her position in it always as a member of a familial unit. Her subjectivity is not considered in an isolated manner, but from her role as a daughter who is part of a bigger group of people having Moroccan ties and whose communal identity will be more or less determined by her individual behaviour. The narrator utilises once again the concept of reputation to channel this, making it clear that such reputation is safeguarded by the whole group. When she writes about her first attempt to abandon the life that her mother has envisioned for her, we learn that she backs out, mainly because of a feeling of remorse born out of the tacit pressure of the Moroccan community, which would read her gesture as improper behaviour –which, in turn, would affect her mother’s reputation too, for, as the narrator herself states: “La meva reputació és la de la mare” (2015: 20). In the following quotation, the narrator describes how the communal network operates:

he vist un cap arrissat¹³⁰ que s’esmunyia per la porta i he començat a patir per si algú em veia. Algun marroquí, és clar, d’aquests que saben qui sóc i què faig a cada moment, que m’observen per després explicar-se els uns als altres que m’han vist a tal lloc o a tal altre i ho diuen a les seves dones i les seves dones s’ho diuen entre elles, fins que una arriba de visita a casa nostra i tot parlant amb la mare treu el tema sense donar-hi més importància: no hi ha noia més tranquil·la que la teva, no li veiem fer mai cap disbarat, no parla amb ningú. Amb *ningú* volen dir que no parlo amb cap home, que per més que em diguin coses pel carrer, per més que em segueixin, jo no els faig mai cas. La meva reputació és impecable.

(*ibid.*)

¹³⁰ The hair functions as a marker of community-making, strengthening the body as a locus of identity.

2.3.1 Women and the Nation

These thoughts showcase the idea that women are the ultimate guardians of the national community: they must comply with the kinship regulations that vertebrate the familial units and, finally, the national one. In the first chapter I explored the conflation between women and the nation, and how that construction conformed a gendered gaze, in Catalonia and France, whereby those subjects that were read as women, in the host societies, were more conspicuously turned into the epitome of the stranger. Another reading of the texts studied allows us to understand that, within the Maghrebi communities that both El Hachmi and Kerchouche portray in their texts, women, too, are considered differently than men and that this consideration has to be understood together with the fact that they also get identified with the nation.

However, whereas from the European point of view, as we learnt, the “women-nation” pairing means that they will be more or less pressured to abandon what, from the stereotypical gaze operative in the European societies, is conceived as culturally attaching them to their origins, from the Maghrebi communities this linkage will result in a multi-layered pressuring so that they do not abandon those elements identified as culturally defining components or behaviours. Thus, for example, as is made evident by El Hachmi, women who, like her narrator, are thought of as being part of the Moroccan community that the author portrays, are invited to remain “chaste” and not talk to any men who may dishonour them and their families.

It is worth pointing out that the pressure that these women have to endure is very much connected to their sexuality, something that has to do with the idea that they are conceived as the physical and symbolic reproducers of the nation, as pointed out by Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989). In *From Gender to Nation*, Rada Iveković and Julie Mostov delve into this notion, and their thoughts on the matter illuminate to what extent our authors and their narrators are subjected to two-fold gendered readings. They signal that “[w]omen’s bodies serve as symbols of the fecundity of the nation and vessels for its reproduction, as well as territorial markers. Mothers, wives, and daughters designate the space of the nation and are, at the same time, the property of the nation.” (2002: 10) I have already written about the fact that harki women, especially girls, were somehow devoid of their own voice on matters to do with their arranged marriages within the camps –although, as we know, and as exemplified by the cases put forward by Kerchouche, these did not always end up happening. El Hachmi’s *La filla*

estrangera also highlights the fact that girls and teenage girls are confronted by an even greater pressure than their male counterparts as those that are constructed as the guardians of the Maghrebi cultural tradition that needs to live on in Catalan soil.

The narrator of the novel dedicates some space to explaining how the Maghrebi community in connection to which her mother constructs her daily life has managed to find a way to practise Islam. In order to do so, some changes have had to be made: in Catalonia they have to settle for a “local ombrívol ple d’humitats amb les sabates dels fidels escampades a l’entrada i el terra emmoquetat d’un gris brut” *in lieu* of a mosque, a word that, in yet another example of her usage of graphic signs to reinforce the message she wants to convey, the narrator writes in italics “perquè la realitat a què fa referència la paraula *mesquita* està tan allunyada del sentit original que esdevé ridícula” (2015: 99). The transformations to which the narrator gives evidence have to do not only with spatial elements, but also with the way that this community expresses their Islamic identity. Thus, for example, the narrator notes that many girls who did not use to veil themselves when they first arrived in Catalonia, decide to cover their hair after a while (183), embraced by other women with whom they conform a community that, as evidenced by this very example, is organic and not static. The protagonist is very critical towards the figures that are to be held more responsible for those changes, such as the local imam:

Al principi era un home del poble mateix que encapçalava les oracions, però fa alguns anys l’ha substituït un de barba llarga, vingut de Bèlgica però rifení i que es passa el dia parlant de com han d’anar vestides les dones i sobretot, sobretot, les joves filles dels musulmans que creixen en aquestes terres de llibertat excessiva.

(100)

In these lines we pick up on how women’s way of dressing is also something worthy of patrolling, but on how “les joves filles” are the ones who need to be more strictly watched over, for they will most likely become mothers and, as such, the future continuators of the Maghrebi community within Catalonia –a patrolling gaze that, we saw, is also effective within the harki camps.¹³¹ Iveković and Mostov point out that “[w]omen as mothers are reproducers of the

¹³¹ El Hachmi herself has further dwelled on this idea somewhere else: “Las mujeres, más que los hombres, han estado siempre en el punto de mira [...] en aquellas ciudades o pueblos europeos donde las comunidades de inmigrantes se concentran y además proceden de una misma zona, sucede a menudo que el control social se centra en la indumentaria de las madres y las hijas.” (2012: 155)

nation; but they are also thought of as potential enemies of the nation, traitors to it, and collaborators in its death.” (2002: 11) If we read the relationship between Leïla and Jérôme that Dalila Kerchouche portrays in her novel along with these lines, Iveković and Mostov’s reflections point towards an understanding of why Leïla’s parents did not approve of such a relationship –because it might have endangered the genealogy of values that Leïla was supposed to perpetuate, as the oldest daughter within the family. Similarly, this citation arguably explains why the mother in *La filla estrangera* wants a Moroccan husband for her daughter. According to Mostov, “‘belonging’ for women is also –and uniquely– linked to sexuality, honor, chastity; family, community and country must agree on both their acceptability and legitimacy, and their membership within the fold.” (in Iveković and Mostov 2002: 21) Despite the fact that she talks of the Indian scenario, her insights lend themselves to being extrapolated to the cases I study.

I have already signalled that the protagonist of El Hachmi’s *La filla estrangera* does not hold a clear sense of belonging, as epitomised by her final gesture of rupture with her mother’s world. Her uprootedness is highlighted throughout the text; as expressed by her grandmother, she does not fully master the different codes that regulate life in her native rural Morocco, and very significantly, she stands out amongst the group of Maghrebi women that has ended up becoming the family-nation with which her mother interacts on a regular basis. Unlike these women-compatriots-relatives, the narrator does not wear the veil, which translates not only her atheism –a position that somehow shortens her language, for she tries to eliminate from “la nostra-seva llengua” a series of religious expressions– but also drives her away from a series of gestures that encapsulate a way of being in the world and interacting with the others (2015: 27-28). The narrator does not share, thus, the same linguistic and corporeal codes that these women do have and with which they understand their selves. That is why, this “nostra-seva llengua” to which the narrator refers when talking about the language inherited from her mother could arguably be widened to that utilised by the larger female community to which the protagonist is not fully inscribed.

We learn that the inscription within this community is sometimes symbolically marked by tattoos that “les nostres dones”, as the narrator “says” –and she questions herself for having used that expression: “les nostres? Ara parles com ells? Com si fossis una d’elles?” (23)–, wear on their faces. Under this gaze, the community that has to give the subject a clear sense of self is revealed in the subject’s body. These tattoos, which were common practice amongst

Amazigh women although the narrator does not specify so, used to literally traverse and divide women's faces –they were drawn “al mig del front, al mig de la barbata fins avall al coll” (23)–, hence making visible their belonging to a communal identity. The body became, as was the case for circumcised men as made clear in El Hachmi's autobiography, a space for identity construction.¹³² In her novel, the author resorts to a corporeal element, once more, to express the particular (un)belonging of her main character. Like her mother, we know that the narrator does not have tattoos, but she somehow feels torn by an invisible dividing line that she feels to be “alive” and that would connect her with those tattooed women that conform a group, but in a very specific way:

la línia que imagino la veig clara recurrent-me de dalt a baix. Com una cicatriu que no sé quan es va cloure sobre meu per fer-me així com sóc, amb moltes coses a dintre que no surten més que en circumstàncies excepcionals. Intueixo que en algun moment, fa molts anys, jo era al revés, aquesta pell m'acompanyava, em protegia, m'embolcallava i era agradable, em donava força i empenta per anar-me'n cap al món com si fos tot per mi, com si el pogués abastar sencer. En algun moment que no he pogut recordar mai, aquesta pell em va enclaustrar per protegir-me.

(24)

2.3.2 The Body, the Family and the Nation

The shift in the way the narrator conceives her skin, her body, is tantamount to her awareness of how her female body becomes the locus of an oppressive gaze from within the Maghrebi community in which she is asked to fit. Her adult body, shaped by the line that the narrator feels like a scar –an image that yet again sends us to the semantic universe of the wound–, is not an agent of freedom but holds the potential to become a prison. The narrator confesses that she sometimes retraces that line “des de la barbata i vaig davallant”, which has the effect of provoking orgasms most of the times (26). By resignifying the line that, in its origins, was

¹³² In *L'Art de perdre*, Alice Zeniter explores the effects that the multi-layered conflict that shook Algeria starting in 1954 had on the every-day life of a rural community in the Kabylia, where “la famille représente le plus noble degré du lien” (2017: 36). We learn that Yema, mother of Hamid, one of the main characters, experiences her son's circumcision when he was five as a tremendously sad event. The circumcision marks the boy's entrance into the terrain of adulthood and manhood, “[c]e qui veut dire qu'il ne pourra plus rester près d'elle [...] Il sera désormais le fils d'Ali, son associé, son futur.” (76) The conflation between the family and the nation is further emphasized in several other passages. Like Hamid, who transitioned from childhood into adulthood very quickly, Algeria, too, is presented as a “pays sans adolescence” (59), profoundly marked by the war that continues to play a major role in the country's fabric. During the war, the FLN perceived itself as the safeguard of the nation: “Nous sommes la nation” (69), one of the characters states.

supposed to function as a collective identity marker and placing it within the field of desire and self-sexuality, which appeal to the narrator's individuality, the protagonist is subverting the inherited conception of her body. She is not conceiving that phantom line as a thread that weaves her into the communal fabric of women that have to give birth to the future inhabitants of the Moroccan nation in Catalonia, but she understands it as an element that will help her deal with her process of subjectivity formation. The ink of the tattooed line becomes the ink with which the narrator writes about its transformation.

El Hachmi had already explored a similar gesture of resignification, via the body, in *L'últim patriarca*. We learn that, as a child, the narrator would enjoy a great deal of freedom due to the mobility to which she had access because she was sort of her father's protégée—a position that allowed the child to transcend the gendered borders that we saw were in place within her daily life. However, once she gets her period, her relationship with her father changes, which, in turn, modifies the way in which she interacts with the world around her: the masculine universe that she was able to visit at her father's side becomes banned. It is worth noting that right after the narrator announces that she got her period—which she does by referring specifically to the blood, “em va venir la sang”, somehow invoking the negative imaginary to which blood is sometimes linked—the letter that accompanies her statement is the letter *o*: “*O*, nom de la lletra *o*. *O*, conjunció.” (2008: 238) We know that this letter, like all the others that pepper the novel, symbolizes the new vocabulary that she is incorporating into her self through the learning of the dictionary.¹³³ By choosing this particular letter, and its definition as a conjunction, the narrator is highlighting the two-fold universe in which she will inhabit from the moment she has her period and, hence, becomes a woman.

As an adult woman, the narrator will transition between the world that she inherited from her family—in which she should dedicate herself to the domestic chores and reduce her interaction with men to the minimum—and the one that is offered to her outside those well-defined boundaries, one in which she can indulge herself with her academic interest, her love for

¹³³ Jessica A. Folkart has noted that the narrator finishes reading the dictionary when she meets the man who will end being her husband, with whom she loses her virginity. That is why the author believes that “language and sexuality are intertwined”, for they are both used by the narrator to “escape from imprisonment” (2013: 365). Folkart resorts to a passage of Assia Djebar's novel *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* to further explore this connection: “An open wound is etched into the woman's body through the assumption of a virginity that is furiously deflowered and the martyrdom of which is consecrated by the marriage in a most trivial manner. The wedding night essentially becomes a night of blood... that is also a night of the gaze and of silence. Hence the razor-sharp chorus of long cries uttered by the other women (a sisterhood of spasms that tries to take flight in the blind night)” (Djebar in Folkart 2013: 365-366).

reading and explore her own body via extra-marital sexual relations. The anal intercourse that she decides to have with her uncle, a gesture that is imbricated in both worlds because as a university professor who values knowledge her uncle “era el primer de la familia amb qui no sentia que [...] havia nascut en el lloc equivocac” (277), can be read through the same lenses than the divisive line on the body of the *filla estrangera*. The sexual practice so naturalized by Mimoun gets recontextualized and, through the body of his daughter, becomes a decisive gesture that ends up breaking an ancestral order.¹³⁴ The narrator’s final deed is all the more transgressive because in the first part of the novel we learn that Mimoun believed his wife had cheated on him with that very same uncle who in the last scene of the novel he sees having sex with his daughter.¹³⁵ This conflation of familial ties further charges the sexual scene, especially as the uncle feels proud of teaching her niece how to do it “pel darrere”: “Qui millor que el teu oncle per ensenyar-te aquesta mena de coses, eh?” (331).¹³⁶

Jessica A. Folkart has paid particular attention to this passage of the novel, connecting it with other episodes in which the author explores issues to do with the body and sexuality. Folkart chooses to focus on the notion of the hymen in order to explain to what extent this final deed of the narrator is subversive, when compared to his father’s attitude towards it. Thus, she claims that

[w]hereas Mimoun’s goal in piercing [the narrator’s] mother’s hymen was to create bonds that could never be broken, the narrator aims to burst those bonds by violating the law of the father, defying the claim he staked on her body, and breaking her own hymen at will with a phallus of her choice. The hymen indeed serves a subversive function “in between” the prescribed and proscribed, for even as the primacy of the patriarchal law is writ in its blood, the hymen can disarm the privileged phallus by welcoming the phallus of a forbidden other.

(2013: 367)

Following Folkart’s analysis, then, the narrator’s sexual encounter with her uncle is a gesture that speaks of her agency, for it is the narrator who controls her body and chooses who is going to penetrate it. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that this kind of sexual activity is not

¹³⁴ The fact that, as we deduce from the narrator’s account, Mimoun seems to have been raped by his uncle (2008: 34) adds layers to this deed. Mimoun was profoundly marked by that episode and it is another type of anal intercourse that puts an end to his patriarchal order.

¹³⁵ Following the logics of contingency that I explored above, we could read the figure of this uncle as the mirror self of the narrator’s father.

¹³⁶ Dieter Ingenschay sees the uncle-niece relationship as an intertextual reference to the life of Mercè Rodoreda (one of El Hachmi’s most prominent literary references), who married her uncle (2011: 65).

conducive to maternity,¹³⁷ but as portrayed in El Hachmi's novel, it is directed towards satisfying a sexual desire, furthermore, normally directed from a man to a woman –and it is worth noting that the locus of such a desire are the eyes, the uncle's gaze is what provokes in the narrator an “excitació sobtada” (El Hachmi 2008: 330); this is important inasmuch as the narrator learnt from her father that her eyes should never show signs of lust. In addition to this, it should be noted that the transgressive nature of the narrator and her uncle's deed is also connected with the fact that the patriarch is watching. The eyes are the locus of subversion, for if they were not open and watching, the scene would not be coated with the same meaning –there would be no recognition of the wrong-doing on the part of the father, hence his patriarchal domain would not be altered.

Like is the case with the protagonist of *La filla estrangera*, the narrator of *L'últim patriarca* eschews the kinship regulations that were supposed to perpetuate the patriarchal regime of which her father is a representative –which would imply accepting her role as a mother– and manages to regain her agency by using the corporeal space that, whilst growing up, she was told had to eventually make of her a mother and as such allow the familial genealogical line to live on and also keep the Moroccan community alive in Catalonia. This potential double birth is, as we saw in the first chapter, what awakens the fears of those who read the protagonists I study from a position of alterity, because, as written by Iveković and Mostov, “[t]he ‘other’s’ women are enemies as reproducers, multiplying the number of outsiders, conspiring to dilute and destroy the nation with their numerous offspring.” (2002: 11) “Women's bodies mark the vulnerability of borders and, in another sense, women *embody* the borders: they are ‘signifiers of ethnic or national difference’ and the boundaries of the State.” (12; emphasis in the original)

In her work on the notion of kinship, Judith Butler has written about the conflation of the familial and the national community. She has noted that relations of filiation were traditionally constructed according to a symbolic order, regulated by the state, that would have heterosexual marriage as its basis. She argues that such a symbolic order has been broken, which

¹³⁷ As hinted by Mernissi in “Virginité et patriarcat”, this kind of sexual practice is enacted by men in heterosexual relationships with unwed women so that their virginity remains intact and they do not lose their “value” once they are to be married. In their turn, certain women make use of this kind of intercourse to transgress the prohibition of having sexual relationships before they are married, doing so in a way that is deemed as “anti-natural” in many cultural traditions. Because of this, we could arguably say that this fact somehow redraws the subversive subtext of the narrator's deed, which, from the lenses of the Judeo-Christian tradition might seem more “anti-normative” than vaginal penetration. Thus, we could read El Hachmi as being part of a kind of “cultural tradition” regarding heterosexual anal penetration.

constitute[s] a “breakdown” [...] that not only displaces the central place of biological and sexual relations from its definition, but gives sexuality a separate domain from that of kinship, allowing as well for the durable tie to the thought outside of the conjugal frame, and opening kinship to a set of community ties that are irreducible to family.

(2002: 37-38)

She then goes on to talk about France in order to exemplify her views. Signalling the widely-spread objections to the “marriage pour tous” as a “site for anxieties about cultural purity and cultural transmission”, Butler believes that in France, “concerns over reproduction work in tandem with concerns over the reproduction of an identifiably French culture. [...] [O]ne can see a certain implicit identification of French culture with universalism, and this has its own consequences for the fantasy of the nation at stake.” (23) The texts by Dalila Kerchouche, which have France as its background, but also those by El Hachmi, and more particularly her novels –which, because of the lack of geographical references, lend themselves to being more easily translatable to any other European context– provide us with insights on how these concerns are effectively sustained upon a continued suspicion that constructs the “other’s women” as enemies, as signalled by Iveković and Mostov. In Butler’s opinion, the views of those who argued that should gay people have children these would pose a threat to “culture” were in fact converging with “debates taking place on issues of immigration, of what Europe is, and implicitly and explicitly, of what is truly French, the basis of its culture, which becomes, through an imperial logic, the basis of culture itself, its universal and invariable conditions.” (22)¹³⁸

Joan Wallach Scott has explored the universalist subtext that, according to her, is the basis of the French identity discourse. Scott analyses the 2004 law against the public usage of the veil filtering it through this conception, hence noting that the notion of sexual equality that the law is claiming to foster is in truth a pretence. Echoing sociologist Éric Fassin, she sees this vindication as

¹³⁸ In Sayad’s *The Suffering of the Immigrant*, the English version of the French original text, translator David Macey includes a note on the English equivalents for “*l’immigration algérienne*”, in which he states that “Standard English usage would of course speak of ‘the Algerian community in France’.” However, he understands that “[t]he term ‘community’ offends [...] the classic French notion of a secular and universalist republic which simply does not recognize the existence of ‘communities’ defined by ethnicity, culture, language or even gender.” (2004: n.p.) This is something that, as we saw earlier, is also defended by Joan Wallach Scott.

a way of insisting on the immutability of the republic in its current incarnation. Sexual equality (like *laïcité*) has become a primordial value. Those who don't share this value (Muslims in this case) are not only different but inferior –less evolved, if capable at all of evolution. The ultimate proof of the inassimilability of Islam thus comes down, or adds up, to sexual incompatibility. This incompatibility was so profound that it compromised the future of the nation –its literal reproductive future as well as its representation. “One and indivisible” might include men and women, but it couldn't accommodate more than one arrangement of the relations between them because the existing arrangement was said to be rooted not just in culture but in nature.

(2010: 173-174)

The wives of the harkis have tended to be excluded from the media coverage and also from the historical and sociological studies on the harki community, as noted by Dalila Kerchouche. In an article that puts them at the forefront, Nina Sutherland offers valuable insight into how Butler, Fassin and Scott's explanations are applicable to my analysis of how the harki population was read in France and, based on the testimonies offered by El Hachmi's work, to the Moroccan community in Catalonia, too, I argue.

Tout comme la propagande coloniale française, qui décrivait la femme algérienne musulmane comme le moyen idéal de civiliser la population locale et de propager les valeurs françaises, l'image de la femme harkie a été utilisée, immédiatement après l'indépendance, comme le symbole de la bienveillance et de la supériorité culturelle de la France.

(2013: 228)

We have seen how this allegedly “bienveillant” treatment of the harki population within the camps, or the somehow paternalistic attitude of the Catalan local community towards the Maghrebi families, place our authors and their characters in a position that makes it difficult for them to have a clear sense of belonging –Scott speaks in terms of “insiders who don't belong” (2010: 181). What I aimed to show in this second chapter is that these difficulties in the navigation of the characters' identities in Europe are further problematized by their inherited subjective elements. These elements, values and customs position them inside familial and larger communal groups that also galvanize them to identify themselves as part of the Maghreb that lies at the core of the genealogies that have been passed on to them –which, as we saw, are sustained upon gendered logics and strict kinship regulations. Thus, the main protagonists of Kerchouche and El Hachmi inhabit a magmatic space, in which they are pulled between the controlling gazes of both Europe and the Maghreb –embodied in their enlarged

familial communities. This tension to which they are subjected is translated in the series of identity labels with which they interact (those of *immigrant*, *harki*, but also *Moroccan*, *Algerian* or *Maghrebi*), that the authors and their characters dissect, dialogue with and contest only to find, in that exercise of dialogue and contestation, the in-between that best suits their interstitial subjectivities, as shall be explored further down.

**SECOND SECTION: IN BETWEEN LANGUAGES,
MEMORIES AND SPACES**

3. THE BORDERLANDS AS HOME: WRITING BEYOND VICTIMIZATION DISCOURSES

In the first section of the thesis, I have analysed how the particular multi-layered and betwixt subjectivities that conform the bulk of my analyses stem from the in-between position Najat El Hachmi, Dalila Kerchouche and their main characters occupy. As made clear by the divisions that organize this text, such positioning gets explained by a two-fold outer gaze that eschews a clear-cut and static sense of identity, which in turn permeates the protagonists' idea of home and belonging. In the following pages, my purpose is to delve into how the characters portrayed in the texts studied get to acknowledge their in-betweenness and how their own relationship with it gets transformed as they resignify what at first they learnt to construct as a disadvantageous location, if we take into account the messages launched at them by both the European communities where they have become adults and their communities of origin, which I have above analysed. I argue that their interstitial position, which is shaped in a unique manner in each of the cases, paves the way for an understanding of the in-between as a mode of dwelling that dismisses hermetic and fixed ideas of being and, thus, transcends any kind of victimization discourses that target unstable epistemologies.

I believe that both the factual and the fictional accounts by El Hachmi and Kerchouche underpin a sense of agency that lies within the in-between, as they all draw a picture of the in-between as a site that allows for an acute and attentive gaze that enables the protagonists to realize to what extent the reality they inhabit –which also holds true for an increasingly globalized world– is, just like their subjectivities, mixed and holistic. The characters portrayed in them embody a sense of difference in the “white”, non-marked, unlabelled universe that they have learnt to perceive in Catalonia and France; and because they have acquired the tools to somehow “fit in” in such universes –more so than their parents–, they also feel a sense of alienation towards the values, languages and customs that their biological families passed on to them. The authors' realisations are enmeshed within the very gesture of describing the consequences of the multi-layered trips (to the origins, to the self, to the core of the familial genealogies) somehow inherited from their families.

Therefore, by writing about these trips and their consequences, the authors are gesturing towards an understanding of those journeys, in an exercise that entails not only that their writing helps them in their voyage of self-discovery but also conforms their subjectivity.

Precisely because of such an unfolding their writing also displays a hybrid fabric, which is so because of the many voices displayed in the works but also because they allow for many readings that complement and enrich their literary dimension. The fact that the works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche so much as simply posit the questions they posit, questions that nag the writers to the point where they try to disentangle them via their writing, ignites a problematic that for some people (who might not find themselves at any sort of crossroads) might go unnoticed but conforms the fabric of many societies nowadays.

Getting to know those questions and tuning in to how our authors interact with them represents a willingness to embrace the “cosmopolitan” attitude, which “necessarily involves a re-theorization of the nation-state” (Brennan 2003: 40) and that is very often brandished –at least in what has been constructed as the West– but not explored as deeply as one might wish for.¹³⁹ In this respect, both El Hachmi and Kerchouche represent a sort of guidance in attaining the advantageous position that, as we saw earlier, Edward Said locates in metaphorical exile:

Even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate, it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins, where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never travelled beyond the conventional and the comfortable.

(1996: 63)

¹³⁹ The notion of cosmopolitanism, understood as the political view that believes that all individuals are “citizens of the world”, remains a contentious issue, when it comes to how it is defined and how it intersects with other notions, such as that of internationalism (see Brennan 2003). In the words of Pauline Kleingeld, “[i]n current moral and political philosophy, ‘cosmopolitanism’ is most often equated with the endorsement of the idea that a theory of global justice should address the needs and interests of human individuals directly –regard them as citizens of the world– rather than indirectly, via their membership in different states.” (2012: 4) Kwane Anthony Appiah calls for what he terms “a rooted cosmopolitanism” or a “cosmopolitan patriotism” whereby the cosmopolitan patriot “can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is [...] attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different people” (1996: 22) for “cosmopolitanism is not just the feeling that everybody matters. The cosmopolitan also celebrates the fact that there are different local human ways of being” (25). Craig Calhoun, however, hints at the problematic embracing of an idea of cosmopolitanism that eschews situated considerations. He claims that “[cosmopolitans] imagine the world from the vantage point of frequent travellers, easily entering and exiting polities and social relations around the world, armed with visa-friendly passports and credit cards. [...] But what does it mean to be a ‘citizen of the world’? Through what institutions is this ‘citizenship’ effectively expressed? [...] How does this citizenship contend with global capitalism and with non-cosmopolitan dimensions of globalization?” (2003: 90) Calhoun notes that there is a tendency “to treat the West as the site of both capitalist globalization and cosmopolitanism but to approach the rest of the world through the category of tradition. More generally, cultural identities and communal solidarities are treated less as creative constructions forged amid globalization than as inheritances from an older order.” (91)

Taking Said's words as a cue, I argue that the insights by El Hachmi and Kerchouche through their writing enable reflections that allow for a nuanced understanding of the world we inhabit today. Even though Said uses the metaphor of the margins and I situate Kerchouche and El Hachmi (and their characters) in what I call the in-between –existentially and in their writing–, both positionalities eschew rigid understandings of any kind and allow for that open-mindedness to which Said refers. I choose to speak of the in-between because in its lack of spatial dimension it can be read as a no-place, that is, it is not situated within the centre-periphery logics and because of that brings up the possibility of creating alternative epistemologies and new modes of dwelling, like I explained in the Introduction to this thesis. As I wrote earlier upon discussing the idea of home that, in both authors, is traversed by the notion of writing, in this section of the research I will elaborate on how writing can be perceived as a mode of dwelling, too.

As has been made clear in previous chapters, El Hachmi's *Jo també sóc catalana* stresses the idea that she would like to get rid of the "etiquetes" (2004: 12) which, she feels, force her to continually explain herself in front of others. She understands her writing as a gesture focused towards that end and it can be argued that she does so not merely through the content on which she chooses to elaborate but also via the structure shaping such content, too. As the author herself explains: "aquest llibre es perfila com una espècie d'híbrid transgenèric: unes memòries que no són ben bé memòries, experiències reals que semblen fictícies i un component d'anàlisi d'aquest relat vivencial que no és ben bé assaig." (13) Najat El Hachmi believes her text to be a contribution to what she terms a crusade (12), which is the fact of living her Catalan life as an "unmarked" person, despite her paternal heritage: "el projecte migratori". An individual crusade that, by being shared and spread, becomes a collective one, as well. The terminological choice is important here, inasmuch as *crusade* is connected with the historical period of the so-called "Reconquista", to which I referred in the Introduction. Thus, by using it, El Hachmi is implying that she ultimately aims to remould the imaginary that, at least in the Iberian Peninsula, has constructed North African subjects as figures of alterity.

The author considers that the society where she became an adult is not ready yet to issue a mature treatment of the diversity that conforms that society, a treatment that entails eluding someone's place of birth as a marker to establish differences between individuals. That is why I approach El Hachmi's writing exercise –and also that of Kerchouche– not only from the literary perspective but I understand it, too, as a political act, in the sense that regardless of how

veracious the contents recounted by the authors are, they bring to the fore a series of reflections that have to do with the every-day reality experienced by many people –i.e. newcomers or the daughters and sons of those who migrated– of whom the local population tend to know tangentially. As Jean-Luc Nancy states, “the political is the place where community as such is brought into play.” (2004: xxxvii) With their voices, and using their voice as a mouthpiece for many others, El Hachmi and Kerchouche raise questions, in Catalonia and France, that contribute to the rethinking of these spaces and to the “being-in-common”, still in Nancy’s words, of those who inhabit them. They also reveal modes of dwelling in the in-between that stem directly from their own personal experiences and to which they contribute to give coverage, through their written production, which I read as hybrid, too.

In what follows, I argue that the work by our authors has to be understood from the particular lens hinted at above. They, together with other authors, as we shall see, paved the way for the circulation of a kind of texts that were meant to impact the societies in which they first got published. El Hachmi was one of the first authors to make room in the Catalan public debates for those who, like her, were not born on Catalan soil and did not have the physical appearance, or the accent, to “pass” as such. Kerchouche, along with Fatima Besnaci-Lancou or Zahia Rahmani, belongs to a group of people, particularly women (see Jouane 2012: 2-4), who thought it important to recount their experiences as harki descendants, raising awareness, with their gesture, towards a community –made up of the former auxiliary soldiers and their families– that had until then been widely neglected within the political sphere, and also quite stigmatized within the public domains, both in France and in Algeria. Studying the circulation of the texts by both authors, as I will do below, in several geographical locations, but particularly in the context where they were first published –that is, Catalonia and France, as determined not only by the language in which the works were written but also by the publishing houses that printed them– seems, thus, like a necessary exercise to get to know their multi-layered nature.

3.1 The Political Gesture of the Writer

Kateb Yacine, a poet who wrote in French to tell French people he was not French (1994: 117) –although he decided to switch to Algerian *darija* after Algeria’s independence–, started writing at a time when Algeria was still under French rule. In a 1985 interview in which he

went over his beginnings as a writer, Kateb declared that he chose to write theatre in order to “multiply” his word and reach a group of people that would not read either his poems, his novels nor his articles.¹⁴⁰ He deemed the theatrical ground –which considered public performances– like the best means to attain his goal. The contexts in which both El Hachmi and Kerchouche write are obviously very different from that of Kateb, especially because as we shall see the choice as to in which language Kerchouche and El Hachmi can write does not include Arabic, *darija* or Tamazight for that matter. However, the works of the two women that I consider here represent a similar gesture, inasmuch as the literary field serves them to diverge from the treatment that, by the time they start publishing, the realities that are central to their texts had theretofore received. In this respect, they assume, more or less consciously, their role as intellectuals, as described by Edward Said: “an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public” and who is able to disentangle stereotypes and reductive categories (1996: 11).

Said bases his reflections about what an intellectual is on Gramsci’s conception of it, which presupposes that everyone working in the field of knowledge is an intellectual: “all men are intellectuals [...] but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.” (Gramsci in Said 1996: 3)¹⁴¹ My reading of Kerchouche and El Hachmi as intellectuals has to do not only with their presence in the media –which has helped them to directly participate in debates about several contemporary topics– but stems also from their literary work.¹⁴² Because they are multi-layered and nuanced texts, they lend themselves to being read from several angles of enquiry. I have demonstrated how the authors put forward an exercise of asserting their multiple belongings through their literature, a belonging that is located in the in-between. Their statements are built on a series of questionings that, we have seen, appeal to the several national communities with which both authors interact at different levels. Such an attitude leads them

¹⁴⁰ In his essay *Le Roman maghrébin*, Abdelkebir Khatibi wrote, regarding Kateb: “On peut se demander à juste titre pourquoi la révolution algérienne n’a pas enfanté sa propre révolution des formes esthétiques. Le mérite de Kateb Yacine est d’avoir compris qu’un écrivain révolutionnaire ayant choisi de combattre par la plume doit être révolutionnaire aussi dans son propre domaine, celui de l’écriture. Son très beau roman *Nedjma* est un exemple significatif de cette attitude.” (1979: 15)

¹⁴¹ I understand the usage of *men* by Gramsci and Said here under the lenses of the generic masculine gender.

¹⁴² Núria Codina Solà has analysed El Hachmi’s critical views, both towards Morocco and Catalonia, considering her published literary works and also her pieces in the media, which put forward her views on topics such as maternity or abortion (see Codina Solà 2011). Since the year 2010, El Hachmi writes regular opinion pieces for the newspaper *El Periódico*, which publishes in both Catalan and Spanish.

to inhabit a ground in which there are no epistemological certainties, which coincides with the terrain that Said feels is occupied by the intellectual, always in metaphysical exile, “constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others”, restless and always in movement (53).

Being an intellectual, Said continues, means “asking questions, making distinctions, restoring to memory all those things that tend to be overlooked or walked past in the rush to collective judgment and action.” (33) And such an attitude not only refers to the individual but permeates the collective territory: “With regard to the consensus on group or national identity it is the intellectual’s task to show how the group is not a natural or god-given entity but is a constructed, manufactured, even in some cases invented object, with a history of struggle and conquest behind it, that it is sometimes important to represent.” (*ibid.*) The first two chapters of this study evince how Kerchouche and El Hachmi give account to his realisation.

Andreu Domingo dedicates part of *Catalunya al mirall de la immigració* to the literary voices that have contributed to the way we think about immigration in Catalonia today. Domingo –who devotes a whole section of his analysis to listing and briefly commenting on the different autobiographical works that have population displacements at their core, from those featuring internal Spain-to-Catalonia displacements in the 1960s and 1970s to later international cases– understands that the gesture of inscription that is facilitated via the literary exercise is tantamount to the demand of a social space. Writing becomes, thus, a call for visibilization and a legitimating strategy, whereby it is understood as a cultural product that gets inserted in the network of cultural values of the society with which they dialogue. Domingo names El Hachmi, together with UK-born Mathew Tree, as narrative voices that “canviaran radicalment la perspectiva en la construcció literària de la immigració” (2014: 292) –furthermore, I argue, they have also contributed to shifting the discourse on the construction of Catalan literary identity.

Francesc Candel –who has been made into a representative voice of those internal migrations from Spain to Catalonia and whose work I will consider in the next chapter, in relation to the work produced by El Hachmi– is cited as a role model in the way immigration was perceived in Catalonia, fostering the rising of a new subgenre, “basat en la recerca identitària a partir del relat de vida, que farà de mirall de la identitat catalana, que inevitablement es busca a través del discurs de l’altre, de l’immigrat, i que alhora fa de pont entre la cultura d’origen de l’escriptor i la del lector.” (*ibid.*) The first-person narrative, in which the exploration of the

subjectivity is sought, corresponds to this identity search, a process, that of the identitarian search, which Domingo himself believes to be of paramount importance, because “és a través de les històries d’arrelament que es defineix la identitat catalana” (*ibid.*).

The importance of El Hachmi’s voice within the contemporary Catalan literary circle is proven beyond the awards the author has won (*L’últim patriarca* was awarded the most prestigious prize for Catalan letters, the Ramon Llull; and *La filla estrangera*, the Sant Joan BBVA). She was responsible for prefacing a special uncensored edition of Francesc Candel’s *Els altres catalans* –her name even appears on the cover–, which highlights to what extent she is seen as the epitome of what sociologists call, in regard to Catalonia’s scenario, the third wave of immigration, which enlarged the Catalan population and contributed to its contemporary heterogeneity, adding to the already diverse social fabric to which Candel’s book attests (see Domingo 2014: 28-41). In her prologue, El Hachmi acknowledges the similarities of those two Catalonias, which her own oeuvre and that of Candel help to capture through the voices of the “other” Catalans, that is, those individuals and families that were not born on Catalan soil but made it their home. And it is precisely Francesc Candel’s attention to detail, his “aposta indiscutible pel matís”, his “voluntat de no deixar-se portar per la primera impressió de les coses ni per partidismes precipitats” (2008b: 7) that which our author values the most.

Like Candel’s attentive gaze, which led him to use his text as a palimpsest that included many individual voices, El Hachmi’s work also represents an approximation to the universe of migration that is receptive to the small gestures that conform the every-day life of those “other Catalans” like herself. El Hachmi admires Candel’s appreciation for detail and praises him for his conciliatory efforts, which, in her words, made him a pioneer:

perquè va fer de pont, mirava a banda i banda d’una frontera invisible que separava mons que ell coneixia molt de prop, intentava tant com podia mirar atentament dues societats que semblaven viure d’esquena l’una de l’altra i es fixava en els punts d’interacció d’ambdues on els individus es relacionaven o es negaven a fer-ho. Fou ell qui va aconseguir sobreviure a aquesta intersecció amb un punt de vista gens còmode però, malgrat tot, conciliador.

(8)

Like Candel, we read how El Hachmi considers herself like a bridge, an idea echoed by scholarly voices like that of Domingo. Her will to portray what that means in her work has not

gone unnoticed. She was included in the volume *Women Writers in Catalan: Fifty Contemporary Authors You Need to Know, plus the Ten Classics You Can't Miss*, commissioned by Barcelona City Hall and in which the Associació d'Escriptors en Llengua Catalana has participated. The volume, published in Catalan and English to appeal “to publishers all over the world” (2017: 9), includes writers tagged as “classic” (some of whom are referenced by El Hachmi in her works), “up-and-coming talents”, “contemporary” writers and “poets” and aims to “put on the map those writers that have received insufficient attention [...] because of the historical discrimination” endured by women and also “to fill in the gaps of the Catalan literature imagery, where pieces were missing that are essential to make sense of ourselves as a literature and as a culture”. (*ibid.*) El Hachmi, whose name brings to the list phonemes that none of the other writers have, is listed as a contemporary voice and the short biographical note accompanying her extract from *La filla estrangera* presents her as a cultural intermediary of Amazigh origin (99), something which will add to her particular sense of belonging and which will also shape her writing, as we shall see.

The idea of El Hachmi’s self-perception as a kind of bridge is presented very early in her work. In the first pages of *Jo també sóc catalana*,¹⁴³ she reiterates that the migration she inherited –from her father– has provided her with a “pensament de frontera”, which has to do with inhabiting a world filled with “denominacions d’orígens”, “pors”, “dubtes continus” and “abismes de pioners que exploren nous mons”, which she chooses to acknowledge and confront (2004: 14). By writing, she hopes to get rid of the enclosing and hermetic potential that all those doubts and fears hold and look for her own happiness, “a cavall entre dos mons” (*ibid.*)

As I have already explained, El Hachmi’s upbringing in Catalonia is determined by the fact that, as she herself chooses to highlight, her family was one of the first to settle in Vic, something which will lead her to look for her own references and models. “Sóc un esgraó intermedi, formo part del que jo anomenaria generació de frontera, altrament mal dita ‘segona generació’”. (13) By resorting to such a denomination, dismissing and signalling the wrongness of the “second generation” label –which would imply that the societal life of someone who,

¹⁴³ In an article that analyses El Hachmi’s 2004 work in relation to the much contested label of “migrant literature”, Marta Segarra weaves a connection between the author’s statement and the title of the autobiographical novel *Journal: Nationalité: Immigré(e)* (1987) by Sakinna Boukhedenna –who tends to be thought of as a *Beur* writer, designation to which I will refer within this chapter–, “in which the author bitterly denounces the lack of national identity, on a symbolic level, for these immigrants ‘in between two worlds’” (Segarra 2015: 79). The thread uniting both authors is worth pointing out, for El Hachmi interweaves several references of the so-called “*Beur* literature” in her work.

like the author, has inherited a migration will always be permeated by that experience– the author is, I argue, embracing her interstitial positionality and turning it into an empowering place.

3.1.1 Hybrid Productions

In a piece published within the volume *Migrations and Creativity*, in which the author was selected to participate, together with other writers born outside of Catalonia, as a voice giving testimony to the interculturality conforming Catalonia (Bassols 2012: 8), El Hachmi writes of her particular interstitial position as a fertile ground for creation, describing it in the following terms:

Este lugar de desencuentro, este espacio sin sentido o con tantos sentidos distintos al mismo tiempo [que nace “cuando a las hijas se nos empieza a pedir un manejo audaz de los códigos culturales de las dos orillas del Mediterráneo”], en el que resulta tan difícil construir una lógica vital, es el lugar ideal para que surja la creación literaria.

[...] Si hay algo que resulte imprescindible en un entorno cambiante, ese algo es el relato, la explicación y descripción de unos hechos que tienen lugar en un tiempo y espacio determinados que es el texto. [...] el relato se vuelve imprescindible para evitar una cierta esquizofrenia identitaria.

(2012: 156)

Writing is described by the author –in an image that rekindles the connection between women and the sewing universe¹⁴⁴– as the sewing that ties together all the fabric scraps that conform her own “patchwork”, the image El Hachmi feels best describes her own hybrid identity. It is through writing that she is able to construct an object that is meaningful on its own, beyond the individual fragments that make up the clothing (157). However, she is wary of the way she should handle such composition, for, as she herself acknowledges, the authors who find themselves in that kind of vital intersections risk, in El Hachmi’s words, falling into the trap of

¹⁴⁴ Worth noting is the fact that, in *L’últim patriarca*, the narrator uses sewing classes as a cover to gain time to spend with her lover, because this kind of activity her parents approved of (2008: 304-305). In *Les Sindbads marocains*, Fatima Mernissi informs us that traditionally “[l]’acte de tisser [est un] geste éminemment féminin”, like that of writing (2004: 67). “Quant au lien entre tisser et écrire”, Mernissi points out, “il suffit d’ouvrir n’importe quel dictionnaire pour découvrir que texte vient du latin *textus*, tissue, trame. De là provient l’enchaînement d’un récit qui vient de *texere*, tisser. Donc, l’acte de tisser soit des fils, soit des récits ou des mythes, semble avoir été associé au féminin, dès l’aube de l’histoire.” (68)

“autoexotización”¹⁴⁵ when they want to make it the core of their work, that is “escribir destacando especialmente los elementos definitivos de la sociedad de origen de una manera superficial centrándose en la descripción costumbrista.” (*ibid.*)

Such an attitude is transmitted to the way El Hachmi has decided to present her writing, calling for a reception that should also be betwixt and hybrid, escaping from clear-cut genre definitions.¹⁴⁶ This understanding holds true not only in regard to *Jo també sóc catalana*, a “híbrid transgerènic” but functions when we decide to consider her work as a whole. As I shall explore below, Dalila Kerchouche’s production lends itself to being read this way, too, something that strengthens the comparative analysis on which this research work is based. If we read the three texts by El Hachmi that conform the core of the corpus of this thesis, we perceive their overlapping in matter of content, and how the two novels somehow function as a two-fold mirror that enlarges the experiences recounted by the author in the 2004 text –two-fold because the 2008 text focuses on the father-daughter relationship and its protagonist jumps into the past to delve into her previous generation’s lives, whilst the 2015 one brings wider attention to the maternal figure, after a migration experience, also signalling to what extent she leaves an imprint on her daughter.¹⁴⁷ The three works revolve around the semantic universe of migration, and they all have their locus in individual experiences (those of the narrators, which cannot be understood without making references to the experiences of their own families).

So far, I have made reference to a few aspects that are pivotal to El Hachmi’s oeuvre, namely the autobiographical traits, the importance of the maternal figure and the need to put a special emphasis on the body and on sexuality –the central concern of her novel *La caçadora de cossos*, as we learnt–, which are used by the author, in the different narrative voices she deploys, to give account to the internal turmoil of the protagonists and to all the questions that arise from

¹⁴⁵ Ziauddin Sardar has paid attention to this phenomenon, what he calls “indigenous Orientalism”, using the following terms to explain its logics: “brown sahibs”, “Orientalized Orientals” or “captive minds” –scholars, writers and thinkers “defined by [their] acute state of intellectual bondage and total dependence on the West” (1999: 85).

¹⁴⁶ After discussing the risks of “autoexotización”, El Hachmi highlights that the other great danger in what concerns a writer’s work has to do with the reader, for it is connected with the reception of that work. She declares herself worried about readings which might be “‘culturalmente’ sesgadas” (2012: 158). Similarly, she is very critical of what she calls “pornografía ètnica”, a kind of discrimination. El Hachmi believes that discrimination manifests itself in many ways: “la del racista, que colpeja de front, però també la del paternalista, que diu coses com que acceptant l’immigrant la nostra cultura s’enriqueix. [...] [L]’immigrant no vol pertànyer a una associació d’immigrants, sinó a una de veïns” (in Castellano Sanz 2018:159).

¹⁴⁷ As we know, in *Mare de llet i mel*, El Hachmi sort of combines this double gaze, inasmuch as the author portrays the life of a woman from rural Morocco who decides to follow her husband, who had migrated to Catalonia.

inhabiting a plural and complex identity. In *Nouvelles romancières francophones du Maghreb*, Marta Segarra explains that these are questions criss-crossing an entire generation of Franco-Maghrebi women writers, such as Assia Djebar or Malika Mokeddem. Leïla Sebbar, with whom I already explained that I connect El Hachmi's work, is also considered by many literary critics as being part of that generation of writers, because of her biography and because of the content and style of her work. Sebbar's and El Hachmi's connection was materialized in a volume that, in its Catalan edition, interweaves the voices of Nora Aceval with those of both Sebbar and El Hachmi.

The work is a collection of tales, orally transmitted by different generations of “nomad and peasant women” in the high plateaus of Maghreb, that Aceval collected in written form –first she recorded them, as they were told, in oral Arabic; then she transcribed them and finally she translated them into French. Originally published in French in 2008 and under the title of *Contes libertins du Maghreb*, it was translated into Catalan by Najat El Hachmi, who also wrote a prologue to the edition.¹⁴⁸ In the prologue, El Hachmi signals that stories like those collected by Aceval were also part of her Maghrebi surroundings¹⁴⁹ whilst growing up, although they “no formen part del que es pot fer públic” (2011b: 10). Because of their sexually explicit content –a terrain, that of sex, which our author connects with the universe of desire, explored by the story-tellers in surprisingly canny ways– she believes that the stories fulfil a two-fold function: “per una banda s’escapen de les normes morals i per l’altra serveixen per convertir en com a mínim narrable, des de l’excepció que suposa la ficció, el que està socialment

¹⁴⁸ In *Contes que em van curar*, Afghan Nadia Ghulam “diu” and Joan Soler i Amigó “escriu” a collection of tales from the Afghan cultural tradition of Ghulam’s mother, who belonged to a “non-literate” culture (2014: 11). In the introduction, Ghulam states that the tales she is bringing to paper, thanks to Soler i Amigó’s help, had never been written before, and so they see the light, in their written form, in Catalan. “En una cultura no escrita la memòria ho és tot.” (12) I find it interesting to note how written Catalan becomes the means by which oral traditions get to penetrate a different context from which they arose. Ghulam signals that readers might find intrinsic similarities between the tales she is keeping alive and those that circulate within the Catalan context, perhaps because as the author herself reveals, the stories “formen part d’una herència que sempre ens sobreviurà. La nostra identitat.” (14) I find particularly noteworthy the healing component that Ghulam attributes to these tales. Furthermore, they tell of a country that no longer exists, due to the war in which it is enmeshed – Ghulam was born in a country at war. Ghulam’s text got published by the same editorial group than El Hachmi’s.

¹⁴⁹ In *Jo també sóc catalana*, El Hachmi accounts for both the story-telling universe that surrounded her as a child and the explicit sexual content of some of the stories that circulated within her Moroccan family: “S’havien acabat [ja a Catalunya] els contes, les històries fragmentades que, com Shahrizat, la mare ens explicava cada nit.” “[De visita al Marroc] El tema de conversa preferit de la gran matriarca era tot el que tingués a veure amb les relacions de parella, ja fossin matrimonials o no. El que era un escàndol per a la meua àvia, per a ella era un motiu de riulla, un pretext per desfer-se en detalls sobre què ha de fer una dona quan se li apropa un home, etc.” (2004: 33; 141) On another note, it is worth mentioning that the figure of Sheherazade, as tied to an Orientalist imaginary, has been contested by Lebanese poet Joumana Haddad –in 2010 she published an essay entitled *I Killed Scheherazade*–, whose journal *Jasad* (Body) (founded in 2008) represented an important contribution to gender and sexuality studies in the Arabic-speaking world.

castigat.” In what she believes to be a multi-layered gesture of pleasure, a pleasure that is both erotic and literary at once, the very telling of these stories signifies a hint, in El Hachmi’s words, “perquè el gaudi sobrevisqui al que és convenient, de manera que el que és aparent no sigui alterat.” (11)

Fiction is brandished by Aceval, El Hachmi and Sebbar like a tool that disrupts clear-cut dichotomous structures, such as that confronting the public and the private spheres, and, as signalled by Sebbar, allows for the formation of counter narratives that challenge what is constructed as “prohibited” or “allowed” to circulate, functioning as a kind of clandestine voice that is based on a language that is free and libertine –that of the storytellers that made the survival of these stories possible (2011: 13). Sebbar reminds us that the knowledge she has of her native Algeria has always been filtered through the fragmented voices of others, a reminder that serves to signal the literary field as a space of intervention, as highlighted by Kateb Yacine. In this sense, by translating the stories into Catalan and linking herself to Aceval’s project, El Hachmi is facilitating the permeability of the Mediterranean space, bringing part of the Maghrebi imaginary into the Catalan cultural and literary space. At the same time, through her translation gesture, she is situating herself within the field of an oral tradition that she is helping to recuperate or maintain –albeit in a different form.

3.1.2 The Other(s)’s Voices

Dalila Kerchouche, too, has consecrated her work as a writer to the survival of certain voices, those belonging to the harki community, and, like El Hachmi, she has also contributed to the unveiling of others, as made explicit in her latest novel, *Espionnes*, in which Kerchouche brings to life the reality of those women that work for the secret services in France. Kerchouche defines their job as “hors norme” (2016: 23) and in the introduction to the text she explains that some of the women were “même soulagées d’être enfin autorisées à témoigner dans le cadre sécurisé que leur offre l’anonymat” (27). The book is the result of a year-long investigation in which Kerchouche interviewed around 50 women. Women represent a small percentage of the totality of the French secret services, and their particular experiences remain largely hidden: “Les très rares ouvrages qui leur sont consacrés les campent, de manière caricaturale, en vamps vénéneuses, qui vous séduisent pour mieux vous trahir.” (28)

After writing a piece for *Madame Figaro* about the topic, Kerchouche plunged into the writing of *Espionnes*, in an effort that, the author hopes, will bring the focus of attention to a group of women “insuffisamment reconnues” and who participate, secretly, in “la défense nationale et protègent les Français.” (29) This last statement helps us envision the connection that does exist between *Espionnes* and Kerchouche’s previous works a link that might seem weak to the readers but which Kerchouche herself wants to present as solid. Like the former combatants, the role of these women interviewed by Kerchouche is to protect their country and yet, despite their relentless efforts, their portrayal in the narrative and the imaginary of the French discourse on espionage is biased and anecdotal.

The will to uncover this and other invisibilities constitutes a pillar sustaining Kerchouche’s projects. She dedicates *Espionnes* to “toutes les femmes fortes et invisibles d’hier et d’aujourd’hui” (2016: n.p.) and confesses that her attraction to the female universe of espionage has to do with the fact that whilst growing up she was surrounded by exceptional women, like those she interviewed: “Dans ma famille [...] plusieurs générations de femmes brimées, mais fortes, ont affronté avec un courage inouï le triple joug de la colonisation, de la pauvreté et de la domination patriarcale dans l’Algérie rurale du début du siècle.” (20-21) She declares that these women forged her feminism, which has led her, as a journalist, to find “d’autres insoumises qui luttent contre les injustices”, interviewing “des pionnières d’univers variés qui, toutes, abattent des barbelés réels ou imaginaires, forcent des barrages arbitrairement posés, ouvrent voies nouvelles, élargissent le champ des possibles pour les générations futures.” (21)

Because of her desire to explore universes that are somehow taboo through writing and pointing out their arbitrary constructions, we can read Kerchouche’s oeuvre much along the lines of El Hachmi’s. Hers also includes a variety of genres and escapes fixed categorisations. And like El Hachmi’s work, Kerchouche’s projects are very much the fruit of a particular context and respond to a particular goal the author hopes to accomplish. As I explored in previous chapters in relation to the texts that deal directly with the harki universe, Kerchouche’s focus on the topic can be explained by her wish to denounce what she feels is an unfair treatment of the harki population. In this sense, the author also becomes a kind of bridge, inasmuch as her texts allow for the circulation of voices that had up to then remained unheard, something that holds true also for the scenario depicted in *Espionnes*. Still in the introduction of her 2016 book, and in an exercise that we witnessed in her previous works whereby she links an image of the reality

she sees with its metaphorical counterpart, Kerchouche declares that upon meeting with the first women for her research, in a building at the boulevard Mortier, she stumbled upon a “forteresse grillagée” (21) which took her straight back to her own story: “À ma mémoire, encore douloureuse et révoltée, de fille de harkis née dans un camp entouré de barbelés dans le sud de la France.” (22) She describes the camp in which she was born as a “lieu d’humiliation, de non-droit et d’exclusion”, where her family “a été victime de cette même toute-puissance de l’État français”, a “toute-puissance” that the fortress at boulevard Mortier also incarnates (*ibid.*).

Kerchouche learnt that the Bias camp, in which she was born and where her family spent a few years, was under surveillance by a section of the French secret services for a while because the State feared a rebellion within the camp premises. Whilst she confesses not to be taken by any feelings of revenge because of that, she does nonetheless feel the need to explain that she is aware of the double-bind nature she identifies at the heart of the secret services in France: “j’ai parfaitement conscience que, si les services secrets protègent les français des périls actuels, ils sont aussi un instrument au service du politique; [...] et n’hésitent pas à broyer des familles au nom d’obscures raisons d’État.” (22-23) *Espionnes* represents her attempt at “saying” and revealing that double-bindedness, which is to be summed up as what she wanted to accomplish via the writing of *Mon père, ce harki*, which she wrote “pour [s]e libérer de ce monde du tabou, du secret et du silence, qu’incarne encore l’histoire des harkis.” (22)

The multiple angles of enquiry through which the works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche can be approached are tantamount to the fact that they can dialogue with many disciplines – dialogues that the publishing houses have been fast to establish by somehow determining the circulation of the authors’ texts within the contexts in which they were first published. At the back cover of *Jo també sóc catalana* we are told that the text is “fonamental per entendre com són els nous catalans del segle XXI”, thus it is being praised for functioning almost like a socio-anthropological and even academic tool within Catalonia, masking, however, that it can speak to many other different audiences because of its literary dimension. It is worth mentioning that a special emphasis is placed on the language usage by El Hachmi on that same back cover: the text is said to have been written “[a]mb un català impecable i ric en matisos”, a statement that would not have been made had El Hachmi been born on Catalan soil or had she no Maghrebi descent whatsoever. By presenting the text thus, Columna, which is now owned by the giant Spanish publishing house Grupo Planeta –which has also edited the rest of El Hachmi’s books–, is

putting forward an exoticizing vision of a writer that from the very beginning has been made into a figure meant to fulfil a certain role in Catalonia's literary and also societal panorama.

The publication of *Jo també sóc catalana* was momentous, as it coincided in time with the publication of *Les dues cares de la lluna*, the second book written by Asha Miró. Born in India and adopted by a Catalan family in 1974, an adoption whose intricacies she recounts in *La filla del Ganges: la història d'una adopció*, Miró was, as she herself recalls, the epitome of difference in the neighbourhood where she grew up. I have written about how she was read as an immigrant at a time when transnational adoptions were not at all common in the Catalan context, which led me to examine the regard through which she herself and her works were approached in parallel with the way El Hachmi's figure and first book were also considered (Joan-Rodríguez 2015). Miró became a public figure, appearing in many public spaces –she started presenting a music programme for one of the Catalan public channels–, at a time when, as I have already explained, Catalonia's social fabric was undergoing a significant shift, through the incorporation of people laying claims to many cultural traditions not present in the territory before in significant ways. El Hachmi was being presented, through her 2004 text, as yet another voice arising from that diversity with which “locals” had to get acquainted with. As I described in Chapter 1, Columna, in its juvenile branch, had already edited in 2004 a text by a woman from Nador who migrated to Catalonia as a child –Laila Karrouch.¹⁵⁰

In *De Nador a Vic*, Karrouch remembers how it was to abandon her native Berber town to go and live in Vic with her family, how she experienced the separation from her grandparents and how she managed, in the end, to reconcile the many sides upon which she feels her subjectivity is conformed. It is particularly relevant to note that Karrouch, a nurse by profession who had scribbled some notes about her migration into Catalonia, was asked by someone to turn those diary-like notes into a book, a request I read as connected with the willingness to turn Asha Miró into a public figure or to present Najat El Hachmi as key to deciphering the “new” Catalonia. In an essay entitled “Catalanes, inmigrantes y *charnegos*: ‘raza’, ‘cultura’ y ‘mezcla’ en el discurso nacionalista catalán”, social anthropologist Montserrat Clua i Fainé analyses the rhetoric sustaining the Catalan nationalist discourse on identity over the last century,

¹⁵⁰ Castellanos notes that the first decade of the 21st century represents the beginning of a new literary canon in Catalonia, for it is then that “irromp en la literatura en català una nova gamma d'escriptors i, sobretot, d'escriptores que van arribar a Catalunya d'infants o joves”. These include Najat El Hachmi and Laila Karrouch, but also Asha Miró, Agnès Agboton, Saïd El Kadaoui, Pius Alibek, Simona Skrabec, Salah Jamal, Ko Tazawa, Nassira El Hadri El Yousfi, and Matthew Tree (2018: 16-17).

highlighting that to this day it remains what scholars term a “civic” kind of nationalism, based on cultural traits and not on biological or phenotypical ones.

Clua i Fainé analyses the circulation of the label *charnego*, initially used, in Catalonia, to refer to the children of parents of mixed marriages between a non-Catalan Spanish immigrant and a Catalan, and their descendants (2011: 58). The label’s usage rocketed during the sixties and seventies, coinciding with the high numbers of internal displacements from Spanish impoverished rural zones to more industrialized Catalonia –and because of this, the label was equated with lower incomes and translated a tinge of discrimination which was later reversed, as today many people of *charnego* descent claim the label with pride.¹⁵¹ The anthropologist fears, however, that the discrimination and “the social discourses of exclusion” that accompanied the term *charnego* might come back directed towards the new immigrants and their descendants, of which El Hachmi, Miró and Karrouch are representatives (71).

Such a comparison has already been established by El Hachmi herself, drawn, as we learnt in her preface to Candel’s *Els altres catalans*, and also in *La filla estrangera*. As I have already explained above, once it has been decided that the protagonist is to marry her cousin, the narrator and her mother start to look for a new flat that can fit the newly formed family. The narrator recounts that she and her mother have always lived downtown, where housing is cheap,

¹⁵¹ Recently, and in the light of the pro-independence movement that is shaking Catalonia, a few thinkers have used the media to discuss about the current status of this label. In a piece entitled “Orgull ‘charnego’”, Brigitte Vasallo –author of *PornoBurka*, an allegation against fixed and hermetic identity categorisations set in Barcelona’s Raval, considered as one of the poorest neighbourhoods of the city and traditionally the home of the immigrants– understands that nowadays the label refers to “[l]es filles d’aquelles que ningú no ha escoltat, de les oblidades de sempre, de les que no tenen veu [...]. Nosaltres, les seves filles, ni som d’allà ni som d’aquí: no tenim lloc on anar quan ens dieu que marxem a casa nostra si no ens agrada el que passa aquí. Som les dels vuit cognoms malsonants, les de la llengua que embruta la vostra llengua, les del xivarri.” Citing Gloria Anzaldúa’s conception of “la frontera”, Vasallo brandishes “charneguismo” as an in-between identity that, to her view, has no room in today’s Catalonia, where everybody is asked to position themselves in favour or against independence (2017). However, political figures such as Gabriel Rufián (who belongs to the pro-independence party Esquerra Republicana) claim their status as *charnegos* in their defence of pro-independence standpoints. Poet Blanca Llum Vidal, in response to another article by Vasallo where the same viewpoint explored above is put forward (Vasallo 2018), deploys another way to understand “la xarnegor”. According to Vidal, “la xarnegor” is not connected to a specific upbringing or social class –for “charnego” or “charnega” would normally be used to refer to working class people– but it is everywhere, impregnating those sectors that according to Vasallo have constructed a rigid nationalistic discourse based on “authenticity” that would arguably leave out the “charnegos” –deemed as not “authentically Catalan” (2018). The topic remains a contentious issue and continues to play a part in Catalonia’s social debates –as evinced by the fact that in April 2019 Vasallo curated the I Festival de Cultura Txarnega, which aimed at creating a memorial archive for this population group. The spelling of this word in the festival’s title is worth noting: “Per mirar de recollir totes aquestes línies obertes, hem volgut fer un joc amb la llengua i escriure ‘cultura xarnega’ amb tx: ‘txarnega’. Era una manera de visibilitzar una nova manera d’explicar-nos, un nou espai narratiu, una forma de parlar per nosaltres mateixes que no és ni des de la narració catalana oficialista ni des de l’apropiació espanyola, sinó amb una nova variant, una estranyesa enriquidora.” (Vasallo 2019)

but due to gentrification trends, “no ens ha quedat altre remei que buscar fora del centre, [...] on viuen els ‘de les olives’, els immigrants que fa més temps que nosaltres que són aquí”, a clear reference to those “altres catalans” about whom Candel wrote (2015: 85).¹⁵² The process of house-hunting that leads them to ex-centric positions and that is punctuated by racist attitudes on the part of the owners that do not want Maghrebi women as their tenants, metaphorically explains the place that, through the narrator’s account, we see she and her mother occupy. As evinced by this account, the protagonist and those subjects who are read through the same lenses by the autochthonous population are, like the *charnegos* initially were, constructed from stereotypical grounds, which makes it easier to place them at the margins. El Hachmi is aware of breaking the stereotypical image that, as early as 2004, Catalan society had of Maghrebi people –especially women:

Els mitjans de comunicació, quan parlen de magribines sempre fotografien dones amb gel·laba i mocador, com més podrien ser? [...] En dies com aquests en els quals es parla tant d’immigració, no deixem enrere els estereotips, la realitat val més retenir-la com l’hem coneguda per primera vegada, és més fàcil que pensar que tot canvia i nosaltres no copsem tanta complexitat.

(2004: 61)

The media are an important agent in understanding the place El Hachmi, and also Kerchouche, occupy in their respective societies. Not only because both authors participate actively in them, as I have already signalled, letting their voices be heard through their pieces and columns, but also because of how their works, and their figures, have been constructed by those very same media, which has had important effects on their reception. Clua i Fainé, in the above-mentioned paper, explains that El Hachmi was presented, within the media, as “un ejemplo de integración exitosa en la sociedad catalana de la inmigración” (2011: 71). The anthropologist signals that El Hachmi’s name came to be well known after she won the prestigious Ramon Llull literary prize: “Fue realmente una noticia inesperada y los medios reflejaron ampliamente la sorpresa que ésta causó, planteándose la cuestión de su catalanidad a pesar de su procedencia marroquí.” (*ibid.*) This apparent contradiction can be paired with an episode I already analysed in the first chapter, where we saw how one of El Hachmi’s neighbours would praise her linguistic skills in Catalan, making her feel at the same time that her language proficiency would never be

¹⁵² These kinds of difficulties in finding accommodation also underpin El Kadaoui’s *Cartes al meu fill: un català de soca-rel, gairebé*, which, in its very title, also dialogues with the discourse on “charneguismo”.

enough to erase the fact that she was born in Morocco –a mark that, it seems, the locals are not willing to forget about. Such an episode can also be related with the phrase about El Hachmi’s Catalan on the back cover of *Jo també sóc catalana*.

On the back cover of the first edition of *L’últim patriarca*, we read that the text we have before us “és un tipus de novel·la que, tant pels conflictes tractats com per la forma literària d’abordar-los [which includes an intentional use of the oral tradition’s resources, we are told], fins ara ha estat inèdit en la literatura catalana.” Again, such a statement might hide a double-standard judgment on the author and her work. On the one hand, El Hachmi’s contribution is valued and acknowledged in a context, the literary panorama in Catalan, that is not acquainted with what has come to be known in other geographies as “migrant literature”. However, the appreciation of her work might hide biased considerations. The label “migrant literature” is a very problematic one, as has extensively been discussed in those contexts in which it widely circulates, most significantly the Anglophone and the Francophone worlds because of the role of the UK and France as colonial empires. Within the post-colonial scenario, many texts arising from the former colonies written in either French or English and whose content portrayed experiences somehow linked to population displacements and their consequences led to a proliferation of this categorization, which is featured in the bookshelves of many bookshops to this day. I believe that the problematic use of this label has to do with the fact that at the core of such phrasing lies a mode of thinking about literary texts according to divisions established in national terms.

3.2 The Language of the In-Between

In an article outlining the status of the issue of the pairing “literature and migration”, Paula Meiss goes through some of the scholarly voices trying to define a new theoretical framework to eschew the national divisions within the field of comparative literature. She bases her reflections on the thoughts of Armando Gnisci, who believes literature of migration to be the new world literature –a conception that has also been contested because of postulates of hidden ethnocentric undertones (see Chow 1996). Meiss believes that “literatura de la migración”, “[e]l relato de viaje migratorio que contiene alguna clase de reflexión, explícita o no, acerca de la relación del inmigrante con el nuevo espacio de circulación mediada por la escritura, por la lectura, por la letra” can function as a means to establish comparatist approaches without the

“nation” being a meaningful axis: “el relato de viaje migratorio no sólo nos permitirá analizar la representación de la identidad en proceso de definición en relación con el Otro, sino también la representación de la relación con el espacio que es condición y símbolo de ese encuentro.” (2010:19) Meiss reviews different scenarios, namely the anglophone and francophones ones, to analyse the weight of post-colonialism in contemporary considerations of literary practices from all over the globe, as, she reminds us echoing Nico Israel, “issues of class and of post-(or neo) colonialism inflect both the experience of displacement and the reception of texts written about displacement” (18).

Meiss sustains that in both of these scenarios attempts have been made to place the experience of migration at the core of literary reception practices.¹⁵³ The rise of the concept of diaspora¹⁵⁴ in the anglophone universe, however, does not eschew the compartmentalization strategies based on national literatures, for the focus is placed on the common origin of the community of people to which the concept refers, which “ayuda a continuar relativizando la presencia de estos escritores en los ámbitos socioculturales de llegada.” (*ibid.*) As in the francophone case, the usage of this categorization has also proven to be problematic –as was the concept of francophonie, used only critically and often in plural. As Olivier Milhaud states, “the adjective ‘francophone’ has to be decolonised, since it is often used in France for everything that is written in French but that is not French, reinstating an imperial dichotomy between France and ‘the rest’”. (in Meiss 2010: 18) Within the same lines, Marta Segarra explains that

“Francophone literature” [...] can be used to refer to every work written in French by people whose national origin is not metropolitan France. It refers in particular to all those arriving from the country’s former colonies in Africa or the Caribbean, as well as those in Belgium and Canada. However, many writers pigeonholed under “migrant literature” reject this label, which they consider exclusive. Indeed, they feel they are turned into “second class” authors. Therefore, a few years ago, a set of artists from diverse backgrounds (including native French

¹⁵³ Contrary to what happens with the topic of exile, which “cuenta con un estatus reconocido como tema literario”, “la migración es un tema todavía bastante marginal, sobre todo en el ámbito hispánico.” (Meiss 2010: 18) In this regard, the publication, in 2014, of Mariano Siskind’s *Cosmopolitan Desires: Global Modernity and World Literature in Latin America* represents an important contribution to rethinking comparative literature within the Spanish-speaking world.

¹⁵⁴ The importance of works such as those by Robin Cohen, James Clifford or Avtar Brah is proven by their critical influence. On another note, as stated by Alfonso de Toro, Maghrebi diasporas “n’ont pas été jusqu’à maintenant prises en compte dans la recherche internationale sur les diasporas”, highlighting the fact that they are not included within Robin Cohen’s seminal work *Global Diasporas* (2014: 15).

writers, as stated in an expression with racist overtones) created the concept “World Literature” or “littérature-monde” in an attempt to overcome these categorisations.

(2015: 75)

In 1995, Mario Fortunato, upon reflecting on the apparition of the label “letteratura migrante” within the Italian context, wrote that, in fact, the stories narrated by immigrants are for the most part “pre-literary experiences that have sociological value. They are messages in a bottle that arrive from an underground reality still in formation. It will take other generations, a deeper assimilation of the language, of its narrative styles.” (in Di Maio 2012: 93) Fortunato’s words resonate when we consider the reception El Hachmi’s works have had in Catalonia. Because of the Catalan social fabric at the time of El Hachmi’s first publications, her literary voice, which encompasses imaginaries and references different to those used in literary texts written in Catalan before her apparition, is perceived as “unprecedented”. It is worth noting that the cover and back cover of *L’últim patriarca* portray a frontal picture of El Hachmi’s face; her gaze is straight, directed at us. In this gesture, a line is being drawn between the fictional work and the author’s biography, as if the value of the novel depended on the vital coordinates of the person who wrote it, a connection that would prove that, in effect, El Hachmi’s work is conceived from the lenses pointed out by Fortunato’s consideration (in Chapter 4 I shall examine the same cover through different lenses).

However, a thorough analysis of her work shows that El Hachmi’s literary voice is solid and well inscribed within the Catalan context where she has become a writer and with which she wants to dialogue. This is made clear by the intertextual network of references that she displays in her texts.¹⁵⁵ In *L’últim patriarca*, for instance, she includes isolated specifically Maghrebi cultural references –songs by Rahid Nadori (2008: 51) or others (151), and a work by Leila Houari, *Zeida de nulle part*, the protagonist of which El Hachmi’s narrator compares herself with (274)– but the most relevant references listed by the narrator belong to Catalan cultural tradition. There are also references to the so-called Western world, including some connected to the pop-culture universe and also to literary works by renown writers, such as Joyce or Faulkner (286). At one point, the protagonist discusses one of the houses where her family

¹⁵⁵ Núria Codina Solà reads El Hachmi’s work as an epitome of “transcultural literature”: “La literatura transcultural trasciende las categorías de nación, lengua y Estado y crea así una intertextualidad y un corpus de temas y motivos transversales que permiten reconstruir una epopeya postmoderna de la diáspora cultural y de la migración.” (2011: 197)

lives filtering it through the work by Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (230); and she compares one of her teachers with a character from Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (262). I believe that the mention of these two works is significant, inasmuch as they can be read as the kind of literary practice that El Hachmi does, too.

As noted, El Hachmi also mobilizes a set of references that connect her with a Catalan literary tradition.¹⁵⁶ Still in *L'últim patriarca*, the narrator mentions one of the first texts to be considered as written in the nascent Catalan language, *Curial e Güelfa* (214). But more significant are, because of the weight they have within the storyline, the references conjugated in the feminine. Her work dialogues with that of important canonical figures, such as Carme Riera –who has also been considered as difficult to pigeonhole because of her linguistic choices¹⁵⁷–, Víctor Català and Mercè Rodoreda, whose characters are used, by El Hachmi's narrators, to understand the reality that surrounds them (2008: 170, 177, 199, 222 and 2015: 205).¹⁵⁸ These intertextual sets of references have not gone unnoticed for some critics, as proven by El Hachmi's inclusion in the volume to which I referred earlier, *Women Writers in Catalan*. The fact that she became a recipient of the Ramon Llull prize undoubtedly punctuated her career and inscribed her within a very specific literary genealogy, something that, nonetheless, has not been an impediment for her work to be read from an interstitial angle of enquiry.

In March 2017, *La filla estrangera* was chosen as part of a series of talks that, using literary texts as a cue, aimed to establish ethnographical and anthropological conversations about different realities.¹⁵⁹ The session on El Hachmi's novel resulted in an introductory lesson on Amazigh culture in which its literary component was never really taken into account. Whilst initiatives like this are relevant in today's Catalonia, for they bring literature to the fore as a tool to enable social cohesion, they elicit a certain construction of authors who, like El Hachmi,

¹⁵⁶ In a forthcoming article that will be published in the journal *Transmodernity* I delve into the hybrid fabric of both the subjectivities portrayed by El Hachmi and her fictional works. See Joan-Rodríguez 2020.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, Simon 2013: 1-20.

¹⁵⁸ The band for the second edition of *Mare de llet i mel*, a sentence by Catalan professor at University of Girona Mita Casacuberta, reads: "Hi ha tres dones en la literatura catalana: la Mila, la Colometa i la Fatima" –Fatima refers to the protagonist of El Hachmi's fourth novel. Casacuberta is thus placing El Hachmi in the literary genealogy in which El Hachmi positions herself and stating the importance of El Hachmi's literary voice in the panorama of Catalan literature. Kathryn Everly, on her part, has written about the intertextual references to Mercè Rodoreda's work in *L'últim patriarca* (2011).

¹⁵⁹ The series, entitled "Trencadís. Mirades antropològiques a través de la literatura", was held at the Ethnological Museum and Museum of World Cultures in Barcelona.

tend to be considered fragmentarily. After the publication of *L'últim patriarca*, El Hachmi's following work, *La caçadora de cossos*, was not near as successful as its predecessor nor got the critical attention that *L'últim patriarca* did receive. Because of such a reception, I argue, El Hachmi was somehow pushed to continue dwelling on the universe of migration and the long-term consequences of it, within the Catalano-Maghrebi context, in her following work: *La filla estrangera*. The style and the literary form of *La caçadora de cossos* had not changed in regard to El Hachmi's previous works, but the content had –a thematic shift that I believe determined the (lack of) commercial success of the 2011 novel. To this day, El Hachmi keeps exploring those conflicts that, according to the literary industry, are her biggest asset, as evinced by her latest published novel to date, *Mare de llet i mel*.¹⁶⁰

In *Le Roman maghrébin*, Abdelkebir Khatibi offers a panorama of the state of affairs of a genre that, he feels, is “un genre littéraire importé, avec sa structure et ses modèles, sa manière d'organiser le temps et l'espace” which does not constitute “une unité cohérente” and which has the autobiographical mode as its “expression favorite” (1968: 14, 15, 109) –an opinion which might be read as controversial. Khatibi puts a special emphasis on the role played by novels written in French by Maghrebi writers right after the processes of decolonisation, focusing on the Franco-Algerian scenario because of the imprint of French colonisation. As recalled by Khatibi, in the immediate aftermath of the decolonising processes, “chaque maison d'édition [française] posséda son ‘Arabe de service’”. However, once the situation changed globally and once “le problème nord-africain a été ‘résolu’, les écrivains maghrébins d'expression française se sent[ai]en[t] un peu volés après avoir été encensés.” (10)¹⁶¹ Khatibi's words shed light in helping us understand the way El Hachmi's literary voice has been built inside the literary market within Catalonia, in accordance with what has been explained above.

¹⁶⁰ In a paper that analyses contemporary literary representations of Moroccan migration in Spain, Nasima Akaloo warns against certain texts that portray experiences of migration and are brandished, in the West, as products of multiculturalism but fall, in her view, into what Étienne Balibar terms “racisme différentialiste” or Martin Baker calls “cultural racism”, whereby different cultural traditions are put in connection but always from hierarchical points of view. Akaloo warns that “[c]lose scrutiny must also be paid to the powerful attempts by editors and publishing houses to control and manipulate ‘immigrant’ representations, as well as their desire to promote works which will attract the widest audience, thereby crippling or stifling, to some degree, alternative creations. This point is well worth emphasising in view of the number of narratives published with sensational images on the front cover and catchy titles that reinforce exotic representations.” (2011: 132)

¹⁶¹ In her work on the multifarious transfigurations that have shaped the contemporary history of the Maghrebi territories, Winifred Woodhull retrieves Khatibi's ideas to talk about the literary scenario of Maghrebian literary texts in French. According to Khatibi, these produce “identités folles”, “that resist the constraints of a dualistic sex/gender system, as well as those of other bounded systems such as language, nation and culture” (in Woodhull 1993: xxii). The notion of conflictual and shifting identities will be analysed further on.

Khatibi points out that language represents an important preoccupation for this post-colonial generation of Maghrebi writers:

Le colonisé a reçu le bienfait de la langue de la civilisation dont il n'est pas l'héritier légitime. Et par conséquent il est une sorte de bâtard. [...] Le bâtard lui, exclu de l'héritage, est obligé de reconquérir à la force du poignet; réintégrant par la force sa qualité d'héritier, il a été capable de connaître et d'apprécier dans toute sa plénitude la valeur de l'héritage.

(39)

Whilst neither El Hachmi nor Kerchouche can be said to belong to the constellation of writers to whom Khatibi is referring (Kateb Yacine, Mohammed Dib and Driss Chraïbi, most prominently), they do make reference to the language in which they write. These linguistic considerations are important if we bear in mind that the way these authors' works circulate is determined by the language in which the works are written. Because of the difference in referentiality between El Hachmi's fictional and non-fictional works, which results in a lack of proper nouns and concrete geographical and linguistic references within her novels, *Jo també sóc catalana* is the text that contains more explicit linguistic references. When addressing the language issue, El Hachmi hopes that her son will inherit her "milítància per la llengua" (2004: 54) as she expresses her relationship with the Catalan language from a political standpoint, describing it as an oppressed language, much as her native Tamazight, which leads her to speak about these languages as "llengües germanes":

I tu, fill? [...] Voldràs aprendre la llengua àrab? [...] Al cap i a la fi, ni tan sols és la llengua dels teus pares, és la llengua dels opressors en un regne on l'amazic sempre s'ha considerat de segona categoria, llenguatge oral, només, bàrbars, ens diuen.¹⁶² ¿Et sentiràs ferit el dia que tornis al Marroc i aquells que ostenten el poder et parlin en la llengua del profeta, en la llengua del rei? Segurament menysprearan els nostres sons, però aquesta sensació no et serà desconeguda. La teva altra llengua materna, el català, fou en altres temps perseguida i menystinguda, no en va la teva mare les sent com dues llengües germanes.

(27)

¹⁶² Tamazight is constituted by a series of dialects spoken all across North Africa. The status of the language varies depending on the country. In Morocco, where it is spoken by a very large amount of the population, it now has official status. In Algeria, however, where Kabyle is the main dialect, it lacks consideration. Much like the Arabic dialects –which are grouped separately from standard or literary Arabic, called *fusha*– Tamazight is a predominantly oral language (see Lafkioui et Merolla 2008). I find it significant that one of the first ever dictionary of Tamazight, which aims to standardize it and because of it has been written including both the Latin alphabet and also the tifinagh, is a bilingual Tamazight-Catalan dictionary, elaborated by Carles Múrcia and Algerian-born poet exiled in Catalonia Salem Zenia (2015). Tamazight is one of the most-spoken mother tongues in Catalonia.

El Hachmi describes the Catalan language as a “necessitat vital”, at the time when she and her family arrived in Vic, for in a place with barely any Moroccans, “entendre el català era obrir-se les portes a un nou món, tenir les claus per accedir a la intimitat dels habitants d’aquell país de boira.” (38) In referring to Catalonia as a country, El Hachmi is strengthening the value of Catalan as a language that can translate the cultural specificity of Catalonia. Catalan is also the language in which she was able to discern her particular in-between situation. She realises that she is no longer the child who arrived in Vic the moment she acknowledges that she talks to herself in Catalan, a realisation that represents a turning point in her process of subjectivity formation:

La confusió va començar a regnar en la meua vida, més intensa i dolorosa que totes les confusions adolescents. No tenia cap punt de referència, algú que em digués: no t’hi amoïnis, això és normal, que et sentis de dos llocs alhora, que tinguis dues llengües maternes, encara que una sigui adoptada.

(47)

The fact that she refers to Catalan as her adopted language can be paired with the linguistic references of the narrator in *La filla estrangera*. When commenting on what clearly is Tamazight –a language which “només vola per l’aire i només ha quedat fixada en la pell de les dones” (2015: 86)¹⁶³– the protagonist of the novel uses the formula “la llengua de la mare”, of which she considers herself a “parlant deficient” (106). She believes herself to be lacking a wide enough register, in her mother’s tongue, to express herself fully in that language. In Catalan, the language in which she tells of her story of disconnection from her mother, she is, however, able to delve into her nuanced subjectivity. It is remarkable that she thinks of the teacher who taught her Catalan as a second mother (159). The access to Catalan, its acquisition, is tantamount to a new identity almost. In Catalan, the narrator can give birth to the person she has chosen to become, and not the one her mother wanted her to be, which is why she cannot tell of this process in her mother’s tongue.

¹⁶³ The narrator reminisces about her first interactions with her new society. Neither the narrator nor the protagonist spoke Catalan, and there was the added problem of having no dictionary “de la llengua de la mare a la llengua d’aquí” (El Hachmi 2015: 86). Carles Múrcia and Salem Zenia’s dictionary fills that blank. It is worth noting the importance of dictionaries in El Hachmi’s work. In *L’últim patriarca*, the dictionary translates the manifold knowledge the protagonist is acquiring after she left her native village. In *La filla estrangera*, the narrator talks about the process of conforming her own dictionary (2015: 90). We could argue that the dictionary that the narrators makes up in *L’últim patriarca* becomes enlarged, in *La filla estrangera*, with the Tamazight and the *darija* terms that translate the narrator’s inner self.

Such a reflection problematizes the concept of mother tongue, understood as that language in which we are “born” and which defines us and remains within ourselves – a problematization that I also explored in relation to those people who were adopted as children. The case of El Hachmi and Kerchouche –whose work circulates in a language that is not strictly speaking their mother tongue¹⁶⁴– differs from that of writers that throughout their careers decided to try out different languages, so to speak, but connects with others in their preoccupation towards language as a means to elaborate on fluid and mobile identities. Born in West Bengal but self-proclaimed American, Jhumpa Lahiri has produced several literary texts that explore, like El Hachmi and Kerchouche’s texts, the consequences of living in a multi-layered in-between. A few years ago she moved to Italy and started writing in Italian, and self-translating herself from Italian into English. In an interview, Lahiri confessed that she is “working to free [her] work from geographical coordinates, and to arrive at a more abstract sense of place.” (in Leyshon 2018) By tensing the relationship between language, place and subjectivity, the work of Lahiri –who dedicated her first novel, *The Namesake*, to dwelling on the importance of one’s name in our interplay with ourselves and with others (2003)– questions fixed categorizations that connect someone with their place of birth, also problematizing the national divisions of literature to which I referred earlier.

In the introduction to an edited volume entitled *Algeria in Others’ Languages*, Anne-Emmanuelle Berger discusses the linguistic politics deployed in Algeria during its decolonization process, which consisted of an “Arabization” of the country, to be pursued by means of the Modern Standard Arabic –a situation of diglossia unfolded, whereby oral Arabic and Tamazight, spoken by the majority of the Algerian population, were deemed unworthy of becoming national languages.¹⁶⁵ Berger notes that “[t]he public debate surrounding language might in fact be coterminous with the formation of an Algerian postcolonial civil society” and insists that the case of Algeria “raises issues of belonging: Who does a language ‘belong’ to? Can it actually ‘belong to’, or make the subject who speaks it belong (but to what exactly)?”

¹⁶⁴ Problematization brought to the foreground by the struggle El Hachmi has to endure when choosing which language to pass on to her son Rida.

¹⁶⁵ Juan Goytisolo, who was born in Spain but decided to live in Morocco, expressed on many occasions his hope that the diglossia permeating North African countries would end up disappearing: “El desfase entre la lengua culta y la hablada afecta a todos los órdenes de la vida social, política y cultural. ¿Cómo escribir, en efecto, una novela u obra teatral presuntamente descriptiva del ámbito urbano o rural del Marruecos o de la Argelia de hoy en una lengua que nadie habla? Tal dificultad explica por qué medio siglo después de la independencia, gran número de escritores de los dos países se expresan todavía en francés y no en un idioma que no es el materno sino el que se aprende en las escuelas.” (2012: 204)

(2002: 5, 9).¹⁶⁶ Berger discusses the importance of a seminal work by Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Amour bilingue*, and I believe that her reflections illuminate the way I understand the writing exercise of our authors, and most particularly Kerchouche's, for it is caught up within the complex post-colonial dynamics that still lie at the heart of the relationship between France and Algeria:

Khatibi in *Amour bilingue* – writing (in) French rather than simply speaking it, opens the possibility, –for Khatibi, and, beyond him, for any Maghrebian whose “being and language always consist in at least two languages, two cultural scenes, and two bodies”– of affirming French, albeit an “other(ed)” French, rather than submitting to it. Writing would allow Khatibi to invent a French that would be neither an appropriation of the colonial language nor the betrayal or an evasive original language.

(13)

3.2.1 Language and Belonging

The notion of betrayal, connected to language, has been deeply explored by other writers with Maghrebi origins who, like Khatibi, wrote in French. Assia Djébar and Leïla Sebbar also used writing to understand how the sense of belonging of people who find themselves in-between several cultural spaces is constructed. In *L'Amour, la fantasia* Djébar found herself at odds with writing in French, which she defined as her “stepmother tongue”, “the language of the enemy”, but her “written” language nonetheless –a language that she acquired because her father took her to French school in colonised Algeria. Sebbar's work puts the emphasis on the differences between those Algerians who migrated to France and their descendants, generations who have different codes, as illustrated by her title *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père*, although in her case, that she does not speak her father's tongue gets explained by the fact that her mother was French and French was the language of the household.¹⁶⁷ Like Djébar and Sebbar, Kerchouche's relationship with the French language is mediated by the paternal figure,

¹⁶⁶ In a 2001 interview to Al-Jazeera, Kurdish writer Salim Barakat, today exiled in Sweden, answered in the following terms upon being asked about his choice to write in Arabic: “Arabic has a richness to it that allowed me to express my being Kurdish if not in its highest degree, in a necessary one. I have made of Arabic language my Kurdish identity. My truest homeland is my language; I see no borders but language, nor a deeper or greater freedom than the one I have within it. I live inside language, where I am independent, and I have declared my own republic with the grammatical rules of Arabic” (2001; my translation).

¹⁶⁷ Nina Bouraoui's case holds similarities with Sebbar's. Bouraoui writes in French and she is the daughter of an Algerian father and a French mother. She was born after Algeria's independence and raised in Algeria.

her texts –like Djebbar’s– are enmeshed within the “friend-enemy” dialectics, and they help us reflect upon generational differences, the way Sebbar’s oeuvre does.

We do not find, in Kerchouche’s texts, the kind of linguistic statements that El Hachmi includes in her works. However, the “fille de harki” does reflect, albeit tangentially, on the relationship between *darija*, the oral Arabic spoken within the familial community, and French, the language in which she writes about that community. The already-analysed formula “J’écris pour parler à mon père”, which is brandished by the author as her goal upon writing *Mon père, ce harki*, serves us to understand the role played by French in the process of identity negotiation that traverses both that work and *Leïla*. In *Mon père, ce harki* we are made aware that it is somehow because of Kerchouche’s father that she writes in French. It was her father participation in the Franco-Algerian war, on the French side, that prompted the familial migration to France, where Kerchouche went to school.

Despite the fact that she was born in France, Kerchouche becomes aware, through the process of writing the book and thanks to the academic and familial research it entails, to what extent the France that her family knew for as long as they remained in the camps was not the one she got to know. She gained access to a different France because she escaped the reality of the camps when she was one and a half. The author realises that this “unlived” experience has had effects on her linguistic skills, amongst many other aspects. Unlike her, the process of schooling of the Kerchouche’s siblings –and many other harki children– was traversed by the particular position the harkis occupied in their new surroundings. On the margins of the landscape in which the camps had been built or equipped, they were also set aside within the schools where they went. This, Kerchouche explains, led to the situation whereby children did not get to know the French language properly and somehow pushed them to communicate in what she calls “Francarabe” (2003: 151).

Francarabe, “a sabir [...] incompréhensible” for the non-harkis, in its mixture of French and Arabic, translates the in-betweenness these children inhabit and symbolizes to what point they are on the margins of French society. This hybrid jargon corresponds almost to a defence mechanism to come to terms with the detrimental treatment they receive, categorised by Kerchouche as a “ghettoïisation” with terrible consequences: “Au fil des années, les enfants accumulent un retard scolaire de trois ou quatre ans en moyenne.” (*ibid.*) The author’s words help us understand the consequences that the camps had for those who lived in them and the

ontological locking-up they entailed. This is precisely why her exercise of resurrecting the past –most particularly the reality of the camps–, so that the cruelty of the harki treatment can be acknowledged and so that some sort of compensation might arise for the families who endured it, is so significant. The one member of the Kerchouche family line that did not get “locked” in those constructs and who, therefore, has been able to acquire the epistemological and also the linguistic mobility that the rest of her family could not get, is the one to be freed from that constraint.

Françoise Lionnet points at Assia Djebar and Leïla Sebbar as “astute interpreters of the postcolonial condition” whose works “create new paradigms that represent, through innovative and self-reflexive literary techniques, both linguistic and geographical exile, displacements from the margins to a metropolitan centre, and intercultural exchanges.” (1996: 322) In that sense, I connect Kerchouche with this line of writers who, Lionnet also states, give us insight into what Renato Rosaldo has called the “border zones” of culture. In these zones, Lionnet claims echoing Rosaldo, “there is an incessant and playful heteroglossia, a bilingual speech or hybrid language that is a site of creative resistance to the dominant conceptual paradigms” that, by its very nature, problematizes both the concept of assimilation and that of acculturation (321, 323). In this respect, *Francarabe* can be read as evidence that the harki camps were indeed border zones, in the direction established by Rosaldo. At the same time, because the linguistic logics of the camps and also the power dynamics displayed there were somewhat inscribed within the harki families and the way they lived their life once they were outside the camps, I argue that Kerchouche herself and the protagonist of *Leïla* are the embodiments of Rosaldo’s border zones, in the same way El Hachmi and her narrators are. The inheritors of displacements that, through the values and codes passed on to them by their families and learnt in their European surroundings, put in tension several cultural and linguistic traditions, Kerchouche, El Hachmi and their literary figures display forms of creative resistance to any kind of dominant discourse.

Because of their particular inheritance, the kind of experiences epitomised by these writers and their narrators are different to the experiences of their previous generation –defined not by the parents-children axis but rather by the kind of codes and skills that individuals possess. As I have explained earlier, in accordance to this approach to the notion of generation, Dalila Kerchouche belongs to a different generation than that of her siblings because, even if they are close in age, how they experience life in France is marked by the reality of the camps, which

Dalila did not experience and which shaped her childhood and her learning process in a very different manner to how her siblings went through their formative phase. This would explain why Dalila's relationship with France, for instance, was unproblematic until she dug into her harki condition and understood why within her familial milieu that relationship had been troublesome from the moment the Kerchouche family arrived on French soil –as proven by the silence of Dalila's father or the suicide of her brother. The different generations portrayed in Kerchouche's works, and in El Hachmi's too, interact differently with the space at the other side of the Mediterranean, mainly because their interaction with the local subjects are permeated by their different linguistic skills. That is why Kerchouche's statement, "J'écris pour parler à mon père" is also significant in helping us understand the intricacies of these generational gaps.

The statement translates the generational differences at the heart of the Kerchouche family, in which the older generation is illiterate and *speaks* oral Arabic and the one inaugurated by Kerchouche *writes* in French. Much as it happened with the narrator of *La filla estrangera* –who wanted to learn how to think like an illiterate (El Hachmi 2015: 175), for that would render her closer to her mother–, the language that allows for that story to be brought to life is that of the "host society" –or, the adopted language, as described by El Hachmi. It needs to be pointed out that, in Kerchouche's case, the written language is also the language of the officials who enrolled her father into the war and then abandoned those who, like him, had fought for France. French was the language used by the administration that mistreated her parents and siblings, the language of the State that willingly excluded the harkis from the contemporary historical discourse, an omission that Kerchouche seeks to compensate by resurrecting the past and making it present, in French. As explored in Chapter 1, the problematic relationship she has with France as a State that is made responsible for the mistreatment towards the harkis –a relationship, we have learnt, that is still unresolved, as she explains in the prologue of *Espionnes*– gets passed on to the way she interacts with the language. Thus, the manner in which she writes the word *harki* parallels the way she feels about that word and the universe it encapsulates. By embracing her harki inheritance and symbolically writing it with a capital H, she is metaphorically making room, in her texts, for the untold story of her family and many others who remained "unwritten" –as I shall analyse in the following chapter.

The exercise of making room, via the written word, for the universe of the untold is further emphasized in Kerchouche's following work. By choosing to write a fictional text that is

thematically connected to her autobiographical account, Kerchouche is exploring the coordinates of the writing universe and, at the same time, her novel functions as a means to open the door to the extrapolation of her particular reality. We know that in *Mon père, ce harki* she includes the voices of many other harki people who do not strictly belong to her family, but filters everything through her personal lenses. By writing a novel and portraying a protagonist that has experienced the camps –thus, distancing it from her own personal biography– Kerchouche writes a text that is a loudspeaker, and the word-choice is not trivial, for voices like those belonging to her previous familial generation whose access to the written field is in one way or another barred. When speaking about the importance of writing in warlike times in Algeria, Kateb Yacine explained that through writing about Algeria he aimed at giving birth to it (1994: 27). El Hachmi and Kerchouche write about their experiences and those of others, which at the same time becomes an attempt at *saying* the nuanced and hybrid world they inhabit, and by saying it, by naming it, therefore, giving it shape and existence.

3.2.2 Writing, in French, to Unsilence Algeria

In the particular case of Kerchouche, her process of written reproduction of the harki universe, unfolded through the two texts analysed here and through the other projects that she dedicated to this topic, is traversed by her desire to revindicate a community she feels has been mistreated. In that desire, she is connected with other writers that have also produced texts about the need to bring the past to the fore. All these works seek to acknowledge the wound of the abandonment to which the harkis and their families were exposed and their subsequent confinement in camps (and, less present in the texts but also significant, the retaliatory massacres that those who stayed in Algeria suffered). Like the texts by Kerchouche, those of Zahia Rahmani and Fatima Besnaci-Lancou are embedded in the authors' own biographical particularities, but extend beyond them to explore the consequences of the harki condition in its multifarious shapes and through multiple angles of enquiry. Besnaci-Lancou's work is very journalistic whilst Rahmani's contains a very rich literary dimension. As I have already noted, the first works by these three writers were published in the same year, 2003. Their works dialogue with each other and together they display an extraordinarily nuanced portrayal of what it means to understand oneself through the filter of the label *harki*.

The publication of these texts and other works by the same writers has led some critics to talk of a literary form they have named “harki literature”, as evidenced by a volume edited by Keith Moser entitled *A Practical Guide to French Harki Literature* (2014). In the first chapter of the collection, Abderahmen Moumen outlines the historical construction of so-called harki literature taking 1962 as its date of birth and signalling that the first years of the new millennium, coinciding with the publication of the works explained above, were really the time when this new literature emerged. Before that, Moumen recalls, the accounts of two former *supplétifs* recounting their experiences as soldiers were published: Saïd Ferdi’s *Un enfant dans la guerre* was published in 1981 and Brahim Sadouni’s *Français sans patrie*, in 1985. Moumen also cites more recent works to be added to those by Besnaci-Lancou, Rahmani and Kerchouche, also written by harki children: Jeanette Bougrab’s *Ma république se meurt* (2013) or Toumi Djäïdja’s *La Marche pour l’égalité* (2013)¹⁶⁸ –to this list we should add *L’Art de perdre* (2017) by Alice Zeniter, which was awarded the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens, a recognition that surely helped in procuring media coverage for this “kind” of literature, a literature that, Moumen himself states, has already received considerable attention.¹⁶⁹

Moumen highlights the importance of Kerchouche and Besnaci-Lancou’s texts because he understands that these women belong to “the transitional generation in both Algeria and France”, and he believes that their texts represent an exercise of raising the harki voice:

During this crucial tipping point from 1990 to 2000, Algerian memory work was being conducted at a blistering pace due to the end of the official amnesia on a state level. Coupled with the effects of lingering, overwhelming historical trauma, breaking this institutional silence paved the way for the emergence of this “mémoire blessée” [...].

(2014: 1-2)

¹⁶⁸ It comes as a surprise that *Mohand le harki* (2003), by Hadjila Kemoum is not in the list. One might wonder whether its non-inclusion has to do with the fact that the writer’s life story was not connected to the harki universe.

¹⁶⁹ Muriel de la Souchère speaks about the coverage of the topic of the harkis in the audiovisual media: “Parent pauvre du récit de la guerre d’Algérie, l’histoire des harkis a, en effet, connu plusieurs étapes sur l’écran de la télévision française. D’abord partie intégrante d’une actualité couverte par les caméras du journal télévisé et des magazines de reportages des années 1960, la représentation des harkis a disparu progressivement des écrans en même temps que la fin de la guerre s’éloignait. Ceux-ci réapparurent de façon sporadique sur la scène médiatique au gré des grèves de la faim, manifestations et émeutes qui ponctuèrent leur histoire de 1975 à 1991. À partir des années 1990, est venu le temps de la commémoration de la guerre d’Algérie. Enfin, avec l’engouement médiatique pour cette guerre, une nouvelle phase a débuté. La question bénéficie désormais d’un traitement plus important et l’histoire des harkis se fait plus présente à la télévision, les documents s’y rapportant sont plus denses.” (2012: 169)

Because of the different pathways each of the authors took in tackling their harki heritage, their works were also received differently. Both of Kerchouche's texts considered here were published by Seuil, an important publishing house renowned within the French context for its philosophical and social sciences choices. *Mon père, ce harki* was presented by Seuil as a "témoignage", which marked its circulation inasmuch as it was placed, in bookshops all over the country, in the section dedicated to autobiographical works. The text was published in two different formats: as a hardback book and in a pocket edition, within the collection "Le Cercle Points". Both editions state in their back covers that Dalila was born in a "camp de harkis", that she works as a journalist and that she is the "dernière d'une grande fratrie".

The choice of presenting the author as part of a familial genealogy is significant, because family is portrayed, already in the title, as an important axis upon which the account is sustained –something I have explored in the previous chapter. The hardback cover further emphasizes the significance of family ties by displaying a two-fold image of Kerchouche's father, to whom the title refers. In the picture, Kerchouche's father, who seems to be the age he is by the time the book got published, is holding a picture of himself from, we can safely assume, the time when he enrolled himself as a harki.¹⁷⁰ The image epitomises the two ways in which the title can be read, which translate the permeability of the term *harki*. In French, *ce* is a demonstrative article both of proximity and of distance. By opting for this formula, Kerchouche points to the fact that the consequences of his father's participation in the Algerian war are still felt by the time she decides to write his story.¹⁷¹

Her position as the last member of that line, also highlighted on the back covers of both editions of *Mon père, ce harki* should also be noted. That last position, which we have seen places her as somehow distanced from the other members of her family in her experiencing of the harki condition, is also what gives her the tools and ultimately allows her to execute the memory work signalled by Moser. She willingly takes on her inheritance –initiated by her father– and looks at it straight on, as shown in the design of the pocket edition's back cover, where an image of Kerchouche has been chosen in which she looks straight at us, the audience, and tells us that she has learnt to be proud of her *Harki* legacy, as epitomised by the symbolic

¹⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that the older man is wearing Algerian attire on his head, whilst the harki –which, by his very condition, was tied to France– was not.

¹⁷¹ Susan Ireland sees, in the title of Kerchouche's work, an "ironic allusion to Gérard Lauzier's 1991 film *Mon père, ce héros*", which, to her view, "suggests from the outset the notion of a counter-narrative" –an idea on which I will elaborate in the following chapter (2009: 304).

capitalization of the word. When physically grabbing this edition of the book, the first line that calls our attention is the following one: “Oui, je suis une fille de harkis. J’écris ce mot avec un grand H. Comme Honneur”, which sums up the multi-layered journey Kerchouche went through in her process of subjectivity navigation. In both this complex and nuanced journey and in her gesture towards the recuperation of a certain past –which leads her to gather many voices and témoignages–, she is connected with the other authors mentioned earlier, who also understand themselves through the label *harki* but also with the writers Françoise Lionnet defined as inhabitants of border zones.

Lionnet highlights that the interstitial position of these writers, which places them at a vantage point that enables them to borrow from language and narrative strategies from the different cultures to which they can ascribe themselves, allows them to engage in creative processes “as a means of resistance to the ‘victim’ syndrome”:

The way they portray characters transforms the way that *they* themselves see the realities of their worlds, as well as the way *we* –readers who are outsiders to the region or culture– will in turn perceive those worlds, that is, no longer as a radically “other” realm, so different and alien that it could only alienate itself more through contact with the West but rather as a microcosm of the globe.

(1996: 331; emphasis in the original)

These words illuminate my analysis of the works by both Kerchouche and El Hachmi; I believe that by embracing the particular multi-positionality, sign of their in-betweenness, and not making of it an identity burden but rather an enriching emplacement, the authors escape any sort of victimization processes –something on which I will dwell further on. Of course, as we already know, this realisation and the positive acknowledgement and acceptance of their hybridity comes after a long process of discovery that transcends the subject herself and reaches the different communities with which both authors interact, explorations that are materialized in the fictional works by both authors; works that represent possible and different lives to the ones that El Hachmi and Kerchouche ended up leading. I am interested in analysing how in the specific case of Kerchouche, the transformation she experiences with regard to her relationship with the harki inheritance –unacknowledged at first, problematic when confronted and positive at the end– is epitomised by how her relationship with her father also changes, as does his portrayal.

Kerchouche's gesture to decide to write about her harki background comes after she has made up her mind about confronting it rather than hiding it, as she would do as a teenager. This hiding exercise coincided with the silence of Kerchouche's father about his time serving in a *haraka* for the French army, a silence that hovered around the life of the Kerchouche family after they left the camps. Such a silence was mixed with fear of some sort of retaliation ("Quand j'ai parlé à ma mère de mon projet d'écrire un livre sur leur histories, elle m'a dit, craintive: 'Et s' *ils* nous le reprochent?' [...] Qui est ce *ils* mystérieux qui tourmente encore mes parents", Dalila asks herself [2003: 15])¹⁷² and with the determination not to stir up old memories, as encapsulated by the formula "*li fat mel*" ("the past is dead") which in the lips of Kerchouche's father becomes almost like a mantra. The distance that defines the relationship between Dalila and her father gets surmounted when she learns that his silence is indeed the result of his difficulty in navigating the identitarian turmoil that originated already at the times of war and that ended up situating him in an in-between location, similar to the one where she is at.

When Dalila visits the camp at Roussillon-en-Morvan, she realises that such an in-between condition was experienced by her family also from a physical dimension: "La situation de mes parents, coincés entre le cimetière et le village, résume parfaitement leur existence dans les camps: à mi-chemin entre les morts et les vivants." (96) She learns that this confinement affected her parents differently. When she reflects upon their time at Bias, where Dalila herself was born and the camp that we know was one of the most hostile towards the harki families, the author notes that the fragility to which her family was exposed got translated into "la folie". Such madness pierced through the dynamics that conformed the family itself, provoking the fact that Kerchouche's father "a démissionné de son rôle de chef de famille." (178) After she goes to Algeria, where she meets with members of her biological family, she will end up finding the way to put together the different pieces that she has come to see as integral parts of her identity.

Before leaving for Algeria, Kerchouche had constructed that space –to which her parents never returned– as the ultimate source of revelation in her process of identitarian discovery. Dalila decided to not tell her parents about her trip –a gesture, that of "not-telling", which could be equated with her father's silence– but decides to incorporate within her account the

¹⁷² In Chapter 2, I explained how the pronoun *ils* was used, on the part of the harkis, almost as a label to enclose the French people. Here, it also showcases all-encompassing categorizations –referring to the FLN in this case.

hypothetical conversation she would have had with her parents had she decided to tell them about it: “Je connais [l]a réponse [de ma mère]: ‘Tu as un toit, un travail et tu manges à ta faim. Qu’est-ce qu’il te manque?’ L’essentiel: ‘Une identité, *ama*’, ai-je envie de répondre. Mais je ne connais pas le mot en arabe...” (208) In these lines we comprehend the importance that Kerchouche assigns to confronting her Algerian roots, which she had never really explored before deciding to write about it. Her family were really the only connection to that pillar of her cultural background, and it was a faint connection as signalled by the paternal silence. Furthermore, because she did not grow up in the camps –which we saw were almost like a parcel of Algeria within France–, she did not get to experience the communitarian dimension that, she learnt, was part of her native cultural tradition.

At the same time, the quotation sheds light on the linguistic problematics to which I referred earlier. On the one hand, we know that part of the identitarian confusion in which Kerchouche is enmeshed stems from her relationship with her two languages: French and Algerian *darija*, the language which she speaks with her family, and because of that, the language that connects her with Algeria. On the other hand, the conversation remains in the terrain of the conditional tense, and in the written form, because the author is pointing to the idea that it could never have happened in an oral interaction with her mother, for she does not know a word as important as *identity* in the familial language. As I discussed, when tackling this idea in El Hachmi’s *La filla estrangera* –the narrator had to distance herself from the language of her mother, of which she was a poor user, in order to fully unravel her subjectivity–, here, too, we see how Kerchouche resorts to French, a language in which she can write, *say* and think about identity, to present her account. It is worth noting that the words I reproduced earlier are directed specifically to Dalila’s mother, which help us envision how the author’s reflections further problematize the concept of mother tongue.

On commenting on the linguistic situation in post-1962 Algeria, and on how the different social strata managed France’s colonial legacy, Anne Berger notes that for certain groups, such as for the intellectuals, French had become almost like a mother tongue, which rendered their relationship with the French language very complex:

The mythical force of a notion such as “mother tongue” may well stem from the fact that language itself is experienced as motherly and mothering, as if the irreplaceable uniqueness of the idiom through which the subject is “brought to identity”, recalled –or, as it were,

“replaced”– the irreplaceable uniqueness of the mother. Indeed, the locution *langue maternelle* in French, perhaps even more than its English equivalent, is an ambiguous expression, since it can mean either the language of the mother, or language itself as mother.

(2002: 14)

Whilst Dalila Kerchouche finds herself in a different context, because of her harki inheritance and her French upbringing, in her text she also gives account to the linguistic tensions she has had to navigate, as connected with her identity. In order to explain what lies behind the conception of “mother tongue” in an Algeria that is no longer subjected to France but that somehow still holds a link to it, Berger traces a line between the French language and France, stating that “Algerian nationals often refer to France as a ‘step-mother figure’, (*une marâtre*) rather than as a father figure.” (13) Similarly, the relationship of the Kerchouche family with France is bumpy and far from easy, an irregularity that, as we have seen, also marks Dalila’s interaction with her French side. As I have explained earlier, the DVD version of *Harkis*, the film whose script Dalila Kerchouche helped to write, is accompanied by a documentary recounting the condition of the harki families portrayed in the film, entitled *Amère patrie*. The title of the documentary encapsulates how the harkis related to France, a manner that can be equated with how the Algerian nationals to which Berger refers dialogued with this country, too. Literally translated, the phrase means “bitter homeland” or “bitter motherland”, as the word *patrie* can have different equivalents. However, the title lends itself to being read homophonously as “a mère patrie”, a homeland that is also a mother, in a juxtaposition that is almost an oxymoron because the word *patrie* refers to the figure of the *père*.

Such a reading ties in with Iveković’s ideas in the previous chapter, which explored the notion of nation from a gendered perspective. Kerchouche’s works are interesting because although they show the maternal figure as transmitter of cultural values tied to Algeria, at the same time they present the figure of the father as the one ultimately responsible for Dalila’s –and Leïla’s younger siblings– new “homeland”, France, which is inseparable from their command of the French language –a command that is incomplete in the older generation. Anne Berger, too, has elaborated on this using Derrida’s work as a cue. Upon commenting on *Le Monolinguisme de l’autre*, she highlights the tension to which Derrida, born in French Algeria, was exposed because of his linguistic background:

[i]t is as if, for someone who was born in Algeria, and an Algerian Jew at that, French monolingualism, far from signifying the assertion and consolidation of a homogeneous identity, introduced the experience of an infinite and originary division –and rejection– of the origin, as if it re-marked, in the guise of a hyphen across the sea, the originary separation from the mother.

(16)

3.3 Beyond Monolingualism: The Language of the Multiple Self

We learn that both El Hachmi and Kerchouche are “monolingual” writers in the sense that, to this day, their language, as writers, is only one –such a fact dilutes the idea that French and Catalan have been *chosen* by these writers, something which is sometimes highlighted when the works of these writers are critically considered. They write in Catalan and French because they can only do so in these languages, as pointed out earlier, because their exploration of the written world comes via the language of their schooling. However, as analysed by Berger in relation to Derrida, their (written) monolingualism is not tantamount to a homogeneous identity. The rupture these writers enact, by writing their texts in a language other than that of their mother’s, is translated to the way they interact with Catalan and French. *La filla estrangera* is peppered with expressions in Arabic and words in Tamazight –the language of the mother, from which she feels “expulsada” as she is “òrfena de paraules” (2015: 37)–, which the narrator decides not to translate, as a way to point towards the linguistic in-between in which she is also caught up. Despite the fact that Catalan is her written language, there are certain realities she can only reference in Tamazight, a language that because of its oral nature resists any sort of pigeon-holing –which can be equated with the narrator’s liquid subjectivity.

At the same time, her will to distance herself from her mother’s tongue is equated with her will to put distance between her and her mother, too, in an exercise that points to the maternal separation that Berger identified in Derrida’s scenario. Such a distancing signifies the originary fragmentation, in identitarian terms, to which both El Hachmi and Kerchouche’s work point. Along the same line, the texts by our authors point towards the impossibility of an unproblematic relationship between the self and the language(s) in which it exists. Derrida believed that “[l]a langue dite maternelle n’est jamais purement naturelle, ni propre ni habitable”; “je n’ai qu’une langue et ce n’est pas la mienne [...] Ma langue, la seule que je

m'entende parler et m'entende à parler, c'est la langue de l'autre" (1996: 112, 47).¹⁷³ In a preface to a volume that gathers the interventions by Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous in the framework of a research seminar, under the title *Langue à venir*, Cristina de Peretti pulls the thread of Derrida's words to disentangle what it means to speak the language of the other:

La lengua, la mía, la que supuestamente es mía, la que yo hablo, es siempre la lengua del otro, de ese otro, cuya lengua, la suya, la que él habla, se convierte a su vez en lengua del otro, de ese otro, quizás, que también yo soy para él. La lengua siempre es lengua del otro. Y es que la posibilidad de la lengua, es decir, la oportunidad de la promesa y del juramento, la oportunidad asimismo del don y de la hospitalidad no pueden acontecer sino gracias al otro, a su lengua y a su venida.

(2004: 17)

Peretti's words are useful in understanding the manifold intrinsic alienations that underlie our authors' texts. Because they are written in languages other than the ones the writers use to communicate with their mothers, Catalan and French represent a sort of exile from their mother tongues, a linguistic exile that as I have already pointed out is problematized by the fact that the languages in which Kerchouche and El Hachmi exist and deploy their literary universe, in writing, have not been *chosen*. On the other hand, because French and Catalan do not conform the subjectivities of the subjects that gave them birth as individuals in the same way that they conform our writers, these tongues are the language of the other in the writers' original communities. At the same time, as explored in previous chapters, Kerchouche and El Hachmi are sometimes read, in France and Catalonia respectively, from a position of alterity. In El Hachmi's case that Othering gaze causes the Catalan she speaks to be perceived as an Other's Catalan –and, earlier in this chapter we explored how the Catalan that she writes is also caught up in this kind of considerations and approached from an exoticizing point of view.

In an article that calls for a more nuanced representation of the group of people that fall under the label *harki*, Muriel de la Souchère reviews the documentary *La Blessure* and writes about its importance in displaying a view of the harkis that is not commonly portrayed in the media,

¹⁷³ In her essay *Je n'ai qu'une langue, ce n'est pas la mienne*, Kaoutar Harchi explores what it means to be an Algerian writer in France who seeks recognition. Harchi retraces the works by five Algerian writers and puts a special emphasis on the linguistic axis in her analysis (2016).

underlining the fact that the command of the French language is used as an axis to put forward a particular kind of portrayal:

Pendant longtemps, sur les écrans de la télévision française, les anciens harkis filmés parlaient avec un fort accent,¹⁷⁴ avaient pour certains du mal à s'exprimer en français, étaient pauvrement vêtus. Les caméras s'arrêtaient volontiers sur des détails soulignant la pauvreté, voire l'insalubrité de leurs habitats. Les différents éléments donnés à voir au téléspectateur dressaient alors le portrait d'hommes se trouvant majoritairement en marge de la société, non intégrés. Jusqu'à la fin des années 1980 existait donc ce qui pourrait être qualifié de modèle de représentation des harkis.

(2012: 170)

De la Souchère insists that such a portrayal was biased and eschewed the existing diversity within those Algerians who found themselves in France after having fought for France during the war, and their families –a diversity that was there already at times of war and that leads the author to question the idea that there exists a harki “community” (171). At the same time, she notes that the almost systematic side of such a portrayal, which went on for nearly thirty years “souligne le décalage entre les individus faisant partie du groupe des harkis et le reste de la population française. Il met ainsi en avant le fait que, près de trente ans plus tard, ces hommes et femmes demeurent différents, qu'ils ne sont pas devenus français.”

La Blessure marks, in de la Suchière's view, a shift in such a tendency, strengthened by the fact that after it aired on TV, as part of special programming dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Algeria's independence, a debate followed in which the participants, three harki children, were the “incarnation d'une intégration réussie” (*ibid.*). Dalila Kerchouche, described as a journalist and a writer, was amongst them, and I argue that her works, together with those by other harki children mentioned above, already represented a change within the incomplete and tendentious portrayal signalled by De la Souchère. Whilst it is true that Kerchouche focuses on those who ended up in camps for long periods of time after their arrival in France, she builds characters that have agency and that problematize the rigid and stereotypical gaze from which certain sectors of the French population and the French administration observe them.

¹⁷⁴ Commenting upon the linguistic power logics that unfolded in colonial India, Spivak notes, in “The Politics of Translation” that “[i]n the old days, it was important for a colonial or postcolonial student of English to be as ‘indistinguishable’ as possible from the native speaker of English.” (1993: 187)

An element that was brandished in the dichotomous construction of the harki-French duality was language. Abdelfattah Kilito, in *La Langue d'Adam* –a Biblical reference that aims to point to the ontological dimension of Kilito's considerations, sustained by the idea that “[l]’ambiguïté est originelle” (1996: 9)– highlights the importance of language, as something that is “nécessaire à la vie”: “L’absence de langue équivaut à la mort; la vie, la survie, est dans la langue” (12).¹⁷⁵ What renders the texts by both El Hachmi and Kerchouche paradigmatic in reflecting upon this topic is that the survival –of certain realities, of the microhistories they help to bring to the fore– that is allowed via language passes through languages that are not their mothers’, their families’. Much like Hélène Cixous does in her work,¹⁷⁶ Kilito, too, leaves room in his considerations for the actual, physical organ of the tongue, presenting his ideas from a two-fold perspective and merging “l’idiome” with “l’organe” because “le savoir est ainsi inséparable de la saveur” (9). He notes that for “les Arabes” there exists an unbreakable link between “nourriture” et “langage” –“dans *les Mille et une Nuits*, bien souvent on mange avant de raconter des histoires ou de réciter des poèmes” (13).

3.3.1 The Mother(‘s) Tongue and the Body that Writes

Kilito’s association adds nuances to the linguistic reality unfolded in *La filla estrangera*. As noted earlier, there are, in the narrator’s account, certain words that are left in Tamazight because they have no equivalent in the “nostra-seva llengua”, as the narrator defines her mother’s tongue. The phrasing encapsulates the tension that vertebrates her relationship with that language. It is a shared element between mother and daughter but it is ultimately the

¹⁷⁵ In *Lan tatakalama lughati* [Thou shalt not speak my language], Kilito further dwells on the tensions between life and death, and the (im)possibility of communication through the politics of translation. Kilito explores the topic of bilingualism and transcultural criss-crossings, using Arabic on the one hand and European languages on the other, as his tools. His text circulates in that ambiguity that he identifies as original, as proven by the title of the essay in Arabic –the language in which he wrote it (2002). As noted by Wail S. Hassan, the translator of the text into English, “the Arabic title, *Lan tatakalama lughati*, is deliberately ambiguous and could be understood as either declarative or imperative, a factual statement or an Eleventh Commandment.” (2008: xxiii-xxiv)

¹⁷⁶ In *L’Amour du loup et autres remords*, whose very first heading takes us back to this idea –it is entitled “Ma conscience me mord la langue avec tes dents”– Cixous unites her “tongue” with those of the animals and of literature. In the first pages we read: “Nous qui vivons sous le même toit mais pas le même moi, nous nous parlons en langue étrangère. Je te parle dans ma langue et le français, un certain français. Tu me parles le chat, le tigre, le perroquet, l’allemand, un certain allemand, sans parler de la langue étrangère née de ma langue, dans laquelle le livre tandis que je l’écris se retourne sur et contre moi et me remord. Il s’agit de la langue étrangère que tu m’adresses, que j’essaie de toutes mes forces de me traduire sans trop de travers; certes nous nous comprenons au-delà de toute compénéance, nous nous ‘understand’ d’une langue aux autres et c’est miracle, mais il reste le reste, la langue dans ma bouche n’est pas ta langue, je ne sais pas comment elle bouge dans ta bouche, et dans la mienne non plus quand ma langue bouge je ne sais pas comment, elle parle je la suis et ce n’est pas moi entièrement.” (2003: 11-12)

mother's, as it does not translate the sense of belonging of the protagonist. It is important to highlight that from the very beginning, most of the words in Tamazight, marked in italics, are part of a semantic universe connected to taste, to food, which I read in relation to Kilito's affirmation. *Thaglaxt* and *abarrad*, the first Tamazight terms we encounter in the novel –which do not quite coincide with *teapot* or *coffee pot*– are left untranslated because the narrator cannot find their correspondence into the language in which she is *writing* about them: “De sobre aquest decalatge lèxic, tan insignificant, tan banal, m’ha fet recordar com n’estic de lluny d’ella, del seu món, de la seva manera de veure i entendre les coses.” (El Hachmi 2015: 15) The italics are a mark of that distance, strengthened by the lack of Catalan translation of the terms, which trespasses that sense of abyss to the reader that is not familiar with Tamazight.

The universe of food, of odours and flavours –about which we know the narrator is very sensitive and which becomes a source of pleasure, a preoccupation of the narrator– that is unfolded in the accounts is, thus, identified as a maternal heritage, the same way orality is, too –a connection that puts together “l’idiome” and “l’organe”. By placing the words in Tamazight and making room, in this way, for the universe of taste and food that ties her with her mother and the other women with whom her mother relates, the narrator is using the languages at her disposal to discuss her process of subjectivity negotiation. She has a certain knowledge of that language and participates in the food-related ceremonies that bring together the women within the cultural tradition of which she is originary –something that presents the universe of cooking, normally placed within the domestic space, as a collective experience– but her command of that language does not suffice for her to articulate her identitarian reflections. In that sense, I read the narrator of El Hachmi's novel through the same lenses I read Dalila Kerchouche's, who we saw lacks the vocabulary in Arabic to fully mould her subjectivity negotiation process.

Food and cooking are, in Kerchouche's work, too, domains that belong to the mother. Like in El Hachmi's texts, Kerchouche presents the mother as the figure that does the cooking and nourishes the family, a gesture that metaphorically allows us to approach the maternal figure as the keeper of the familial community. In addition, the space of the kitchen is that in which stories are transmitted, orally, by feminine figures. The food universe is also used by the narrator of *La filla estrangera* as a tool that regulates her relationship with her own body, as we saw in the previous chapter. Thus, her gluttony indicates identitarian uneasiness, the same way her dizziness does –a relationship also present in *L'últim patriarca*, when the narrator

faints as a result of her difficulty in navigating the pressure that stems from both her family and her husband (2008: 315). I have already explained how the body is also a vehicle for the exploration of sexual pleasure, a topic that is present throughout El Hachmi's literary universe –we learnt that the narrator of *La filla estrangera* does not have the room, in her mother's land, the land where the “nostra-seva llengua” is spoken, to masturbate at her will, for instance. The body becomes, once again, a powerful element in rendering the tension that vehiculates the relationship between individuality and community, between the oral and the written universes.

In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Assia Djébar draws a strong line between the body and the writing universe. In the autobiographical parts of this work –parts that are “woven” like fiction because they are practised in the language “de l'ennemi” (in Mortimer 1988: 201)– she gives account to the fact that, because of her father she had access to the written world that was offered by the French language, and not by Tamazight or Arabic. By going to French school she escaped the cloistering –and the physical veiling– of the harem and because she studied and spoke in France “[son] corps, durant cette formation, s'occidentalisait à sa manière”. (Djébar 1985: 182) Writing, in the familial universe unfolded by Djébar, is an act of love –“l'amour et ses cris”, homophonously “l'amour s'écrit” captures that idea– that necessitates the whole body: “Quand la main écrit, lente posture du bras, précautionneuse pliure du flanc en avant ou sur le côté, le corps accroupi se balance comme dans un acte d'amour.” (208) The body, claims Djébar, needs a “starter” to engage in its own movement, and hers, she writes, found its starter in “la pratique de l'écriture étrangère” (*ibid.*) and to resurrect the voice of others.

In *La palabra y el secreto*, Clara Janés reflects on the intersection of body and writing using a celebrated phrase by Henri Michaux, also referenced in Djébar's work: “J'écris pour me parcourir”. According to Janés, Michaux was making reference to

al cuerpo nuevo –desconocido para el poeta– que era él mismo y el poema, resultado de esa pulsión o llamada que produce el vacío existente entre el yo y lo otro, esa ausencia que atrae a una presencia, a un nacimiento. La escritura, en este sentido, sería trabajar con una ausencia, hacer presente, dar cuerpo a lo que no está ahí, para recorrerlo, para conocerlo; sería un proceso de conocimiento y de autoconocimiento.

(1999: 19)

Janés points to the existence of three bodies –that of the writer, that of the other and that of writing–, which are present in Djébar’s work and also in the texts by our writers. El Hachmi and Kerchouche inscribe several absences in their texts –in the next chapter I will explore all those who have to do with the historical discourse and the silences upon which the grand narratives are constructed– and do so by combining these three bodies. Through a practice of *escritura encarnada* the writers used the written text to *say* the voices that cannot be written and to give corporeality to their mother tongues. The fact that both writers mark the languages that they inherit from their families, Arabic and Tamazight, in italics is noteworthy. Like Djébar’s body that bends and swings when she writes in French, the italics our writers choose to introduce the expressions in Tamazight and Arabic in their texts puts forward their own bending, the particular relationship they have with their native languages, which is not a straightforward one.¹⁷⁷ Apart from the Tamazight words, El Hachmi writes certain expressions in Arabic which have a religious basis and explain the space that Islam has in the universe shared by the narrator and her mother. When she reproduces the conversations she has with her family, which we know take place in *darija*, Dalila Kerchouche resorts to French, arguably for the sake of comprehension. However, she transliterates certain Arabic terms and expressions using the Latin alphabet because of the weight they have. The following quotations depict relevant examples.

Upon trying to think, with her parents, about the reasons that might have led the French administration to treat the harkis the way they did, Dalila’s mother answers in these terms: “‘Tu veux savoir? Parce que les Français n’aiment pas les Arabes. Voilà pourquoi, *benti*.’” (2003: 183) The word that is highlighted here by the use of the italics is an expression in *darija* meaning “my daughter” that is used affectionately.¹⁷⁸ The word encapsulates the importance of familial ties within the context in which Kerchouche has been brought up. The phrase “*li fat met*”, of which we already know the importance throughout Dalila’s account, encloses the significance of the past, and its (un)veiling, not only for Dalila but for the whole of the harki community with which she interacts. We encounter it for the first time in the first chapter, and it is used by Dalila to establish the different relationships she and her family have with the past:

¹⁷⁷ Other interpretations might lead to the idea that italics or any other way to mark words out equals highlighting their strangeness, making visible the fact that they are “strangers”, “foreign” words.

¹⁷⁸ *Benti* is currently used in other Arabic dialects, not only in Algerian *darija*. Furthermore, it is worth signalling that there exist, in the many Arabic dialects, words that refer to kinship relationships and that are used by the speakers to show affection, even if the people to whom they are addressing these words are not actually their relatives –that is the case, for instance, of the word ‘*am*, literally “uncle”’.

“Pour eux [her parents and siblings], la page est tournée, il n’y a plus rien à dire sur le passé. ‘*Li fat met*’, me dit souvent mon père: le passé est mort. Ils veulent tous oublier. Sauf moi. Je suis la plus jeune, et pourtant la seule à y penser.” (22) By the end of her text, she retakes the phrase, always through her father’s lips, to talk about the complexities of the war and the impossibility of approaching it in simple terms. When she meets her uncle, in her Algerian visit, she is able to reconstruct the situation surrounding the war and how it was experienced by the Kerchouches, and their clan, the Beni Boudouane. She is, thus, able to witness, so to speak, what her father would have said in that context: “C’est fini, *li fat met* – le passé est mort, désormais. L’Algérie a besoin de toutes ses forces pour se reconstruire...” (267)

Because of the significance of his revelations, one of Kerchouche’s most important Algerian encounters is that with her father’s brother. He causes her to find out about how, also within the war, his father was placed at an in-between, as he collaborated with the FLN. This realisation will lead her to state that she feels “trahie par [s]on propre frère, trahie par son silence” (257). However, before the realisation that crystalizes Kerchouche’s multi-layered learnings –gathered in the last chapter, consisting only of one page: “Un grand H, comme Honneur”–, the author decides to include the conversation she had with her father upon returning from Algeria, in which she confesses to him to have uncovered his secret. In a choice that reveals that the text’s disposition is very meaningful, the author is arguably highlighting the fact that such a conversation allowed her to finally embrace her harki legacy proudly, thus constructing her father as key in the deconstruction of the label –which, we know, was understood by both Maghrebi and French people as tantamount to traitor.

One of the most revealing pieces of information that Dalila’s uncle shares with her has to do with the fact that the Beni Boudouane were Berber:

Cette révélation m’a bouleversée, parce qu’elle désensablait tout un pan de mon histoire. Je suis donc berbère... Je suis rassurée, rassurée parce qu’il y a déjà eu un changement cultural dans ma famille. De Berbères, nous sommes devenus Arabes. Et d’Arabes, aujourd’hui, nous devenons Français. Comme moi, mes ancêtres ont changé de langue, de coutumes, d’identité... En basculant dans l’islam, ont-ils eu le sentiment de “trahir” leurs origines, comme j’ai pu l’avoir en devenant française? Apparemment, non. Cela dédramatise mon histoire.

(214)

This realisation is important not only because at an individual level it leads to our author's acknowledgment of the nomadic identities that conform her familial genealogy, but also because it calls for an assessment of reality that is not based on prejudices or blind judgements of any kind. It is an invitation to think about the identitarian elements that criss-cross us from moving perspectives, and not statically. After dwelling on the effects that her Berber origins have on her, Dalila goes on exploring the Algerian land and embracing the images that such an exploration raises. Upon observing some children running barefoot, not only does she imagine her mum, but she *sees* her: "en elles, je vois ma mère, fillette brune avec un fichu sur la tête" (216). Right after this, the author juxtaposes a comment that has to do with her present moment: "Je remonte mon chèche qui ne cesse de glisser sur mes épaules." (*ibid.*)

This last image showcases movement and non-fixity, and also enmeshes the author's present with the past of her family, of which she has no memories, only those shared by her mother and that, I insist, gain corporeity in a language that is not the language of the mother. The tension between the self and alterity –expressed somehow corporally–, between orality and writing is resolved in Kerchouche's text via this kind of confluences. A page ahead, she writes about seeing a camp that, she learns, used to be occupied by French soldiers but that is now occupied by Algerian ones, a realisation that holds the ability to shake and problematize the normative conception of time: "À nouveau j'ai le sentiment de revivre l'histoire de mes parents, à nouveau passé et présent se confondent." (217) Again, this overlapping can metaphorically be read as a vindication of non-totalizing readings of reality. This idea culminates when Kerchouche writes about the lesson drawn after she has delved into the intricacies of the war where the label *harki* was initiated: "Il n'y a ni traîtres ni héros dans cette histoire, comme on a voulu me le faire croire... Mais des hommes, des frères, pris entre deux feux." (275; emphasis in the original)

3.3.2 Translated Subjectivities, Subjectivities In-Translation

As expressed by the above, the *harki* is, thus, born of an in-between, which gets passed on to those that interact with the label to a greater or a lesser extent. In *Mon père, ce harki* Dalila Kerchouche explores the manifold ways in which such an in-between is expressed. In *Leïla*, which because of its fictional character is less analytic and descriptive than the 2003 work, the author's decision to choose, as the main narrative voice, a teenager that speaks to herself in

Arabic but *writes* her account in French can be read as another deployment of the in-between, and as Kerchouche's embracement of the inherent alterity that underlies any linguistic experience, as I pointed out earlier. Reflecting on the writing practice of Jacques Derrida and H  l  ne Cixous within the volume *Langue    venir*, Marta Segarra notes:

toute   criture po  tique [...] est le seul "ailleurs" (Cixous) capable de se soustraire    la logique des oppositions binaires, puisqu'elle se nourrit de l'alt  rit  , des autres qui sont en *moi* sans que je le sache, "nos femmes, nos monstres, nos chacals, nos arabes, nos semblables, nos peurs". L'  criture serait ainsi l'espace de la "non-co  incidence", ni avec moi-m  me ni avec l'autre, affirme P. Kamuf.

(in Cixous and Derrida 2004: 34)

The statement by Peggy Kamuf, a celebrated translator of Derrida's works into English, and the citation by Cixous help us understand the writing practice of Kerchouche and El Hachmi as that which enables the creation of "espaces de la non-co  incidence", and thus that puts forward several kinds of identification –linguistic, cultural, to do with one's subjectivity– and eschews binary constructions. Cixous' words belong to an essay entitled "Mon Alg  rie" in which the Oran-born writer and scholar writes about the way the intersection of the different components that conform her, which have to do with the fact that she was born in a Jewish cultural background in French Algeria and had relatives from multiple origins. In that same text, Cixous notes: "Je me suis toujours r  jouie d'avoir   t   sauv  e de toute 'arriv  e'. Je veux l'arrivance, le mouvement, l'inachev   dans ma vie." (1997: 74) In this extract, the intellectual calls to resist any sort of epistemological certainties, which gets extrapolated to the way the self is conceived, and how language is approached, too. Cixous' language is, like Djebbar's, bent, non-straight-forward and that is why it is so difficult to translate. "Mon Alg  rie" has recently been translated into Catalan by Joana Mas  , who in the prologue to a volume that puts together other texts by Cixous notes the challenges of translating the writer's linguistic universe.

The volume is rightly entitled *La llengua m'  s l'  nic refugi*, which is Cixou's phrasing, for language is a constant concern in the texts of the collection and is used by Cixous to express her "Alg  rie". Similarly, we have seen how our authors have found their ways to express their particular in-between through linguistic strategies, too. The words they incorporate into their texts, which we have seen belong to different linguistic systems, indicate that all these

languages play a part in the construction of their identities. At the same time, the incorporation of an oral dimension to their accounts allows for the transcendence of the dichotomy orality-written text –which in El Hachmi’s textual universe is further emphasized by the lack of graphic marks to signal the dialogues between characters– and for an incorporation of the experience of their everyday existence. In *La filla estrangera* that everyday dimension has to do with the universe of food and taste, and with the weight Islam and islamicate practices have in the values and beliefs of her mother’s community. For Kerchouche, it has also to do with the familial universe. Be it as it may, the fact is that as readers we are faced with works that consciously inscribe the untranslatable nature of any cultural experience, a trait that could also be equated with the subjectivities of our authors and their protagonists. At the same time, the conflation of the different languages allows us to realise that the everyday nature of these characters gets articulated from a two-fold perspective. On the one hand, there is the idea of the “everyday” that they find at home,¹⁷⁹ and then there is the one they themselves construct, by merging it with the familial one, in the language of the Catalan and the French society that are also their languages.

In the seminal essay “The Task of the Translator”, Walter Benjamin reflects about his practice as translator (the essay is a paratext accompanying his translation of Baudelaire’s *Tableaux parisiens*) by exploring his understanding of what translation should function as. I believe that such an understanding can illuminate the way I read the subjectivities presented by El Hachmi and Kerchouche, which I consider to be in a process of translation. In a frontal attack to the ideas of the *Rezeptionsästhetik*, Benjamin announces that he conceives translation not as an activity that has to copy, to mimic a source text, but as a form of art, and as such it has to be autonomous and not subjugated to another entity. Heavily influenced by his friendship with Gershom Scholem and his interest for the Kabbalah –which evinces, like in Kilito’s case, Benjamin’s ontological preoccupations– and by Jena Romanticism,¹⁸⁰ in this essay he theorizes about the absolute. For Romantics the absolute was “the great novel”, understood as a tissue of fragments that incorporated in equilibrium the finite and the infinite, the singularity of the particulars doomed to remain incomplete. For Benjamin, that absolute is what he calls “pure language”.

¹⁷⁹ In *La filla estrangera*, we encounter the character of Munna, who is described as a border woman –also because of her civil status, since she is not married despite her age– and who is feared by men (2015: 64). Munna connects the Maghrebi women that populate the universe of the narrator’s mother with their land of origin via the Moroccan products that she sells them.

¹⁸⁰ For a thorough analysis of this connection see Benjamin and Hanssen 2002.

Pure language is the language of truth, it represents the essence of language precisely because it does not have the burden of meaning and as such is a “purely intransitive language” (Benjamin and Hanssen 2002: 11). “It is not *a* language; it is language” (Benjamin 2001: vii; emphasis in the original), a language *sans accessoires*, in Mallarmé’s words. Pure language is also a tissue of quotations represented by natural languages, that joins them in kinship –the kinship of languages is “suprahistorical”. They represent the particulars of that whole, pure language, which, like the great novel, will never be realised. In that sense they are all united in the fact that they are somehow self-contained –because as systems they allow communication and they make it possible to render meaning and even to produce artworks– but at the same time they are incomplete, for they will never be able to grasp the essence of language and will have need of other languages to lead them in the search of that essence.

Walter Benjamin claims that the relationship between content and form –that is, language– is very tight in the original and hence is forcibly “untouchable”, whereas in the translation such a relationship is loosened, because the translation’s intention is different, goes “beyond transmittal of subject matter” (*ibid.*). Translation proves that the thing meant in the original –that claims itself to be meant only in a certain way– allows for different ways of meaning, not only in different languages but in different ways –there are as many translations as translators and every translator can read the original differently every time. That is why “the thing meant is in a constant state of flux” (Benjamin 2004: 18). Even though it is only a fleeting state –because stability is to be found only within pure language and pure language is itself inaccessible–, translation transplants the original to a “higher and purer linguistic air” (19), since it makes it evident that the original relationship between form and content, as tight as a fruit and its skin, in Benjamin’s view, is distanced from the pure language.

Benjamin’s praise of translation is linked to his belief that because it points at the tissue of languages in kinship, translation is closer to pure language than the original is. Translation breaks the unity, the tightness of the original and forces the original to reflect on itself, sending it in circulation. Through translation, the original escapes its finite condition and rises as an entity in perpetual becoming. Aided by another image, Benjamin conceives translation as being outside the forest of language, in a different position than the original, placed right in the middle of that forest, where the thickness of the foliage does not allow for the light, coming from above, to penetrate. The translation, located outside, receives the light of the pure language and waits for the echo of the original to reverberate so that it can produce repetition with variation.

Like the echo, which is produced by one's own language but escapes us and follows its own course whilst allowing the original utterance to live on with variation, translation displaces the relationship between symbol and thing symbolized, pointing the original towards that meaningless pure language. Because of such a gesture, Paul de Man wrote that the original is sent "in exile" (1986: 92), although as made clear by Benjamin, there is no homeland to return to.

Conceived within this universe of metaphors and very nuanced images, the characters put forward by El Hachmi and Kerchouche can be read as examples of Benjamin's understanding of translation. The space of "non-coincidence" that is unfolded in their texts highlights the irreducible plurality that lies at the core of any kind of identitarian identification –be it understood on linguistic or on national terms. Because they are read through the filter of their "immigrant" and "harki" inheritance, as we already know, the narrators of the texts analysed here are symbolically located by some at the margins of the places where they live, which means that their "originality" –their "authentic" claim of affiliation to the territories of Catalonia and France– is put into question. Similarly, the fact that they grow up having to conflate the cultural elements that sustain their families with those they find at the Northern rim of the Mediterranean displaces them from their communities of origin. However, as is the case with Benjamin's translation, placed outside the forest of language, the dislocated position of these characters becomes a vantage point in the comprehension of reality in a world where ever more-increasingly subjects and communities are acknowledging their fluidity.

In another seminal essay on the issue of language, "Des Tours de Babel", Jacques Derrida points out that translation is a process of ripening (1985). Such an understanding ties in with the ideas I have analysed above about the way I read the characters in the works of our authors. Because they call for the constant problematization of one's subjectivity, their examples help us conceive identitarian processes as exercises of perpetual ripening and questioning, because "pure language" –"pure identities"– are off the table. It is often highlighted that any process of translation entails loss, because of the lack of exact equivalents between the source text and its translated version, whatever the form they might take. Through the combination of words belonging to different languages, our authors inscribe the experience of untranslatability that points to the realm of pure language. The loss (of comprehension, of "readability") that might accompany such a strategy is but an exercise of highlighting the fragmentary nature of identities.

Jena Romantics praised the notion of the fragment as that which epitomised the tension between the finite –a fragment might be self-contained– and the infinite –more fragments can always be added to an existing fragmented composition. Kerchouche and El Hachmi build characters that get to acknowledge the fact that they are traversed by several affiliations, which emphasizes the fragmentary nature of their subjectivities, something which ends up being understood positively and not in terms of loss. This get translated in the idea that they resist closed and hermetic categorizations, and, like translation, they dress themselves up with garments that cover them “like a royal robe with ample folds” (Benjamin 2004: 19). Ambiguity, the openness to new interpretations and new ways of understanding a text, a subjectivity, is favoured *in lieu* of fixed meaning.

This last idea connects with postmodern views on literature, which, following Barthes’ “death of the author” claim, disseminate the figure of the author as the ultimate source in the articulation of meaning. If the authorial voice is no longer the most significant yardstick with which to read a text, then a text that is born out of a translational experience can relate to its source in a horizontal relationship and not a hierarchical one. In an essay collected within the volume *Betwixt and Between: Place and Cultural Translation*, Marie-Christine Press considers the works by London-based artist Zineb Sedira to explore how multimedia texts, in this case, present an identity-based discourse that outdoes vertical structures of meaning. Sedira was born in suburban Paris of Algerian parents and her pieces explore the consequences of all those crossings and trespass across well-defined boundaries. In *Mother Tongue*,¹⁸¹ she juxtaposes three screens, each displaying a conversation between two women: her mother and herself, she and her daughter and her mother and her daughter. Each of the women speaks in their own “mother tongue” –*darija*, French and English respectively–, and whilst in the first two screens we witness communication through words, the last screen, featuring the grandmother and her granddaughter indicates that there has been a rupture. About this, Sedira states:

¹⁸¹ This piece is featured in Paris’ Musée national de l’histoire de l’immigration, within the collection of contemporary art, which seeks to give account of the artistic representations by people who are somehow connected with the French territory and are traversed by an experience of migration. In the museum’s website, the installation is defined in the following terms: “À travers l’usage des langues, ce travail donne à voir la pluralité des identités qui constituent un individu. Là, ou les langues parlées et/ou comprises renvoie(nt) à la biographie de l’individu, à ses migrations ou à celles de ses parents. Zineb Sedira a évolué entre la langue de sa famille, celle de l’école (en France), puis celle de sa vie en Grande Bretagne. Si le triple langage de l’artiste témoigne de la diversité et de la richesse de son identité, les migrations ont aussi créé des différences culturelles qui rompent le discours entre la grand-mère et la petite fille.” (Musée de l’histoire de l’immigration 2002)

Lack of communication is also a way of conveying meaning. My mother never learned French properly because she wanted to show her rejection of the French language and behavior after the war of independence, even though she and my father lived in France for economic reasons –North African immigrants were used as cheap labor. They experienced a lot of racism, and my parents felt a sense of failure that they had to bring up their children in that culture. They were angry that the French had managed to divide their Arab identity too, setting Algerians against each other by giving French citizenship to Algerian Christians and Jews but not Muslims, so that Arabs and Algerians would turn against each other.

(in Ianniciello 2018: n.p.)

The generational gaps that in Sedira's piece are explored via language reverberate in the texts of our authors. We already learnt that in *Jo també sóc catalana*, Najat El Hachmi gives a lot of thought to the linguistic universe in which her son will grow up, and to how he will navigate his relationship with his mother's tongues, which he will inherit. In *Mon père, ce harki* Dalila Kerchouche is aware of the disconnection that exists between her and her family, which has to do with their relationship with French and Arabic, amongst other things. Marie-Christine Press notes that through her pieces, Sedira "assumes the role of cultural translator", because she interprets her "in-betweenness" in works that "present the possibility of an identity that is not so much located between cultures as occupying multiple spaces which can become a specific cultural place –in and through translation." (2009: 250) My reading of the characters by Kerchouche and El Hachmi as mediators and translators will be analysed in the next chapter. However, I would nonetheless like to explore hereafter the idea presented by Press of cultural spaces that are created in and through translation.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora*, sociologist Avtar Brah puts forward a revision of the concept of diaspora in an exercise that seeks to contest identities that are enunciated in singular in order to conjugate them in a plural manner. Her aim is to disentangle how the notion of diaspora intersects with the ideas of "home", "subjectivity" and "displacement". Brah favours the notion "diaspora space" to eschew totalizing and essentializing views, for she understands it as "the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dislocation", where "multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the accepted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle" (1996: 181, 208). According to Brah, such a space "seriously problematizes the subject position of the 'native'" (108) because, amongst other things, it is sustained on a perception of culture

as a global condition. Following this logic, Brah theorizes a way to inhabit the world that entails a constant embracing of interrogation and questioning, for she believes diasporas to be “contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure.” (190)

Brah’s diaspora space is made up of subjects in-translation. That condition does not necessarily pass through an incarnated experience of displacement, as is the case of El Hachmi and her protagonists, or of Kerchouche’s Leila, but with confronting the idea of a changing and multiple self. We have seen how the language usage and the languages displayed by our authors are helpful in the acknowledgment of such an understanding of subjectivity. In “The Politics of Translation” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes about language as “one of many elements that allow us to make sense of things, of ourselves”, which is “what produces identity.” (1993: 179) Language is conceived as a “vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries” (180) and because of that it is useful in the self-awareness of the “subject positions” that vertebrate us. Spivak is also concerned about the ways in which language can be an enactment of agency. She connects the staging of language with the production of agency, and analyses specific cases of translation practices that conjugate dominant languages –such as English, linked with an experience of colonialism– with those belonging to the so-called “third world”, to claim that one cannot translate from a position of monolinguist superiority (195). I argue that the language staged by the narrators of the texts I study accounts both for their literal and symbolic multilingual condition and for their agency, too.

I believe that the linguistic strategies deployed in the works by Kerchouche and El Hachmi are directly connected with their digestion of their inherited migration experiences. In a volume entitled *Translation and Identity* Michael Cronin claims that “[t]he condition of the migrant is the condition of the translated being.” (2007: 45) Such an affirmation rests on the idea that the translated being “moves from a source language and culture to a target language and culture so that *translation* takes place both in the physical sense of movement or displacement and in the symbolic sense of the shift from one way of speaking, writing about and interpreting the world to another.” (*ibid.*) Whilst, as I have already explained, I do not consider any of the narrators of the texts analysed as migrants *stricto sensu*, I argue that their embracing of the consequences that the migration their parents undertook and that their accounts put forward make them “translated beings”, too. As we have seen, translation has to do with accepting transformation as a constitutive part of both individual and collective ways of processes of self-reflexivity.

Cronin echoes Maria Tymoczko's ideas in stating that translation is "a metonymical process of contiguity and connection" and not merely based on a hierarchical relationship towards the source text:

Critics will, of course, differ in their norms, but translation-as-substitution breeds a discourse about translation that is dualistic, polarized, either/or, right/wrong. A metonymic approach to translation is more flexible, resulting in a discourse of both/and which recognizes varying hierarchies of privilege, overlapping and partially corresponding elements, coexisting values, and the like.

(Tymoczko in Cronin 2007: 55)

Upon approaching the texts of our authors from a close reading angle of enquiry, we are able to see how the translated condition of their narrators results in complex processes of negotiation of all the elements that constitute them, which relate between themselves in the way signalled by Tymoczko. And because they put these complexities to the front, I believe that the accounts considered in this thesis are a valuable means to inhabit the syncretic world in which we live. In Spivak's essay, the scholar and translator confronts "[t]he old anthropological supposition [...] that every person from a culture is nothing but a whole example of that culture" (1993: 189). The protagonists I analyse reveal the impossibility of understanding culture in whole and self-enclosed terms. Spivak declares herself "convinced that the interesting literary text might be precisely the text where you do not learn what the majority view of majority cultural representation or self-representation of a nation state might be." (*ibid.*) By choosing to reflect on the long-term consequences of displacement, and on the translated subjectivities of people who are somehow inheritors of such an experience, through the literary field, El Hachmi and Kerchouche are building a message that deconstructs those "majority views" of "majority cultural representation" of the places where their works are inscribed.

3.4 The (Language of the) Borderlands

In an article that keeps dwelling on the connection between migration and translation, with the emphasis on how debates about immigration in Europe tend to revolve around preoccupations with issues of difference, Michael Cronin makes his the ideas of sinologist and philosopher François Jullien, who argues that "the notion of *écart* or 'gap' is more productive and less toxic

in accounting for cultural diversity and more especially in capturing the labile quality of self and intercommunal identity construction” (2013: 348):

Between cultures, I would not trust these supposedly characteristic *differences*, labelled as such and presented as standard (the most obvious traits are often the least interesting): as they become ossified, they become an obstacle to thought. But, I said it before, I make the *gaps* work –the notion is exploratory not classificatory. Opening up a gap is to break with conformism, to bring tension back into thinking, in short, to set our reason back to work.

(Julien in Cronin: *ibid.*)

The notion of gap as understood by Julien ties in with the untranslatability inscribed in their texts by our authors. Cronin believes that such a notion is useful in understanding both the relationship between cultures and those that lie within them: “cultures are not uniform blocs reified under the sign of difference which are assimilated by translators and then bridged by their irreproachable sense of tact. They are dynamic entities, constantly in a state of flux.” (*ibid.*) When understood this way, acknowledging the cross-fertilization that underlies any cultural construction, identity is, according to Cronin, put into question and “becomes highly problematic” because as we have seen by the way French and Catalan society read the protagonists of the texts studied, identities tend to be thought of as connected with an idea of culture that stems from a nation-state, with the “majority view” signalled by Spivak. The problematization of such an idea of identity put forward by Kerchouche and El Hachmi, who present us with protagonists that juggle with the cultural traditions with which they interact, galvanize us as readers to understand identity the way Timockzo understands translation. In this way, their texts are “gaps” within both the autochthonous French and Catalan communities where they live, and their communities of origin.

The idea of the gap refers to a physical dimension. Place constitutes a particularly significant element in any discussion of identity, for, as it has already been noted, identities tend to be considered in connection to a nationality –a connection that signals the nation(-state) as a stronghold for meaning. In the introduction to the aforementioned volume *Betwixt and Between* Stephen Kelly articulates his vision of place from a political point of view: “Place is political: our identities, our histories and our desires wrap their roots around the spaces we occupy –they provide us with the soil within which we lazily seed our life-narratives, but such soil can be contested.” (2009: 7) He cites Giorgio Agamben, who himself echoes Arendt’s 1943 work on

the destabilizing potential that refugees hold in the deconstruction of the nation-state as a source of meaning, to remind us that nation “with its philological origin in *nascita* –birth–” has functioned and continues to function as “origin and definition” (6). Following this idea, Agamben, like Arendt did, believes that placeless or displaced peoples, whose bodies occupy spaces –and configure their positions– that are outside the national boundaries where they were born, blur the ability of the place of birth as a means to create fixed identity meanings (2002).

Whilst I consider the characters in the works by Kerchouche and El Hachmi as multiply-rooted rather than as “displaced” or “placeless”, my consideration of them as translated beings ties in with what has been explored by Kelly, who also writes about translation as “practice and ethical regime”. Understood this way, translation allows for the disavowal of the “philological quest for origins” (8), as it rests on its fluid, uncertain and provisional nature and resists fixity and rootedness. Translation “is a preeminent means of investigating the possibility of new forms of politics expressive of the pluralities of place, of identity, of history” (12). For her part, Katherine Shields dwells on this idea to suggest that it is “more about what cannot be easily mapped, [it is] more a contribution to the uncharitable process of becoming and of changing” (2009: 268). Shields borrows Antoine Berman’s words to dictate that the essence of translation is but dialogue and “métissage”, “décentrement”: “Elle est mise en rapport, ou elle n’est rien” (Berman in Shields 2009: 233).

3.4.1 The Subject of the *Mestizo* Territories and their Agency

The works by Chicana writers and theorists prove highly valuable in understanding the conflation between notions of place, roots and identities in translation, much as Brah’s work does. Self-identified Chicanas proudly embrace their indigenous and *mestiza* heritage, which is a direct product of colonialism. The term was “recovered in the Chicano/a civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s” and “signals a political and historical awareness of racism, colonialism, and classism.” (Blake 2008: 4) Filtering my analysis of the works by Kerchouche and El Hachmi through the writings by Chicanas –which also consider a strong feminist perspective– can, thus, illuminate a deeper understanding of what I term the translated nature of the protagonists of my authors and their written personas as well. Because of their socio-historical and cultural background, the reflections by Chicanas became an important landmark in exploring the condition of those inhabiting a space criss-crossed by several cultural

traditions. Whilst the context in which I have inscribed Kerchouche and El Hachmi's works are very different to that of the Chicanas, in their texts they display social realities that are also built on multiple cultural elements and that is why I believe that the theoretical considerations by the Chicanas lend themselves to being applied to the contexts put forward by our authors.¹⁸² Furthermore, as we have learnt, both El Hachmi and Kerchouche's experiences in Catalonia and France are mediated by their feeling that the subjectivities they represented were somehow pioneers in those territories.

Despite the presence of the "other Catalans" in Catalonia, the kind of difference that the El Hachmi family epitomised within Vic by the time they settle there, in terms of language and customs and beliefs, was heretofore unseen, which provoked a series of long-term consequences that, as we have seen in previous chapters, launched Najat El Hachmi into a long and complex process of self-understanding that she explores throughout her literary production. Similarly, despite the fact that France's social tissue was already conformed by people with strong cultural ties to the North African territories, the experiences of the harkis and their descendants was somewhat unique, in the sense that non-harki Maghrebis in France did not bear on them the "scar" of being considered traitors –as the author herself acknowledges in her work. The Beur movement, in the 1980s, galvanized by the descendants of Maghrebi immigrants to France, was built on a process of resignification of the designation *arabe* –used as an Othering strategy by the dominant French, constructed as the norm, unmarked. It had to do with embracing the term and what it referred to in order to counteract its tinge of marginalization.¹⁸³ *Harki*, however, was chiselled differently, upon the mark of betrayal that permeated both the French and the non-harki Maghrebi imaginary.

In her seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa elaborates on her own experience as living in-between the U.S.-Mexico border, within a patriarchal surrounding. She insists on the idea of being aware of the consequences of inhabiting what she calls "the Borderlands", which "are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and

¹⁸² The approach that considers the lenses of U.S.-Mexico scenario to read postcolonial writings ensuing from North Africa has already been developed by some authors, who claim that "it is pertinent to note significant similarities between the processes of identity construction found among postcolonial writers of North African immigrant origin in France and those of Mexican origin in the United States, which are documented by Raquel Sáenz Ortiz." (See Célestin *et al.* 2013: 2)

¹⁸³ In *Transfigurations of the Maghreb*, Winifred Woodhull states that *beur*, "originally pejorative", became "'appropriated' by Maghrebian-French youths critically negotiating their cultural identity" (1993: x).

upper classes touch” (2007: preface to the 3rd edition, n.p). All these overlaps get translated into the inhabitants of these spaces, who following Anzaldúa’s considerations understand themselves as being traversed by several components, all of them conforming their subjectivities in an exercise of mixture that is not an easy one, as the Chicana author herself recognizes: the Borderlands are not a “comfortable territory”, but a “place of contradictions.” (*ibid.*) Anzaldúa finds, in language, a way to express, highlight and work on the contradictions that form her.

In her text, she displays some of the languages spoken by many Chicaxs living in the Midwest and the East, which include Standard English and Spanish, but also working class and slang English or North Mexican Spanish dialect (77). By providing dialects and slangs with the same status as the standard versions of English and Spanish, Anzaldúa is also crediting the multi-positional subjectivities of those Chicaxs who speak what she calls “a border tongue”. Their complex and heterogeneous subjectivities can only be expressed through an equally complex and heterogeneous language, which allows those Chicax subjects who do not identify with either the linguistic or the cultural realities represented by monolingualism or hermetic conceptions of culture to communicate their realities and experiences. There is a “wild tongue” not only because it defies the “reglas de academia” (76) but because it puts into tension the (post)colonial legacies. Anzaldúa claims to have been accused by “purist” –Latinxs who believe that Chicano Spanish is deficient– of betraying the Spanish language because of her usage of English, “the oppressor’s language”, in their view (77). By theorizing about the language of the Borderlands and using it to create her literary compositions, Anzaldúa is diluting the hierarchical relationship between the language strata that conform it and freeing it from the negative tinges it might have if considered from a (post)colonial point of view, although such a process of resignification does not prevent Anzaldúa from acknowledging the power relations that lie beneath the position that English and Spanish today occupy in the territory of the Borderlands.

Acknowledgment is, as I have noted, a key attitude not only in relation with the linguistic sphere but also when it comes to approaching the Chicana subjectivity. In order to reshape the border –which has traditionally been understood as a delimiting element that serves exclusionary practices– and transform it into an empowering space, the Chicana must be aware of the interplay of signifiers within herself, which do not necessarily coincide with those of her fellow Chicaxs. The process of “dignification” that Anzaldúa is igniting, via her book, of all

those who like her have been left to feel somehow “unfit” or “treacherous” –which, I believe, finds its echo in the task set forth by El Hachmi and Kerchouche in her respective contexts– starts internally, in the psyches of every “Chicano, *indio*, American Indian, *mojado*, *mexicano*, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian”, for their psyches “resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people”. “Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society”, Anzaldúa claims (109).

By pointing towards the interlockings of self-understanding and representation, Anzaldúa is bringing attention to the importance of portrayals of subjectivities that, like hers, have not been hitherto constructed as normative. Because, just like her border tongue, she resists taming and calls for palimpsestic understandings of identity, her work enables us to displace dualistic or Manichean understandings of identities that are sustained upon the pillars of different cultural traditions, displacing, at the same time, the tensions that establish clear-cut centre-periphery logics: the Borderland “is a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants... those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’. [...] Ambivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger.” (25-26)

These ideas resonate with those presented by Brah upon commenting on her understanding of the diaspora space, connect with the analysis about translation that I have laid out and highlight the corporeal element that is inseparable from any conception of identity, reminding us at the same time about the political dimension of place, as discussed above. The resistance to any form of enclosure that is claimed by Anzaldúa and Brah, which fosters ambiguity as a landmark is reminiscent of the decolonial imaginary, which aims at surpassing the colonizer-colonized dichotomy. An important referent in decolonial thinking, US-based Argentinian María Lugones identifies herself with the way of articulating ideas cultivated by the Chicana discourse. In her article “Purity, Impurity, and Separation”, Lugones understands *mestizaje* as a metaphor for both impurity and resistance “to interlocked, intermeshed oppressions”. She refers to herself as a curdled subject and considers curdling and *mestizaje* as manifestations of multiplicity, which she differentiates from fragmentation –because she believes that fragmentation follows the logics of purity. By embracing the “impure” curdled form, she enacts her agency: “That we curdle testifies to our being active subjects, not consumed by the logic of control. Curdling [...] can become an art of resistance, metamorphosis, transformation.” (1994: 478)

Mestizaje is understood by Lugones as a means to “def[y] control through simultaneously asserting the impure, curdled multiple state and rejecting fragmentation into pure parts. In this play of assertion and rejection, the mestiza is unclassifiable, unmanageable.” (460) Because of the lack of “pure” parts, she resists being controlled, Lugones claims—a situation that she connects with Renato Rosaldo’s anthropological views on those who are (in)visible in a culture. Rosaldo believes that “[f]ull citizens lack culture, and those most culturally endowed lack full citizenship” (in Lugones 1994: 461), which leads Lugones to denounce that within this logic “[o]nly the culture of people who are culturally transparent is worth knowing”. People like her, and like Chicanas, would be, according to this view, “postcultural” subjects whose culture is invisible to those that understand culture as “static, fixed and separate”. “If it is ambiguous” Lugones claims “it is threatening because it is creative, changing, defiant of norms meant to subdue it.” (477)

In Chapter 1 we saw how Homi K. Bhabha’s understanding of the “colonised subject” was also articulated upon the same idea, which recognized the centrality of ambiguity in the experience of the colonised—encapsulated in the cited formula “the same, but not quite”. I have also made clear that, in Catalonia and France, subjects like the protagonists portrayed by our authors fall into the same logics of (non-)recognition, as they are pressured into understandings of their selves that are univocal and easily defined in monocultural terms—and, as such, easily recognizable and lending themselves to being read from unproblematized angles of enquiry. The fact that they do not fit in these well-established patterns leads these characters to complex processes of self-negotiation that necessarily pass through a phase of awareness, like the one specified by Anzaldúa, and which means recognizing the “curdled” nature of their subjectivities, on Lugones’ terms.

Much like Benjamin’s conception of translation—which helps the original in getting involved in an exercise of self-reflexivity—the works by our authors display Anzaldúa, Lugones and Brah’s considerations from a two-fold perspective. On the one hand, they put forward an idea of identity that, as described above, encourages their readers to dislocate binomial connections such as those that consider one’s place of birth as the ultimate generator of identification. On the other hand, a thorough analysis of their works, considered as a whole, allows for the realisation that their writings are the space where that process of self-acknowledgment takes place. In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa tries out a writing practice that, like the subjectivity of the author herself, unfolds in a *mestiza* manner—that is, mixing autobiographical

assessments, essay-like reflections and poetical pieces all traversed by the border tongue in which Anzaldúa dwells.

When read together, the different works by each of the writers that I analyse evince the same kind of writing strategy. It is through writing that they are able to come to terms with their multi-faceted selves. In an important collective volume that gathered multiple texts by Chicanas of colour, *This Bridge Called My Back*, which also dilutes genre boundaries, editors Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga understand writing as an empowering tool that permits questions to arise that ultimately help those who posit them to define themselves through the act of writing. Writing is conceived as a means that facilitates an embracement of one's nuanced identity and the construction of several affiliations. In its Foreword, Toni Cade Bambara hints at the outcome that such a composing strategy might help bring to the fore:

This Bridge documents particular rites of passage. Coming of age and coming to terms with community –race, group, class, gender, self– its expectations, supports, and lessons. And coming to grips with its perversions –racism, prejudice, elitism, misogyny, homophobia, and murder.

(1983: vii)

The particular rites of passage to which the works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche attest, and the different process of coming to terms with the different realities they encounter through their processes of self-discovery is translated into a writing that also conflates personal reflections with other kinds of voices. In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Homi K. Bhabha relies upon the notion of hybridity to talk about a mode of articulation that he calls the “third space” which is based on the idea of cultural translation and which seeks to deny “the essentialism of a prior given original or originary culture” (1990a: 211). His aim is to announce that “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity”, a process that should not be understood in terms of addition but as a betwixting understanding that produces “a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (*ibid.*).

Like Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, Bhabha's “third space” is sustained upon an understanding of the idea of border that sees it as a site that invites mixture rather than as a divisive construct. It ties in with his definition of the “beyond”: “neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past” (Bhabha 2004: 1-2) In its reconfiguration of the temporal coordinates, the beyond that

Bhabha envisions focuses on the articulations that are produced in-transition, in-translation: “we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion.” (2) The third space, beyond dualistic subjective considerations, is holistic in nature and relies on processes of hybridization that, in turn, send us back to the curdled and impure qualities embraced by Lugones.

3.4.2 Hybridity Revisited

The notion of hybridity has received much critical attention, and has not always been well-received by scholars ensuing from geographies that are still highly symbolically marked by colonial experiences, such as the Latin-American territories –where the decolonial school is heavily reliant on a thorough revision of the constellation of concepts to do with “race”, in which *hybrid* or *mestizo* are caught up– or India. In a volume entitled *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* Anjali Prabhu acknowledges the seductiveness of the idea of hybridity, which “is claimed by prominent theories in postcolonial studies” because “[i]n its most politically articulated guises, hybridity is believed to reveal, or even provide, a politics of liberation for the subaltern constituencies in whose name postcolonial studies as a discipline emerged.” (2007: xi) However, she acknowledges the need to be vigilant about the concept for it “is a colonial concept” and a “‘racial’ term”, and as such “served certain interests, which were central to the colonial enterprise” (xii).¹⁸⁴ As we learnt in the Introduction, the works by sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, born in Bolivia, revolve around decolonizing practices, that, according to her, pass through deactivating the positive potential with which some authors, like Homi K. Bhabha, conceive the notion of hybridity:

La hibridez asume la posibilidad de que de la mezcla de dos diferentes, pueda salir un tercero completamente nuevo, una tercera raza o grupo social capaz de fusionar los rasgos de sus ancestros en una mezcla armónica y ante todo inédita.

(2014: 70)

¹⁸⁴ In his pivotal work *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy also highlights the ethnic dimension of the notion of “hybridity”, when he states that, together with the notions of *créolisation*, *métissage* and *mestizaje*, hybridity “would be a litany of pollution and impurity [...] from the viewpoint of ethnic absolutism.” (1993: 2)

Rivera Cusicanqui rejects the unproblematic conception of hybridity, which she takes from Néstor García Canclini. In his much celebrated works on the topic García Canclini puts forward an idea of hybridity that, on Rivera Cusicanqui's term, "es una metáfora genética, que connota esterilidad" (*ibid.*). In *Culturas híbridas*, García Canclini notes that in the last decade of the twentieth century, the concept has been used to talk about cultural processes and as such embraced by postcolonial scholars, such as Young or Bhabha, by those interested in travels and border-crossings (like Clifford), and signals that even literary, broader artistic and communicational works have been thought of in hybrid terms (1990). However, as highlighted by Rivera Cusicanqui, the fact that its origin is biological, which connotes a nuance of infertility, provokes that in the gesture of translation to a sociocultural terrain "ganó campos de aplicación, pero perdió univocidad. De ahí que algunos prefieran seguir hablando de sincretismo en cuestiones religiosas, de mestizaje en historia y antropología, de fusión en música." (2014: 15)

A similar idea is expressed by Alain Brossat, but in reference to what he calls "métis' thinking", for, according to him, its "toute-puissance" seems to favour the fact that all kinds of hybridity can happen and be celebrated: "L'argument tout-terrain du métissage va devenir l'un des rouages du déni de la violence des processus civilisationnels, du déni du tort causé aux vaincus par les vainqueurs de l'Histoire" (2001: 32). The citations by Rivera Cusicanqui, García Canclini and Brossat evince the complexity that terms like *métis* or *hybrid* carry within them, for they are caught up in power dynamics and historical processes that, according to the context where these concepts are used, acquire different layers of meaning.

In order to show her confrontation with the notion of hybrid, Cusicanqui goes back to her Aymaran inheritance and retrieves the notion of *chi'xi*, which "plantea la coexistencia en paralelo de múltiples diferencias culturales que no se funden, sino que antagonizan o se complementan. Cada una se reproduce a sí misma desde la profundidad del pasado y se relaciona con las otras de forma contenciosa." (2014: 70) Because it considers its own litigious nature and because of its recovery of the past –which puts into tension traditional (Western) notions of time– I connect the *chi'xi* with the work by Anzaldúa, Brah and Lugones. I believe that to the extent that *chi'xi* "obedece a la idea aymara de algo que es y no es a la vez, es decir, a la lógica del tercero incluido" (72), Cusicanqui's ideas are helpful in considering the kind of belonging expressed via the works of Kerchouche and El Hachmi.

Like Anzaldúa, who retrieves the Aztlán myth in order to put forward a redefinition of the national idea of Chicana, Cusicanqui gestures towards the Aymaran past, untainted by colonialism, to define a present “que conjuga los opuestos” (69). As I noted in the Introduction, Cusicanqui confesses to be against the notion of “identity” and favours instead that of “identification”, which she believes is less hermetic and leaves room for the ambiguity and the component of undifferentiation and contingency that vertebrates the *chi’xi*. Both Anzaldúa and Cusicanqui’s ideas are rooted in contexts heavily marked by processes of colonisation whose traces go back a long way and are useful in thinking about what we understand by “identity”. The background that cements the experiences for which Kerchouche and El Hachmi’s texts account relate to colonialism from a very different standpoint, as has already been made clear in previous chapters.¹⁸⁵

However, I consider it important to unfold the proposals by these Latin-American scholars, for I conceive the strategies and approaches set forth by our authors from their lenses, even if the constellation of terms and expressions I use in my theorizations do not coincide with the ones they utilise. We learnt how in Catalonia and France, the protagonists of the texts analysed are somehow invited to reconsider their affiliations with their cultures of origin to the point of dismissing their footprints, as some of the locals construct the Maghrebi location as a backward –and homogeneous– territory. The relationship with their originary past is, for El Hachmi and Kerchouche, a distant one, due to the fact that their processes of maturity happen in Europe and not in North Africa –a distance that, in Anzaldúa and Rivera Cusicanqui’s cases is measured temporally. However, like the Latin-American scholars, they decide to incorporate their heritage into their understanding of their selves and let it play a part –a role that takes different shapes, as we have seen, in the different explorations that each of the texts represents.

Such strategies enable us to see how they envision knowledge and self-exploration from a dialogical perspective, which allows for the coming together of all the elements that the protagonists feel that conform them. Despite Rivera Cusicanqui’s rejection of the notion of hybridity, I do believe that, when taken away from the biological terrain and when decentred from the Latin-American scenario, it functions as a powerful means to think about processes of subjectivity negotiation and cultural intermingling like the ones I consider in this thesis. As

¹⁸⁵ I believe it is worth repeating that one of the references that El Hachmi inscribes in *L’últim patriarca* is *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros, considered to be of great relevance in the Chicana literary movement. El Hachmi is thus connecting herself with this landscape.

Prabhu notes, hybridity might serve as a key to unlock dichotomical ways of thinking and to champion instead “ideas of multiplicity, plurality, and difference in a less specifiable way.” (2007: xiii) Prabhu also identifies the fact that theories of hybridity reserve a central role for the notion of agency. The question of agency is pivotal in Anzaldúa’s theorization of the Borderlands and in Bhabha’s third space. Using the above-mentioned definitions of these spaces as a cue, we could understand the Catalonia and the France that our authors inhabit and in which they place their literary universes as Borderlands or third spaces, for the territories they occupy are traversed by cultural elements, languages, every-day practices and memories that belong to both the Northern and the Southern rim of the Mediterranean.

3.4.3 The “Wounded” Mediterranean as a Borderland¹⁸⁶

Such an understanding could lend us to think of the Mediterranean as a landmark that, just like the physical border that separates the U.S. from Mexico, facilitates cultural intermingling on either side of the liquid frontier. In fact, many academic voices have acknowledged the solidity of the Mediterranean in shaping the lives of those who are permeated by its waters. Paul White speaks of it as “Europe’s Río Grande” (1995: 8); Russell King edited a volume entitled *The Mediterranean Passage*, whose cover features a map of the Mediterranean territories in which the coloured mass is not that of the land but of the sea (2001). Within the same lines, Gabriel Audisio wrote about it as “the liquid continent” (in Tamalet Talbayeb 2017: 51). However, as proven by a thorough analysis of the corpus of this thesis, such an idea is not as felicitous as it might seem at first glance.

In an article that appeared within the publication *Quaderns de la Mediterrània*,¹⁸⁷ Najat El Hachmi positions herself very firmly against the idea of the existence of a “Mediterranean identity”, which leads her to wonder whether there is such a thing as a common Mediterranean essence that lets itself be felt through all the territories caressed by the sea. Were this to exist, “cumpliría con todas las características de cualquier identidad colectiva sana: no es granítica

¹⁸⁶ Anzaldúa wrote: “The U.S.-Mexican border es *una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country –a border culture.” (2007: 25) This heading dialogues with Anzaldúa’s remarks.

¹⁸⁷ The 26th issue of this publication, which like every issue always comes out as a bilingual edition, is entitled “Imagining the Mediterranean” and seeks to explore the (im)possibility of building a collective identity for all the “countries and cultures touching the Mediterranean Sea” (Ferré 2018: 9).

ni hermética y no se sabe exactamente dónde comienza y dónde acaba, en qué punto podemos decir que algo ha dejado de ser mediterráneo o ha empezado a serlo.” (2017a: 221) El Hachmi highlights that such a vision is, nonetheless, projected within the Northern rim of the Mediterranean: “es una construcción creada, enseñada y difundida desde la orilla norte y para la orilla norte.” (222) Following her personal experience, which of course might differ from other people’s experiences, she claims that “allá abajo nunca hemos oído hablar del Mediterráneo, nunca nos han preguntado si éramos mediterráneos o no.”

In fact, she declares that the first time she and her family even acknowledged that there was a “common sea” “fue gracias a la compañía de ferris que nos iba a llevar de una orilla a otra en nuestro primer traslado, Transmediterránea”, a journey that the El Hachmi family would repeat many times and in which “había más elementos para sentirnos parte de la patria de los inmigrantes que para descubrirnos mediterráneos.” (*ibid.*) In this piece, El Hachmi recognizes herself as “hija de la inmigración”, a denomination that, just like that of “fille de harkis” (Kerchouche 2003: 13), highlights the relevance of the inherited paternal decisions in the subjective configuration of the authors. In the “patria de los inmigrantes”, El Hachmi is united with all those others “hijos de la inmigración” who feel, on the European side of the Mediterranean, how the sea is constructed like a border that far from Anzaldúa’s considerations, unfolds dualistic regards. These regards are built on judgments that tend to consider the body as a signifying element, whereby all those bodies that are clear-skinned “belong” to the Northern rim of the Mediterranean and those who, on the contrary, have darker skins “belong” to the other side of the sea.

El Hachmi sprinkles her texts with several of the considerations written above, which, I argue, make it clear that her work is a valuable tool in the construction of Catalonia as an effective Borderland or a “third space” and not a mere theoretical paradigm.¹⁸⁸ As we have previously seen, the Catalonia depicted by El Hachmi acts, like the Europe that only at a discursive level embraces the idea of the Mediterranean identity, hypocritically when it comes to letting subjects with genealogies different from the one constructed as “purely” Catalan into the Catalan social fabric. Thus is felt by the protagonist of *La filla estrangera*. When she and her

¹⁸⁸ The 2018 Euromed Survey, entitled “Changing Euro-Mediterranean Lenses” “emerged from [the] assessment at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) that Euro-Mediterranean relations continue to be too often dominated by Euro-centric perspectives and debates”, something which institutions such as the IEMed are trying to revert (2018). In this respect, the epistemological tools offered by El Hachmi via her work represent much valuable material to effectively enact such a change.

mother go to the government delegation office, significantly located in downtown Barcelona, in search of documents that would somehow regulate their situation in Catalonia, she feels she is at the “país dels immigrants” (2015: 103), at a physical margin where all the other immigrants are placed by the dominant regard of the autochthonous population. The lack of specific references to the legal apparatus that regulate the status –and, hence, “changes” the identity– of the foreigners who arrive in Catalonia is, I believe, a strategy deployed by the author to signal how she does not understand identity from these lenses.

We already saw how Kerchouche also tackles the futility that these legal mechanisms play in her conception of subjectivity. As a child of harkis she is different from the non-harki Maghrebis in France, who might or not might not have French nationality, and from her Algerian relatives, for she does not have an Algerian passport. This leads to a situation whereby, when she decides to visit Algeria, at the border she is read like Algerian because of her name and her skin but her passport says something different. The understanding of identity put forward by the authors via this particular strategy brings back the idea of their writings as that space from which to unfold their particular Borderland, dismissing restrictive and divisive borders such as the ones epitomised by legal documents. In a paper entitled “The Mediterranean as a Borderland”, Linda T. Darling confronts the so-called “Borderlands paradigm” with the “Frontier paradigm”. Contrarily to the latter, which understands frontiers as a “consolidating agent” on the society behind it (2012: 55), the Borderlands paradigm puts forth an idea of the territory as constantly exposed to transnational processes. Understood as a paradigm from which to think about situated cultural encounters, the Borderlands are traversed by ambiguous identities; that is why, following the work by Zartman, Darling defines them as not just places or events, but as “social processes” that are continually in movement. Such an understanding cancels out the restrictive function of the frontier and hence nullifies the “clash of civilization” epistemology.

We learnt how, through their writing, Kerchouche and El Hachmi enact such a paradigm, by questioning dualistic conceptions of identity and favouring hybrid ones, instead. In the introduction to the above-mentioned volume on Cixous’ considerations about language and identity, Joana Masó understands that for someone who, like Cixous, who does not contemplate identity through “les inscripcions del passaport”, literature is a tool to build belonging there where it is absent: “La literatura és un esquinç que surt a les banderes, als nacionalismes i a la simplificació de la identitat” (Masó 2009: 12). Masó understands that it is through writing that

Cixous is able to express her particular ambivalent relationship with French imperialism, whose political apparatus she rejects, but whose cultural skeleton –in the form of the French and language and its literature– she embraces.

As I have developed in previous chapters, the image of the wound is recurring in Cixous' work. Masó understands that the Algerian-born scholar's manifold affiliations stem from a double wound which translates her double "absència de pertinença" (*ibid.*). Like Cixous, I argue that our authors also construct their particular in-between sense of belonging from a standpoint of "double absence", which they deal with to the point that we, as readers, end up conceiving it as enriching rather than in a negative way. Like the more abstract concept of the in-between, the wound is also an interstitial space, an opening of sorts that, although it might cause pain, results in the acknowledgment that our bodies are alive, that they change and transform themselves following the experiences they go through. Using this imaginary as a basis, Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, or Bhabha's "third space" are like scarred bodies, in the sense that they are cracks opened within the solidity of spaces well-delimited by borders (understood as firm and homogeneous conceptions of identity, of nationality, of languages). Scarred skins bear the inscription of the wound, hence, the possibility of transformation, the mark of change. At the same time, such a mark speaks of imperfection, which we can connect with Lugones' understanding of the fragmented and curdled being –which she conceives positively. The wounded body is also aware of its fragility and of its potential to heal at the same time, of its permeability.

The subjective wounds of which Kerchouche and El Hachmi's texts speak are connected with their understandings of belonging, which pass through acknowledging and confronting the several boundaries that are in their way –directly linked with their inherited migrations. Physical borders are important elements in the universes of both Kerchouche and El Hachmi, as they act as sites of acknowledgment: they become the landmarks that allow their protagonists to directly face their multiple subjectivities, as the examples retrieved above show. Because of their symbolic significance in the processes of self-awareness, which we know Anzaldúa recognizes as crucial in the new mestiza's subjectivity, borders are also sites of action. In *La filla estrangera*, the space of the border is what triggers, in the narrator, her decision to ultimately take care of herself and choose her path to the detriment of her mother's: "A la frontera ho vaig decidir" (2015: 189).

The border, in Kerchouche's works, is encapsulated in her presentation of the harki camps. Following the portrayals of these spaces, we know that they, like the traditional configuration of borders, are constructed as hermetic and unchangeable. As we learnt above, the French administration took advantage of the lack of knowledge of the French language of the harkis to locate them outside the French society they should, supposedly, be a part of. This idea is expressed by Leïla upon reflecting on the years her family spent in camps; she wonders: "Que deviendrons-nous après ces treize années passées dans les camps, coupés du monde?" (Kerchouche 2006: 139) A formulation, in the shape of a question, that translates the uncertainty harki families inhabited following their placement inside the camps: "Nous sommes libres, mais pas pour autant libérés." The narrator describes the kind of life she has led, as an "enfant des camps", as a "vie d'exclus" (*ibid.*).

The camps occupy a great deal of narrative space, which evinces their relevance for all of the characters portrayed by Kerchouche. Despite the parallelisms that can be drawn between the two written works considered here, *Leïla* and *Mon père, ce harki* represent different takes on a series of topics. Thus, for example, some of the subjects that were widely unfolded within *Mon père, ce harki* get summed up in the novel, as is the case with the Berber component that is present in many harki families –for the Kabylia, an Algerian region heavily marked by a strong Berber identitarian component was an important scenario of the independence war. The discovery of the Berber ancestry of the Kerchouche family is a turning point within the 2003 work. In the novel, however, it gets reduced to a sentence, to a memory of the protagonist about her grandmother, whose face "avec ses tatouages berbères" she tries not to forget (34), which makes us realize that it impacts differently on the subjectivity of the protagonist – for her, the Berber element is not a discovery, but it has always been a part of the familial community. The space of the camps is another issue that gets developed differently in the two texts. In the autobiographical account, the camps are almost like an archaeological site from which the author retrieves information, and then realizes to what extent they are symbolically crucial in the current configuration of her family and, by extension, her own. In the novel, we get to experience them as the scenario of the every-day life of the protagonist and, hence, we understand why they can be thought of as "borders".

At the beginning of her process of self-examination, Leïla understands herself to be in a position that she conceives from a negative standpoint, packed in the formula: "Je ne sais plus qui je suis" (2006: 15), which translates a subjective instability that trespasses epistemological

boundaries. The narrator parallels her not-knowing herself with the difficulty she has in understanding the in-between that the harkis, as a group, occupy at either end of the Mediterranean: “Parce que nous sommes harkis, les Algériens nous considèrent comme des traîtres, et les Français comme des parias” (16-17). She is, thus, caught up in a two-fold in-between that stems from her position as a woman coming-of-age living in France with Algerian roots, and as a daughter of a harki that identifies herself as such. This particular multiple fold pushes us to think of the protagonist of the novel as someone who is not the figure of alterity –which is sustained on a dualistic outline–, but a “third” figure that transcends those subjective dualities. As she understands herself at the beginning of the novel, the harki that is epitomised by Leïla is the other of the other within either of the national groups with which the harki intersects.

This conception is mediated by the space of the camps, that makes the ontological suspension of which I wrote in Chapter 1 possible. Early in her account, the narrator of *Leïla* states that all the camps are similar and describes them as “no-man’s land” (20). This expression speaks of the impossibility of establishing felicitous relationships of belonging with the territories where the camps are set. Precisely because they hamper these relationships, I conceive of them as limiting borders. Kerchouche, however, puts forward a character that ends up being able to revert their obstructive nature. Leïla will become part of the revolts that, starting in June of 1975, put an end to the regime of the camps for good. The importance of this chapter of the harki history will be considered further down, but it is noteworthy to learn that it was a collective project, and it is because Leïla acknowledges that collective side of the revolt that she is able to navigate her in-betweenness from a positive standpoint.

By the end of the novel, we are aware of how the protagonist connects her particular subjectivity with her familial line. She has confessed how she has learnt to cope with the fact that her relationship with both France and Algeria is different from that of her parents –which highlights the generational differences of which I wrote earlier–, because whilst Leïla’s parents “aiment ce pays et se sentent français depuis plusieurs générations” –a feeling that, she claims, is vehiculated through a military tradition that took both sides of her family to fight for the “mère patrie”–, she feels “farouchement algérienne”, despite having lived in France for longer than in Algeria. That is why she mentally lives there: “Je m’accroche à mes racines, à mon enfance, refusant de grandir” (37). By connecting herself with her familial thread, learning to integrate the differences that are at the heart of that community, she also contemplates the

siblings that come after her. Marianne is the youngest sister of Leïla, and bears the name of the Republic. She was born in a camp but holds no memories of that time—for which we can equate her with Dalila Kerchouche, as I shall examine—and is described by the narrator as an “espoir”. Marianne is the paradigmatic inhabitant of the Borderlands, and represents yet an extra fold in regard to the already multiply-folded subjectivity of Leïla. Because she is at once inside and outside of the reality of the camps, she can escape their reclusive component and at the same time rid herself of the “criminal” component that for the harkis before her the love for France supposes (16).

After reading the novel, we can go back to *Mon père, ce harki* and understand the identitarian analysis unfolded by Kerchouche from a more nuanced perspective, and read it as an exercise of counter-narrative that, I argue, El Hachmi’s works also deploy. When Marianne is born, Leïla declares que “[c]’est pour elle qu’[elle] doi[t] [s]e battre” and invites her younger sister to defend the harki community, “tu défendras les harkis”, in a very categorical way (112). *Leïla* is the proof of that fight, which started with the publication of *Mon père, ce harki*. In the following chapter, I will look into the works by our two authors as a means to question dominant conceptions of history. I will consider the narrators of the works studied from yet another interstitial position, that of the witness understood as a mediator figure. The retrieval of familial memories that we already know the works by our authors facilitate, a retrieval that establishes relationships of belonging, serves, at the same time, to claim a discursive space for their originary communities, which have no room in the hegemonic historical discourses. At the same time, this exercise of reconceptualization of the past will push us readers to rethink the notions of the self and of the community.

4. IN BETWEEN RECEPTION AND ACTION:

THE WITNESS AS MEDIATOR

This chapter seeks to explore the ways in which both El Hachmi and Kerchouche deal, via their textual production, with the legacy they inherited. By legacy I am referring to the paternal migrations that led them to grow up in Catalonia and France, for these experiences, as has been explored in earlier chapters, produced the labels through which the authors understand themselves, labels that are also used by their characters to understand their subjectivity construction. I argue that this somehow intangible inheritance has (un)willingly turned them into witnesses of a series of events surrounding those migrations, as they were not the ones who initiated the displacements but because their consequences vertebrate their identity construction, they are solidly linked to these experiences. As such, I read the authors and their characters as mediators that make possible the survival, reception and unveiling of a group of memories tied to these migrations and their multi-layered consequences. In what follows, I shall dwell deeper on the polyphonic nature of El Hachmi and Kerchouche's work, to understand to what extent their incorporation of different voices –as we know, belonging to several generations and different in nature– into their texts facilitates a blending exercise that allows us to comprehend the role played by memory in creating bonds of belonging. The authors “tie together” the different components that constitute their selves, elements that are linked to certain events that criss-cross them –whether they were experienced first-hand or not– and, at the same time, in this memory-related gesture of recuperation, they contribute to the reformulation of collective identities.

From such an angle of enquiry, I conceive the literature produced by our authors as a tool to destabilize hegemonic discourses. By retrieving the different voices that will be further considered, and filtering them through their writing, the authors produce works that function as counter-memories entering into direct dialogue with the contexts in which these texts are inscribed. Migrants and harkis have been relegated to the margins of the historical official discourses of Catalonia and France respectively, discourses that tend to be built on hermetic premises and linear-time approaches. In defiance to that linearity, Kerchouche and El Hachmi go back to their past in order to retrieve experiences that serve to fill in historical gaps and directly call on the societies with which these authors interact. They write down memories they have received orally and they also name –and, thus, give visibility to– some, up to then, veiled realities. Understood this way, the written exercise functions as a strategy to bridge over certain

kinds of oblivion –and obliterations– and that is why I read the works that conform the corpus of this thesis also as rewritings of history. A counterpart of any act of memory, oblivion also represents a pillar in any process of subjectivity formation. As acknowledged by Paul Ricœur in *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, forgetting is at the same level as both history and memory in the constitution of identities (2000), as the cases of El Hachmi and Kerchouche illuminate. Hence, in the following pages I will consider the ways in which the authors and their characters are informed by multi-layered gestures of oblivion.

The weight of memory and oblivion as elements configuring a sense of identity is significantly more prominent in the harkis scenario, for, as we are reminded by Mohand Hamoumou, the harkis are sometimes referred to as “les oubliés de l’histoire” (1993: 15). The harki identity is inextricably linked to the Algerian war, the context in which the label was actually born, and to the consequences that it unfolded, both on French and on Algerian soil. The silences surrounding the participation of the harkis during the war (a triple silence, as described by Hamoumou) will be thoroughly analysed here, since Kerchouche’s work cannot be properly understood without a full comprehension of these. Her texts signify the erasure of these silences, a gesture that speaks of the battle for recognition of the harki community undertaken by Kerchouche and other people who understand themselves through the harki filter, as we shall see. Albeit differently, El Hachmi’s texts also speak of a call for recognition for the migrants, which is explored in a more direct way in her autobiographical text. The demanding subtext that informs all of the texts analysed in this thesis is then directly connected with the labels dissected in Chapter 1, which as we learnt are one of the pillars upon which the authors and their characters understand their subjectivities. As we shall see, this process of self-understanding is also mediated by a series of claims that these labels unfold.

The collective dimension of El Hachmi’s fiction is of a different nature than Kerchouche’s, as her novels are more focused on the family circle and on the individual, whereas from the very beginning Kerchouche tells us that her familial story should be read along the lines of a wider communal group: “Alors qu’au départ je ne pensais écrire qu’une histoire individuelle, je me rends compte que ce récit ressemble au parcours de milliers d’anonymes. Que des milliers d’enfants de harkis auraient pu réaliser le même voyage que moi.” (2003: 187) This realisation is noticeable in the title of the works themselves. Both the autobiographical account and the novel by Dalila Kerchouche feature the word *harki*, which hints at the importance of the harki component throughout the texts. Despite the fact that *Leïla* is presented as fiction, its back

cover highlights the idea that the account is informed by extra-fictional layers, which make of it a tool to *speak* of the “souffrance des harkis”. By not elaborating on the content of the novel, the text on the back of the book evinces the fact that the story of the protagonist is used as a tool to speak of the “exclusion”, “ostracism” and “contempt” which, we are told, the harkis continue to endure to this day. Because, “[o]n ne parlera jamais assez” of this topic, we understand that the novel is a way of maintaining the conversation about the harkis going, a conversation that as we shall see arrived at a turning point in the year 2003, when *Mon père, ce harki* was published.

Chez El Hachmi, the titles of her fictional accounts highlight the significance of family relations –in fact, as the author publicly acknowledges, *L’últim patriarca*, *La filla estrangera* and *Mare de llet i mel*, the novel she published in 2018, conform a trilogy seeking to explore the long-term consequences of a familial migration from the different points of view of those who partake in it. Contrarily to what happens with Kerchouche’s texts –there is a sort of continuity in the main narrative voices, in the kind of statements made by the leading voices of *Leïla* and *Mon père, ce harki*, aimed at denouncing a series of injustices– the fictional works by El Hachmi are significantly different from the autobiographical *Jo també sóc catalana*. The usage of the first person, which in *Jo també sóc catalana* situates the subject position from which El Hachmi is writing, is not so clearly specified in *L’últim patriarca* nor in *La filla estrangera*. As has already been discussed, the author makes a point of not providing the fictional female narrators of these texts with proper nouns –a gesture that in previous chapters I read from a gender perspective and that here I will connect with the author’s will to denounce the lack of historical recognition of the migrants– and of avoiding stating the geographical locations where the stories told unfold. Such a contrast obviously determines the way we read the texts. Thus, although the novels are traversed by subtexts having to do with the demand of more agency for the migrants in their so-called “host societies”, the 2004 text is clearly invoking the Catalan population.

The formula that El Hachmi chooses for her title situates the demanding tone of the account, which we can arguably assume is inscribed within the universe of migration. The fact that she writes *també* makes it clear that, throughout the pages of the account, the readers will find out other cultural affiliations through which the author understands herself, thus she is announcing that her identity is multifaceted as a result of having migrated from Morocco to Catalonia as a child –something of which we learn on the back cover of the book. Furthermore, the use of the

copulative verb connects the title with the realm of belonging, thus turning her affirmation into an important stance within the societal context where the text circulates –let’s not forget that the year of the account’s apparition, Catalonia was immersed in heated debates about how to cope with, “els nous catalans del segle XXI”, as stated on the back cover; debates that continue to this very day.

The set of pictures that we find on the cover is also significant in understanding how the account is being presented to us by the publishing house. As previously signalled, *Jo també sóc catalana* was constructed around a question, formulated by Najat’s son: “Jo sóc català, mama?”, which is also featured in the back of the book. The fact that Rida, Najat’s son, is the one who is looking straight at us in the front picture speaks of the importance of his question in the articulation of the account. The text that El Hachmi ends up writing dwells on the idea that just as it happened to her, her son, too, will be read as connected with Morocco –a land perceived from exoticizing regards in Catalonia, as hinted by the picture that is in the background of the cover– due to his skin colour, his features and his name. Hence, as indicated by the picture’s composition, both mother and child will have to deal with the fact that in Catalonia their Moroccan ancestry will somehow “surround” them. The fact that the cover features two different generations should also be noted, because throughout the text El Hachmi reflects upon the perennial dimension that seems to inform the kind of migration experiences like the one she lived through. Just as she inherited the label *immigrant* from her father despite the fact that she did not actively choose to migrate –in Catalonia, she is “sempre nouvinguda des de fa setze anys” (2004: 61)–, she will pass on the label to her son.

The transgenerational nature articulating the label *immigrant* also permeates the *harki* one. This is important because, as I shall discuss later, it is the descendants of those who participated in the war as harkis the ones that will decide to tackle the set of signifiers in which the harki label has been caught up, and contest them to ultimately try and resignify what it means to be connected with the term *harki*. Keeping with the analyses of the paratexts of the texts conforming my corpus, we can observe this generational leap through the covers chosen by Seuil for Kerchouche’s text. Thus, *Mon père, ce harki* features Dalila’s father, a representation that is important in as much as it is him, a combatant in the war, who introduces the harki element within the Kerchouche family. The cover of *Leïla* features a picture of a girl that we might identify as Dalila’s sister, although nowhere inside the edition do we find information

about it. Kerchouche dedicates the novel to several relatives, amongst whom her sister Fatima, her “inspiratrice”.

This ties in with what I just stated, with the fact that the novel can be read as a complement of the 2003 account. The picture of the girl might as well be found in an anthropological book recounting the experiences of the harkis. Both covers could be part of the Kerchouche’s family album –and, indeed, I already stated that family pictures are included in the hard cover edition of *Mon père, ce harki*, which strengthens its factual dimension. In El Hachmi’s case, however, the pictures that have been chosen for the covers of her novels¹⁸⁹ mark a distance from the one in *Jo també sóc catalana*. The cover of *L’últim patriarca* does feature Najat El Hachmi –for which we could argue that Planeta was seeking to monitor the work’s reception along autobiographical lines, as I explored in Chapter 3– but her face is split and so what is being pursued is not full recognition between the author and her narrator; *La filla estrangera* features an anonymous girl whose eyes do not meet the audience –hence, recognition here cannot be fully accomplished either.

Before moving on to a more detailed analysis of how the works dialogue with historical discourses, and in order to understand the various weights of the different demands criss-crossing the works by both authors, it should also be noted that these texts and their authors have been received differently in France and Catalonia. Due to the importance of the literary prize that the writer’s first novel received, Najat El Hachmi is mostly known in Catalonia (and elsewhere) as the author of *L’últim patriarca*. Hence, her inscription within the different projects in which she has participated as a member of the Catalan society, such as her collaborations in the mass media, are traversed by her role as a writer. This is translated also in the fact that the majority of critical texts discussing her production concentrate on this novel and not on the other texts she has published. On the contrary, within France Dalila Kerchouche is received as a journalist and her role as a writer is not as prominently highlighted. This explains why in 2018 her novel is not available in the French bookstores,¹⁹⁰ whereas *Mon père, ce harki*, which was published earlier, is. Furthermore, the 2003 account’s importance gets explained by the fact that the text has been published in a pocket edition –as *Espionnes* has been, too, another book that does not elaborate on the literary dimension.

¹⁸⁹ My discussion makes reference to the first editions of the original texts, in Catalan and French.

¹⁹⁰ It is worth noting that *Leila* was placed in the Social sciences section of the library at the Institut du Monde Arabe, in Paris.

Both Najat El Hachmi and Dalila Kerchouche published their first works at the beginning of the new millennium. Because the skeleton of these accounts are experiences of population movement –which in turn produce other kinds of movement– the texts clearly epitomise the globalized fabric of many parts of today’s world. Although movements of peoples, of goods, of languages long predate the era in which we live, the fact that we now have easier access to tools, like the books here analysed, that bear witness to the imprints and the consequences of those movements is of much significance in the analyses of what Arjun Appadurai calls “ethnoscapes”, which help to shed light on the understanding of the intricacies of today’s betwixt societies.

Ethnoscapes, or “landscapes of group identity”, are, according to this critic, “no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous.” (Appadurai 1996: 48) Precisely because of the heterogeneity of which Appadurai speaks, which informs all kinds of identity constructions, any exercise seeking to analyse processes of identity formation –as is one of the aims of this research– must forcefully contemplate a thorough contextualisation of each of the processes. Hence the importance of dissecting the fabric of the France and the Catalonia of the turn of the century, in which the accounts are embedded. As was made clear in the introduction, the architecture of the present chapter is different from the previous ones because it does not interweave the analyses of both authors’ works, but presents my study of El Hachmi’s production first, followed by my readings of Kerchouche’s texts. This choice aims to pay enough critical attention to each of the contexts in which the authors’ work are inscribed. After each of the individual thorough analyses, I will close the chapter by weaving together my concluding remarks about both El Hachmi’s and Kerchouche’s oeuvre.

4. 1 The “Mora” Writes Back¹⁹¹

Writing in Catalan to a Catalan audience and choosing to identify herself as part of those who claim such an identity marker, Najat El Hachmi is presenting herself as a powerful interlocutor in a context, the Catalan society of the new millennium, that, I argue, benefited a great deal from the reflections that she puts on paper and into circulation. Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, who situates El Hachmi as a “diasporic writer”, signals the importance of this author’s texts in changing the way in which representations about experiences of migration from Morocco to Spain (including Catalonia) have been conveyed through literature. *Jo també sóc catalana* marks the beginning of a shift of paradigm to do with migrated subjects that will go from “being narrated” into “narrating” (Fernández Parrilla 2014). In her doctoral dissertation, historian Aitana Guia studied the multi-layered contributions of contemporary migrants to Spanish societies. Upon discussing the role played by writers not born within Spanish territory, she claims that “[i]n pushing Spain’s understanding of community belonging”, these writers “are opening space for themselves” whilst at the same time “counterbalancing the stale, ubiquitous approach to immigration in academia and the media, an approach based on statistics and policy.” (2011: 293)¹⁹²

This idea is encapsulated in El Hachmi’s description of her visit to a high school, as an adult:

En els vostres ulls s’hi reflecteix la sorpresa. No us esperàveu que fos així, potser us imaginàveu una noia envoltada de teles amplíssimes i amb la mirada baixa. [...] Us van dir que vindria una noia a parlar de la seva experiència com a nouvinguda, sempre nouvinguda des de fa setze anys. [...] En dies com aquests en els quals es parla tant d’immigració, no deixem enrere els estereotips, la realitat val més retenir-la com l’hem coneguda per primera vegada, és més fàcil que pensar que tot canvia i nosaltres no copsem tanta complexitat.

Al cap d’una estona de monòleg avorrit parlant del mateix tema, us deixo que pregunteu vosaltres. Al cap i a la fi, per a molts és la primera vegada que coneixeu un immigrant.

(2004: 61)

¹⁹¹ The title of this section seeks to dialogue with the seminal work in postcolonial studies *The Empire Writes Back*. Just as the analyses of the authors of this important volume are caught up in power logics inscribed within the colonial paradigm (see Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1989), I read El Hachmi’s work as an exercise of contestation that also aims to rethink the colonial leas that vertebrates Moroccan-Spanish relations –sustained upon logics of alterity. In the Introduction I already explained the meaning of the word *mora*. By using it in my title, in inverted comas, I intend to highlight the gesture of rewriting that informs El Hachmi’s texts.

¹⁹² Guia also claims that Muslim immigrants “have forced the government to create and flesh out laws on religious pluralism and review the state’s involvement with religious bodies, including the Catholic Church.” (2011: 21)

This fragment is particularly important because El Hachmi is offering a radiography of the Catalonia in which she grew up, which is still coming to terms with “newcomers” like her –whilst, at the same time, calling upon that Catalonia to posit questions about those newcomers which, in turn, constitutes a self-interrogating strategy. In writing about the surprise she identifies in her audience, El Hachmi is portraying the stereotypes through which she is being read, stereotypes that, as she discusses somewhere else, are embedded in the imaginary of the Reconquista and the Orientalist regard with which many Western societies conceive the so-called “Arab world”, constructed as a monolithic entity. As a consequence of the impact of these stereotypical understandings, autochthonous Catalan folks think of people who, like El Hachmi, come from the Southern rim of the Mediterranean in terms of alterity, hence their surprise upon realising that the woman they have in front of them does not fit into those clear-cut Othering parameters and speaks to them in their own language and with their own codes. Later in the account she tells her son that many times people have told her that she is “different” –that is, that she is not the stereotypical (Muslim) Other coming from the Maghreb–, to which she replies, as I already stated in the Introduction: “Jo no sóc diferent, no ho vull ser, vull ser com tots els immigrants, mentre algú els discrimini. Quan en fereixes un, denigres el seu nom i el tipífiques, m’estàs ferint a mi, m’estàs denigrant.” (91) By refusing to accept that difference, as we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, she is indeed signalling the fallacious ground on which the “immigrants” are perceived in Catalonia.

Najat tells her son that she spent many years “sense terra, sense identitat i sense sentir-[s]e de cap lloc” (*ibid.*), and it is because of statements like this one that we understand the importance of the account that we are reading, in which she is claiming a land, an identity and a home in Catalonia, whilst at the same time problematizes these concepts. Read together with the above cited quotations, we understand that her demand is also inscribed within a larger claim, which ties in with Fernández Parrilla’s analysis. By stating that she wants to be “com tots els immigrants”, El Hachmi is highlighting that her inscription within Catalonia cannot be felicitous unless the abstract construction of the migrant Other is undone and contested.¹⁹³ The

¹⁹³ In this respect it is worth remembering that, as signalled by Max Doppelbauer and Stephanie Fleischmann, “[e]n los tiempos del Medievo tardío y la temprana Edad Moderna, después de muchos siglos de hibridación cultural y medieval, el ‘país fronterizo’ se convirtió en el baluarte de la Europa Cristiana frente al Islam norteafricano dando lugar a la idea del antagonismo bélico con el ‘moro’ en el imaginario español durante la ‘reconquista’ tardía. De esta manera, la demarcación con respecto al Islam norteafricano se convirtió en un elemento fundacional de la identidad española mientras que España se conformaba como Estado moderno. La unión del territorio peninsular iba acompañada de actos de exclusión del componente cultural islámico-norteafricano y judío. El ‘moro’ se convirtió, de esta forma, en el ‘otro histórico’ por excelencia de la cultura española (comp. Goytisolo 1998). Se lo combatió primero como enemigo externo (continuando la ‘reconquista’

way she expresses this is as significant as the content of the ideas that she is inscribing in her text. In the scene of her visit to a classroom –which, as has been signalled, is an important space inasmuch as it is a key site of socialisation–, the author chooses to somehow include the exchange that unfolds within the classroom, but she is the main voice filtering what happens. There are no dialogues, no objective descriptions, but her analysis of how her presence and her talk are received. By directing her words at these people, tinged with an undertone of reproach, and speaking straight at them, she is launching a powerful plea.

Taking the cue from Fernández Parrilla’s argument, the 2004 text by El Hachmi represents the change from being “written over” (being considered a mere figure in studies aiming at dissecting the societal fabric of a country) to becoming an active agent in explaining not only what lies behind the act of migrating but especially what happens after those “figures” install themselves in their new territory. That is why Zovko notes that very often writers launch themselves into being “cultural decoders”. We can indeed read El Hachmi as such,¹⁹⁴ for within her account she inscribes the customs and traditions that inform her culture of origin but also and especially she explains how these get moulded with the ones adopted by her in her Catalonia –an explanation which is filtered through the cultural lenses that have been passed on to her by her family (Zovko in Fernández Parrilla 2014: 273). That is why Núria Codina Solà states that the interest in El Hachmi’s work is partly to be sought in the fact that it “vehicul[a] una penetrante crítica cultural y social tanto del país de origen como del país de acogida.” (2011: 196)

The year 2004 was a symbolic date in Catalonia, for that year Barcelona held the Fòrum Internacional de les Cultures, an event that presented itself as a celebration of diversity with which the Barcelona City Hall, the government of Catalonia and the Spanish state wanted to signal their willingness to deal with the societal transformation galvanized by the arrival of migrants into Spanish, and more specifically Catalan, territory.¹⁹⁵ The Fòrum was a

en campañas expansivas en la costa norteafricana e instalando allí fortificaciones españolas) y luego como enemigo interno, a través de la discriminación, persecución y expulsión de los moriscos.” (2011: 2)

¹⁹⁴ It is worth noting that at the time Najat El Hachmi was working as a cultural mediator in the town of Granollers.

¹⁹⁵ We should not forget that the new millennium was profoundly marked by 9/11, which, according to Aitana Guàrdia left an imprint not only in the way in which migrants from Islamic countries were perceived but prompted another and more profound look towards them in order to understand not only the figures regarding immigration but also the interaction between Muslims and Christians: “Anthropological and ethnographic studies, which tended to look at areas of contact, borderlands, and integration, broadened the picture [...]. More refined sociological studies analysed the structural underpinnings of migration. In cultural studies, research looked at immigrant culture and native/immigrant cross-fertilization.” (2011: 16)

problematic event, for its celebration led to the construction of a massive site that was built at the expense of the neighbourhood of La Mina, a very impoverished neighbourhood at the threshold of Barcelona and Sant Adrià del Besòs –which in itself constituted an attempt at undertaking a process of gentrification, although rather unsuccessful, of the area. Problematic as it might have been, though, its very celebration was a manifestation of the fact that there was a debate, within Catalonia, about issues related to the diversity that comes from the mixing of several cultural traditions, a reality in the Catalonia of the turn of the century. What El Hachmi’s account help us to comprehend is that it does not suffice simply to have the debate, but it is mandatory to consider the voices that conform such a mixing. In this respect, the literary scene can be a good yardstick against which to measure this issue. In one of the volumes of the already mentioned *Atlas de la inmigración marroquí en España*, the one which saw the light that same year 2004, Fernández Parrilla and Irene González wrote:

Tras *¿Dónde estás Ahmed?* (2000), el siguiente eslabón en la imparable evolución del reflejo literario del hecho migratorio marroquí a España llegará cuando se manifieste esa generación *beur* española que está a punto de expresarse, cuando Ahmed deje de ser un mero título de un libro para convertirse en el autor de la obra, en la que puede que nos hable casi seguro de cuestiones relacionadas con las peripecias migratorias de su familia para muy pronto hablarnos de lo que nos hablaría cualquier otro escritor español.¹⁹⁶

(2004: 425)¹⁹⁷

Some years later, Fernández Parrilla himself declared his inability to foresee that “Ahmed would go on to write in Catalan, instead of in Spanish, and that instead of an Ahmed writing, it would be a Leila or a Najat. Now it seems just so obvious that the place where this was going to happen would be in Catalan society, and that only a woman (from the Rif region) could

¹⁹⁶ Along these same lines, it is worth noting that as remarked by Marta Segarra, many critics of the francophone Maghrebi literature held that this literature –and also so-called “littérature Beur” and literature written by Maghrebi women– went through what was perceived as an initial more ethnographic phase, based on the biographical coordinates of their authors. These considerations deemed the texts as having less literary value than others eschewing the autobiographical components. However, as contested by Segarra, there have been many Maghrebi (and) female voices such as those of Djebbar, Memissi or Cixous that developed the autobiographical voice from a very elaborate literary standpoint, which strengthens the literary value of this writing mode (see “La construction d’un sujet-femme dans une perspective méditerranéenne”, Segarra 2010: 19-31).

¹⁹⁷ Along the same lines, Campoy-Cubillo states: “Rafael Torres’s *Yo, Mohamed* (1995), and Pasqual Moreno Torregrosa’s and Mohamed El Gheryb’s *Dormir al raso* (1994) [...] recompilation of testimonials, as Daniela Flesler has indicated, attempted to give a voice to the immigrant without reflecting critically on the issues that speaking for others entail [...]. While these works are interesting inasmuch as they may help us describe the role of the Maghrebian immigrant in the Spanish imaginary, they can hardly be considered to be a direct expression of Spanish, postcolonial identity.” (2012: 129)

make it.” (2018) Parrilla’s text overviews recent literary publications by authors of Moroccan descent who write in Spanish and Catalan and that have started to create a corpus of Maghrebi authors writing in the languages of Spain, a corpus that, contrarily to what happens in the francophone scene, was practically non-existent before the new millenium –an absence that Parrilla relates to “the particularities of this colonial context” and also “to the general absence of Hispanophone literatures within the field of postcolonial studies, where issues related to the modern Spanish colonies are not often discussed”. In perspective, 2004 is marked by Parrilla as a starting point in the real “triggering of a new literature written by Moroccans in Spanish (and Catalan)”, which “constitutes a diaspora that is intimately connected with the former condition of the region as a Spanish colony.” (*ibid.*)

As I have previously explained 2004 was the year when El Hachmi’s account got published and also the year when Laila Karrouch published *De Nador a Vic*.¹⁹⁸ These two texts are important inasmuch as they bring the Amazigh identity to the foreground and also lend themselves to being read from a postcolonial perspective, as the reading of the authors in Catalonia is embedded in an imaginary informed by a colonial past. Parrilla focuses on the title of Kerrouch’s text to highlight that “[i]t alludes [...] to the condition of the north of Morocco as a former territory colonized by Spain. Moreover, it also signals a subaltern indigeneity of Berbers/Amazigh within Morocco, which is even more pronounced in the case of the Riffians.” (*ibid.*)

Because she chooses to tackle her Amazigh inheritance, which will manifest itself in different forms as we shall see, El Hachmi’s production is a vindication of the localised diversity that informs what sometimes is abstractly constructed as diversity in a loose way. The author chooses to highlight the specificities of her inherited condition of being born Amazigh and

¹⁹⁸ Both *Jo també sóc catalana* and *De Nador a Vic* were published by Columna in what can allegedly be read as the editorial house’s position to stand for these “new” voices arising in Catalonia and conformed in non-Catalan geographies. It is worth mentioning that both works had a big circulation in the Catalan context –Karrouch’s even became part of the syllabus of secondary schools–, but El Hachmi’s was never translated into Spanish. Margarida Castellano argues that the lack of Spanish translation for El Hachmi’s first work is due to the fact that the essay is addressed “al lector model, català” (2018: 161). Whilst Karrouch’s *De Nador a Vic* became, in its Spanish translation, *Laila*, a title that erases its geographical specificities, both inscribed within very particular cultural scenarios that are part of bigger ones –i.e. the Moroccan kingdom and the Spanish state. On his part, commenting on the lack of impact that *L’últim patriarca* had in the Spanish media, Cristián H. Ricci has noted that the Spanish version lacked the “plastificidad [sic] lingüística del original (concisión, exactitud y fuerza expresiva)” (2010: 88). Castellanos believes that, like the 2004 essay, El Hachmi’s first novel was also mainly directed to Catalan audiences, which would explain the difference in the reception that the work had in the Catalan and the Spanish contexts. For a reception of El Hachmi as a (non-)Catalan author in the Spanish media see Castellano Sanz 2018: 154-157.

having grown up in Catalonia, which serves as a cue to reflect on the consequences of colonial practices, although the Catalan and the Riffian contexts are, of course, very different scenarios.

4.1.1 The Literary Text as a Questioning Tool

In his analysis of the importance of El Hachmi's works, Fernández Parrilla tells us that “[h]er works deal [...] with the powerful reluctance of our societies to assume a new reality, and to acknowledge that many of the current migrations are a consequence of European and North American economic, political and military interventions in those territories.” (2018) We saw in earlier chapters how this reluctance to engage in such critical thinking is translated in the way El Hachmi and her family are received in Vic, where people would tell them “ja sou d'aquí”, but at the same time engage in a campaign against the building of a Mosque once the Muslim population in town gets bigger.¹⁹⁹ As has already been stated, El Hachmi's account is particularly nuanced because, with the publication of *Jo també sóc catalana*, she is erecting herself as an interlocutor in the debate about the meaning of Catalan identity. In contrast with the reflections voiced by Kerchouche in *De Nador a Vic*, which adopt a didactic tone on how the author feels about understanding herself as both Amazigh and Catalan, El Hachmi's are much more rebellious and thus, as noted by Jessica A. Folkart, engage “cloaked prejudice against immigrants”, hence her text “confronts the paternalistic rhetoric and contradictory actions of Catalan politicians and, moreover, parallels the marginalization of Catalonia by Spain with the relegation of Amazigh identity in Morocco.” (2013: 362)

In the following quotation, which belongs to the final wrapping thoughts of Karrouch's account, we realize to what extent the author's reflections on the cultural space she occupies eschew any kind of problematizations, and resort to homogenized ideas about what cultures are –what does it mean that the two cultures to which Karrouch makes reference are “opposed”?:

Vic és i ha estat molt important per a mi igual que la meva ciutat natal, Nador, sento que forma part de mi; i jo formo part de Vic i Catalunya, per què no dir-ho?, em sento catalana i ben

¹⁹⁹ It is worth mentioning that Vic is where the racist party Plataforma per Catalunya was born in 2002. This party obtained considerable results in the 2007 Catalan elections, although their political strength has considerably weakened and they barely have political representation today.

privilegiada de poder conèixer dues cultures diferents, oposades, amb el seu encant i la seva màgia cadascuna. [...]

No he perdut la meva cultura ni les meves arrels, sinó que he guanyat una altra cultura i uns altres costums. M'agrada fer un bon cuscús per dinar i un entrepà de pa amb tomàquet per sopar. Per què no?

(2004: 149-150)

Contrarily to Karrouch, El Hachmi's text is informed by much more nuanced reflections that allow the reader to comprehend the complexities in navigating an interstitial cultural space that is traversed, furthermore, by affiliations that belong to non-hegemonic cultural traditions, such as the Amazigh and the Catalan ones. The difference in the way in which they unravel their in-betweenness lets itself be felt in the kind of questions both authors formulate. Thus, whilst Karrouch's are really rhetorical phrasings, El Hachmi fills her 2004 account with questions that do aim at interrogating the local Catalan population that will read her text. The question asked by her son Rida might as well be directed at this Catalonia that makes him wonder about his legitimacy to claim a space in it.

Because of the critical approach and the multi-axial portrait of Maghrebi-Amazigh immigration into Catalonia that the text allows to draw, *Jo també sóc catalana* can be read in dialogue with Candel's seminal work *Els altres catalans* –a reading, as we learnt, facilitated by the fact that El Hachmi was responsible for prefacing a special uncensored edition of the work. Albeit originally written in Spanish, *Els altres catalans* was rapidly translated into Catalan by Ramon Folch i Camarasa and it is in this language that it became a best seller. Guia situates this work as a precedent in the literature in Catalan written by immigrants (2007: 230), whose peak occurred “after heated, often bitter debate on the January 2000 Immigration Law.” (2011: 286) Within the Catalonia of the turn of the century, literature became an important element in contributing to such a debate and counteracting the focus of the media, tilted, according to Guia, towards “‘illegal migration’ and border permeability.” (*ibid.*) Like Candel's text, Guia reads El Hachmi's 2004 account as an attempt to tell Catalan society “que ha de canviar les seves formes de fer, que ha d'ampliar el concepte de ‘nosaltres’ perquè [people like El Hachmi] no s'hi senten inclosos” (2007: 234). Candel and El Hachmi share the fact that they come from impoverished backgrounds. Guia's analysis of the reception of the works published in Catalonia by immigrant writers –although she reads El Hachmi, like Karrouch, as belonging to

the so-called 1.5 generation²⁰⁰– considers the class axis,²⁰¹ for it determines, in her view, the way these writers are addressed in public:

El Hachmi, [...] i tants i tants altres immigrants de pells brunes i classe treballadora veuen com, dia sí, dia també, molts catalans utilitzen la llengua com a barrera infranquejable per demarcar la identitat, per marcar diferències, per reafirmar, un cop més, que el “nosaltres” no només es de neix per “viure i treballar a Catalunya”²⁰², per “sentir-se català”, per “parlar català”, sinó que hi ha també un fonament important de religió, raça i classe social: blancs, cristians i professionals primer.

(243)²⁰³

We saw how this was explored by El Hachmi when she recounts the episode in which her son is spoken to in Spanish in the supermarket, an attitude that the author reads as racist.²⁰⁴ The language question is fundamental in the Catalan scenario, as it is an element of paramount importance in the understanding of the Catalan identity.²⁰⁵ In a text entitled “El ‘altre català’” –included in *Inmigrantes y trabajadores*, published by Planeta, the same publishing house for El Hachmi’s *L’últim patriarca*–, Candel reflects upon these issues when commenting on the success of his *Els altres catalans*:

²⁰⁰ The concept “generation 1.5” was coined by Ruben Rumbaut. Guia claims that because both Karrouch and El Hachmi “tenen memòries molt vívides de la seva família i vida al Marroc”, “han experimentat el viatge migratori com a una pèrdua, cosa que les apropa a la primera generació. Però a diferència dels seus pares, elles foren escolaritzades en la societat d’acollida, amb la qual cosa han ‘guanyat’ molts més atributs de la nova cultura, entre ells la llengua.” (2007: 243)

²⁰¹ The class axis is also what tends to determine whether someone perceived as non-local is referred to as “estranger” or as “immigrant”, as pointed out by Mary Nash (see footnote 87).

²⁰² This motto was launched by Jordi Pujol, who was the president of Catalonia between 1980 and 2003.

²⁰³ In *L’últim patriarca*, the narrator explains that her group of friends from school is united by their familial background, which means that in their households similar experiences unfold, all connected with their somehow “subalternity”: “Totes tres havíem presenciats fenòmens extraordinaris com plats o gots voladors, històries que si les expliques a algú que no ho ha viscut mai no et creuria, et miraria amb sorna i diria au, va, no fotis. [...] A casa meva perquè érem immigrants, a casa de l’amiga u perquè eren pobres” (El Hachmi 2008: 274).

²⁰⁴ The usage of Spanish on the part of local Catalan population to interact with those perceived as foreigners is a complex issue, and it does not always respond to racist attitudes. As hinted in a volume entitled *L’autoestima dels catalans*, in certain instances it might be connected to the fact that Catalan is a “minority” language that Catalan speakers might feel does not elicit the interest of non-natives to learn it, which contributes to a feeling of somewhat low self-esteem. In the section dedicated to language and self-esteem, Bernat Joan i Marí states that within the “comunitat lingüística catalana podem trobar [...] diglòssia interlingüística”, whereby Catalan is perceived as less valuable than Spanish, to which Catalan relates in a subordinate relationship (2003: 89). This would explain the fact that Catalan-speakers might decide to “hide” their Catalan in specific situations.

²⁰⁵ As noted by Zapata-Barrero, the contemporary fabric of Catalonia, which he defines as a “[t]erritori d’immigració per excel·lència”, “s’ha construït, políticament, econòmicament, socialment i culturalment amb els immigrants, i amb la llengua catalana com a signe d’identitat.” (2012: 15) For a nuanced analysis of the construction of Catalonia as a nation see the work by sociologist Montserrat Guibernau (2002, 2009).

Els altres catalans [...] consiguió dar un nombre digno a una cantidad inmensa de habitantes de Cataluña que hasta entonces sufrían una discriminación titular, aparte de la social y racial. La diversa nomenclatura usada a su entorno abarcaba todas las gamas. La insultante: “mursianus”, “pa i ceba”, “andalusus”, “charnegos”; la despectiva: “castellanufos”; la racial: “no catalanes”; la burocrática: “inmigrantes”; la científica: “castellano-parlantes”; la de arriba abajo: “esas gentes”... La definición “altres catalans” fue la panacea, por decirlo así, lo que sirvió de moderador en el conflicto. Y ha quedado como denominación –de un modo amplísimo y general– de todo aquel que vive en Cataluña sin haber nacido en ella, pese a que yo empleé el término para designar, más que nada, a una masa inmigrante proletaria y subdesarrollada.

(1972: 15)²⁰⁶

The question of all-encompassing categorizations will be further explored in relation to the harkis since, as we know, the very label that has served to articulate the identity construction of several generations connected with the Algerian war is in fact imprecise and interrelated to other labels. Focusing on the Catalan scenario, and following on the lead offered by Candel, we can better comprehend what lies behind the phrase “Els nous altres catalans”, used by El Hachmi in her prologue to Candel’s reedition. Such a denomination also considers the class perspective,²⁰⁷ which explains the linguistic scenario whereby Spanish is used as a language to mark the position of alterity of those perceived as foreigners to Catalonia.

This position of alterity is marked not only by the language dynamics put in place by the autochthonous population but it also becomes physical. As we learnt with the case of the harkis, relocated in camps at the margins of the cities in which they had to establish themselves once they got to France, El Hachmi’s production also reflects on this kind of population distribution that speaks of power relations. As we saw in the previous chapter, in *La filla estrangera*, when the narrator recounts her search for a bigger flat that can accommodate her mother and her “cousin-husband”, she writes that unable to find a flat downtown they have to look for it “fora del centre”. We learn that this is the space occupied by “els ‘de les olives’, els immigrants que fa més temps que nosaltres que són aquí però que no es consideren a si mateixos immigrants

²⁰⁶ Candel also coined the neologism *acatalans* to refer to the descendants of “els altres catalans”, who “s’empipen davant del dubte de la seva catalanitat, una catalanitat atípica que pot semblar apàtica, una catalanitat que per a ells és com una cosa resolta i arraconada, amb escassos matisos de discussió. [...] Amb ells, amb la generació ‘acatalana’, acaba la història de la immigració a Catalunya.” (Candel in Espasa *et al.* 2009: 55)

²⁰⁷ Coined by philosopher Adela Cortina in the 1990s, the term *aporophobia* –which is different from *racism* or *xenophobia*– encapsulates this idea, as it refers to hostile attitudes towards poor people.

pel simple fet de tenir el mateix carnet d'identitat que la gent d'aquí 'de tota la vida'." (2015: 85) Whilst the narrator –following the trend that informs El Hachmi's fiction– does not explicitly mention the “altres catalans”, this is a clear reference to those who, like Candel, arrived in Catalonia coming from other parts of Spain. The use of quotation marks within the narrator's discourse indicates to what extent categorizations such as “els de tota la vida” are still in place in the conformation of the societal discourse of Catalonia. By presenting these categorizations and elaborating on them, El Hachmi is, via her fiction, inscribing herself in the ongoing debate about the questions that we saw conform her autobiographical account.

In *Memories of the Maghreb: Transnational Identities in Spanish Cultural Production*, Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo focuses on the Catalan scenario and acknowledges the corpus of contemporary texts written by people claiming ties to the Maghreb within Catalonia: “the nascent Maghrebian postcolonial literature in Catalan and in Spanish certainly has a significant role to play not only in giving voice to the new immigrant communities, but also in helping reconfigure the existing nationalities in the peninsula.” (2012: 141) In this chapter I focus on the extra-literary value that I see in El Hachmi's works, which is nonetheless inextricably linked to their literary dimension, not only because as literature they are cultural elements that circulate within the context in which they are published, but also because of the literary journey covered by El Hachmi.

Her first book takes on a straight-forward demanding tone and is used by the author to frontally interpellate her Catalan neighbours so that they reconsider how they define Catalanness, using her own experiences as the core of her reflections. With her jump to fiction she is clearly situating her demands within the artistic circle. Because of the award she received for *L'últim patriarca*, El Hachmi became an undeniable voice within the Catalan literary scenario –her prize signified “a true turning point from a history of invisibility”, in Parrilla's view, for authorial voices that expressed themselves in Spain and were connected to Morocco (2018)–, despite the problematic nature of her work's reception. The fact that she continued to dwell on the universe of migration in *La filla estrangera*, and later in *Mare de llet i mel*, can be read, apart from El Hachmi's wish to explore topics of her interest, as her willingness to insist on the idea that the stories of people who have traversed the Mediterranean and have to deal with the consequences of such a displacement are also part of the fabric of Catalonia.

The Ramon Llull prize meant her consolidation as a writer, and she used that position to elaborate on that idea.²⁰⁸ Her fictional works signify a more nuanced take on topics such as language, an element which, we already know, is highly significant in the Catalan context. Thus, the way she deals with the language of her mother, a syncretic Tamazight, how she incorporates it and combines it with Catalan into the different works analysed here is of much relevance because her strategies are connected with her aim to give visibility to what lies behind that language, the cultural background that surrounds it and also the people who understand themselves through that very background and who now live in Catalonia. El Hachmi will go from making clear and rebellious statements about the minority status of both Tamazight and Catalan languages to perform a process of “imazighation” of the Catalan language in her fiction –through the incorporation of Tamazight words into the text written in Catalan using the Latin Alphabet, and also through the usage of strategies that bring to the surface the orality embedded in her cultural tradition of origin.

In an article entitled “Respostes per viure junts i juntes. Les polítiques d’immigració a Catalunya”,²⁰⁹ the then Secretary for Immigration of the Catalan government, Oriol Amorós wrote about the societal impact of immigrants arriving in Catalonia at the turn of the century, a concern for the government to the extent that the year 2008 the National Covenant for Immigration was signed by the government and other economic and social agents “amb l’objectiu de respondre a les demandes que planteja la societat catalana respecte a la transformació demogràfica viscuda pel fet migratori i les seves conseqüències.” (Generalitat 2008) Amorós states that in the changing Catalonia of 2008, “[n]ecessitem la immigració i, al

²⁰⁸ In a literary supplement edited on the occasion of the celebration of the Day of the Book of the year 2008 journalist Jaume Vidal wrote a literary review of El Hachmi’s novel entitled “Els catalans ja tenen noves fesomies”. In it, we read: “El país començava a adonar-se que el concepte restringit de català quedava en desús. Els catalans incorporaven al seu univers identitari nous accents, nous pensaments, noves tonalitats de pell i noves fesomies. Catalunya s’incorporava al segle XXI” (in Castellano Sanz 2018: 153). The question of how literature circulates and the reception of foreign authors in Catalonia was something tackled by El Hachmi in her 2004 essay. Upon commenting on a literary prize that she got as a youngster, and the repercussion that it had in the local media, she declares: “en el fons sentia que el que menys importava era que jo escrivia, ser d’on era passava per davant de si tenia talent o no” (2004: 44).

²⁰⁹ As noted by the author, Morocco is one of the most important countries of origin for migrants arriving in Catalonia between the years 2000 and 2007. This would explain why the image that illustrates the article is a group of veiled women, portrayed from behind, an image that seems to be problematic if analysed in accordance with the ideas presented here, as it somehow dissolves their capacity to engage in the dialogue that, Amorós explains, the government of Catalonia is trying to initiate with Catalonia’s newcomers.

mateix temps, la problematitzem.” (2008: 7)²¹⁰ In order to resolve such a contradiction, Amorós believes in what he phrases as a common public culture: “Si es vol que aquesta diversitat no creï noves desigualtats, ni divideixi la societat, i si es vol que el projecte de nació catalana continuï sent el referent compartit per a tota la població, s’ha de garantir un espai comú de convivència, de reconeixement i de participació.” (12)²¹¹ The process of building that common space continues to this day, since Catalonia is still an important site for immigration. The fact that this kind of reflections are voiced from political spheres is important to the extent that, as expressed by the former Director of the Jaume Bofill Foundation, Jordi Sánchez i Picanyol, “[e]ntre tots [els responsables polítics del nostre país] han de fer [...] possible el fet que definitivament en aquest país el risc de fractura cultural i d’escissió per col·lectius de procedència, no torni a estar mai més sobre la taula. És l’única garantia que Catalunya pugui aspirar a desenvolupar amb èxit el seu projecte nacional.” (2009: 12) Sánchez i Picanyol brings to the forefront, as Amorós does, the contradiction sustaining the societat basis of Catalunya, whereby:

[h]em estat [...] un país d’immigració²¹²[, p]erò [...] malgrat la importància de la immigració, no hem estat capaços de construir un relat, una memòria col·lectiva com a nació, amb la immigració com a base. Aquest és un punt dèbil o com a mínim que ens debilita davant la nova realitat migratòria. És indiscutible que la immigració forma part de la memòria familiar de la majoria de les llars del nostre país. Però no hem sabut bastir una memòria col·lectiva sobre la immigració.²¹³

(*ibid.*)

²¹⁰ As signalled by Clua i Fainé, Catalonia is “un territorio caracterizado precisamente por ser una *tierra de recepción de inmigración*. A lo largo de su historia, Cataluña ha recibido un importante flujo de población, hasta el punto de que se ha armado que la inmigración es parte integral del sistema moderno catalán de reproducción (Cabré, 1999)”. The author claims that, at the beginning of the new millennium “se estima que [...] dos tercios de la población son ellos mismos, sus padres o sus abuelos, de procedencia inmigrante.” (2011: 63; emphasis in the original)

²¹¹ “Convivència” is a key concept in the political project of Mohammed Chaib’s Catalonia, as indicated by the title of his 2006 book *Ètica per una convivència*. Chaib was born in Morocco and lived in Catalonia after the age of 4; he became an MP for the Partit Socialista de Catalunya from 2003 to 2010.

²¹² As a result of the economic crisis that affected Europe, important flows of people emigrated from Spain (and Catalonia) at the beginning of the 21st century, which had an impact on the societal tissue of the Spanish state (see Herrera Ceballos 2014). In previous centuries, however, Catalonia also saw the societal impact of emigration.

²¹³ This “marginalisation” of the collective memory gets translated, or rather can be understood as a result of a marginalisation at a legal level, to which immigrant people are subjected. As noted in *Fabricar l’immigrant*, the “ley de extranjería” legitimises the unequal treatment of the Spanish population, and it contravenes democratic values and international law (2009: 13). Žižek argues that “[n]o se admite públicamente el mensaje racista y sexista [...] pero éste se articula en una serie de indirectas y dobles mensajes.” (Žižek in Espasa *et al.* 2009: 14) This ties in with the idea of structural racism as expressed by Houria Bouteldja, analysed in earlier chapters.

I believe that with her texts, El Hachmi is aiming to make room for that common space articulated by an axis of diversity and at the same time helping to conform that collective memory, within Catalonia, that incorporates the stories of people not born on Catalan soil.²¹⁴ Because her works incorporate traditions, customs, ideas, stories that inform the every-day life of people that have come to inhabit Catalonia, hers is an important tool aimed at facilitating that space of recognition for difference –what in earlier chapters, and following Avtar Brah’s terminology, we termed “diasporic space”. El Hachmi’s call for a nuanced understanding of the intricacies that accompany any act of migration is of much relevance because it focuses on undoing homogenized ideas about any cultural identity. In stating that she understands herself as Catalan, amongst other things, and doing so by means of the Catalan language, she is advocating for a common cultural ground that incorporates those customs, traditions and ideas she discusses, which are inextricably linked to the language that she inherited from her mother.

4.1.2 The Other Language, the Language of the Other

The presence of the Tamazight language lets itself be felt differently in the different texts by El Hachmi considered here. In her 2004 account, where El Hachmi speaks of language as a communicative tool –she describes Catalan as a vital necessity in order to access the intimacy of her new world (38)–, the author speaks of it in a direct way with an almost activist tone. As I explored in Chapter 3, she compares Tamazight to Arabic, to which she refers as “la llengua dels opressors”, and notes that Catalan, too “fou en altres temps perseguida i menystinguda” (27). Because he will wind up somehow renouncing both Arabic and Tamazight, in his incorporation of the autochthonous languages of Catalonia (Catalan and Spanish), the question that Rida poses to her mother (“Jo sóc català, mama?”) becomes even more poignant and meaningful. As indicated in the title of the section of the account dedicated to languages, entitled “Llengües maternes”, El Hachmi claims to have two mother tongues, Tamazight and

²¹⁴ In her essay *Les altres catalanes*, whose title clearly connects with Candel’s seminal book, Margarida Castellano Sanz states that “[l]a importància de la literatura per al tema de la migració [...] sol ser subestimat en les investigacions i els diferents apropaments al tema [...]. Cal, en aquest sentit, reivindicar el poder de la ficció que té la migració, per la quantitat d’interpretacions a què pot donar lloc i pel poder que suposa la creació literària per tal d’explicar els processos de socialització que construeixen l’acceptació del a migració. Cal, així mateixa, reivindicar el paper de l’escriptor migrant com a cronista d’històries oblidades i desconegudes.” (2018: 43) Castellano reads El Hachmi, together with Agnès Agboton, Laila Kerrouch and Asha Miró as “unides per una triple marginalitat, perquè són [...] dones, immigrades i [...] han triat el català com a mitjà d’expressió.” (17) and, taking Laia Climent’s theorizations as a cue, believes that this makes them inhabit a “triple circumstància subalterna” (18). Although I think that Castellano’s mobilization of the “marginality” of these women is quite problematic, I find it important that she emphasizes the manifold value attached to the literary production of women who write in Catalan and who have affiliations to several cultural traditions.

Catalan. The latter one is presented as her adopted language (47), something which problematizes the very notion of mother tongue, as has already been discussed in the earlier chapter. What is worth noting is that following this quotation's cue, we understand that El Hachmi's language of writing was traversed, at the beginning of her literary career, by a revindicative will. As previously analysed, she understood Catalan and Tamazight to be "lengües germanes", linked by a shared condition of having been persecuted.²¹⁵

Almost thirty years after the end of Franco's dictatorship, which signified, on paper, the end of the persecution towards the Catalan language and put an end to its invisibility within the Spanish territory, El Hachmi is using that very same language, which she did not inherit at birth –hence is not part of "what was given" to her, to use Hannah Arendt's formulation– to write (to make room within the language, to open a space within written history) about those who, like "els de les olives", belong outside the centre, as they are read in terms of alterity on the Northern rim of the Mediterranean. And as it happens, she is writing about people that are conformed by a cultural tradition that is in its turn "otherized", something that further nuances her exercise of recuperation –and because of the many creases that also vertebrate the harki scenario, which make of the harkis also a sort of "the Other of the Other", the comparison between the two authors of this research and their works demonstrates which different strategies can be put in place to compensate for this relegated position that Amazigh immigrants in Catalonia and harkis in France occupy in the historical hegemonic discourses of these countries.

The raw reflections, interpellations and ironic straight-forward comments unfolded by El Hachmi in *Jo també sóc catalana* get transformed in her fiction, where she balances differently the weight of Tamazight, eminently oral, by adding its intangible dimension to her texts. The importance of oral accounts and practices of storytelling is already highlighted in the author's first publication. Much like *Mon père, ce harki* is punctuated by the formula "li fat mef", which reiterates the importance of the past for the harki community, *Jo també sóc catalana* is traversed by the expression "explica la llegenda", which foregrounds the importance of the oral tradition for the Imazighen. This trait is also present in El Hachmi's first novel, punctuated by

²¹⁵ We must bear in mind that this was published in the year 2004. More than ten years later after the publication of *Jo també sóc catalana* Tamazight language is taught in Moroccan schools, although as signalled by Jordi Aguadé "eso no implica, sin embargo, que en zonas berberófonas la enseñanza se imparta en bereber: simplemente se pretende que los escolares marroquíes puedan aprender esta lengua" (2008: 283).

legends and rumours, which are also part of the novel's fabric, and where the role of storytelling is first and foremost reserved for the mother of the narrator: "la mare sempre explica que..." (2008: 118).

In this respect, El Hachmi's and Kerchouche's fiction share the fact of bringing women to the fore as responsible for the storytelling and hence the passing on of information; about the family but also about tales and stories that conform the cultural imaginary of the protagonists and their communities. That is why they can be read as important figures in guarding the so-called "tradition". In fact, both El Hachmi and Kerchouche have published works that, albeit outside the corpus of this research, deserve to be mentioned. As I have already pointed out, *Mare de llet i mel* focuses on the life of Fatima, who we can read as the maternal figure in the author's earlier novels. Whilst in both *L'últim patriarca* and in *La filla estrangera* the mother does have a weight in the storytelling, her role (and voice) get overshadowed by other more prominent characters, namely the father and the daughter, in the 2008 novel, and the daughter, the "filla estrangera", in the 2015 one. When read in reverse chronological order, we get a more precise idea about the role played by the Amazigh oral tradition within El Hachmi's fictional triptych.

Mare de llet i mel is built upon two narratives, in the first and the third person, that get interwoven and end up recounting the story of a woman born in a Riffian village who crosses the Mediterranean to understand why her husband abandoned her without any explanation. In "Christian territory", where she travels with her daughter Sara, Fatima will try to make Sara part of the genealogy of Amazigh women to which she belongs, but the daughter will follow another path. Back in Morocco, Fatima –for the first time in her works El Hachmi does name her female protagonist²¹⁶ will herself tell her sisters about the unease that this distancing of

²¹⁶ The name choices made by El Hachmi are important here. Sara, Sarah in its English formulation, is linked with both Arab and Hebraic genealogies and also to the issue of maternity, as it plays an important role in regard to semitic genealogy: Muslims would be the descendants of Isma'il, son of Hagar and Abraham, whilst Jews tie themselves with Isaac, the son of Sarah and Abraham. On the other hand, Fatima is both a very common Arabic name (that was used stereotypically by the pied-noir community in French Algeria to refer to "Arab women, [who] were [...] called *fatmas*" in order to efface both their "ethnic-cultural" and individual distinctions [Sivan 1979: 25]) and a prestigious name at the same time. Fatma was the mother of Hassan and Hussein, a fact that makes her the symbolic mother of the Shia, and Fatma was also one of the prophet's daughters, the only one who survived him. In the fictional universe deployed in *Mare de llet i mel* the maternal figure bears the name of a daughter and her daughter, bears a maternal name. The importance of female genealogies in this novel is worth noting, for they contest the masculine line that we saw determines genealogies in the Arabo-Islamic cultural tradition.

her daughter makes her feel.²¹⁷ It is important to note that the subjectivity of women, as recounted in El Hachmi's novel, is profoundly marked by their descendants, because "allò que e[ls] ha sortit del ventre" is described as the ultimate mark of belonging (2018: 116). The story that Fatima shares with her sisters is peppered with descriptions that tell us about the everyday life of other Fatimas and their inner conflicts within a patriarchal regime more or less (self-)imposed, and in this respect an intertextual analysis of the work allows us to identify the referents that El Hachmi has used in her other novels, such as Mercè Rodoreda and Víctor Català. These prominent authors within the literary Catalan canon have conceived characters like la Colometa or Mila who, we know, are used by the narrators of both *L'últim patriarca* and *La filla estrangera* to describe their mothers and their mother's relationship with their surroundings.

The unfiltered voice of Fatima is complemented in the text with the comments of an omniscient narrator that writes thoughts that the protagonist does not dare to confess out loud, having to do with the discovery of desire and her own body. The fact that these get written from a distance and we do not *hear* them from Fatima's lips can be read along gender lines and speaks of the role reserved for the body within the imaginary inherited by Fatima, very much attached to the place where she was born. The body of Fatima is connected to the world of nourishment –the activity of making bread punctuates her life and will allow her to create an affective network outside her native village– and to giving birth. In this respect, we already learnt how the female body is linked with the survival of a nation. In *Mare de llet i mel*, this passing on gets altered by the migration experience, which problematizes the unquestioned acceptance of that inheritance on the part of Sara, Fatima's daughter.

In her constant interpellation to her sisters, the narrator ends up transcending the page and speaking to us, readers, about how the migration has transformed her and has widened the generational differences that are to be found within any familial community –yet again, the written and the oral will serve almost as a hinge between the mother and her daughter. Fatima will only have her spoken words, which she pronounces in Tamazight because, contrarily to

²¹⁷ Thus, the gendered reading of El Hachmi's production whereby female characters do not have names as a way of indicating their lack of voice within a patriarchal system gets reinforced. In this novel, El Hachmi hands the speaking role to a woman that epitomises all those other women whose stories went unsilenced. In the flap of *Mare de llet i mel*, there is a citation by El Hachmi that can be read along these lines: "Em ve de gust fer literatura sobre totes les dones que he conegut perquè estan totalment oblidades. És el material narratiu que tinc, és la realitat que he viscut i a més en vull parlar, perquè està invisibilitzada, i és important escriure'n."

her daughter, she will never manage to command the language of the land to where she follows her husband. El Hachmi decided to include quite a long glossary at the end of the novel that defines all the Tamazight words and expressions that are marked in italics the first time they get inscribed within the body of the narrative. The italics disappear, however, the second time those phrases are used. With this gesture, El Hachmi is not only stressing the idea that she is writing the discourse of Fatima as she tells it to her sisters, that is, in Tamazight, but at the same time she is somehow forcing us readers to get acquainted with a language that is part of the Catalan fabric.

El Hachmi is, thus, introducing us to a woman who speaks in Tamazight but her presentation is mediated by the Catalan language. Because Fatima is illiterate, El Hachmi's gesture can be read as an act of retrieving the stories of many women that, like Fatima, have been relegated to outside the written narratives, and if they have made it to the page, their portrayal has been superficial or biased. With this novel El Hachmi is herself rewriting the scenario that she somehow drafted in her previous novels and looking back to give voice –and ink– to those women that, from the past, give us the tools for a better reading of the present. And if we take this novel as a cue and “read back”, we can appreciate how *L'últim patriarca* and *La filla estrangera* are indeed narrated by voices that are informed by the very linguistic turns and ways of telling displayed by Fatima in *Mare de llet i mel*.

4.1.2.1 The Hybrid Tongue that Reads Back and its Reception

The first part of *L'últim patriarca* is all based on accounts, rumours and legends that are told within the family circle (the origins of which are unknown) or in stories recounted by the mother of the narrator, as I have stated. Thus, rather than absolute certainties, memory, always subjectively filtered, becomes the thread hemming the narrative –like the subjective voice of Fatima, which is informed by her own memories and oblivions, in *Mare de llet i mel*. When we are told about the different “incidents” that have conformed the life of Mimoun, we read that there might be “altres versions no oficials [que] corren per la família” (2008: 34). It is worth noting that the idea that there are official and non-official versions to a story is recurrent in the text: “Les dues versions oficials no han admès mai que... La versió de les tietes...” (62); “segons solen explicar les versions oficials, tot i que quan Mimoun està begut pot arribar-ne a

donar alguna altra.” (71) El Hachmi might be insisting on the thought that any discourse is but a legitimated and agreed upon narration that is brandished as the “true” version of an event.

The oral dimension of El Hachmi’s novel is perceived in several strategies that the author uses in order to produce the effect that what we are reading resembles a transcription of her internal thoughts. Thus, by not adding inverted commas to mark the presence of a dialogue between characters, she is presenting the oral interactions in a horizontal relationship with the narrative voice. The repetition of personal pronouns, much more present in oral speech than in writing, or the sometimes inaccurate syntactical turns of the narrator allow for an easy reading and at the same time inscribe us readers within the textual space, for we become, like Fatima’s sisters, the interlocutors of the narrator’s speech.

This display has not always been well received amongst the critics. Important voices like Sam Abrams’ have read El Hachmi’s intention to emphasize orality as a poor execution conducive to a faulty and simplistic style: “[I] believe that the technical and formal problems of this novel come from a lack of understanding of the difference between orality and simplicity, between oral culture and narrative simplicity” (in Campoy-Cubillo 2012: 139) Sam Abrams’s critique of El Hachmi’s novel is based on the idea that, according to him, the author does not fulfil the promise of an oral tradition. Campoy-Cubillo, however, states that this promise has been in fact imposed on the novel’s reception. This is identifiable on the back cover of the novel itself, where we read that the author uses “els recursos propis de la tradició oral” in order to build a “faula moderna”. However, Campoy-Cubillo states:

Once the preface is over, the performative narrator reverts to a much more literary role to the extent that, while continuing to be a self-conscious narrator –one that explicitly reflects on her role in the novel, the narrator of *L’últim patriarca* never reflects on the physicality of the narrative performance [...] but on the literary intertextuality on which the narration is built. What we actually have in *L’últim patriarca* is a narrator that parodies the exoticism of Western conceptions of Moroccan orature, and then proceeds to explore her Moroccan heritage using a literary voice that is neither European nor Moroccan.

(140-141)

The page-long preface, entitled ‘0’ –and the title is significant because we are *told* that the origins of a patriarch “es perd[en] en els principis dels temps i aquí no ens interessan els

orígens”– is indeed separate in style, tone and narrative voice from the rest of the novel. Written by a collective *we* and for a collective *we*, the gateway to El Hachmi’s novel is coated with a Biblical subtext, as the first sentence lists the genealogical line to which the male protagonist of the novel belongs, a series of men that the storyteller informs us somehow influenced Mimoun “amb la fermesa de les grans figures bíbliques.” (2008: 7) This explicit Biblical reference, together with the title of the preface, situates the preface almost in an atemporal framework and allows for a reading that connects it to a fable-like tradition.

At this point let us not forget that the Western imaginary of the so-called Orient is well embedded in the story of Scheherazade and her storytelling. As is well known, the French version of the *A thousand and one nights* by Antoine Galland in 1704 heavily influenced the way this character was constructed and how it circulated around Europe, as the collection of tales became very popular and enticed many imitations. In an article that studies the portrayal of this character within “la literatura española de tema marroquí” in the 20th century, Yasmina Romero Morales analyses the specificity of Spanish Orientalism –which is criss-crossed by the fact that “España es una nación que resulta a la par orientalizada y orientalizadora” (2018: 223)– and claims that “España ha tenido un Oriente fabulado fuera de sus propias fronteras que casi en la totalidad de los casos se le ha hecho emanar, real o figuradamente, de un contexto árabe-islámico. [...] [E]l Oriente español siempre se ha encontrado en África, en particular en Marruecos, por su proximidad geográfica, histórica y cultural.” (224) This Orientalist view is approached, albeit tangentially and less full-on than in *Jo també sóc catalana*, by the narrator of *L’últim patriarca*, when she is trying to explain the way in which Mimoun was received in his new location:

Encara era exòtic veure un moro allà al mig d’una ciutat tan d’interior i força sovint hi havia qui es girava i se’l quedava mirant amb la mà tapant-se la boca per no mostrar més del compte la sorpresa. Sobretot les senyores, que recordaven històries de magribins assassins durant la guerra, que havien tallat el cap a tot aquell que es trobaven per davant i que els penjaven després pels cabells al mig de la plaça. O això és el que se n’havia sentit a dir.

(2004: 84)²¹⁸

²¹⁸ As analysed by María Rosa de Madariaga in *Los moros que trajo Franco: La intervención de tropas coloniales en la guerra civil española*, it is interesting to realise that the Spanish Civil War shaped the perception of the Moroccan population in Spain. The fact that Franco included Moroccan soldiers in his troops led to the situation whereby in the Republican side Moroccans were perceived as the enemy (see De Madariaga 2002).

The last sentence ties in with what I described earlier, whereby the story of Mimoun is inscribed within a network of legends and rumours. In this passage, we learn about the leas that inform the stereotypical construction of the “moro”, which is connected with ideas of barbarism but, at the same time, turns out to be exotic in an appealing way: with his looks, his corporal attitude and his eyes, “que per aquella zona resultaven força exòtics” (*ibid.*), Mimoun managed to compensate for his lack of knowledge of the autochthonous languages. “Algunes [dones] continuaven relacionant la seva procedència amb totes les llegendes que havien sentit explicar sobre moros a les seves àvies i això era un punt que jugava a favor de Mimoun.” (143)²¹⁹ It is worth noting that contrarily to what we saw happening with the eyes of women in this novel, male eyes are portrayed as a powerful tool that can disclose agency. By incorporating these reflections within the narrative tissue of the novel, El Hachmi is in turn signalling the weight that oral accounts have also in the local Catalan population, as these tales inform their conception of those perceived as foreigners.

In the series of events and activities that followed the publication of *L'últim patriarca*, El Hachmi put forward very strong views about not wanting to be read as a representative of anything, thus, asking for a reception of her work that eschewed any form of ethnicism. However, as noted by Campoy-Cubillo, her own interpretation of the novel has not always followed her own requests:

In numerous interviews and lectures at cultural institutions, El Hachmi, [...] has often highlighted the Moroccanness of her writing: “Mi escritura tiene una herencia muy palpable: la tradición oral de mi país de origen” [...]. But, as El Hachmi explains in the same interview in *El País* her relation to her cultural heritage is a conflictive one: “He intentado alejarme de unos orígenes que duelen [...] Luego he entendido que cuando no es posible destruir algo, sólo queda la posibilidad de asumirlo”.²²⁰

(2012: 138-139)

Campoy-Cubillo understands this ambivalence to which El Hachmi is referring regarding how she deals with her origins as somehow inscribed within the structure of the novel, which he

²¹⁹ Cristián H. Ricci has noted that the transcultural agenda deployed by El Hachmi in *L'últim patriarca* reveals the “profundas contradicciones del sistema normativo de Occidente, que por un lado protege, compadece, desea sexualmente y exotiza, pero que a la vez menosprecia, explota y expulsa a los inmigrantes norteafricanos.” (2010: 73) This view ties in with the analysis presented in Chapter 1 about the ambivalences that vertebrate the label *immigrant* in Catalonia.

²²⁰ El Hachmi’s words have been kept as they were published in the interview to which the quote refers.

reads as “an intertextual dialogue” between the author and her literary predecessors. “This intertextual dialogue explores her Amazigh heritage through the lens of her Catalan literary heritage, hence articulating a fluid Catalan-Amazigh identity” that avoids making “either side of her hybrid heritage the signifying centre of this new identity.” A “playfulness” that the scholar reads as a “postmodern/postcolonial, ironic distance from both cultural traditions.” (142) In his analysis of *L'últim patriarca*, Cristián H. Ricci examines the significance of the episode where the narrator’s teacher offers her a notebook where she can write about the intricacies of growing up. Ricci notes that “la narración de las costumbres y tradiciones que hace la autora (a través de la narradora) es de naturaleza eminentemente oral y, por ende, supone transmitir saberes ancestrales” (2010: 83). He understands the writing exercise in the novel as a therapeutic practice, as a vehicle “de la identidad amazigh-catalana”, and as the tool that helps the narrator in her learning process, for “al ordenar verbalmente todas las fases del proceso que experimenta consigue entender la complejidad del entramado cultural en el que vive y afianzar su identidad como miembro de la comunidad multicultural a la que pertenece.” (84)

Ricci sees El Hachmi’s novel as the author’s attempt to problematize “categorías taxonómicas” and “identidades afro-europeas”. As such, “la insumisión escrituaria, plural y transgresora de El Hachmi se convierte en una lucha, una negociación de la diferencia, un encuentro-desencuentro entre la obsesión de las marcas de origen norteafricanas y la ‘ansiedad de la influencia’ de lo europeo.” (72-73) El Hachmi inhabits, according to Ricci, a culture that is a hybrid composite of the different cultural traditions with which the author interacts, belonging to both sides of the Mediterranean. This cultural space –reminiscent of Bhabha’s “third space”, for it is a result of syncretic practices and not of mere juxtapositions–, not only helps to conform what Ricci names an Amazigh-Catalan identity but has an impact on El Hachmi’s writing, too. Thus, the critic argues that in the first part of the novel, the Amazigh universe is described “como en un texto Orientalista” (72) in which supernatural phenomena are recounted, together with episodes that portray evil men, and women subjected to the mandates of a severe religion –which could also be read through the lenses of magical realism. Ricci also writes about the two-fold division of the work, which “en partes actúan como opuestos”, and connects it with the Hispano-African novelistic tradition (87). Commenting on the reception of El Hachmi’s work, González Parrilla wonders, however, about the (non-)utility of this kind of categorizations:

¿Tiene sentido etiquetar a Najat El Hachmi como autora marroquí, *amazigh* o musulmana?
¿Debemos recurrir a lo híbrido, a identidades *hyphenated* del estilo “catalana-amazigh-marroquí”, pese a que, como ha puesto de manifiesto Anthias, tampoco resuelven nada y acaban incurriendo en las mismas “culturalists essentialists traps as earlier notions of ethnicity”?

(2018)²²¹

At times a collaborator of Anthias, Yuval-Davis recently published an article in which she describes the axis upon which she bases her studies on dissecting national identities. She claims to put forward what she terms a “situated” –e.g. contextualized– intersectional perspective, and also “transversal politics”, based on dialogical practices in which “tots els participants en el diàleg es veuen a si mateixos no com a representants, sinó com a defensors de determinades col·lectivitats i categories socials.” (2017: 9)²²² The question of representation has already been tackled in regard to El Hachmi’s work, as she herself refuses to act as a spokesperson for any communal groups, and will be further explored in connection with the works by Dalila Kerchouche. It is also a topic on which the characters of El Hachmi’s novels reflect –as discussed when, in *La filla estrangera*, the narrator is supposed to speak in a kind of multicultural forum as a spokesperson for the “Moroccan community”, in a space that is like a “mini parlament” (2015: 107). The way I study the texts explored here follows the idea presented by Yuval-Davis, hence I read their authors not as representatives of anything but as interlocutors engaging in a dialogue with the societies where they live and where they publish their works. The way these works are received has to do with how they convey their messages, more prominently the language in which they do so.

In what has become a seminal essay, “The African Writer and the English Language”, Chinua Achebe contributed in the decade of the 1990s to the debate about what it is that constitutes “African literature”. His arguments, which revolve around the idea that English should be deemed an African language, consider the colonial scenario and assume its legacy. Contrarily to those voices, such as wa Thiong’o’s, that claimed that only texts written in native languages

²²¹ El Hachmi has written about the way the literary industry also operates on *labels* (she herself uses such a term). Thus, reflecting on the works by Amin Maalouf, El Hachmi states: “Los titulares le definen como libanés, francés, árabe, europeo o francófono. Cuando quieren ajustar la etiqueta le dicen francolibanés o libanés residente en Francia. Todos mienten y todos dicen la verdad, porque Amin Maalouf es todas estas etiquetas y ninguna de ellas en exclusiva.” (2010)

²²² The text, written by Yuval-Davis in English, was published in Catalan as the prologue to the collective volume *Terra de ningú. Perspectives feministes sobre la independència*.

predating the arrival of colonisers to the continent should be considered “African”,²²³ Achebe stated, about English-written texts:

What I do see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a worldwide language. So my answer to the question *Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?* is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask, *Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?* I should say, I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use.

(2003: 62-63; emphasis in the original)

Whilst I realize that the context to which Achebe is referring is very different from the context in which El Hachmi’s work is inscribed, his reflections can be paired with all the considerations heretofore presented. In *L’últim patriarca*, the narrator informs us about the linguistic displacement that is operating inside her, whereby “la llengua de la capital de comarca” is taking over (2008: 226). She confesses that she speaks to herself in this language and not in “la llengua dels musulmans”, in a reference to Arabic, and we might arguably assume that such an overlap also affects her maternal language.

This displacement or linguistic substitution is mediated by the Catalan dictionary, as we know, which gives the narrator the vocabulary to face a complex reality, unknown to her –here it is worth recalling that when talking to her mother about her exploratory trips, Dalila Kerchouche writes that she cannot tell her that what she is looking for is the part of her identity that she feels is missing, because she does not know the word *identity* in Algerian *darija*. The narrator starts reading the dictionary at a time when severe tensions vertebrate her parents’ relationship. Unable to foresee “quan s’acabaria tot allò” (180) –and here, the *allò* translates the lack of any kind of certitudes the narrator finds around her–, she reads the definitions, despite not understanding what she reads, “per veure com sonava” (182).

²²³ See, for instance, Achebe 1989 and wa Thiong’o 1986.

4.1.2.2 Language and Belonging

The fact that the narrator is incorporating the sound dimension to her learning experience of “la llengua de la comarca” is important because the oral space was up to then reserved for the language spoken at home: Tamazight –which we might assume also incorporates words in *darija* due to the fact that they are both used in a betwixt manner in the Morocco where the narrator’s family come from.²²⁴ Thus, because the narrator engages with this new language in all its spectrum, it comes as no surprise that she recounts her process of subjective negotiation in Catalan and not in the language she inherited at birth. The text where this kind of problematics occupies a more central position is, however, *La filla estrangera*, where, as we have seen, orality and the written world are constructed almost dichotomously to sustain the differences between mother and daughter.

Unlike in *L’últim patriarca*, the preface to this novel is of the same narrative nature as the rest of the text. The fable-like dimension of the previous novel is not present here, but El Hachmi has inscribed the Tamazight language via other means. From the beginning we learn to perceive it as an oral language, connected to the retrieval of memories, to the telling of stories. In one of the female gatherings that the narrator witnesses, her mother and her female friends reminisce about their life to the South of the Mediterranean: “Ara ja comencen a rememorar [...] els temps d’allà, els temps remots de la infantesa i joventut, cadascuna encetant el record en un punt determinat” (2015: 30). The narrator laments that “ningú reproduirà mai el parlar apresat d’aquestes senyores en cap llibre pel simple fet que fan servir una llengua que és del tot aliena al paper, que es transmet per l’aire sense deixar rastres de cap mena.” (30-31)

El Hachmi is, however, via her narrator reproducing this “parlar apresat”, as she continues to do in *Mare de llet i mel*, although, as Achebe would have it, through a different kind of use. By transferring it to paper, a medium to which, as indicated by the narrator, this language is alien, it changes shape and transforms its sounds –because it adopts the Latin alphabet and incorporates the Catalan phonemes. This exercise of (written) inscription is of paramount importance as, if read in dialogue with *Jo també sóc catalana*, it helps us understand to what

²²⁴ More important than having a clear sense of the DNA of the language that is spoken by the narrator’s mother and her Maghrebi community, whose linguistic boundaries are never clearly defined, I find it important to highlight the symbolic meaning that the different languages that appear in the novels by El Hachmi have. For a thorough analysis of the extremely nuanced linguistic situation of contemporary Morocco –also applicable to the Algerian scenario, albeit in a different way– see Corriente and Vicente 2008.

extent El Hachmi's fictional works are not only introducing the experiences like the one of the main family of *La filla* as part of the Catalan social tissue, but also "writing in" new linguistic universes. Thus, in order to rethink Catalanness and to build a "common ground", in Amorós's terms, made of diasporic elements, the Catalan language must also be prepared to assume new creases and folds. By constantly introducing metalinguistic reflections about the "llengua de la mare" in the narrator's thoughts, El Hachmi is signalling the importance of language in the process of self-exploration that unfolds in the novel. It is safe to assume that the Catalonia that, as is the case in France, continues to be an end point of many population movements will be enriched by people who, like the protagonist, do not have Catalan as their "llengua mare" (212) –and it is worth noting that the only time the narrator speaks of Tamazight in these terms is when she has abandoned her mother and has decided to abandon her language, too. When she can retrieve memories of her past without them being painful.

The linguistic considerations throughout the novel are varied and manifold. On the one hand, they refer, as in *L'últim patriarca*, to the process of identity-formation of the protagonist; these comments are linked to the capacity of naming –and visibilizing realities– that is intrinsic to languages. Thus, when she is unable to find equivalents in the language in which she is narrating for things she can only name in her mother's tongue –and she punctuates her account with this realization (106)–, the narrator starts creating her own dictionary, mirroring what the narrator in *L'últim patriarca* did, too.²²⁵ The importance that this kind of learning has on the protagonist gets explained by the fact that she finishes some of the chapters of her account with words that she has acquired and which she has found difficult to define. The difficulty she encounters in defining words explains the difficulty she finds in navigating the in-between space she occupies.

In her negotiation between the written and the oral, she realises that a language is also informed by gestures and sounds that cannot be transcribed and that somehow speak of belonging. One time when her mother tells her off, she accompanies the untranslatable expression *min kham ixedden* with a snap sound of the tongue –a sound "que no podria ser reproduït per l'escriptura, ni tan sols amb una transcripció fonètica" (106). Unlike "[l]es noies que han crescut allà", in Morocco, who know how to pepper their discourses with this sound with flair, the narrator does

²²⁵ At this point, it is worth restating that at the time when the narrator and her mother settle in their new land, there is no Tamazight-Catalan dictionary.

not dare to do so. She tried to rehearse it but failed to acquire the sound, which made her feel “sobtadament forastera, incapaç de pertànyer al mateix grup que la mare”; the snapping of the sound “et pot fer sentir desarrelada”, she states (107). This last thought can be connected with the kind of considerations put forward by Abdelfattah Kilito in Chapter 3 whereby he linked the linguistic system with the organ that re-produces that system orally: the tongue. In this interweaving, language acquires a bodily dimension, which is evident in the abovementioned scene –the narrator is unable to use her tongue to inscribe, within her knowledge of her mother’s tongue, a phoneme of sorts, the snap, which would make her a full member of the community of speakers of that language.

Because she remains on the margins of that community due to her inability to snap her tongue, a sound that only those who have grown up “allà” are able to reproduce, the narrator’s linguistic considerations also speak of the relationship between language and territory, about how languages tend to be thought of as tied to a specific location –already in 1882, Ernest Renan stated that “[l]’importance politique qu’on attache aux langues vient de ce qu’on les regarde comme des signes de race. Rien de plus faux.” (1991: 46) We know that whenever the narrator tries to come up with a translation she recurs to images to find an equivalent. In this scene, her attempt to translate *min kham izedden* takes her to a rural scenario with “bèsties que duen lligats a sobre grans embalums” and “dones amb farcells a l’esquena” because literally translated the phrase would be something like “què t’ho ha lligat a sobre?” (106) In the account, the rural reality to which the narrator is transported is connected with her origins, for it is in her native village that she would see this kind of images that have ended up conforming her imaginary of that space –and hence, of the language that she spoke at birth, a language that, as we know, “només vola per l’aire i només ha quedat fixada en la pell de les dones” (86). Again, we encounter the bodily dimension with which the narrator has embedded her metalinguistic thoughts.²²⁶ Her non-tattooed skin will be unable to “speak” in the same manner as her mother’s does, and that is why she feels expelled from her language.

We have already analysed how the body is a key element in El Hachmi’s writing, as it is connected to language, like the earlier examples illuminate, and also speaks of the process of

²²⁶ When trying to have sex with her husband by resting on top of him, he loses his erection because he claims he does not know how to have sex that way: “de sobte vaig recordar totes les expressions que en la llengua de la meva mare es refereixen a situacions humiliants: pujar a sobre d’algú, deixar que et pugin a sobre.” (El Hachmi 2015: 174)

subjective negotiation of the different protagonists of her works –the narrator of *L'últim patriarca* becomes physically ill when her parents learn about her wedding to a Moroccan man, as does the narrator of *La filla estrangera* when she is unable to conform to the standards of living that her mother and her “cosí-marit” want her to follow. This code of values and ways of living to which the narrator wants at first to adapt but ultimately fails to do so is also formed by a specific beauty standard, one in which she should be “grassa, amb la cara rodona com la lluna (per mi, pa de pagès)” (2015: 73) –the different metaphors used by mother and daughter to describe the same reality also speak of their distance.²²⁷

However, the narrator wants to inhabit another kind of body, for she understands that by getting thinner she could fit better in what are now her surroundings, far from “allà”. Her willingness to transform her own body is also paired with her ability to “adequ[ar-se] molt bé” to different registers and contexts (60), an ability that includes her language skills. However, despite being “la ben integrada”, she will have a hard time finding her place in Catalonia. Similarly, in *Jo també sóc catalana*, El Hachmi recounts how she had to conform to working at a pizza factory, working long hours, a job that “cap autòctona no est[ava] disposada a acceptar” but she, “com qualsevol altra immigrant” had to. She starts working there despite the fact it would make her “emmalalti[r] cada dia que passa”, because she could not find anything else “en aquest país que creia meu i que encara ara em creu de fora, ciutadana de segona categoria” (2004: 87).²²⁸

The narrator of *La filla estrangera* has difficulties in fitting within the labour market, too –she will have to juggle with several jobs at once despite her good grades and her manifold skills– and also in fitting within the universe of her mother, and especially in matching the two, which are portrayed as belonging to different spheres. Thus, when she is offered a job as a mediator, she fears finding herself in a difficult and even dangerous position, because this job would

²²⁷ At this point, it is worth pointing out that this distance on which the narrator dwells gets also explained, to a certain extent, by the fact that both women belong to different generations, even if the narrator does not comment on this idea. One might assume that the generational gap would be there even if they both lived in Morocco and had undergone the same kind of upbringing and education.

²²⁸ Commenting on the labour situation for those read as migrants in Catalonia, authors Espasa, García, Sastre and Zambrando note that “no es diu explícitament que [...] els immigrants, com a persones ‘endarrerides culturalment, políticament i econòmicament’ s’han de dedicar a fer feines al mercat de treball submergit o, en el millor dels casos, perifèric; es fa raonable a partir de paraules clau com ‘integració’, que el discurs populista conservador ha associat a una relació dicotòmica en la que [sic], ‘per sentit comú’ els membres d’una societat més endarrerida s’han ‘d’integrar’, s’han d’adherir a la ‘cultura avançada’ que és la de l’anomenada ‘societat d’acollida’.” (Espasa *et al.* 2009: 14) Whilst the factual basis on which El Hachmi sustains her reflections is true, her analysis, whereby those read as immigrants only have access to precarious jobs and locals can get better positions, seems at times too dichotomous. The labour market at the Catalonia of the turning of the century was a tough one for the vast majority of people, especially youngsters, as indicated by statistics.

render her close to words –to the written universe that she is self-imposedly trying to forget (2015: 161). However, as she finds out, she will have to act as an interpreter, and hence will only work in the oral terrain, and decides to take it. In this job she will get to know more closely “la realitat hipòcrita dels mots”, in a domain where immigrant children are referred to as children with “necessitats educatives especials” (168) a realisation that the narrator accompanies with an ironic comment, “que sona més higiènic”, to reinforce her outrage at how this supposedly more “socially engaged” language operates.

By presenting us with this character, who as we know finds herself unable to unfold her complex subjectivity in the linguistic and cultural universe of her mother, and at the same time has trouble fully fitting into the universe to which her mother does not belong, El Hachmi is problematizing clear-cut and static conceptions of language. She de-centres and de-territorializes Catalan by situating it in an Amazigh milieu. It is in this “imazighized” version of the Catalan language that the narrator can ultimately make peace with her story of subjective negotiation and write it down. This is why she can, after having distanced herself from her mother and what she encapsulates, refer to the language she inherited as her “llengua mare”, in the end. As the text that we read proves, the linguistic universe that she unfolds in her account is embedded in this language from which for a long time the narrator separated herself. Thus, because the narrator “també [és] catalana” –an affiliation that she pursues by staying in Catalonia after she leaves the town where she grew up and in which she felt somehow marked out, mainly because of the Maghrebi community–, El Hachmi is indeed declaring that this kind of Catalan that holds onto Amazigh roots is also part of Catalonia and serves to create ties of belonging.

4.1.3 Writing the Oblivion to Become

The distance that the narrator of *La filla estrangera* necessitates in order to “ser per mi”, as we read in the preface of the novel, is also somehow tied to the idea of oblivion. As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, oblivion is an important element in the accounts analysed in this thesis for it informs the processes of subjective negotiation of the authors and their characters, and also the communal identities with which they interact. In the epilogue of *La filla estrangera*, the narrator speaks of oblivion as a necessary strategy that she had to employ in order to follow her own path: “d’aquella època en guardo pocs records. M’ho vaig proposar i

ho vaig aconseguir, de no mirar enrere [...] M'ho vaig imposar com la més estricta de les normes, si volia mirar endavant i continuar amb la vida que m'havia triat" (2015: 209). The repetitions, which add to the texture of the "command" that the narrator is sharing with us, explain a self-imposed determination to forget about the life she shared with her mother, which includes the language in which they communicated. Furthermore, the narrator informs us: "No recordo gaire res de l'època també perquè vaig fer-me el propòsit de deixar d'enregistrar amb aquella exactitud malaltissa tot el que em passava, vaig esforçar-me per canviar aquella manera meva de funcionar, de relacionar-ho tot amb tot fins que ja no sabia on tenia el cap" (210) –and we learnt at the beginning of the account that the protagonist used to register everything around her, almost involuntarily, in order to be able to appeal to her memories in case she needed them, although of course the reliability of her memories can be put into question, for the nature of memory eschews total accuracy.

Here, the pairing of oblivion with the concepts of change and transformation is also worth highlighting, as it ties in with other reflections put forward by El Hachmi in her accounts and also by Dalila Kerchouche –we learnt how, in the camps, social assistants urged the harki families to forget about their daily practices and transform them to more "French" ones, for instance. In this respect, although I already analysed it in Chapter 1, it is worth highlighting, once more, a reflection by El Hachmi in *Jo també sóc catalana*, for it speaks of how such dynamics unfold within the Catalan territory. By means of "forgetting" about their ties to their Maghrebi origins, the El Hachmis are asked to "integrate" into Catalonia –and El Hachmi gets weary about the word *integration*, as she ironically shows in her fiction:

Quan algú et diu que t'integris, el que en realitat t'està demanant és que et desintegris, que esborris qualsevol rastre de temps anteriors, de vestigis culturals o religiosos, que ho oblidis tot i només recordis els seus records, el seu passat. Perquè no hi ha por més terrible que la por al que és desconegut, és millor que tots siguem iguals per no haver-hi de pensar gaire.

(2004: 90)

In this sense, the gesture of travelling back to the past, invoking it and speaking of the weight it has in the configuration of subjectivities (individual and collective), as our authors and their protagonists do, can be read as a strategy aiming to contest the dominant, to counteract the attempt to silence a series of filiations informing the identities of the protagonists and the communities to which they belong. Following the cue of lesbian activist Karin Quimby: "For

subcultures and politically oppressed groups, restaging the past can be an act of recuperation and resistance.” (1997: 194) Like those subjects Quimby has in mind, who embody a dissident non-normative sexuality, in Catalonia, and in France, the “immigrants” epitomised by El Hachmi’s array of characters, and the harkis display cultural traditions that do not belong to what has been constructed as the dominant and hence they are somehow silenced because of this. The works by El Hachmi and Kerchouche can be analysed from this perspective, whereby they highlight these silences in order to undo them and somehow make up for them. In order to do so, they embed their texts with references to the past and retrieve memories that help them make sense of their present. Philosopher Fina Birulés understands memory as “una de las formas de generar sentido, de anclar nuestra vida, protegiéndola de la sospecha de lo casual y sin propósito [...] de decir, de ordenar la experiencia del presente” (1995: 10-11). Through Birulés’s lenses, in what follows I shall consider how memory intersects with the inscription of those read as immigrants and harkis within Catalonia and France respectively, as presented by El Hachmi and Kerchouche.

Already the first work by Najat El Hachmi disrupts linear and forward conceptions of time. The conversation between the author with her son Rida, which takes place in the present of the writing exercise, is followed by a trip to the author’s past, in which she inscribes memories of all sorts, including memories that she has inherited and hence that are not connected with an “embodied” experience, because they predate her own birth –such as when she informs us of how her name was chosen. These jumps to the past –which also become jumps of interlocutors, for El Hachmi starts talking to her son and ends up appealing to her dead grandfather by the end of the account– reveal the idea that memory, and the processes of reminiscing are not rigid or neatly organized. Because in the prologue El Hachmi tells us that she writes “per navegar els records”, realization to which she arrives after having written *Jo també sóc catalana*, “unes memòries que no són ben bé memòries” (2004: 13), the writing exercise can be read as an exercise of reminiscing.

In her exploration of the different layers that inform any act of reminiscing, we are made aware to what extent memories are connected to a sense of belonging. Najat holds memories of her childhood in Morocco²²⁹ but these get reconfigured, redrawn and somehow ultimately

²²⁹ Childhood memories are more widely and more descriptively explored in Laila Karrouch’s *De Nador a Vic*. Because she speaks of her subjectivity as informed almost dualistically by her Amazigh and her Catalan sides, the

forgotten with the passage of time. Thus, the Najat she was in her native village will be performed only in her grandparents's memories of that time. When El Hachmi describes the day when, together with her mother and siblings, she leaves for Catalonia, she speaks of memory as their own "veritable frontera" (181), thus showcasing to what extent memory plays a role in delimiting their sense of identity. The Moroccan landscape that El Hachmi leaves behind will get resignified by the memories that those who stay in Morocco keep of Najat and the other relatives who left. Thus, her grandparents will treasure the small gestures and details that end up configuring one's memorial network: "Veus, en aquell racó, just allà, la meva néta jugava a fer nines"; "[i] allà dalt és on es va enfil·lar el meu nét i va caure" (184, 185). El Hachmi claims that "la pàtria són els records d'infantesa" (183), a statement that helps us understand the negotiations that inform her process of subjective construction. Earlier in her account, she explains that roots grow there where we have "els records més intensos" (79) and, as she will move on to explore, her Moroccan memories will either get (voluntarily) obliterated or substituted –which will put her in a situation whereby she has "cap punt de referència" in Catalonia as a member of a family who passes on to her a series of values belonging to a genealogy that she has somehow problematized because she finds herself in a land informed by other cultural references (47).

The usage of the term *pàtria* in connection with childhood is important because *pàtria* can be translated as "fatherland", and is linked in the work by El Hachmi with the land of origins, a territory that ends up playing an important symbolic role in the author's and in the author's female protagonists' processes of maturity; but is the territory where effectively none of them grows up. Thus, it is a space they can retrieve via their memories and, when they do physically go back there, they realize that their selves, which have been transformed on the Northern rim of the Mediterranean, no longer fit in that space in the same way they did when they were children. Thus, for instance, the *filla estrangera* will no longer have the codes to cook in her native village. The reference to cooking is important, in as much in this particular novel, and also in *Jo també sóc catalana*, food and cooking are very much tied to identity, too.²³⁰ In the

space these memories occupy in her account is much bigger than the place they take in El Hachmi's work, who offers a more nuanced approach to the construction of her identity.

²³⁰ In 2001, Palestine-born Salah Jamal published *Aroma àrab. Receptes i relats*, in which the author who now lives in Barcelona highlights the role played by the culinary universe in someone's subjective constructions. Odours also featured in the title of his first novel, *Lluny de l'horitzó perfumat*, which recounts the trip of a Palestinian man who decides to settle in Barcelona in order to study medicine. Similarly, many of the works, both in Spanish and Catalan, by Benin-born Agnès Agboton feature the universe of food and cooking: *La cuina africana*, *Àfrica des dels fogons*, *El libro de las cocinas del mundo* and *Més enllà del mar de sorra: una dona africana a la nostra terra*.

novel, many of the elements configuring the untranslatable universe of the narrator's mother have to do with ingredients and cooking utensils, as we learnt. In the 2004 account, El Hachmi speaks of a very specific gesture that translates her willingness to stop living “pensant només en el demà i en el passat alhora, [...] deixa[nt]-se anar pels records i per les especulacions d'un retorn triomfal” (190). When she decides to rule out her eventual return to Morocco, which for a while punctuated her new life in Catalonia, she goes to a bookshop and buys a cooking book. This purchase translates her willingness to incorporate new flavours, new ways of doing in the territory that, despite not being built on an architecture sustained on her memories, will be the scenario for her son's childhood memories.

The role played by Rida in *Jo també sóc catalana* is of major importance, as he represents a yardstick of sorts against which Najat measures her own process of growing up in Catalonia –we learnt already how she understands herself as a bridge (54). In a way, Rida has crossed to the other side of that bridge. Thus, if we take into consideration the way in which the different generations of the El Hachmi family relate to Tamazight for instance, we notice that it remains the language of communication within the familial milieu for Najat's parents, but endures a transgenerational linguistic process of oblivion as it is passed on to Najat's generation and then to Rida's generation. Thus, Najat knows how to speak Tamazight but it is not the language of her writing –an activity that, as we have learnt, is central in defining her; Rida, for his part, does not actively use it and has difficulties in enunciating certain sounds. The shift in the importance played by the “original language”, which somehow gets transformed, as analysed in the context of *La filla estrangera*, is paired in the works by El Hachmi with other processes of substitution and/or oblivion that criss-cross the life of the familial community.

Thus, we know that the “soundtrack” accompanying the life of the El Hachmi family goes from being articulated around the sounds of the muezzin to the tolling of the church's bell. The Ramadan practised by Najat's mother becomes more austere, and little by little, as recalled by Najat “els actes transcendents de la quotidianitat es van anar diluint i ja amb prou feines ens recordàvem de les sures i de l'alfabet àrab” (2004: 105). I have already studied how El Hachmi went through a religious phase in trying to navigate her interstitial position in Catalonia. The author describes the guilt she felt for having neglected/forgotten certain religious customs. Involuntary oblivion (or the dissolution of the limits of certain customs, which problematizes what is “authentic” and what is deemed “not authentic”) is conceived by the author almost like

treason to the origins –and we already know of the importance of the semantic universe related to treason in the construction of the harki identities. Looking back to her past, which we have established cannot be dissociated from the subjective nature of memory –something that becomes clear to the author and her siblings when, upon travelling back to their native village, they realize that “res no era com record[a]ve[n]” (191)–, is conceived, in this episode recounted by Najat, as a source of guidance and identity reaffirmation. In this respect, the experience described by El Hachmi is of great value in our own navigation of current times. If, following Hannah Arendt (1968), we realize that the thread of tradition has been broken, then the past no longer serves as a guidance for the present, as it does not allow us to formulate expectations.²³¹

A connoisseur of Arendt’s work, Fina Birulés reminds us that Arendt’s thought can help us in acknowledging the fact that “[w]hat has been lost is the continuity of the past as it seemed to be passed on from one generation to another.” Thus, “[w]hat you then are left with is still the past, but a *fragmented* past, which has lost its certainty of evaluation” (Arendt in Birulés 2009; emphasis in the original). In line with this idea, Françoise Collin approaches the rupture of tradition from a gendered perspective and states that “[l]es modèles maternels, s’ils ne sont pas reniés, ne suffisent cependant plus à inspirer les nouvelles identités” and highlights that more so than men, “les femmes [...] ont aujourd’hui à ‘juger’ et à ‘décider’ hors de tout modèle et de toute norme, leur héritage étant désormais sans ‘testament’” (1993: 13-14). This lack of certitudes, I argue, is imprinted, in the works by El Hachmi, in the way the author has chosen to organize the stories that she is recounting and in the kind of intergenerational relationships that her texts put forward. Thus, her works are sustained upon temporal ruptures and do not follow a chronological order. Moreover, they present us with female protagonists that cannot find solid guidance within the familial, and more specifically maternal, surroundings.

As already noted, in *Jo també sóc catalana* the author’s reminiscing takes her continually back to a Moroccan setting. *L’últim patriarca* is multiply circular. Mimoun grows up surrounded by women that protect him and that somehow turn him into a patriarch-to-be, or at least place him

²³¹ In this respect, it is worth remembering that, as Reinhart Koselleck pointed out, anthropologically we do not talk about *past* and *future*, but about *experience* and *expectation* (1993: 15).

upon this path.²³² His knowledge of women is, from the time he is very little, eminently corporal. He sleeps with his sisters and starts having (anal) sexual relationships with his cousin (and we already learnt how this sexual practice was rather common as it allowed for the maintenance of women's vaginal virginity and avoided pregnancies). It is through these interactions that his attitude towards women is built. The novel –much like the patriarchal line of the Driouch family– is halted when his daughter has anal sex with her uncle, Mimoun's brother, who is a teacher in Morocco. Hence, this ending somehow places us back in Morocco, the space where the story finds its origins. In *La filla estrangera*, as I have already noted, both the beginning and the end of the account are escapes in which the protagonist insists on her need not to look back in order to go forward. Due to such circularity and to all these repetitions, El Hachmi evinces that within repetition there is space for variation and, precisely because of that, no clear-cut truths can be established.

In her search for referents, Najat will turn to the women around her that do not belong to the Maghrebi circle that she finds at home. These women, as we learnt, will make her feel “vergonya de la pròpia procedència” (2004: 155),²³³ hence she will bring herself round to undervaluing the image of her mother and grandmother, which will ultimately push her to deploy strategies of voluntary oblivion, in order to cover up “allò que [li] semblava que esdevindria grotesc als ulls dels catalans”, like her dresses, her skin and the music her father played at home (69). These transformations, or this letting go of what she terms “qualsevol indici magribí que poguessin intuir els [...] veïns” (*ibid.*), can be equated with the universe of loss. By the end of her book, Najat confesses to having found what she believes to be the key to understanding the “hurricane” of emotions that she has experienced: the seven migratory

²³² Castellano echoes Christián H. Ricci's reading of this particular feature of the novel: “Davant d'aquesta denúncia que fa la narradora envers les dones que envolten el patriarca [que el 'fan' patriarca], es planteja la possibilitat d'una lectura alternativa de la novel·la: en comptes de pensar que el discurs narratiu va realment en contra del patriarca, va en contra de sa mare i la protagonista-narradora es limita a seguir el patró masculí de la seua 'feminitat'.” (2018: 188) Castellano has also commented on the diferent interpretations of the novel's ending, which I inscribe within the idea of circularity: “No tota la crítica, però, està d'acord amb la significació d'aquest final abrupte [final de la línia patriarcal] i, fins i tot, hi ha qui el llegeix no com una conclusió de la nissaga patriarcal, sinó tot el contrari: una reafirmació de poder de l'home marroquí respecte de la dona, que no ha aconseguit alliberar-se d'aquesta tradició masclista, tot i la seua vida entre cultures.” (187)

²³³ As we saw in earlier chapters, Najat navigates the turmoil of emotions that all this provokes in her by splitting herself into “dues Najats”: “la marroquina” and “la catalana”. The split is constructed on indoor/outdoor logics, whereby the Moroccan Najat unfolds “portes endins” and the Catalan one, “portes enfora” (2004: 67). They do not communicate with each other, the author informs us. The title of the account signals the process of negotiation and the surpassing of this dichotomic construction by El Hachmi.

mournings. Speaking of her experience in terms of mourning means that she understands her process of subjective negotiation as traversed by loss. This is more clearly present in *La filla estrangera*, because the loss gets physically translated into the life of the protagonist, as the narrator puts physical distance between the *pàtria* –which, in this novel becomes the *màtria* or “motherland”, understood as the land that holds her childhood memories, in this case her maternal universe– and the new life that she wants to start by herself. However, as she later finds out, “tot el que [es] pensava que havia oblidat [...] en realitat ho duia a dins sense saber on” (2015: 212-213) –a thought triggered by the sound of her “llengua mare”.²³⁴

This fluid conception of memory ties in with the non-linear and non-rigid conception of time that we saw El Hachmi unfolds in her works. After realising that she has not been able ultimately to pull out her inherited cultural universe from her self, the narrator decides to dwell on it rather than pursue her will to obliterate it. “Quan en vaig tenir prou, de plorar, vaig decidir escriure. Escriuria la història de la meva mare per recuperar-la, per recordar-la, per fer-li justícia. [...] Escriuria la seva història i així podria destriar-la de la meva. Escriuria la seva història i així podria ser jo sense per ella però també ser jo sense ser contra ella.” (212-213) The repetitions in this passage provide these thoughts almost with a kind of mantra-tone and signal the importance of the scriptural practice.

Because she has made peace with the fact that her subjectivity is at least partially conformed by her maternal inheritance, she can finally write the story of how this process unfolded, how it was born and how it affected her. That is why we might as well assume that this last gesture of writing down serves the narrator to get rid of the feelings of guilt that riddled her when, trying to navigate her interstitial position in her mother’s home, she felt as if “tra[ïa] la realitat si no la d[e]i[a] en la llengua de la mare” (88). She has managed to recount her own reality in her own hybrid language to ultimately *tell* her own tale and, in turn, *write* her mother’s story. In this sense, El Hachmi and Kerchouche’s work are connected, inasmuch as Dalila, too, needs to write down her father’s story in order to comprehend herself and goes from wanting to forget the part of herself that is connected with the harki universe to ultimately embracing it.

²³⁴ In this respect, the words of Beatriz Sarlo in *Tiempo pasado* might be illuminating: “Proponerse no recordar es como proponerse no percibir un olor, porque el recuerdo, como el olor, asalta, incluso cuando no es convocado.” (2005: 9)

The way memory is portrayed in El Hachmi's work, as something that escapes the subject's rational control, and hence does not let itself be cloistered by rigid boundaries, coincides with the understanding of identity that can be deduced from these works. The subjectivity of El Hachmi's characters, much like her own subjectivity, is multiple and informed by affiliations that might be somehow hidden but that resurface at specific times, in specific contexts. Thus, we learn that when Najat witnessed xenophobic attitudes, she confronted them "sentint-[s]e més musulmana que mai" (2004: 118). Despite the fact that she decided not to let religion play a decisive role in her every-day life, she is indeed aware of the fact that she was raised in a Muslim family, and thus, she "duu dins" the legacy of such an upbringing. However, although such an upbringing is also sustained upon the idea of *mektoub*, a consideration that is more clearly inscribed in *L'últim patriarca*, Najat and her characters bridge over the rigidity of that *written* destiny by writing counter-stories that allow them to merge their cultural inheritance with the narratives that inform their new surroundings. In El Hachmi's first novel, the title cannot be fully grasped unless paired with this idea –the narrator informs us, throughout the account, that the genealogy to which her family is connected, which predates time as signalled by the '0' with which the author entitles this realisation, is based on "l'ordre establert", as if there could only be one familial history, whose outcome was inescapable.

With her story, the narrator bends, dilutes, redraws and deforms the History in which she was supposed to fit. And because it is a woman who does it, and women are not part of the list of names that figure in the genealogy to which the Driouch family belong, the rewriting described by the narrator is all the more significant. In earlier chapters of this thesis, I commented upon the fact that the relationship between Dalila Kerchouche and her characters, and the harki universe is somehow mediated by the phrasing "*li fat met*", "the past is dead". If the gestures of defiance that we find in El Hachmi's works have to do with the undoing of "l'ordre establert", in Kerchouche's work the defiance comes from retrieving the past that is supposed to be dead and hence is constructed monolithically and as untouchable. As we shall see, the fact that the retrieval of the past that the works by Dalila Kerchouche put forward is undertaken by women is also meaningful and worth analysing. The (re)writing that is practised by this author is largely informed by memories that belong to her, as they configure the Kerchouche's familial identity, but that however refer to events that she did not experience first-hand. Her looking back is, thus, like El Hachmi's, nuanced and complex, and problematizes linear temporalities.

4.2 The Harki Re(-)Members and Re(-)Writes

If the *filla estrangera* wrote down the story of her mother and the narrator of *L'últim patriarca* accounted for the Driouchs' story –exercises with which El Hachmi was articulating a complementary narrative to the hegemonic discourse that vertebrated the sociohistorical discourse of the Catalonia of the turn of the century–, Kerchouche wrote the story of her own family –which, as she herself realises, holds parallels with the story of many other harki families– to intervene in the narratives circulating, both in France and Algeria, about the harkis. Her intervention is directly connected with the silence disclosed in the phrasing that her father keeps repeating. As stated in the preface of *Mon père, ce harki*, silence is defined as a powerful element inasmuch as “il nie l'existence elle-même” (Jordi 2003: 9). Kerchouche tells us that “[l]es harkis hésitent à parler. Comme si parler, et écrire, était trahir encore” (2003: 16).

Similarly, the father of Leïla in Kerchouche's novel will answer: “‘*Mektoub*', ‘C'est écrit’” or “‘*li fat met*', ‘le passé est mort’” when his family asks him about the war years (2006: 67). It is worth noting that the oral and the written dimensions are looked upon as being in a horizontal relationship. Indeed, and as we learnt, the *saying* and the *writing* in Kerchouche's work are very much linked, as encapsulated by the author's ultimate realisation about why she wrote her autobiographical account: “J'ai écrit ce livre pour parler à mon père.” (2003: 275) In the same sense, Vincent Crapanzano provides a link between “*li fat met*” and the idea of *mektub* inscribed, as I just mentioned, within the universe of the written word. As Crapanzano affirms, commenting on harki narratives that he reads as articulated by the idea of contingency: “It is, as the Algerians say, *mektub* (written/fate), which Harkis, less so their children, often use. By speaking of their lives in terms of the ‘written’, they avoid explaining what they cannot or do not want to explain.” (2010: 73)

In an article that dissects the symbolic violence to which the harki communities were subjected and how such violence played out in the construction of the identities of the different generations of the harki people, Géraldine Enjelvin explains that they have often been referred to as the “generation of silence”:

As they were not endowed with what Bourdieu [...] has called the “dominant language”, they did not speak, but were spoken to. For this reason and because the transmission of the past to their descendants was, for many, an impossible task, due to the painful memories and feelings

of guilt they are often called the “generation of silence”. Thus, their offspring are the ones who rose up publicly for the first time as a “memory community” [...], a “community of suffering” and as victims of historical injustices.

(2006: 118)²³⁵

Thus, as hinted above, the reconfiguration of this “generation of silence” –a formula that refers specifically to the former auxiliary soldiers– happens by stepping into the past and bringing memory to the foreground as a key component in the process, unveiling the manifold silences in which the history of the harkis is embedded. As noted by Enjelvin, it is the generation of people that are somehow connected with the harki universe but who did not participate in the Algerian war, the ones who will carry out such a task, and who will do so by writing.²³⁶ They will retrieve, via the written word, the times of the war and its consequences, which represents a defiant gesture that might be read as a sign that the “mémoire handicapée” (in Derrida’s terms) has been mended. Derrida speaks of this kind of memory as a deficient memory that is born out of amnesic contexts, which provoke fragmented knowledge (1996: 89).

In the very first page of *Mon père, ce harki* Dalila Kerchouche explains that her book and the “quête harkéologique” that vertebrates it are born out of the partial knowledge she has of her father’s participation in the Franco-Algerian war. She has indeed inherited a handicapped memory of that time which she will try to fill in by revising her family’s past and the space in which the harki label was born. Such an exploration will take many forms and will result in two texts that, different in their nature, speak of the multi-layered process of memory retrieval that Kerchouche undertook. It is important, once again, to signal that she does it by putting to paper the results of her quest, which she gathers by making many people “speak up” about their experiences. Thus, via her publications, she manages to make certain voices circulate, which ultimately break the silences that I will reference below in a graphic manner.

²³⁵ In her novel, Kerchouche uses the difference sets of linguistic skills that Leïla and her parents have in order to speak of their generational gap. The protagonist of the novel, pushed by her parents, manages to become the first of her class in French language, which she sees as her “beautiful revenge”: “la fille de harkis qui a grandi dans les camps, qui trouve sur sa chaise les mots ‘Sale Arabe, retourne dans ton pays’” manages to get great academic results in the language that many see she cannot claim as hers (2006: 87).

²³⁶ According to Rossella Spina in *Enfants de harkis et enfants d’émigrés*, the need to write over the inherited silence of their previous generation is something shared by the harki descendants and the “fils d’immigrés”. She understands that their particular relationship with the fragmented past they inherit informs what she calls their “identités à recoudre” (2012: 11).

The gestures of recuperation, (re)writing and un-silencing that inform Kerchouche's work have to be understood in the context in which her works were produced. As we already know, coinciding with the celebrations of "L'Année de l'Algérie" in France, the year 2003 marked the apparition of four texts connected with the harki universe. Fatima Besnaci-Lancou's *Fille de harki*, Zahia Rahmani's *Moze*, Dalila Kerchouche's *Mon père, ce harki* and Hadjila Kemoum's *Mohand le harki* signified a shift in the way the stories of the harkis had hitherto been tackled in France. The official recognition on the part of the French administration of the Franco-Algerian war, which remained "the war without a name"²³⁷ until the turn of the century (see Elridge 2016: 6), certainly favoured the publication of texts, in several media, that had a link with an enormously significant chapter in the histories of both France and Algeria. Claire Elridge reminds us that, in France, "[t]he reluctance to term the events in Algeria a 'war'" provoked the fact that "the events of 1954-62 were not inserted into the nation's official memory. Instead, they were effectively forgotten in what appeared to be a troubling case of national amnesia." (2016: 33, 6) In order to fully grasp the fabric of the label *harki*, it is thus important to note that its construction is deeply embedded in what Benjamin Stora calls a "war on memory" both on the Algerian and the French sides, as I stated in the Introduction.

In the preface to the 1998 edition of *La Gangrène et l'Oubli*, Stora explains that when he wrote the original text, in 1990-1991, he did so from his conviction that the Algerian war was not over "dans les têtes [ni] dans les cœurs", because it had not been sufficiently "nommée, montrée, assumée dans et par une mémoire collective." (1998: 1) However, he acknowledges in that same preface that both in France and in Algeria "[l]'écriture de l'histoire de la guerre d'Algérie ne fait que (re)commencer". According to him, during the *décennie noire*, in Algeria "l'État perd progressivement le contrôle du monopole d'écriture de l'histoire" and in France, starting in 1992, which marks the starting point of the official recognition of the conflict,²³⁸ considerable amounts of works of all kinds have emerged that tackle this topic (3). This conversation of sorts, via different media, is helping in the construction of a "historical memory" –understood as that which "reaches social actors through written records,

²³⁷ Benjamin Stora references John Talbott's *The War without a Name, France in Algeria, 1954-1962* and reminds us that during the duration of the conflict, the French administration would use different formulas to designate the war without describing it as such: "événements", "opérations de police", "actions de maintien de l'ordre", "opérations de rétablissement de la paix civile" and "entreprises de pacification" (see Stora 1998: 13).

²³⁸ Stora and Mohammed Harbi –a former FLN militant– co-published a book which, as its title indicates, signals 2004 as the year when the "amnesia" regarding the Algerian war ended: *La Guerre d'Algérie: 1954-2004, la fin de l'amnésie* (2006). Following on from this argument, the texts mentioned here would have deeply contributed to putting an end to such amnesia.

photographs, commemoration, festive enactment and films” and “[i]t is scholarly and theoretically constructed in a certain body of historical knowledge” (Maghraoui 1998: 23). However, despite the shift of perspective and although it did get critical attention, the theme of the harkis did not receive the nuanced approach that it deserved, bearing in mind the amount of people that fell under the *harki* umbrella.

Abderahmen Moumen’s *Entre histoire et mémoire: Les rapatriés d’Algérie. Dictionnaire bibliographique*, which appeared the same year as the aforementioned accounts, highlights that most of the fictional and scholarly works that had up until then been published after the years following Algeria’s independence focused on the reasons that led this group of people to side with the French during the conflict –or, as phrased by Géraldine Enjelvin, to fight not so much *for* France but rather *alongside* it (2006: 113-127).²³⁹ However, as we know, and as we are reminded by Jacques Duquesne,²⁴⁰ the historian who wrote the preface to Kerchouche’s *Mon père, ce harki*, the dictionary references two meanings for the word *harki*: “supplétif”, but also “membre de la famille ou descendant d’un harki”. (2003: 10) Bearing this in mind, the works by the four women listed above came to occupy a bibliographical gap, for they explore the consequences of that participation not only for the combatants themselves but also for their families, which pinpoints to what extent the label permeates several generations.

Mohand Hamoumou, himself the son of a harki and whose work *Et ils sont devenus harkis* is considered a seminal study in understanding the heterogeneity of the harki community, provides in his text several analyses that are of major value in understanding how the retrieval of the harki past undertaken by Kerchouche and her fellow writers has to be thought of in connection with the “war on memory” to which Stora refers. I read Kerchouche’s work as the instrument the author uses in order to participate in that “memorialist war”, in order to confront the ways the harkis have been constructed in the collective memories of both France and Algeria –and, as Kerchouche’s case demonstrates, even within the familial memories of the harkis themselves.²⁴¹ Hamoumou states that “la désinformation du FLN, simple continuation

²³⁹ This idea is echoed in Fatima Besnaci-Lancou’s *Fille de harki*: “La majorité écrasante des hommes n’avait pas choisi de s’engager auprès de l’armée française pour tuer mais pour se protéger ou défendre leur famille de la terreur [...]. [I]ls s’étaient engagés avec la France et non pour la France.” (2003: 70-71)

²⁴⁰ Jacques Duquesne is also a French novelist and a journalist. He was responsible for covering the Franco-Algerian war for the Catholic newspaper *La Croix*. In 2001 he published *Pour comprendre la guerre d’Algérie*.

²⁴¹ Claire Elridge has also commented on this particular silence: “The reasons *harkis* were so reluctant to speak of their past were multiple and worked in varying combinations. Powerful external narratives, linguistic and cultural barriers, physical isolation, economic and social disempowerment, mixed with a potent sense of fear and

sous une autre forme de la guerre subversive, a voulu associer le terme harki à l'idée de trahison. Une partie de la presse française a accepté le point de vue imposé par l'Algérie indépendante pour qui les harkis [...] demeurent des 'renégats'". (1993: 113)²⁴²

The stigma that got associated with the term is of paramount importance to understand the inscription of the harkis and their families upon French soil –mediated by the camps– and within the national and historical discourse of both France and Algeria, as shall be further explored. Susan Ireland has noted, in reference to *Mon père, ce harki* that the “repetition of terms connoting absence” that traverses Kerchouche’s text “points insistently to France’s ‘policy of forgetting’” (2009: 206). Ireland interprets Kerchouche’s multiple references to the lack of traces of the past, both physical and archival –when she visits the camps Dalila is at odds to see that nothing remains of the harkis’s passage there, which leads her to speak of the camps as “lieux du vide” which draw a “géographie du néant” (Kerchouche 2003: 91)–, as Kerchouche’s symbolic way of highlighting the “erasure and [...] reluctance to put the *harkis* on the national map.” (Ireland 2009: 305) Because of this, Ireland reads Dalila’s “reference to the star shape that the camps form on the map of France” as her personal cartography aiming at the creation of “an alternative mapping of the events of the war that reflects the *harkis*’ experiences.” (*ibid.*)

Inscribed within the historical discourses of both nations, the harki stigma also vehiculates the relationship between Dalila and her father. Thus, she informs us that at the beginning of her quest she had quite harsh feelings towards him: “Voilà ce que l’Histoire m’a appris: à détester mon père”; “[l]’Histoire, à laquelle se sont ajoutés des problèmes familiaux personnels, m’a séparée de lui.” (2003: 24, 25)²⁴³ The fact that Kerchouche contests these constructions on paper –by retrieving individual and familial memories– helps us to understand the collective dimension of her work. As stated by Jacques Le Goff, memory is “un élément essentiel de ce que l’on appelle l’*identité* individuelle ou collective, dont la quête est une des activités fondamentales des individus et des sociétés d’aujourd’hui” (1988: 174; emphasis in the

exacerbated by the difficulty of articulating a past many were themselves still struggling to come to terms with all played their part in depriving the *harkis* of a voice in the years following their arrival in France.” (2016: 27)

²⁴² Further down, Hamoumou notes that “[d]es Français musulmans rapatriés ont reçu des lettres officielles leur apprenant qu’ils avaient été déclarés ‘traîtres à la nation.’” (1993: 336)

²⁴³ In *Fille de harki*, Besnaci-Lancou also reflects on the topic of history, presenting it with almost human qualities: “C’était à Paris et à Alger que les politiques décidaient pour nous. L’histoire s’écrivait loin de nous.” (2003: 57) She speaks of the camps as spaces that had been, prior to the arrival of the harkis, occupied by “autres victimes de l’histoire” (74, 81).

original). What makes the harki scenario particularly complex is that this identity search is somehow problematized by the very same people that “initiated” such an identity marker, because they chose not to speak about it. Hence the importance of the memorial digging work undertaken by Kerchouche and by other people who understand themselves through the harki filter. Their works are of great value in the construction of a historical memory issued from the Franco-Algerian war that considers all its nuances. By building their texts upon a collective “autobiographical memory” –understood, following Maghraoui, as a memory that “living individuals have experienced in the past” (1998: 23), which will effectively be translated into an *oral* memory–, they are filling in the silences regarding the participation of the harkis during the conflict and the consequences that ensued from such participation.

4.2.1 Writing (the Memories of) the War

In their search for all kinds of sources, the individual dimension of these women’s accounts will be surpassed, since a collective memory will resurface or rather be built. Le Goff understands collective memory²⁴⁴ as “non seulement une conquête, c’est un instrument et un objectif de puissance. Ce sont les sociétés dont la mémoire sociale est surtout orale ou qui sont en train de se constituer une mémoire collective écrite qui permettent le mieux de saisir cette lutte pour la domination du souvenir et de la tradition, cette manipulation de la mémoire.” (174-175) I argue that the works by Kerchouche, in parallel with all the other works mentioned above by harki daughters, constitute the “written collective memory” of the harki community. In this sense, I understand memory as a form of translation, inasmuch as in the etymological root of the term *translatio*, it means to transport, to take something from one rim to the other –in this case, carrying (oral) memories from the past to the written text, inscribed in the present in which the authors who publish these texts live. In this respect, by way of the written inscription that they perform, these authors and their texts enable, at the same time, not only the retrieval of silenced memories but also the writing up of what Françoise Collin calls a “savoir historique” –which ties in with what Pierre Nora wrote in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, as he states that “[c]’est la mémoire qui dicte et l’histoire qui écrit” (xxxviii):

²⁴⁴ As noted by Claire Elridge, today, “the term ‘social memory’ is increasingly favoured over ‘collective memory’ because of the latter’s essentialising and reifying implication.” (2016: 11) Whenever “collective memory” is used in this research, it is understood from non-essentialising conceptions.

Le savoir historique est en effet étroitement lié à ce qui fait marque: ce qui est déterminant, ce qui produit des effets, ce qui transforme le donné, ce qui se capitalise dans des signes, des objets, des institutions, des décrets, des traités, des lois. Même si on a abandonné l'identification de l'histoire à l'histoire des guerres et des conquêtes, il reste que l'on ne peut faire l'histoire de l'invisible, de l'impalpable, de ce qui se dissipe. L'histoire est forcément histoire du durable, de ce qui est "en dur", du monument et du monumental. Qu'elle le veuille ou non, elle a affaire à ce qui se majore (y compris à ce qui se majore dans les minorités). [...] Et d'autant moins que par un paradoxe incontournable, un groupe dominé obéit toujours, même dans sa contestation et sa révolte, aux lois de fonctionnement du groupe dominant: il n'y a pas construction à partir d'une table rase mais plutôt déconstruction et reconstruction de et dans ce qui est déjà là.

(Collin 1993: 17-18)

In the article from where this quote is taken Collin deals with the intricacies of writing a feminist history, but I believe that inasmuch as I read the harkis as a minority, understanding them as a group that is caught up in power dynamics that date back to the French colonial enterprise, her reflections illuminate my analysis of the works by Kerchouche. Kerchouche's texts represent the fabrication of the "en dur" to which Collin is referring, which is indeed born of an exercise of deconstruction and reconstruction: a deconstruction of the stigma that gets associated with the harki label that allows for the construction of an identity marker that can be proudly embraced, as Kerchouche herself does after her "quête harkéologique". The written practice as a gesture of memorial reconstruction is also explored in Fatima Besnaci-Lancou's *Fille de harki*. In the introduction to this work,²⁴⁵ Besnaci-Lancou declares that it was after she heard the statements by Algerian president Bouteflika in a visit to France on the 16th of June of the year 2000 that she decided to write in order to contest the "stigmatisation qui a touché la communauté des harkis depuis la fin de la guerre", a stigmatisation that, according to the author, has enclosed them "dans la culpabilité comme dans une carapace." (2003: 18)

Bouteflika affirmed the following: "Les conditions ne sont pas encore venues pour des visites de harkis. [...] C'est exactement comme si on demandait à un Français de la Résistance de toucher la main d'un collabo." (in Besnaci-Lancou 2003: 14) These words, which Besnaci-Lancou received as a "gifle", awoke the author's past and all its horrors. As the author puts it,

²⁴⁵ The first time that the word *harki* appears in the text, we find a footnote that contextualizes it historically. Much like the introduction to Kerchouche's 2003 work, prefaced by a historian, these paratexts of sorts speak of the pedagogical dimension of these texts and explain, above all, to what extent French society is not acquainted with the reality of the harkis, as they were published by French publishing houses for allegedly French audiences.

“[i]l m’a [...] sortie de mon ‘trou de mémoire’” (13) –and it is worth noting how the usage of the word *trou* is reminiscent of the idea of the wound; abandoning this self-imposed oblivion was, Fatima states, a painful process. Much as the attitude that, we learnt, was adopted by “la filla estrangera”, and following the attitude of the former combatants themselves, Besnaci-Lancou had decided to hide the “événements sanglants de l’été ‘rouge’” (21), by which she refers to the summer of 1962, the recollection of which remained, up to the writing of her book, “bien emprisonnée, au fond de [s]a mémoire, comme un secret honteux, douloureux, indicible.” (20) By writing, she undoes the denial that she had put herself into, in order to “rester vivante” (42) and acknowledges that all those memories of the war that she had tried to forget remained dormant, and got triggered by Bouteflika’s declaration (as in El Hachmi’s novel, an external input triggers the retrieval of memories thought of or constructed as obliterated).

Besnaci-Lancou understands that the writing down of those memories, which mean her acceptance of the harki component criss-crossing her process of subjectivity formation, are in fact a memorial duty –in this respect, we acknowledge a tension between the right to forget to which she was at first appealing and her duty to remember, as triggered by her reflections upon listening to Bouteflika. In writing she ends up understanding the manifold reasons that led the harkis to participate in the war, she dwells on the life conditions of the harki families inside the camps and can somehow counteract the feeling of guilt that “allait contrer pour longtemps le travail de deuil que nous avons tous à assumer, individuellement et collectivement.” (75)

Fatima understands that the guilt was indeed fabricated by the rejection that the harkis had to endure on both sides of the Mediterranean. Her duty involves speaking out about this two-fold rejection, by retrieving her memories about the “guerre sans nom”. She acknowledges that she wrote them for her children: “Je voulais pour eux, effacer la honte et faire barrage à la haine. Je pensais aussi que cette partie de ma vie ne m’appartenait pas à moi seule mais qu’elle faisait partie de l’histoire de ma communauté. Je me devais de la raconter.” (83) With this last series of statements, Besnaci-Lancou is pointing at the permeability of the harki condition analysed above, whereby the passing on of the harki marker signifies as well a passing on of the stigma that gets associated with it. The written exercise that she puts into practice somehow halts this transmission and together with the other accounts mentioned, acts as a turning point in the construction of the harki identity.

The references to Besnaci-Lancou's work are important inasmuch as, as acknowledged by Géraldine Evenjlin and Nada Korac-Kakabadse, "Dalila Kerchouche's and Fatima Besnaci-Lancou's narratives are regarded by the French media as the most visible carriers of the Harkis' collective memory", which leads to the situation whereby "these two writers are seen as representatives of their memory group." (2012: 157)²⁴⁶ Enjelvin and Korac-Kakabadse, who interpret these writers' texts as tools to implement a "textually mediated identity (re)construction" (152), remind us that Besnaci-Lancou not only wrote several books about the harkis since her first published account, but also became president of the association Harkis et droits de l'Homme, which galvanized the writing of the *Manifeste pour la réappropriation des mémoires confisquées* (2004).²⁴⁷

For her part, Kerchouche continued dwelling on the harki universe in her 2006 novel, which was turned into the film *Harkis*.²⁴⁸ The film received much publicity in France and was broadcast in a primetime slot on *France 2*, a major channel in the French television network. Korac-Kakabadse and Enjelvin understand that because the film "reached an even wider audience than the literary works" by the harki daughters, *Harkis* "constitutes the most visible representation of the Harkis' collective memory in French society", which would explain why Kerchouche, together with Besnaci-Lancou are seen by the Euro-French population as "representative[s]" of the harki group and "(are asked to) represent the Harki population at conferences on the Algerian war." (*ibid.*) Thus, the texts by Kerchouche analysed here can be understood as symbolic artefacts capable of facilitating a collective cultural memory, if we understand, following Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, that this kind of memory "is itself premised on the idea that memory can only become collective as part of a continuous process whereby memories are shared with the help of symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both space and time." (2009: 1)

²⁴⁶ Nina Sutherland explains that the large media coverage that the works by Besnaci-Lancou, Kerchouche, Rahmani and Kemoum managed to attain can be explained not only because of their literary qualities and the scarcity of works published by people belonging to the harki world, but also because of "the heightened media interest in the Harkis, following their indictment of the French and Algerian governments for Crimes against Humanity" and the inauguration of the national day of homage to the Harkis in 2001 (2006: 196).

²⁴⁷ The manifesto, which incorporates the voices of the harkis and of the children of Algerian immigrants in France, seeks to rewrite colonial history both in France and in Algeria. It was presented in the French Parliament in September 2004.

²⁴⁸ As I already stated, Kerchouche was involved in the script of the film. The situation of the harki families who arrived in France was portrayed in the musical *Les enfants du soleil* (Assous and Barbelivien), which features three families who arrive in Marseille from newly independent Algeria. The paternal figure of one of them is a harki –because of that, two of the songs of the show are entitled "Un français musulman" and "Harki, mon père", in clear reference to this.

Unlike Fatima, Dalila Kerchouche does not hold memories of the war. This, as we have learnt, is felt by the author as a boundary that renders her different and separates her from the other members of her family. In this respect, the retrieval of the past is conceived as a strategy for creating a sense of belonging, too. By presenting a protagonist for her novel whose recollection of the past is inscribed on Algerian soil, Kerchouche is seeking to bridge over that distance and is in turn widening the memorialist task that her works perform –in this sense, it is worth noting that as indicated by my analyses of Kerchouche’s work, there is agency in the act of remembrance. At the end of her novel we understand that the text that we read is the result of an exercise made possible thanks to the critical distance from which Kerchouche is able to approach the harki universe, due, precisely, to the fact that she had no first-hand experience of the war.

In *Leïla* we find two narrative voices: that of Leïla and arguably, because of what is said in the epilogue, that of Marianne, one of Leïla’s sisters. The first one we encounter throughout the first five pages, Marianne’s, might as well be the voice of Dalila Kerchouche, for several elements in these pages let us assume so.²⁴⁹ We learn that the narrator defines herself as “une fille de harkis” –a statement that punctuated *Mon père, ce harki*–, that she was born in France within a harki camp, that she has grown to learn that despite “ce que la France [lui] a appris, avec ses camps et barbelés”, her father was not a traitor, although she had doubts about it as a teenager. She tells us that her family spent thirteen years in camps but that their inscription within French society was somehow traversed by symbolic wires, in the way the local French people with whom they interact read them as outsiders.

Taking all this into consideration, and understanding *Leïla* as part of the Kerchouche’s literary genealogy, we might assume that when the narrator announces that she “ressucite une voix oubliée, qui jaillit d’un passé enfoui” (10), this voice finds many and multiple echoes in the pages that follow. The narrator, who speaks to us from the Paris of 2006 –another hint that can be interpreted as a way of blurring the lines between narrator and author– proceeds briefly to describe her experience of growing up as a “fille de harkis” to then give way to Leïla, who situates her story in the south of France in 1972 and whose narrative voice occupies most of

²⁴⁹ When put side by side, the picture that we find on the cover of the novel dialogues with the one of Kerchouche in the back of the book. The two pictures portray the same kind of gaze and body attitude. I read this as Kerchouche’s willingness to somehow speak from the position of the girl that appears on the cover, if we consider that authors have the last word in the covers chosen by their publishing houses.

the novel. Thirty years later, Leïla hopes that the generations that follow her will be able to state, “avec fierté, qu’ils sont des enfants de harkis”, which parallels the concluding remarks that we read in *Mon père, ce harki*.

Through the voice of Leïla we learnt about the birth of a baby, within her family, that will mark the familial story, because she will end up being a journalist and from this position she will conduct a particular historical and memorialist search regarding the harkis. The results of this process will be shared within the family circle, and thanks to this the family will be able to understand the injustices they went through once they got to French territory (149). The baby’s name is Dalila, but because of a social assistant that filled in the baby’s birth certificate, she will be called Marianne (62) –again, we realize to what extent the French administration, epitomised in the figure of the social assistant, was responsible for the naming and hence the ways of existing of the harki population. Marianne-Dalila, the narrator informs us, is more than her sibling: “je serai sa deuxième maman.” (60)

Erected as her guardian of sorts, Leïla constructs Marianne as a kind of horizon of expectations, a symbol of a new generation. Leïla will strive to change things within her surroundings –which will lead to a revolt galvanized by the harkis, which greatly contributes to the process of Leïla’s own subjective navigation– so that Marianne will not live through what she and her relatives experienced in the camps (not even in the form of memories of “cet enfer” [138]) and she expresses this idea in a rather grandiloquent way, emphasizing its importance: “C’est pour elle que je dois me battre”; “[p]our elle, je dois briser ces chaînes de soumission qui nous étranglent” (112, 126). Marianne will be the ultimate reason why Leïla does not drown and she will pin her hopes on this baby, who is not old enough to keep memories of the camp where she is born.

Leïla will translate her hopes by talking to Marianne and letting her know the future of possibilities that she envisions for her: “–Mon bébé, quand tu seras grande, tu vivras dans une belle maison. [...] Tu iras à l’université et tu deviendras avocate. Ou alors... journaliste! En tout cas, tu défendras les harkis!” (112) Upon saying this, however, Leïla realizes that the baby is ill, a sign of the fragility of her projections; the baby’s body is swollen and, like the memory of the “first generation” of harkis, risks dying. Via this episode, Kerchouche informs us, through the narrator, about the precarious medical conditions the harkis had to endure within the camps, as we learn that the chiefs of the camps could decide whether or not medical

assistance was provided for the families –depending, sometimes, on arbitrary criteria. I argue that the emphasis placed by the author on the body is not only a tool to convey this kind of information but becomes an important element in the way Kerchouche constructs the idea of belonging, too. In a text that reflects upon a dialogue between Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero, Meri Torras Francés and Michelle Gama Leyva understand bodies as elements that carry within themselves traces of memory. Understood as “un lugar en el que la historia pasa del uno al otro”, the body becomes the conducive piece that allows for the survival of those forms of belonging “que sobrepasan el espacio y el tiempo” (2014: 105). Read through the filter of this thought, the body of baby Marianne is connected with the harkis’ genealogical line and, because of that, the fact that the baby gets physically ill speaks of the harkis symbolic suffering.

In *Mon père, ce harki*, by adding a geographical dimension to her quest (for she physically revisits her family’s journey upon their arrival in France), Kerchouche is inscribing the body within the text as an important element in her multidimensional search. In the process that she undertakes, her initial aim is to look for physical traces –objects, documents– of the past that might help her clarify the consequences of the Franco-Algerian war for those who were read as harkis. However, along the way she realises that the oral archive might well be more significant, as the testimonies to which she has access provide her with a deeper and more nuanced input than those traces she was initially looking for. In that respect, Dalila explores the potentiality of bodies, which have tongue(s), which can speak up and unravel a series of memories that she can *emprunter*.²⁵⁰

In *Leïla*, the story of the harkis is vertebrated through the body of the protagonist. By placing the emphasis on the particular situated experience of the main character of the novel, Kerchouche is aiming for that transcendence of which Torras and Gama speak and hence to build an all-encompassing reflection about the harki scenario. We learn that Leïla’s body gets sick (in the same way that the protagonists of El Hachmi get ill in the more acute episodes of identity turmoil), that it is caught up in the network of suicide. We learn of the surveillance to

²⁵⁰ In *Mes Algéries en France* –the aim of which is, in Cécilia W. Francis’s words, to “[f]ondre une mythologie affective du soi à même un portrait à la fois personnel et collectif d’appartenances et d’allégeances maghrébines aux contours ouverts” (2012: 82)– Leïla Sebbar builds what she calls a “mémoire d’emprunt” that is drawn from several sources and allows the author to unravel her manifold affiliations (2004: 48). In this work, Sebbar includes reflections on the harkis as she visits several harki camps and speaks of her need to “voir pour savoir” (197). She also writes about texts produced by the descendants of the former combatants in terms of “objets de mémoire pour l’histoire à venir” that serve to counteract silence and oblivion (202).

which Leïla's body is subjected, inasmuch as it is "incarcerated" in the camps. We learn of its difficulty in navigating the dichotomy that informs the different spaces in which she circulates, a dichotomy that establishes clear-cut differences between the inside and the outside of the camps and that is conformed both by the colonial dynamics sustaining the camps and by the cultural codes that regulate the familial community.

The body of Leïla is a body that is still in a process of growing –not in vain Kerchouche chooses to write a *Bildungsroman* of sorts, in which the protagonist is a teenager and has not yet reached adulthood, as epitomised by her 17 years of age. This organic feature permeates all the dimensions of Kerchouche's texts. Like the teenage girl who is in a process of subjective negotiation and is subjected to change, the stories of the harkis –somehow frozen up to the year 2003– can be retrieved, and expanded, as Kerchouche's novel itself exemplifies. In this gesture of expansion, articulated through an exercise of remembering –her sister's memories–, Kerchouche is also re-membering the harki community which, after her "quête harkéologique", she decides to claim as her own –and the corporal semantic universe of this formula, *re-membering*, is not trivial. Devoid of the past that he does not want to retrieve, Kerchouche's father –and, like him, all those former combatants that chose to stay silent about their Algerian lives– is but a body. By providing him with a tongue that can be vocal about that past and (re)state it, Kerchouche is, as well, achieving a unified group identity through recollection. The process of memory-retrieval is facilitated by the inclusion of the experiences of a daughter of a harki who is willing to speak about her past and who will pass on her memories to yet another generation (for, as I explained in earlier chapters, I understand the fact that Dalila holds no memories of the camps as a generational boundary) who will *write* those down, in a different tongue.

The fragility that informs this chain of legacies is epitomised, as explained, by the illness afflicting baby Marianne's body. Because she manages to survive, the survival of the harkis memories and their stories also becomes a reality. As Leïla herself explains to us thirty years after she wished for her baby sister to restore the harkis's dignity, her sister did indeed become a journalist who sought to "defend" the harkis by resurrecting their stories from obliteration. If we then "read back" to the beginning of the novel, we strengthen our reading of the conflation between the first narrative voice and that of Kerchouche's, for the narrator announces: "Peut-être passerai-je ma vie à raconter encore et encore la même histoire, jusqu'à l'obsession, jusqu'à l'usure, mais je n'ai pas le choix: j'aurai beau essayer d'échapper à ce passé, il me

rattrapera toujours.” (2006: 13) In the same kind of circular gesture upon which *La filla estrangera* is built, at the end of *Leila* we are made aware that what we just read is another attempt by Kerchouche at re-telling the stories of the harkis and at re-writing their History. Like the “filla estrangera”, Marianne-Dalila “pensai[t] en avoir fini avec [s]on passé” (9) but ultimately realises, like Dalila Kerchouche herself when she decided to embark upon her quest, that “[elle] voudrai[t] parler” (10). Her will to speak up has to do with the memories that she retrieves from her past, memories that are connected with a very harsh reality for they describe a family torn apart because of their harki condition. The past that risks catching up with her is, thus, built not upon her own lived experiences, but on those of her relatives and other people who understand themselves as belonging to the harki community.

4.2.2 The Harki Writer as a (Feminist) Historian, and as a Witness

In the last section of *Les Harkis dans la colonisation et ses suites*, a collective work coordinated by Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, we find the voices of some people belonging to the harki universe that allow for the understanding of the complex nature of the label *harki*. One of these voices, voices that get inscribed in the text through quotations that seek to preserve their oral nature, belongs to a man who defines himself as a “fils de harki” and who lives in Algeria. The man—who remains anonymous, something that could arguably hint at the (jn)existence of the harkis on discursive terms—states: “Je ne vais pas trop parler de ma situation, car il faudrait un bon écrivain pour trouver les mots qui conviennent” (in Besnaci-Lancou 2008: 205). This person’s thoughts point towards the hesitancy to which Kerchouche referred in her autobiographical account when she claimed that, up to this day, the harkis hesitate to speak up.

The need to find a bridge-like figure that can pierce through this hesitancy is reminiscent of the figure of the “vicarious witness”. François Hartog has produced much literature about the centrality of the witness in today’s conjunction, which could be described, following the formula employed by Annette Wieviorka, as “l’ère du témoin” (1998), initiated during the decade of the 1980s and traversed by the Shoah. In an article that analyses the witnessing gesture in connection with the task undertaken by historians, Hartog claims that “[e]l testigo no es un historiador y el historiador, si en algunos casos puede ser un testigo, no debe serlo, porque no es sino tomando distancia respecto de los testigos (de todos los testigos, incluido él mismo) que puede comenzar a ser un historiador” (2001: 10) My reading of the task undertaken

by Kerchouche via her works is filtered through this idea of critical distance as theorized by Hartog. However, I find Hartog's statement rather problematic because, on the one hand, the kind of distance for which he calls –which is reminiscent of the concept of objectivity– might be unattainable. On the other hand, as the Kerchouche's case illuminates, a certain degree of dependency upon that which the historian is seeking to comprehend might be desirable.

As I have stated above, I read Kerchouche's texts as historical rewritings that, together with other texts by harki descendants, aim to facilitate a revision of France's historical account of the war and its consequences. I believe that because of her particular in-betweenness, Kerchouche acts as a vicarious witness, understood, following Hartog, as a “testigo por delegación”, “testigo sustituto” (12-13) that aims at *translating* –again, transmitting– a series of memories tied to an experience she has not lived through. At this particular crossroads, which we know enables the author to adopt a critical distance regarding the theme of the complexity of the harki universe, she is able to perform a particular set of gestures of retrieval that are connected with the roles of the witness and of the historian. By the time that she publishes her first account, there is a need, within the harki community –that by now is made up of different generations– of a restoration of their sense of dignity, something which necessitates a multi-layered and multidisciplinary set of tasks.

The resurgence of memories connected with the war period and especially with the consequences provoked by that war do not suffice, as the harki organizations, which flourished during the last years of the 20th century following from the harki revolts in 1975, identified the need for a historical exercise of revision. Thus, as expressed by Frédéric Grasset –former president of the Fondation pour la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie, des combats du Maroc et de Tunisie–, one of the goals for the kind of organizations he represented was connected with the will to comprehend and with the right to memory. In order to fulfil that goal, they claimed the (re)construction of “une histoire qui est ignorée, oubliée, trahie” (2013: 9), a task that needed to be rightly performed. Thus, the gesture that connects the terrain of memory with that of history, as encapsulated in the title of the volume that includes Grasset's contribution: *Les Harkis, des mémoires à l'histoire*, has to be conducive to a better understanding of the history of the harkis.

Fifty years after the end of the war, Grasset believed that the time had come “au moment où la recherche, la réflexion, la confrontation des analyses permettra une meilleure compréhension

de cette histoire” (*ibid.*). Because of what has been analysed above, I argue that texts like the ones published by Kerchouche, written from the distanced perspective to which Grasset is appealing, allow for the kind of exercise that the harki community –through its several associations– was demanding at the beginning of the new millennium:

Peut-être aussi sommes-nous arrivés enfin au moment où, comme le disait le grand historien Pierre Nora dans *Les Lieux de mémoire*, le besoin de mémoire est un besoin d’histoire. Et où après la mémoire “archive”, la mémoire “devoir”, il faut ce troisième trait qui est appelé la mémoire “distance” pour compléter le tableau de ces métamorphoses, où l’histoire s’installe selon la très belle formule employée dans cet ouvrage comme “un imaginaire de remplacement”.

(9-10)

The construction of a new imaginary, which we could describe as a counter-imaginary because it seeks to replace and contest the stigma that gets associated with the harkis, is facilitated by the fictional dimension of the works that the harki daughters put forward. Kerchouche’s trajectory exemplifies the different stages listed by Grasset that aim to fill in the two-fold need of the harkis as a group. In *Mon père, ce harki*, Kerchouche takes on an archival task whereby, through different written sources, she questions the treatment received by those harki families that arrived on French soil. In her autobiographical account, as we know, she also inscribes familial memories that, together with the testimonies of harki wives and daughters that she collects in *Destins de harkis*, and with the film *Harkis* attest to that “mémoire devoir” that, we learnt, also compelled Besnaci-Lancou to write *Fille de harki*. This memorial duty is understood, following Todorov, as born out of a context that calls for remembrance: “Lorsque les événements vécus par l’individu ou par le groupe sont de nature exceptionnelle ou tragique, ce droit [de mémoire] devient un devoir: celui de se souvenir, celui de témoigner.” (2004: 16) With *Leïla* Kerchouche more actively assumes the distance that she embodies and decides to explore the topics that inform her previous works from another angle of enquiry.

Hartog voices concerns about the fact that today’s witness figure “es una víctima, o el descendiente de una víctima” (2001: 27). The victim position is what “funda su autoridad y alimenta una especie de temor reverencial que a veces lo envuelve” and this, according to the French historian, holds the risk of understanding the account of this witness-victim as conflating “autenticidad y verdad” (*ibid.*). The harkis’ case is paradigmatic of what Hartog

analyses, if we understand the former combatants and their families as belonging to the losing side of the Franco-Algerian war; the treatment that they received afterwards confirms their subjugated position in both French and Algerian territory. Because of this, they could be considered as historical victims of the conflict. Reinhart Koselleck states that history is written by those on the winning side only for a period of time, since “a largo plazo las ganancias históricas del conocimiento provienen de los vencidos” (Koselleck in Hartog *ibid.*). Following on from Koselleck’s cue, Hartog reinforces this idea by claiming that “la historia de los vencidos debe, para comprender lo ocurrido, tomar en cuenta ambos lados.” He wonders, however, about whether a history of the witnesses or victims might include “esta exigencia, [...] que se transporta en el viejo vocablo historia.” (*ibid.*)

As has been demonstrated, the discourse that has constructed the inscription of the harkis in Algeria and in France has obliterated one side of the narrative, namely that in which the harkis themselves accounted for what they went through. Kerchouche’s works are connected with the will to comprehend to which Hartog appeals; and we have seen how in order to do so she unfolds different strategies. These have to do with the exploration of her own biographical coordinates but also with a more academic research, as we know, which resulted in *Mon père, ce harki*. In this account, Kerchouche explores the complex construction of the harkis as victims and we could argue that she also situates herself as a victim of sorts, as she inherited from her father’s silence and for many years she had a troublesome relationship with the set of Algerian affiliations that she ultimately embraces. However, because of the role of “vicarious witness” that she adopts in the writing up of *Leïla*, I believe that she surpasses the position of victim, connected with a more subjective side of the reconstruction of the past, in order to provide it with a historical dimension and to undo the silence and the staticity that, as victims, surrounded the harkis.

As silent figures, the first generations of harkis were also silenced. That is why, in order to provoke a rupture with such circumstances, the un-silencing exercise undertaken by the following generation, as epitomised by the first narrator of *Leïla*, requires that she “réhabilite [s]on père”. Because, as she informs us, “nos parents ne savent souvent ni lire ni écrire et parfois ne parlent pas français. C’est donc à nous, leurs enfants, de nous battre pour leur rendre leur dignité.” (2006: 13) In this passage, Marianne-Dalila understands herself as part of the harki community and, most importantly, calls on other harki descendants to follow her lead. In the case of Kerchouche, the author aims at re-constructing the dignity of which the harkis were

devoid –which we know is connected with their labelling as traitors– by creating a protagonist that eschews the passive component that is normally attached to the figure of the victim and presents her as an active agent in the rewriting of the harkis story. However, Leïla is aware that, because she is too caught up in the reality of the camps and has directly experienced the war and its most immediate consequences –which, we learnt, let themselves be felt at a corporal level, as the camps exemplify–, she cannot perform this task. She will provide her sister with her life-material so that she, from her distanced position and her dislocated memories, can indeed filter that material and construct a new imaginary, in which the harkis are agents and not victims.

In the last chapter of the novel, Leïla tells us that her sister Marianne has no memories of the camp where she was born and which the family abandoned when Marianne was only one. However, she is “la plus acharnée à sortir l’histoire des harkis de l’oubli” and has “soif de justice” (148.). Taking this into consideration, if we go back to the first chapter of the novel we read that the narrative voice of Marianne informs us, in 2006, that “[a]ujourd’hui, il est temps de dépasser la passion et de donner du sens à l’histoire des harkis” (13). Marianne (Dalila) confesses that the injustice of which the harkis are still victims has to do with the fact that “les mots manquent” and that is why she understands that the battle they have to undertake is that “de la parole et de la mémoire”. She is thus presenting herself as someone who has the (written) words to undertake such a task, and to do so from a distance that has allowed her to present a heart-felt but also well documented History of the harkis that aims at shaking the discourse of a country “qui s’imagine encore blanc” (9) –that is, a country that has not yet assumed that its social fabric includes people, like the harkis, who eschew the norm that in the narrator’s thoughts is built upon that *blanchitude*.²⁵¹

From the beginning, Marianne-Dalila informs us of the complexities and the difficulties in which the task that she managed to undertake is caught up. She wonders, and at the same time she interpellates us, when she writes the main “methodological” question that guides her writing exercise: “comment se battre pour une cause dont la mémoire a été effacée?” (12) The novel that we read is an answer to that question. In its asymmetrical construction and in its hybrid nature, which mixes narrative voices, Kerchouche translates the difficulty of her aim. The novel is divided into three parts, and includes an Annex with the norms regulating the

²⁵¹ To this respect, see Houria Bouteldja’s considerations in Chapter 1.

functioning of the Bias camp, which provides the account with a factual dimension.²⁵² The three divisions are unequal, and they are recounted by two different narrative voices, as stated, whereby the first narrator, situated in our present, somehow announces the temporal jumps in which the novel is constructed. The main section, which describes the life of teenager Leïla, living in a camp, is the most important in space but its significance is located in the first pages of the text. From the beginning, we are faced with a character that has incorporated the many and greatly nuanced reflections elaborated by Kerchouche in the 2003 text. That is why reflections that occupy a great deal of space in the 2003 account are somehow summarized and put in a rather succinct way in the 2006 novel –like the father-daughter relationship, as shall be later explored.

Leïla tells us, as an adult, that she will end up being at peace with herself only “quand ma souffrance, et celle de tous les miens, sera enfin reconnue” (152). If we understand her character as an epitome of a certain generation of harkis, a collective dimension that she inscribes in her reflections when she uses the formula “les miens”, we understand to what extent the notion of recognition is relevant, and how this recognition must come from outside the group of harkis that Leïla represents. In an essay entitled “The Historical Construction of Harki Literature”, Abderrahmen Moumen wrote about the accounts published the year 2003, insisting on the importance of rightly contextualising their apparition, which, as analysed in the previous chapter, some scholars are now pigeonholing under the term “harki literature” (see Moser 2014). Therefore, the conditions in which this so-called “second generation” grew up must be taken into account: “Many of these youth had never experienced the drama of the Algerian War first-hand, dealt with repatriation issues, been interned in camps, or had ever seen Algeria.” (Moumen 2014: 8)

Moumen also highlights that the “intensification of Algerian memory work” at the beginning of the 21st century, partly carried out via the literary field as evoked by the above-mentioned accounts, was dominated by “filles de harkis” (9). This so-called “memory work” had to do with, amongst other things, obtaining official recognition for what the harkis and their families had been through. Such a recognition necessitated, first of all, the retrieval of the painful

²⁵² As noted by Kenneth Olsson, “[t]his piece of legislation placed restrictions on the Harkis which limited their contact with the rest of society. The reference to this official state document [...] demonstrates how the state betrayed its own values. The French government created distinctions between its citizens on the basis of their origins and religious practices.” (2014: 162)

experiences that ensued from the end of the war, mostly connected with the massacres that unfolded in Algeria and with the abandonment of the harki families in France, partly translated into their reclusion in camps.

As we already know, the same year 2003, Kerchouche published a collaborative work entitled *Destins de harkis: Aux racines d'un exil*, a photographic account that bears witness to the harkis' every-day life through stories and memories of women, wives or daughters of former harkis, and which accounts for the ways in which they relate to the harki universe, their Algerian past, the experience of the camps and their lives in France.²⁵³ Kerchouche notes that in France the harkis and their wives “sont bel et bien prisonniers” (2003b: 89), something that can be explained by the multifarious silence that surrounds them, as we shall see. Within this regime of imprisonment, however, the women in the camps were subjected to an even thicker layer of silence, for, as I explored in Chapter 2, “les harkis [the combatants], à leur tour oppriment les femmes, qui de leur côté emprisonnent les jeunes filles.” (*ibid.*) Thus, the fact that the accounts mentioned earlier were signed by daughters of harkis becomes significant.

Moumen states that before the new millennia, “an ‘enfant de harki’ was synonymous with a ‘fils de harkis.’” (2014: 8)²⁵⁴ The gender perspective will be translated into a bigger focus on the figure of the harkis' wives, who became even bigger victims of the oblivion that befell the harkis, for these women were not present in academic or journalistic texts (see Kerchouche 2003b: 85). In this respect, the will to inscribe the voices to these women, in *Destins de harkis*, by Kerchouche invites a comparison with what motivated Najat El Hachmi to write *Mare de llet i mel*. Albeit very different in their textual fabric –Kemoum's work breaks away from autobiographical coordinates, unlike the other three; Kemoum and Rahmani's accounts could be marked as novels, whereas the other two fall more heavily into the category of “témoignage”–, the texts of these “filles de harkis” help to shed light in understanding how the term *harki* has circulated, how it resonates to this very day and how, as expressed by François-Xavier Hautreux, it has stopped describing “un état inscrit dans une chronologie (servir dans une *harka*) pour désigner une identité, transmissible à leurs descendants.” (2013: 386)

²⁵³ This same aim motivated Fatima Besnaci-Lancou to publish *Nos mères, paroles blessées: Une autre histoire des harkis* (2006).

²⁵⁴ In this quotation, the conflation of the singular and the plural in the usage of *harki* has been left as it is written in Moumen's text.

4.2.3 Restaging the Past

In what follows, a special emphasis will be put on how those who, like Kerchouche, inherited from the harki marker are the ones that try to transform the way it is perceived, namely by contesting the stigma underlying it. In *Mon père, ce harki* we accompany Dalila in what she calls her “quête harkéologique”, a play on words that emphasize the role of the past in the construction of the harki identity, especially as it is passed on from generation to generation, and in *Leïla*, we are made aware of the author’s exploration of the past from another perspective: almost as in an anthropophagous exercise, Dalila “consumes” her sister’s memories and presents them in fictional form. Together, both accounts represent Dalila’s confrontation with her (non)experienced past, a confrontation that involves (re)visiting the different camps in which her family lived upon arriving in France, and ultimately the Algeria that they left behind. Furthermore, because they exceed the individual point of departure upon which they are born, they allow for a collective understanding of the harki identities.

The camps occupy a great deal of space in Kerchouche’s texts, as we have learnt. Most of the chapters conforming the first part of *Mon père, ce harki* are entitled after the names of the camps in which the Kerchouches lived –which proves to what extent these spaces punctuated their life. The subsections’ titles follow the same formulation: the name of a place, a harki camp mostly, and a sentence that encapsulates an episode experienced in them. The camps are also the main scenario for Kerchouche’s novel, as indicated in the title itself. This accounts for the importance of these spaces in the construction of the harki identity, together with “the question of retaliatory massacres” and “the notion of abandonment in 1962” (Moumen 2014: 1). As I explained, not all of the harkis that managed to cross to France ended up in camps.²⁵⁵ I retake Jean-Jacques Jordi’s quote in Chapter 3 to signal, once more, to what extent the camps were relevant for many of the harkis: “Dans une certaine mesure, la mémoire collective va s’appropriier cet espace de transit. Si les massacres et les difficultés du rapatriement ont ancré dans les mémoires la trahison et le mensonge de la France, ce lieu éphémère va cristalliser le sentiment d’abandon.” (2003: 13)

The symbolic significance of the camps as spaces that generate a sense of identity is further signalled by Kerchouche when she decides to describe herself as “une fille du camp” (2003: 128)

²⁵⁵ See note 52 of this thesis.

–or when she describes the departure of her parents from the camps as a “nouveau déracinement” (180). Kerchouche’s voyage, which as I already explained mirrors that of her family but in reverse order, allows us readers to get to know the different scenarios that constitute “lieux de mémoire”, in Pierre Nora’s terms (1984), not only for Dalila and the Kerchouche family, but also for the harki community understood at a wider level, as the author herself acknowledges (2003: 187). In this respect, Vincent Jouane notes, on commenting upon the textual fabric of *Mon père, ce harki*:

L’utilisation successive du passé composé “ont occupé”, du présent historique “ne charrie que” et enfin du présent de narration “ma mère ramasse... moud... énumère” souligne très bien la double volonté de la narratrice de raconter une histoire personnelle, celle de ses parents, et, en même temps, d’éclairer le lecteur sur des éléments historiques ou, comme dans le cas présent, socio-économiques: l’expropriation des terres par les colons.

(2012: 72)

Along similar lines, Susan Ireland has also made reference to Kerchouche’s willingness to coat her work with a collective dimension, and interprets the title of the account as the first sign of her exercise of counter-writing: “By publishing her family story, Kerchouche signals her intention to enter the realm of public discourse, and the title of her book, with its ironic allusion to Gérard Lauzier’s 1991 film *Mon père, ce héros* suggests from the outset the notion of a counter-narrative” (2009: 304). Under this light, Kerchouche’s ultimate realisation –namely that her father is neither a traitor (as she first perceived him, encapsulated in the word *harki*), nor a hero, as the dialogue with Lauzier’s film suggests, in Ireland’s view– is thus significant. Nina Sutherland, on her part, speaks of Kerchouche’s work, which she reads in conjunction with that of the other harki daughters mentioned above, as “collecto-biographies”, “as they focus upon the lives of the collective, whether that is interpreted in a restricted sense as the family, or in a wider sense as the greater Harki community.” (2006: 196) It should be noted that Sutherland also interprets that the autobiographies written by women descended from the former auxiliary soldiers “have exceeded the traditional egocentric boundaries” of the autobiographical genre “specifically in order to provide a voice for their mothers, a voice which has been silenced by French colonial and postcolonial stereotyping of its indigenous populations” –which considered the Maghrebi woman as either submissive or highly eroticized (194).

Giulia Fabbiano has focused on studying the memorialistic task carried out by this generation of harki descendants that did not get first-hand experience of the Algerian war. In her essay “Writing as Performance” she conceives the written text as a “site d’*énonciation*” (2014: 20) that allows for a nuanced exploration of the collective harki memory, which, she states, started in the 1990s and has been propelled into the public space not by the actual players themselves but by their descendants. Fabbiano identifies six moments that inform what she calls a “borrowed memory”, the camps being one of them; moments that became “points of reference for a collective identity shared by the entire community despite the lived experiences of each individual.” (19) Part of this memory-exploration has to do with an exercise of reappropriation of the term *harki* in order to subvert its negative connotations. In *Mon père, ce harki* we can observe the construction of that borrowed collective memory, and also the way the label *harki* gets transformed within the community itself, as Kerchouche punctuates her account with different spellings of the word that have to do with the way she herself interacts with the term and its legacy. When read in dialogue with the other accounts I mentioned, and with the testimonies of other people connected with the harki world, we confirm to what extent this identity marker plays out very differently for each individual. In that sense, Kerchouche’s text helps us to come to terms with the heterogeneous nature of the harki identity.

Kerchouche’s 2003 account, much like the process of identity-formation that *Leïla* accounts for, is peppered with questions, which translate the author’s willingness not only to find an answer to her subjectivity formation or to seek a better understanding of the harkis’ past and current situation, but also her intention to problematize straightforward conceptions of the label that she has chosen to tackle. The different ways in which she will spell *harki* throughout her text, as well as the concepts with which she will pair it, bear witness to such a problematization –it is not something that can easily be defined. Her inquisitive gaze, which informs her job as a journalist, will lead her to turn to familial accounts and other kinds of sources in order to delve into the queries that vertebrate her quest and to solve some of them –these sources, as we know, get inscribed within the text, turning it into a polyphonic work of palimpsestic fabric. The author closes the very first paragraph of her account with a question directed at her father, for she wonders about why he chose submission over freedom in deciding to join the French side during the war. This *why* will reverberate throughout the whole account and will also be very much present in the 2006 novel, for the story of its protagonist will also be marked by this query: “Je ne reconnais plus mon père. Pourquoi s’est-il battu avec ces Français qui nous

méprisent? Pourquoi est-il devenu harki? [...] Je ne comprends pas. Il ne nous dit jamais rien.” (2006: 67)

As Kerchouche herself states, her lack of knowledge regarding her father’s participation in the conflict has to do with the fact that he kept silent about that part of his life: “Il ne m’en a jamais parlé”, she affirms (2003: 13), a realisation that will find its echo in the novel. That is why, when read in dialogue with this statement, Kerchouche’s acknowledgment in the last chapter of the 2003 book, entitled “Le secret de mon père”, gains in importance. It is after she has learnt, following her father’s “hybrid” participation in the war, that he was not “ni un grand héros ni un traître infâme” (277) that Dalila understands that her writing exercise was indeed a way to engage in a conversation with him. The way Kerchouche navigates her harki identity is inseparable from the changing nature of the relationship she has with her father, who is key in her subjective construction. At the beginning of the account, her father, whom she had adored as a child, is a silent figure that elicits doubts and questions and that Kerchouche blames for choosing to fight against his own people.

Kerchouche formulates this idea in a rather categorical way, in order to give strength to her testimony: “Enfant, je l’ai adoré. Adolescente, je l’ai détesté.” (24) Kerchouche’s realization makes us aware to what extent the harki component that criss-crosses the father-daughter relationship adds nuances to their kinship. As stated in my analysis of El Hachmi’s work, generational differences inform any familial community, hence Dalila’s acknowledgment of her changing perception towards her father could have been made by any other adult woman, regardless of whether she was caught up in the harki universe or had somehow experienced a migration. The migrational dimension or the harki component, however, alter how filial relationships unfold and coat them with a weight that is not as significant in other contexts. Kerchouche’s binominal construction with regard to her father is somehow reproduced in the text, in the way it is structured –almost like a mirror, whereby one side of it is located in France and the other one in Algeria. This translates the fact that, as Dalila learns to appreciate, her subjectivity is informed by two different realities, connected with the two different and heterogeneous spaces, at either end of the Mediterranean, with which she dialogues and that end up conflating and hence eroding the binomial construction. Her physical and subjective trip, her quest, will provide her with the instruments to understand this particular pairing, an understanding that gets translated into the shifting perception of her harki identity, which is worth summarizing once again.

The state of unawareness of the circumstances under which the harki marker was born within her own family leads Dalila to write *harki* with “[u]n petit ‘h’, comme ‘honte’” (13) –this formula, which serves as the title for the very first chapter of the account, marks the starting point of Dalila’s “quête harkéologique”. At the end of it, once she has managed to gather information regarding what happened with the harkis during the war and especially after the conflict, she can spell it with “[u]n grand H, comme Honneur”, which is the title Kerchouche chooses for her epilogue. Before the capitalisation takes place, she spells the word with an “‘h’, comme haine” (181). As we learnt in Chapter 1, this writing occurs right after she visits the Bias camp, a camp “fondé sur la violence et la domination” (176), where she was born and that her family quit when she was one and a half. After her visits to the camps she displaces the semantic universe of treason from the harki scenario to the French administration: “la France a trahi les harkis, la France a trahi mes parents, la France t’a trahi [her brother], la France m’a trahie. La France s’est trahie elle-même.” (180) This shift, we know, fractures her relationship with her country of birth, and she writes about her realisation in a very graphic manner, when she describes “la honte d’être française” as a feeling of “dégoût” that traverses her (181). This kind of rhetoric will also be present in the 2006 novel.

As I have explored, it is after Dalila visits Bias, the last of the camps where her family lived, that she manages to comprehend the reasons that might have led her brother Moha to commit suicide –it is, thus, significant that in this passage she directs her reflections to her lost brother, whose death represents the embodiment of the more or less veiled violence that unfolded within the camps. Following on from what has been explored above, it might seem that the way violence is articulated in the harki scenario is also gendered. Thus, men are the victims of the “honte” that gets associated with the harki component –they are the ones that end up dead– whereas women are able to resignify it and turn it into an “honourable” feature that resurfaces with the written exercise that, as epitomised by Kerchouche and the other harki daughters, aims at contesting the harki stigma. Worth remembering is the fact that Kerchouche’s very important last chapter is closed on a question, written in capital letters, a question that translates the author’s difficulty in believing the harsh truth behind the findings that punctuate her voyage. “POURQUOI?” (181), she writes, she yells. The first chapter of the text was sustained upon a different *why*, aimed at understanding the reasons for her father’s enrolment in the war on the French side; this *why* gets transformed and is launched at a country that had given Kerchouche a strong subjective affiliation, which is crumbling at this point.

4.2.3.1 The Harki Palimpsest

Kerchouche's shift in her subjective negotiation is informed not only by her visits to the camps and the conversations she holds with the people she encounters there, but also by the documents that she reads and studies. These academic sources become so important that the author decides to include them within her account, a gesture that speaks of the difficulty of pigeon-holing and defining with a rigid label the text we end up reading. In this respect, Nina Sutherland has written about how the books by harki daughters mentioned earlier have not always been considered from nuanced perspectives and thus have been sent to circulate within the French publishing market on monolithic grounds:

These books were marketed and sold under the label of historical testimonials of the Algerian war (Kerchouche and Besnaci-Lancou) or as works of North African Francophone literature (Kemoum). Both these labels are highly restrictive: they fail to acknowledge the important feminine subject-matter of these works, when an author's gender, especially if they are of Muslim origin, has become such a selling-point in France in recent years. Such labels also suggest that the plight of the Harkis is either a historical one (and therefore has no impact on contemporary French society) or a foreign problem (and therefore the Harkis are not full French citizens).

(2006: 199)

In *Mon père, ce harki*, Dalila Kerchouche incorporates quotations from a study published in 1985 that confirms that rather than treating the harkis as "Français à part entière", "le traitement et le destin qui leur sont réservés font paraître une autre status, celui de 'Français entièrement à part'" (Abi-Samra and Finas in Kerchouche 2003: 184), as we learnt in Chapter 1. Besides these academic sources, and the memories that her relatives share with her, Dalila decides to look for other viewpoints in her exercise to seek a complex and nuanced understanding of the harkis' stories. Thus, she chooses to listen to the story of the former pied-noir who ruled the Bias camp and who terrified her family by trying to forbid them their traditions and practices. The author includes her visit to the house of this man, and the conversation they had –in which he does not show any sign of guilt or remorse for his behaviour–, which she juxtaposes with the vision of the man and his behaviour passed on to her by her family (105-127).

By multiplying the viewpoints that she references in her account, Kerchouche is looking to eschew the homogenization that tends to inform official historical discourses. In *Leïla*, the different voices and sources upon which Dalilla Kerchouche builds her novel are not physically marked in the same manner as in her autobiographical account. If in *Mon père, ce harki*, she inscribed several references within the text via footnotes –physical marks that further signal the discontinuous and hybrid nature of the account–, in *Leïla* the fictional dimension of the work serves as a strategy to blur such marks. We are presented with three temporal settings –2006, 1972 and 2002– and two narrative voices that offer us readers an array of memories, facts and reflections spanning from the end of the Algerian war to the year in which the novel was published.

In this respect, we could understand Kerchouche’s texts as an example of what Edward Said calls “contrapuntual reading”, consisting of not privileging any particular narrative but of revealing the ‘wholeness’ of the text in order to account for the different strata that conform a society (see Said 1993). As it has already been stated, the main narrative voice of Kerchouche’s novel, that of the teenager Leïla, incorporates the multi-layered and nuanced reflections that the author elaborated in her autobiographical account. Thus, important reflections, like the process of subjective navigation Dalila went through, are summarized in the way Leïla is constructed. We already know that much like Dalila, the protagonist of *Leïla*, too, constructs her affiliations from a double setting, which incorporates Algeria and France. Unlike the author, Leïla is aware of the intricacies of inhabiting this in-between from the beginning, because of the memories she holds of her Algerian past: “Je vis dans l’entre-deux. Entre l’Algérie et la France”, which result in her identitarian turmoil: “je ne sais plus qui je suis.” (Kerchouche 2006: 15) This in-between is further nuanced by the fact that she is traversed by the harki component, which renders those somehow conformed by it a sort of “Other of the Other”, as I explained.

The fictional relationship between Leïla and her father is also of a different nature from the one portrayed in *Mon père, ce harki* between Dalila and her father. In the 2003 account this relationship acts both like a thematic and a structural pillar for the text and the author’s subjective and physical voyage through France and Algeria. In the novel, however, the relationship is presented in a more straight-forward kind of way. Because Leïla does have a direct knowledge of Algeria, her father is not presented as a key element in providing insights on Leïla’s country of birth. Thus, the conflicts that end up arising between father and daughter

have to do more with intragenerational conflicts (we analysed the boundaries that Leïla's parents tried to set in her relationship with Jérôme) than with the harki component, as happened with Dalila Kerchouche. In this respect, it is worth noting that, as a *Bildungsroman*, this focus on the intergenerational conflicts allows us to read the relationship as traversed by the kind of dynamics that conform any parent-child relationship. The paternal figure is, however, of major importance in the novel because, as we know, the father is the initiator of the label that will lead Leïla's family to live in the camp from where she recounts her story.

Thus, the narrator scatters reflections about how she feels towards her father: "J'ai une infinie tendresse pour lui"; "[j]'aime mon père"; "[j]e commence à regarder mon père [...] avec admiration" (31, 105). At one point, she claims not to recognize him when he acts as a weak man and yields to the pied-noir who is the chef of the camp, but because the father ends up confronting the regime that this civil servant epitomises, Leïla will proclaim that she feels "un infini respect pour lui et une gratitude sans borne" (133). Finally, in the last comment that she pronounces about her father, pride is the feeling that is highlighted, and we know of the importance of this particular feeling for the harki community and how it is presented almost like a goal by the protagonist (for she hopes for the generations that will follow her to proudly embrace their "harkiness"). When Leïla and her family quit the camp, Leïla tells her father: "Baba... Je voulais te dire. Je suis très fière de toi." [...] 'Merci, ma fille. [...] Moi aussi, je suis très fier de toi.'" (136) The short sentences translate the emotional nature of these statements –and when we read them we have the sensation that their voices were broken by emotion. The reciprocity in the recognition of the pride that both characters feel is also worth noting. I read the fact that this realization is presented to us in a dialogical form as the author's way of stating that the harki complexity can only be ultimately accepted in the form of exchanges.

The synthetic exercise that underpins the way the father of Leïla is presented in the novel also permeates the way the author portrays the Berber component that permeates her family, as we learnt in Chapter 3. Whereas in *Mon père, ce harki* Dalila elaborates the story about how she found out about her Berber origin, in *Leïla* we read that the protagonist tries to keep her Algerian memories, which she feels are fading away, that include her grandmother's face, "avec ses tatouages berbères" (2006: 34). The Berber element of the family is only present in the text as a symbolic physical mark on the faces of the oldest generation, something which speaks of the relative unimportance of this cultural tradition in the subjectivity of the

protagonist –Algeria is constructed as a very significant space and the Muslim component of the family of Leïla, too, but what resurfaces is their Arabness, not their Berber affiliations. Although this could also be read as the fact that these affiliations are not constructed as contesting but as complementary; the language spoken by the family, their customs might be coated with Berber dimensions in a subtle way.

Also presented in a succinct way is the acknowledgment, on the part of the protagonist, of the reasons that led her father to enrol in the French army. Whilst in the 2003 account we accompany Dalila through the multi-layered voyage through France and Algeria to ultimately learn that her father also collaborated with the FLN, in the novel Leïla learns about the details that involved her father's enrolment when he dialogues with the chief of the camp that wants to send Leïla to another institution because she tried to run away (as a means of refusing the imposed marriage that her parents wanted for her). Touched, as signalled by the exclamation marks, Leïla finds out that the ultimate reason why her father became a harki were his children: "S'il était soumis, résigné, s'il a accepté toutes les humiliations, toutes les brimades c'était pour nous! Pour ses enfants!" (132) That is why when one of his children is about to be separated from the family, he abandons his politics of silence regarding the war-time.

Leïla's father explains: "Je n'étais pour l'Algérie française, moi. Toute notre vie les colons nous ont exploités! Seulement... [...] Mon grand-père a fait la Première Guerre mondiale. Mon père a fait la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Et moi, j'ai combattu en Algérie. Je suis plus français que vous, capitaine." (132) In this respect, Kerchouche presents us with a harki condition that stems out of a military, and allegedly also ideological, point of view.²⁵⁶ Because we can contrast it with what she explored in her previous account, the author informs us, in this way, that there are different ways in which those read as harkis construct their attachment to France and Algeria. She presents this kind of heterogeneity by creating characters that, within the same familial milieu, understand their harki marker from different angles. Thus, the protagonist of the novel has her own set of sentiments, different from the ones she detects in her parents: "même si j'ai vécu plus longtemps en France que dans mon pays natal" –where her roots and her childhood lie, reinforcing the importance of childhood, as we saw in El Hachmi's case, in

²⁵⁶ This does not mean, of course, that all the descendants of military people who fought in the above mentioned wars fought alongside France during the Franco-Algerian war, as problematized by critically acclaimed film *Hors-la-loi*, directed by Rachid Bouchareb.

the construction of a sense of belonging—, Leïla “[s]e sent farouchement algérienne” (37). Her parents, though, feel differently. As the narrator explains:

Mes parents aiment ce pays et se sentent français depuis plusieurs générations. Mes deux familles, paternelle et maternelle, ont hérité d’une tradition militaire qui a noué des liens indéfectibles avec la mère patrie. Tous mes ancêtres ont versé leur sang pour la France. Jamais mes parents n’accepteraient que je manque de respect à ce pays qui, pensent-ils, nous a sauvé la vie. Même dans ce camp infâme, malgré tout ce qu’ils ont subi et subissent encore, ils continuent d’honorer la France.

(*ibid.*)

4.2.3.2 Counter-Imagaries

However, this attitude towards France is problematized by the same parents, as epitomised in the very significant conversation that Leïla’s father has with their camp-chief. At the end of the novel, when Leïla’s father confronts the power regime that the chief of the camp exemplifies, his interlocutor treats him as “l’Arabe” and asks him to return to “his country”. In an article entitled “Moroccan Colonial Soldiers: Between Selective Memory and Collective Memory” Driss Maghraoui analyses how the French imperial administration constructed the figure of the Moroccan colonial soldier “within an overall orientalist discourse” (1998: 30). As such,

[t]he Moroccan soldier had to be imagined according to the way French colonial officers sought to represent him. He is often referred to as “Moha,” a generic name which applies to every single individual within the group.²⁵⁷ [...] The soldier is nameless and has therefore no personal traits or identity. By virtue of being a Goumier, Tirailleur or Spahi, it is the colonial administrator who seems to have given them their newly acquired identity. He speaks for him and represents him in history.

(*ibid.*)

²⁵⁷ In note 216, I explained how Maghrebi women would be called *fatmas* by the French administration, under the same logic that aimed somehow to erase their identity.

In this respect, Maghraoui argues, “[t]his colonial discourse was also characterized by a tendency to dehumanize the colonial soldier.” (*ibid.*) He then goes on to problematize the enrolment of the soldiers for the “coloniser”:

Colonial soldiers can not be categorized as either “resisters” or “collaborators.” It is known that most of those who became part of the colonial army were originally among the most resisting social groups. [...] The uncertainty of economic life, which in many cases was the result of colonial expansion, made different individuals give priority not to political symbols, but to the possibilities that guaranteed their human existence. Moroccan colonial troops joined the French army out of rational calculations in which economic considerations were primordial.

(33)

Following Maghraoui’s cue, we can draw many parallelisms between the case of the colonial soldiers and the case of the harkis. We have already learnt that there were indeed manifold reasons that pushed many Algerians to participate on the French side during the Franco-Algerian war, most of them deeply embedded in the colonial scenario. Dalila Kerchouche, like Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, describes the camps as spaces devoid of humanity, which would tie in with the idea presented by Maghraoui whereby the colonial discourse of the French drew the Moroccan colonial soldier as lacking human qualities. In *Leïla*, the first narrative voice we encounter informs us that Georges Frêche, the socialist president of the Conseil régional de Languedoc-Roussillon, spoke of the harkis as “sous-hommes” (2016: 12). Similarly, as shall be later explored, the colonial administrations would use language as a tool to reduce the heterogeneity of the soldiers and construct them on monolithic terms, which blurs the complexities of the power dynamics enfolded in both Maghrebi-European scenarios.

Dalila Kerchouche uses the conversation between Leïla’s father and the administrator of the camp to problematize the discourse on the harkis and also about the Franco-Algerian war by exploring the nuances that informed the participation of Algerians in the conflict. In *Mon père, ce harki*, the author recounts, through the testimony of the people she encounters in Algeria, the intricacies of the different factions participating in the war. In *Leïla* she deconstructs the linear narrative that, in Algeria, presented the FLN as a united front, through the memories of Leïla about her father’s harki times –which are somehow romanticized: “Je retrouve l’homme qu’enfant j’admirais tant, ce soldat courageux et fier qui s’était fixé pour mission de protéger

les civils algériens et européens pendant la guerre, aussi bien contre les exactions de l'armée française que contre les violences du FLN." (130)²⁵⁸

The father himself explains that "[l]es militants du FLN déguisaient les harkis en femmes et les promenaient sur la place des villages"; "[l]e FLN, ce n'était pas mes frères. Ils pouvaient nous égorger juste parce qu'on buvait de l'alcool" (131, 132). Just as the harkis get constructed monolithically as traitors, here we see how Leïla's father uses the same kind of reductionist lenses upon commenting about the FLN, which was of a much more heterogeneous nature than this quotation demonstrates. In this exchange, the father also summarizes the treatment that the harkis received from the French administration by using his own experience as a cue, which allows us readers to have a clearer idea of how the administrative decisions affected the lives of individuals: "À la fin de la guerre, mon propre capitaine nous a désarmés, la nuit, pendant qu'on dormait. Et le lendemain, à 7 heures du matin, quand on s'est levés, la caserne était vide. L'armée était partie. [...] La France a trahi les harkis!" (131) This last statement, which very literally explains how the French administration betrayed the harkis who were on Algerian soil in 1962, dialogues with Kerchouche's realisation about the treatment received by the harkis after Algeria's independence, as voiced in *Mon père, ce harki* (2003: 180).

The verbal confrontation between Leïla's father and the chief of the camp, a representation of the rising up of the underdog before the powerful and authoritarian figure, somehow epitomises the triumph of the harki riots, which managed to put an end to the regime of the camps. After Leïla and her father leave the office of the chief, they realise that a riot has erupted within the camp. Despite the relatively short space that the revolt occupies in the novel, only four pages (2006: 133-136), its importance is seminal in understanding the history of the harkis and that is why these four pages are filled with significant realisations by the narrator and the harkis as a group. The images that inform this account are also of a very symbolic nature. Thus, we learn

²⁵⁸ In the volume *Les Harkis à Paris* journalist Paulette Péju portrays, in a rather dramatic and at times imprecise way, a completely different picture of the relationship between the French administration and the harkis. She focuses on those harkis that at a time when Algeria was still under French rule "commencent à s'installer dans le XIII^e arrondissement [à Paris] le 20 mars 1960" (1961: 11). Péju adds that "avec eux, s'installe la terreur" (*ibid.*) since, in her view, they are but rapists and assassins, "mercenaires du colonialisme" (93) whose main target are non-harki Algerians. Péju's portrayal is also built on very monolithic terms, as she claims: "Les harkis, eux, n'ont rien à ménager, rien à perdre que leur uniforme de mercenaire et le salaire de la trahison. Ils ont même tout à redouter d'une solution pacifique de la guerre d'Algérie, puisque sans la guerre et la répression ils ne sont plus rien: ni Algériens, ni Français. Méprisés par ceux qui les utilisent, rejetés de la communauté algérienne, ils s'acharnent avec d'autant plus de violence sur leurs compatriotes qu'ils assassinent en eux leur propre image perdue; ils tentent d'effacer ce qu'ils ne peuvent plus être, ils fuient désespérément ce qu'ils sont devenus: les faux frères..." (92).

that the harkis manage to set fire to the vehicles, including the ambulance that transported the harkis deemed as somehow dangerous to their internment in psychiatric facilities, that were used by the French administration to maintain the regime of marginalisation of the harkis. Also, as noted by the narrator, in the imaginary of the harkis, the camps went from being prisons to becoming their fortress, and they were the ones who managed to put down the “barbelés”, becoming active agents in their ontological and physical liberation that led to the situation whereby the camp was shut down –later, the narrator will state that leaving the camp was “une question de vie ou de mort” (128).

As expressed by the narrator, it is worth noting that it was “les adolescents du camp [qui] se rebellent, rejoints par leurs parents” (133), and let’s not forget that in June 1975, two thirds of the camp are people of less than 20 years of age. It is the generation that did not fight the war that stands against its consequences and seeks to change them, as proven by the fact that they become the initiators of the actions informing the revolts, and the grammatical subjects of Leïla’s account: “des fils de harkis attaquent le bureau du chef de camp”, “[e]n ville, des fils de harkis ont pris en otage le responsable de l’Amicale des Algériens et responsable du FLN local” (133), “[à] Saint-Maurice-l’Ardoise [...] les fils de harkis, armés de fusils, ont pris en otage le directeur du camp” (134). The narrator presents an account in which the descendants of the former combatants, together with their parents, stand against the regime they had to endure for many years.

The revolt that takes place within the camp where Leïla and her family live is accompanied by other riots that spread across French territory. Leïla is aware of all of them, actions that create a collective sense of belonging. That is why it is significant for her to inscribe herself in those actions and she feels she is part of the collective uprising: “Je participe aux émeutes”, she states (134). By juxtaposing a series of verbs of action, the author makes us understand how the individual *I* that Leïla conjugates when she speaks of her participation in the mutinies ends up becoming a *we* when the camp is liberated: “Nous sommes enfin libres!”. The girl who for three years had to face “l’arbitraire et [...] l’injustice” has broken free from the “grillages” that were imposed on her and, just like her “conscience de femme” was awoken (122), she starts recognizing herself more deeply as a “fille de harkis”, as indicated by her active participation in the riot: “Prise d’une fièvre libératrice, je m’acharne sur les grillages avec tous les enfants du camp. J’arrache, je cogne, je cisaille, je détruit rageusement le symbole de notre oppression et de notre exclusion.” (135)

This symbolic destruction of the physical imprisonment to which the harkis were subjected is paired with their openness to their French society, carried out by the children of the combatants. That June when the riots took place, the narrator describes the previous moments to the revolt as agitated moments amongst the youngsters, who are able to access a series of texts in which they learn of what the French government and the French population think of the harkis. They realise that many locals are not aware of the fact that the harkis fought together with France, for instance. The articles they read talk about “repli communautaire, marginalisation, surnatalité” in the camps (118) and they talk about children in particular, and their academic situation, their “sentiment d’infériorité” (119). The narrator is profoundly surprised to learn that the French press needs to highlight the idea that “les musulmans français sont des citoyens à part entière” (118)—a statement that dialogues with the formula that Kerchouche incorporates in *Mon père, ce harki* that claims that they are, effectively, “entièrement à part” (in Kerchouche 2003: 184).

The harki children have access to a survey that states that “malgré le milieu clos dans lequel elles sont surveillées et recluses, les filles sont plus désireuses que les garçons de s’en sortir” (2006: 119) —thus, it is significant that the protagonist of the text that we are reading is a woman. Although the narrator uses the formula “fils de harkis” and not “enfants de harkis” —which would encompass both sexes— when recounting the riots, we can assume that the masculine is used generically. Kerchouche and her narrator might not use language as a tool to inscribe a feminist perspective in their reflections, but we already know that Kerchouche’s oeuvre does incorporate gendered considerations. In both the autobiographical account and the novel, as in Kerchouche’s other projects, we learn that the harki universe is sustained upon gendered logics, of which both Kerchouche and her characters are well aware and which, as I have already explored, make of the harki women subjects that follow a “double imprisonment”. However, rather than tacitly accepting the boundaries that being read as a woman might activate in the different scenarios with which these women interact, they use their particular subject position in an empowering way, which ties in and intersects with the in-between position from which I read both Kerchouche and El Hachmi’s female characters.

It is also of great importance that Leïla learns about the existence of harki organizations that protest against the camps’ regime. This knowledge is facilitated by the fact that Leïla, like her peers and unlike her parents, can read in French. This leads to the situation whereby, through her reading exercise, she can create an affective network of belonging, for she feels connected

with others who share her same goals, as she herself expresses: “je prends conscience que je ne suis pas la seule à me battre! [...] En lisant ces pages, je me sens exister, et ce nouveau combat collectif des harkis et de leurs enfants fait écho à ma lutte intérieure.” (*ibid.*) Earlier in the account, she reflects about the idea that, inside the camps, the harkis are disconnected from the world that exists outside those spaces.

Leïla only learns about the events shaking France in May of 1968 in Juliette’s house, as we saw earlier. Juliette’s television, in French, functions like the newspapers the harki children read in the camps and make us aware of how the imprisonment of the camps was strengthened by the ontological suspension to which the harkis were subjected, by their lack of French knowledge. Thus, after her family manages to leave the Bias camp, the narrator worries about their future, when for many years they have existed *in the past*, as if they were still in Algeria. “Coupés du monde” inside the camps, “libres, mais pas pour autant libérés” (139), for as we know the liberation will have to wait another generation. This is evinced by the fact that the French administration aimed to dilute the cultural traits that articulated their Algerian way of life.

It is, then, very significant that after she tells Moha that she has seen the reality of the camps, and before she ends up enunciating the treacherous nature of the French management of the camps, Kerchouche introduces her denunciation with the phrasing “je l’écris et je le crie” (2003: 180). By juxtaposing the oral and the written, she gives solidity to the lost voice of her brother via the written word. Such a blending is reproduced further down in her text. Her epilogue, which signifies Kerchouche’s felicitous acceptance of understanding herself through the harki filter, follows a chapter in which the author decides to transcribe the conversation she had with her father after returning from her Algerian trip. The dialogue, which goes on for several pages, contrasts very sharply with the paternal silence we encounter at the beginning of the account. Kerchouche’s goal, talking to her father, is thus accomplished and the “parler” gets inscribed within the page, which becomes indeed a “site d’émonciation”, following Fabbiano’s formulation. Furthermore, the idea that she closes the book with a dialogue (if we do not take the Epilogue into account) is symptomatic of the kind of formulations and reflections that her account helps to give shape to. Historical discourses, and memories, too, are not self-enclosed constructions, but open to being talked over, hence re-formulated.

4.2.4 The Wound that Enounces and Denounces

In that same epilogue, Kerchouche describes her book as “une faille ouverte dans le passé, une petite résistance contre le rouleau compresseur de l’Histoire” (277) –a statement that is followed by her proud acceptance of her harki legacy, for she chooses to describe herself again as “une fille de harkis”. The undertone that we, as readers, perceive this third time is very different, however, from the one we overheard the first time she declared it –Kerchouche seemed almost wounded to be associated with the harkis– and from the second time she *said* it, in a very angry manner, after holding France accountable for the miseries she learnt the harki families had had to endure in the camps. The image of the “faille” is reminiscent of that of the wound –which has been used to describe what the Franco-Algerian war signified in the French contemporary national discourse. Because of Algeria’s significance inside the French empire, the loss of the overseas territory in 1962 was perceived as a wound for the symbolic body of the French nation (see Stora 1998). Within the same semantic universe of loss, we saw how the harki families experienced their time inside the camps as a sort of abandonment on the part of the French administration, a sentiment that lets itself be felt almost like a wound.

Kerchouche’s *Mon père, ce harki* holds the key to elucidating how these two different wounds can be understood together. At the beginning of her account, Kerchouche recounts that the moment she learnt, as a teenager, that she was a “fille de harkis” she decided to hide that side of herself from others, a part of herself which constituted “[s]a fêlure intime” (14). The way she interacted with society from then on would be built on her silence, on her refusal to confront her father’s legacy. Her text signifies the end of that silent phase of her life, and thus, the beginning of a process of restoration, of healing of that wound. In the same manner, speaking about the Algerian war –naming it as such, discussing its intricacies and consequences– meant, for the French administration, a way to come to terms with its Algerianness as did tackling their treatment of the harkis, assuming responsibilities for the massacres that happened in Algeria and for the damage caused to the families in the camps in particular –a process that resulted in the declaration of the 25th of September of 2001 as the first national day of homage to the harkis. To this day, successive French governments keep implementing measures to make up for the post-1962 treatment towards the harkis.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ In an interview for *The New York Times*, Benjamin Stora said, regarding the attitude adopted by the French administration and its soldiers towards the harkis: “The French had to forget in order to live” (in Sayare 2014). Yet again, oblivion, in the context of the Franco-Algerian war, is presented as a survival strategy.

The individual stories of the harkis, how they are (un)told within familial circles is, thus, inseparable from how the harki population has been inscribed within the historical discourses of both France and Algeria –all of them traversed by silence. In 2016 Kerchouche published *Espionnes*, as we learnt, partially motivated by her will “pour [s]e libérer de ce monde du tabou, du secret et du silence, qu’incarne encore l’histoire des harkis.” (2016: 22) If, as signalled by Marco Ferro, “les silences de l’histoire sont tout aussi importants que l’histoire” (in Hamoumou 2013: 39), silence proves a central topic in any investigation to do with the harkis, as Mohand Hamoumou has widely explored; something I announced in the Introduction. In his research, Hamoumou identifies three types of silences that explain the construction of the “traitor” component associated with the word *harki* and that hint at the “sentiment d’abandon” felt by the harkis who ended up spending long years in the camps. It is worth retrieving these silences once again, because of their importance in the construction of the harki identity.

On the one hand, he analyses the silence of France, whose military elites decided not to protect the harkis after the war was lost, leading to the situation whereby many harki families were left on Algerian soil and tortured and murdered by the so-called “Martians”, the last people to join the FLN who committed brutal acts to prove their engagement with the winning side. By having a passive attitude towards a population that helped them at various levels, France –constructed, as I have explained, almost like a character in the accounts of former combatants– became an accomplice in these massacres. On the other hand, Hamoumou notes, there was the silence of Algeria: because the harkis symbolized a crack in the narrative that presented Algeria as a united people against French colonial rule, the newly formed Algerian government rapidly launched itself to construct the harkis as traitors and relegated them to oblivion by not including them in the national narrative. François-Xavier Hautreux states that in Algeria this has been constructed monolithically and continues to be associated with the idea of treason (2013: 17-23), as proven by the fact that, as stated before, in a visit to France in the year 2000, Algerian president Bouteflika spoke of the harkis as collaborationists –something that Kerchouche decides to incorporate in her text to speak of to what extent “[l]à-bas, le mot ‘harki’ vaut toujours l’infamie” (2003: 206). This also resonates in how non-harki Maghrebi people make a point about differentiating themselves from the harkis.

The two-fold silence, both from the French and the Algerian administrations, that, after Hamoumou, surrounded the harki scenario was also complemented by the silence of the former harkis themselves, perhaps the most significant silence of all, because it is what ultimately

facilitated that, just like in the case of the Moroccan soldiers, the harkis were spoken for, and constructed as traitors. Riddled by feelings of guilt and embarrassment, and always in fear of retaliation by the FLN, the harkis decided not to speak about their participation in the war. This triple silence got translated into a multi-layered oblivion that permeates not only the historical narratives that conform the national discourses of both France and Algeria, but also the familial stories of those subjects directly read as harkis, as the Kerchouche case illuminates. In the year 1990, Hamoumou wrote that the biographical coordinates of the harkis were marked by a feeling of loss: “perte du pays natal, de la confiance en ceux qui les ont abandonnés, d’un statut social, parfois même de leur identité”, which was ultimately conducive to the construction of a collective memory that, up to then, had been “bien délicat de faire émerger, au point d’entendre parfois évoquer une impossible transmission de mémoire chez les harkis” (1990: 13) –as we learnt, Moumen speaks of it as a “mémoire blessée” (2014: 2). The texts by Kerchouche, together with all the others written by harki children, represent a shift in that tendency, an exercise of raising the harki voice –via the written word.

The page is used by Kerchouche not only as a “site d’énonciation”, in which she can write about experiences that have not been written down –be it because many harkis, like Kerchouche’s parents, were illiterate or because they were unwilling to do so–, but also as a site of “dénonciation”. This denunciation is, as we have seen, traversed by an exercise of historical recuperation. In the preface to Hamoumou’s *Et ils sont devenus harkis*, historian Dominique Schnapper situates the harki experience within the realm of tragedy, as he defines the harkis as “victimes d’un piège historique” (1993: 7). Hamoumou states that “[l]’histoire tragique des [...] harkis [...], reste sans conteste le tabou de la guerre d’Algérie”, as they have been obliterated by all the agents in that conflict, leading to the situation whereby, according to Hamoumou, “[i]ls ont perdu aussi la bataille de la mémoire” –which would explain why the harkis are sometimes referred to as “les oubliés de l’histoire” (Hamoumou 1993: 15).²⁶⁰ *Les Harkis ou Les Oubliés de l’histoire* is the title of a book by sociologist Michel Roux which Marianne, presumably the first narrator of *Leïla* and Dalila Kerchouche’s alter ego, considers as her “Bible” and that speaks of her will to “réhabiliter la mémoire des harkis” (2006: 148). To this respect, it is worth turning to Zahia Rahmani’s *Moze*, where the author deploys a series

²⁶⁰ It is worth pointing out that in the demonstrations that were galvanized by the harki community after the closure of the camps in 1975 one of the mottos that encapsulated what had happened to the harki community after the end of the war was as follows: “Après la trahison, l’abandon; après l’abandon, l’exil; après l’exil, l’oubli”.

of linguistic strategies in order to unveil the historical oblivion of which her father is also a victim.

Throughout her text, Rahmani uses several terminological strategies in order to make room, in language, for those combatants who, like her father, were not acknowledged by the French administration and hence were not inscribed within the official historical discourse tackling the Franco-Algerian conflict; strategies that allow for the creation of words that put the emphasis on that very oblivion. In order to highlight this void of existence, Rahmani manipulates the language used by the very same administration to create that existence: “Moze n’a pas parlé. [...] De ce qui l’a tué, de ce qu’il a compris, il n’a rien dit. Ce que sa langue ne suffisait pas à dire, c’est le système qui permit à l’État français de fabriquer une armée de *soldatmorts*²⁶¹ sans se soucier qu’ils étaient des hommes.” (2003: 20; emphasis added) Afterwards, she speaks of the descendants of these “soldatmorts” in the following terms: “Fille, fils, de père-soldatmorts-faux-français-traître [...] Ton père, l’ignoré-français-indigène-arabe, il fallait le tuer.” (21) Later in the text we understand the importance of these linguistic constructions. In the second section of the novel, entitled “La sépulture”, Moze’s children return to the country of their father and the narrator receives a letter from the Commission nationale de réparation of the French Republic in which she is asked to “témoigner”. Rahmani reproduces the conversation that unfolds in this commission:

–La vérité sera impossible.

Mais ceux qui ont différé leur mort l’attendent.

–[...] à toi de faire exister cet homme. Ramène-le. Dis son existence

Donne une langue à Moze. Fais-le parler.

–Je veux témoigner, je le veux, mais je ne sais pas comment. Ce témoignage ne parvient pas. Ce n’est pas que je n’en ai pas l’envie, non ce n’est pas ça. On ne peut pas dire qu’on ne veut pas parler, ce serait un mensonge. Moi, là, maintenant, je le fais, je t’en parle, mais est-ce là le témoignage que tu attends? Sais-tu, toi, le témoignage que tu veux? Aucun ne s’emprunte et ceux qui ont été dits sont consignés. Qu’est-ce qu’a fait Moze? C’est ce qu’ils veulent savoir. Tu sais ce qu’il a fait?

(91, 96, 97)

²⁶¹ In *Leïla*, the father of the protagonist states: “J’ai tout perdu en Algérie. Ma terre, ma famille, mon honneur. Moi, je suis mort. Mais pas mes enfants.” (Kerchouche 2006: 132)

As we have seen, Dalila Kerchouche also reflects on the problematics of the witnessing exercise. In a different way than how Rahmani deals with it, by explicitly writing the questions that inform such problematic considerations, we saw how Kerchouche complements her autobiographical account with a novel (and a film) that somehow also represent the author's attempt at giving her silent father a tongue that can *speak* of the suffering he went through. As I have already stated, I think it is significant that this rehabilitation passes through the hands of a woman. In *Moze*, the narrative voice wonders: "Comment leur demander des souvenirs? Ils ne me parleront pas, il leur faut un homme, un fils, pas moi." (99)

We learnt how, in the reality experienced inside the camps described in *Leïla* the harki daughters were more subjected to the silence that surrounded the harki community because their condition of women imposed on them boundaries that did not affect men. That is why there emerges the need to highlight that, in Kerchouche's account, it is Leïla who, indirectly empowering her sister Marianne (Dalila Kerchouche), pushes for her family to physically and symbolically abandon the imprisonment they endured, represented by the space of the camps. By leaving for another reality, they might finally achieve their ontological liberation and stop being considered, despite the fact that they fought and died for France, "comme [...] des êtres inférieurs", which, as acknowledged by the narrator, is expressed through language, when the local population treats the harkis as "indigènes" (124) –a denomination that has been examined in Chapter 1 and which encompassed non-harki Maghrebi people, too.

Hamomou dedicates many pages to dissecting how the fight of the harkis aiming for their recognition is also tied to language, to how the label *harki* has been used and has circulated. When, during the decade of the 1990s, riots resumed on the part of the harki community to demand their rights as French citizens, the demonstrators would make a point about being called "harki" and not "rapatriés d'origine nord-africaine" or "Français musulmans rapatriés" –denominations that were until then used within French society to differentiate the harkis from those "Français de souche européenne". Hamomou reminds us that finding the right label was important, inasmuch as it facilitated the encapsulation of a population that was diverse and complex. By rendering it under a single label, such a diversity could be countered and their inscription into the French social tissue could become potentially less threatening. Referring to their "Muslim" identity meant highlighting their alterity and that is why Hamomou claims that even today it still makes reference to an ethnic origin (Arab or Berber), more so than to a

religion.²⁶² In an interview for France-Culture Boussad Azni, spokesperson of the organization Coordination des harkis, claimed: “We refuse the term ‘Français musulman’. I ask to be called ‘harki’ because it has a historical sense. We define ourselves in relation to that, and not to a religion” (in Hamoumou 1993: 41).

In Kerchouche’s account, the battle for the (re)definition of the harki identity –both at individual and collective levels– is further contextualized within the written language. By writing her familial story, in turn inscribed within a net of other familial stories –a parallel reading of *Mon père, ce harki* and *Destins de harkis* further allows for a realization of these confluences– Kerchouche is retrieving a series of oral memories that, unwritten, would have widened the oblivion that we identified earlier. It is worth noting that such a written exercise is done in a language other than the *darija* or the Berber spoken by the generation of harkis that did have a direct experience of the Algerian war –languages that, furthermore, and as I have stated, are eminently oral. This linguistic jump can be paired with the critical distance that Kerchouche personifies, which allows her to produce a multi-layered account that gathers many voices. Inside the 1985 sociological study from which I quoted earlier, the authors incorporate an anonymous letter that Dalila, too, decides to reproduce in its entirety within her own account, as “[e]lle dit bien plus que tout ce que j’ai pu écrire jusqu’ici, et je reçois en pleine figure la difficulté à raconter une histoire que je n’ai pas vécue.” (2003: 186)

Such an inscription demonstrates to what extent *Mon père, ce harki* is a mouthpiece for other voices and experiences, stemming from the author’s realisation that her lack of first-hand experience of the camps –which we know makes her feel somehow separated from the rest of her family– allows for a critical distance but necessitates of a turning to the past in order to put forward a better understanding of the present. As we have learnt, because of her particular biographical coordinates Kerchouche inhabits a sort of in-between, she is at once “du dedans et du dehors”, in Jordi’s words (2003: 6). Hers is an account that not only blurs the line between the individual and the communal, but also disrupts a unidirectional understanding of historical times. By incorporating her mother’s memories into her account and putting forward a narrative voice that bridges over her own experiences and those of her mother –which I analysed in Chapter 3–, the author is signalling to what extent in order to produce a better understanding

²⁶² This is highlighted in the title of Zahia Rahmani’s novel, “*Musulman*” roman.

of the kind of historical recognition demanded by the harkis, the retrieval of memories is also necessary.

The emphasis on the part of Kerchouche of the retrieval of the past is of great importance, for it is connected with the undoing of the triple silence analysed earlier. The “first generation’s” reluctance to stir up the past –encapsulated in the formula “*li fat met*”– is confronted with the “second generation’s” willingness to tackle it and resurrect it.²⁶³ After she has been to Bias, in a visit to her parents, Dalila tells her father: “Non, *apa*, je ne suis pas fatiguée. Mais blessée indignée, révoltée. ‘Se souvenir, c’est s’écoucher’, écrivait Françoise Giroud. Depuis quatre mois, je m’écourche aux barbelés de mon passé.” (2003: 182) The corporal image mobilized by Kerchouche takes us back to the idea of the wound as a possibility, a source of knowledge and a necessary gesture in a process of healing. As we know, the author embarked herself upon her quest to bridge over her father’s silence and better navigate her subjectivity’s formation. In order to do so, she had to travel back to her family’s past.

In her study of children of Holocaust survivors, Marianne Hirsch developed the notion of postmemory, which I believe can be useful in describing the kind of memory work that is carried out by Kerchouche and her fellow “filles de harkis”:

Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. That is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created.

(1996: 662)

Hirsch claims that “[f]or survivors who have been separated and exiled from a ravaged world, memory is necessarily an act not only of recall, but also of mourning, a mourning often inflected by anger, rage, and despair.” (661) Kerchouche’s texts gather the accounts of many survivors from the Algerian war –whether experienced directly or indirectly, as in her case– and allow for the realisation that coping with its memories is a complex and changing process.

²⁶³ The difference between the first and the second generation that I deploy here has to do with whether these generations have or lack a direct experience of the war and the camps.

The account's epilogue, in which Kerchouche embraces her father's legacy by proudly stating that she is a daughter of harkis (spelt with a symbolic capital H), signifies the completion of her quest for belonging. Her belonging to the harki world is inscribed not only within her family circle, as epitomised by the fact that she has made peace with her father's initial silence, but it is also permeated by a collective dimension, for she understands that the fate of the Kerchouche family cannot be dissociated from that of many other harki families. Regardless of the different ways in which they cope with their situation in France, Kerchouche highlights the camps as a core wound for the harki people, a wound whose healing might be facilitated by her texts.

In *L'Art de perdre*, Alice Zeniter dedicates a few pages to the time when the main family of the novel lived in a camp. In these pages we read: "La France se coud la bouche en entourant de barbelés les camps d'accueil." (2017: 166) I find that Zeniter's metaphor ties in with my analyses of the works by harki children, as presented above. I argue that, with her account and her novel, Kerchouche –together with other authors considered in this thesis– is attempting to undo a series of sewings, or scarred over wounds, connected with France, with Algeria and with the harki population itself in order to open them up and let the voices of the harkis be heard. *Mon père, ce harki* and *Leïla* invite us to question the grand historical narratives of both France and Algeria and to go back to the past of the harkis to consider all their nuances and understand them not as victims but as active agents of a history that, through different generations, they are still trying to rewrite.

In the first part of this chapter, I argued that the works written by Najat El Hachmi lend themselves to being read from the same lenses as the ones I have used to consider Kerchouche's oeuvre. As I have studied, the moment that Catalonia started to welcome international migrants into its social fabric, these people were constructed from rather monolithic standpoints. It has been made clear that the logics that inform the label *immigrant* operative in the Catalonia portrayed by El Hachmi are, much like the ones that vertebrate the label *harki*, sustained upon essentialising and reductionist positionings which ultimately aim at a silent social incorporation of those subjects considered as belonging to these labels. In her texts, El Hachmi offered us the image of a Catalonia that wanted to silence the culturally-defining traits of people like her and her family who were read as figures of alterity –encapsulated in the idea of integration. These silencing targeted their islamicate practices and also their appearance –via their clothes–, and intersected with linguistic practices, too, in line with what happened with the harki families inside the camps, whose life the French administration was eager to control and dictate.

The wires that enclose the protagonists of El Hachmi are the symbolic boundaries that delimit the label *immigrant*. As I have stated, they are of a different nature than the “barbelés” that, very graphically, bordered the experience of the harkis in France –mainly due to the difference in the (post)colonial logics that criss-cross the transmediterranean spaces considered in this research work. However, otherized in Catalonia, the “immigrants” that El Hachmi puts forwards in her texts –and we saw how the author herself self-identifies as one as long as she feels there is racism in the land where she lives– can be read also like a wound to the symbolic body of the Catalan nation, in the sense that they epitomise a kind of difference that the hegemonic Catalonia wants to dilute. Constructed as a threat, a threat coated with fears that find their source at the times of the so-called “Reconquista”, these “immigrants” made their apparition in statistical studies and reports, which hindered their agency. With her written exercises, Najat El Hachmi calls on her readers to understand the kind of experiences that she puts forward in her works as belonging to the Catalan fabric that those very same texts are already enriching.

In this light, El Hachmi’s text function as tools that, much like Kerchouche’s texts, galvanize us to reconsider the social and narrative inscription of those who have been presented as immigrants or harkis in Europe. This reconsideration lies in contesting the official discourses of both Catalonia and France that do not understand these subjects as active agents in their societies. By putting forward nuanced accounts of how their agency is deployed in these spaces and how they reconfigure them, socially and culturally, El Hachmi and Kerchouche are united in their demand for ways of belonging that, stemming from the in-between they themselves occupy, cast aside rigid understanding of subjective constructions and of collectivities of all sorts.

ANUDADAS CONCLUSIONES

Concluir sin ser conclusiva. Abordar el final de un proceso de investigación desde la certidumbre de que el proceso no ha finalizado. Tal es el reto que guía la redacción de esta suerte de último capítulo. Para ello abandono la lengua inglesa y me sitúo en los brazos de mi maternidad lingüística, y, siempre impelida por quienes son ya un poco *mis* autoras, me dispongo a explicar de qué manera he (re)pensado las cuestiones que me condujeron a realizar un doctorado. Y es que las páginas que preceden estas conclusiones hablan de pertenencia, y la entrecomillan; la cuestionan, la zarandean y la revisten de significados diferentes. También dicen la otredad, plantean de qué modo las miradas de alteridad son miradas alteradas. Los capítulos que vertebran este estudio conjugan acentos diferentes, y dan cuenta de prácticas lingüísticas diversas. Además, proponen aproximaciones a cómo concebir el tiempo que no son lineales, colocando el pasado en el presente, invocando un futuro que para dibujarse necesita reescribir sus cimientos.

En la introducción a esta tesis constato el posicionamiento desde el que he ejercido mi tarea como investigadora. En el terreno de la vulnerabilidad epistemológica, como indica Ruth Behar –esto es, teniendo siempre presente la posición de sujeto que marca y condiciona cómo interactúo con la temática abordada–, he buscado ahondar en procesos de construcción identitaria contemporáneos que de diferentes maneras están atravesados por experiencias migratorias. Para ello he usado textos literarios que presentan tejidos diferentes, y que he puesto en diálogo con distintas disciplinas. El grueso de la producción literaria de Najat El Hachmi y de Dalila Kerchouche se inscribe en el universo temático de los desplazamientos poblacionales. Ambas autoras habitan la escritura para interrogar y pensar la migración no como una acción puntual –lo que haría que pudiera reducirse a cifras, a datos estadísticos–, sino como una manera de habitar el mundo. Precisamente porque sus textos, de ficción y de corte autobiográfico, ponen el foco en las consecuencias que se desprenden de tales desplazamientos, un análisis atento de su obra nos permite comprobar que Kerchouche y El Hachmi construyen identidades migrantes que se nos presentan como aquellas que mejor transitan por las “Borderlands”, los “third spaces”, los “diasporic spaces” en que se han convertido los lugares que estas autoras y sus protagonistas literarias habitan.

El primer bloque de la tesis analiza las distintas “etiquetas” identitarias con las que los personajes principales de las obras estudiadas interactúan, y uso este término, al que también

recurre El Hachmi, para subrayar la rigidez desde la que se construyen. En el cruce entre las categorizaciones que impone Europa y las identificaciones que surgen del contexto magrebí en el que ambas autoras encuentran sus orígenes culturales, los personajes de El Hachmi y Kerchouche encuentran un espacio, de límites porosos, que les permite poner en relación las distintas filiaciones con las que se identifican, los elementos culturales que, adscritos a geografías y a tradiciones culturales distintas, les atraviesan y les configuran. Ese espacio desbord(e)ado, al que en esta tesis me refiero como el “*in-between*”, es sincrético y se articula desde el hibridismo. En mis teorizaciones, que beben de los planteamientos postcoloniales y proponen un uso situado del concepto, el hibridismo permea toda práctica cultural. Desde este posicionamiento, el *in-between* nos impele, además, a repensar las lógicas centro-periferia que rigen las epistemologías dominantes y los espacios de poder; en este sentido, y siguiendo la terminología empleada por el grupo Modernidad-Colonialidad, el *in-between* es el espacio de surgimiento de los “epistemes frontera”, que, en esta tesis, son “epistemes mestizos”.

Hemos visto cómo las familias que nos presentan El Hachmi y Kerchouche en sus textos son instadas por la Cataluña y la Francia en las que se mueven a “integrarse” en su tejido social –y en estas páginas, tal como he venido haciendo a lo largo de toda la investigación y siempre que no respondan a un gesto metalingüístico, las comillas señalan mi voluntad de problematizar el concepto, la idea que las comillas encierran. Sin embargo, tal inscripción social está condicionada por el hecho de que las familias son leídas como “inmigrantes” (en los ejemplos propuestos por El Hachmi) y como “harkis” (en las realidades que plantea Kerchouche); ninguna de estas denominaciones es estrictamente aplicable a las protagonistas que construyen las autoras.

Dicha lectura –que se explica por el color de piel, por los fonemas que componen sus nombres, por las ropas que visten o por las prácticas culturales y religiosas que despliegan estas familias– las coloca en el terreno de la otredad. Por un lado, desde Europa se las invita a abandonar los rasgos culturales que, a ojos europeos, más se arraigan en el Norte de África. Por otro, se les advierte, mediante el uso de las etiquetas mencionadas, que a pesar de los gestos de abandono o de olvido buscado que puedan llevar a cabo, su inscripción en territorio catalán/francés siempre estará puntuada por la diferencia (que llevan impresa en el cuerpo) –y en el caso de quienes son leídos como harkis, la diferencia está marcada de forma muy clara mediante una separación espacial, tal y como ejemplifican los campos.

La noción del cuerpo es de gran relevancia en esta tesis, porque considerado metafóricamente nos ayuda a comprender los procesos de construcción subjetiva que experimentan los personajes principales de ambas autoras. Tanto El Hachmi como Kerchouche dan visibilidad y ponen en primer plano a cuerpos femeninos que construyen su relación con el mundo desde unas regulaciones muy estrictas, que están determinadas por planteamientos patriarcales, tanto en las directrices que reciben en el terreno familiar como en las miradas ejercidas por Europa. Estas regulaciones buscan controlar su movilidad, de qué manera pueden interactuar con las personas de su entorno y cómo han de relacionarse con las poblaciones locales de Cataluña y Francia. Durante la lectura de los ensayos y las novelas, las acompañamos en su proceso de crecimiento y en su entrada a la adultez, marcada por la manera como deciden poner en relación su herencia familiar y los diversos códigos que han aprendido en territorio europeo. Kerchouche y El Hachmi nos proponen asimismo escenas que nos permiten atestiguar que el patriarcado también salpica los cuerpos leídos como masculinos. En la multiplicidad de escenas y de interacciones que evocan se nos presenta la posibilidad de pensar en las columnas que vertebran las lógicas de reconocimiento que sostienen los procesos de construcción identitaria.

En este sentido, concibo los textos de estas autoras como elementos culturales que abren la puerta a pensar sobre la heterogeneidad de que se componen conceptos que en ocasiones se construyen en singular, siguiendo las dinámicas reduccionistas empleadas por los grupos humanos a la hora de categorizar y definir, al sujeto propio y al sujeto otro, en términos rígidos. La ambivalencia, como señalan teóricos como Homi K. Bhabha (2004) o Julia Kristeva (1988), es incómoda, porque significa abrazar la constatación de que no existen verdades absolutas. Lo desconocido es incierto, pero es también el terreno del que pueden surgir múltiples posibilidades. La ambigüedad, eso sí, requiere que reconozcamos que nunca terminamos de *ser*, sino que *estamos*; que siempre habrá, en nuestra subjetividad, un lugar que ocupa el/la *otrx*, el/la *extrañx* que nos configura. Así, Kerchouche y El Hachmi nos presentan distintas maneras de pensarse, y de escribirse, como mujeres que se mueven en el magma identitario que surge del choque de las etiquetas a las que se enfrentan. En dicha diversidad se hace patente que existen distintas maneras de activar los elementos subjetivos que las conforman, atendiendo a cada contexto. Y también queda claro que existen distintos feminismos, enraizados en contextos diferentes y desplegados desde planteamientos interseccionales. Esta manera de entender la literatura de El Hachmi y de Kerchouche me ha llevado a estudiar sus obras también como herramientas políticas.

Cuando Amin Maalouf definió las identidades como asesinas (1998) estaba poniendo el foco en los peligros que acarrear ciertos usos de un concepto, el de identidad, que sigue movilizando a muchos individuos y a muchas colectividades. Una máxima anarquista muy celebrada reza: “No le deseo un Estado a nadie”. En esta tesis, los trabajos de las autoras nos han mostrado estrategias que buscan romper con la rigidez dogmática que vertebra las concepciones hegemónicas de las naciones y los estados-nación. En abril de 2019, *El Presentiment*, que se define como “el arma con la que Espai en Blanc [un grupo de pensamiento crítico constituido en Barcelona en 2002] quiere intervenir en el actual combate del pensamiento”, lanzó una cápsula que reescribe la consigna anarquista: “No le deseo una identidad a nadie”.²⁶⁴ Este “presentimiento”, el número 77 de la serie, tuvo una muy buena acogida en ciertos sectores de la izquierda catalana. Sin embargo, provocó airadas reacciones en los grupos que se entienden como racializados o migrantes. Estos grupos argüían que la frase se inscribe en lógicas hegemónicas, “blancas” –y por tanto no marcadas, erigidas en norma–, que no tienen en cuenta que la lucha de muchos grupos leídos como no-blancos pasa precisamente por poner de relieve su identidad, por visibilizar su entendimiento identitario, construido desde planteamientos culturales y económicos no dominantes. En la reivindicación identitaria buscan nombrar y, en ese nombrar, armar su existencia.

Entendida como dogma, como una etiqueta que, como tal, se quiere fija y estática, la identidad puede generar violencia (simbólica, y también literal, como demuestra el reciente auge de los movimientos populistas de extrema derecha en territorio europeo). Autodefinirse a partir de etiquetas identitarias concebidas como monolíticas significa adscribirse a unos límites que de algún modo limitan nuestra capacidad de acción. Por el contrario, entendida como proceso que activa relaciones de identificación contextualizadas, la identidad se redibuja, y se define, precisamente, en relación con las prácticas de interacción que desplegamos. De esta manera, ya no soy yo quien se autoimpone una etiqueta, sino que mis prácticas cotidianas, mi manera de actuar con mi entorno, mi acción política determinan cuáles son los valores que guían mi comportamiento y mi manera de habitar el mundo. Comprendida como una práctica relacional, la identidad como proceso –esto es, la “identificación”, en palabras de Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui–, invita al otrx a mi espacio, subraya su papel en mi construcción subjetiva, tanto individual como colectiva; da lugar a su diferencia, que me contagia y me permea, me hiere el

²⁶⁴ Esta información puede consultarse en su página web: espaienblanc.net.

cuerpo y lo abre a su llegada, como plantea Esposito, lo prepara para aceptar la incertidumbre ontológica.

La herida es un espacio que, como el *in-between*, es intersticial. Entendido como lugar que reúne, que mezcla y conjuga, el *in-between* es una hendidura en la que se acumulan voces. En el segundo bloque de este trabajo he analizado la multiplicidad de voces que conforman la obra de El Hachmi y Kerchouche; las que las nombran, las que ellas toman prestadas, las voces con las que dialogan. Asimismo, en el tercer y cuarto capítulos se hace hincapié en el papel que juegan el lenguaje y las lenguas en procesos de construcción de subjetividades (individuales, colectivas), y en cómo estas pueden devenir instrumentos para (re)nombrar y (re)escribir discursos y realidades. El Hachmi y Kerchouche heredaron, de sus comunidades familiares, lenguas que, como adultas, han puesto en relación con aquellas adquiridas en sus lugares de aprendizaje europeo –sobre todo la escuela.

La lengua de escritura de ambas dista de su lengua materna, definida como la lengua de la madre. En ambos casos, esta lengua dada por la madre (y por el padre) es de naturaleza eminentemente oral, pero es inscrita por las autoras en su obra, a partir del catalán y el francés. El tamazight sincrético que El Hachmi no logra transmitir a su hijo y el *daríja* argelino del que Kerchouche no conoce todo el vocabulario –como lo demuestra el que desconozca el término *identidad*– subyace en las páginas que he analizado. Del mismo modo en que ya hicieran importantes voces de la literatura franco-magrebí, tales como Assia Djebar, El Hachmi y Kerchouche despliegan estrategias lingüísticas y literarias diversas que ponen en tensión la oralidad y la escritura, y que también cuestionan las miradas que desde la exotización tratan de definir sus obras (y por tanto mediar en su circulación) a partir de etiquetas literarias restrictivas.

En sus textos, las autoras también problematizan el concepto de hogar. Según mi análisis, el hogar de El Hachmi y Kerchouche no se adscribe a un espacio físico sino que se construye en y desde la escritura. El gesto escritural les permite justamente poner a conversar las herencias familiares, las referencias intertextuales que constituyen sus genealogías literarias (en el caso de El Hachmi) o las obras académicas que han utilizado como referencia para recabar información y pensarse (en el caso de Kerchouche). Estos ejercicios de colectivización buscan repensar jerarquías –como la que establece que la oralidad está subordinada a la escritura– y permiten también tomar distancia crítica para que ambas puedan pensar su propia

individualidad y explorar cómo se relaciona con los grupos con los que interactúan. De la lectura de sus obras también aprendemos que la construcción de colectividades puede abordarse desde lógicas no hegemónicas. Los diferentes *nosotros* que proponen El Hachmi y Kerchouche, en sus contextos familiares, en los contextos nacionales con los que dialogan tienen en cuenta los ejes de diferencia que ellas mismas y sus personajes personifican. Porque sus textos se construyen desde el respeto a esas diferencias, he querido concebir sus obras, que circulan en Cataluña y en Francia, como instrumentos que permiten que estas sociedades se repiensen a partir del ejemplo de prácticas identitarias diversas.

Como interlocutoras (y no como representantes de ninguna categorización identitaria) en ese diálogo social, El Hachmi y Kerchouche dan tinta y visibilidad al día a día de los sujetos que bajo las etiquetas *inmigrante* o *harki* no tienen lugar en los discursos hegemónicos de Cataluña, España, Francia o Argelia. Para hacer posible esa visibilización, ponen sobre el papel lo que concibo como ejercicios de reescrituras históricas y también como la creación de contra-imaginarios –porque con sus textos ambas reconfiguran los imaginarios que, en Cataluña, perciben a las personas magrebíes desde la alteridad, y en Francia y en Argelia construyen a los harkis como traidores. En su célebre ensayo “Imaginary Homelands” Salman Rushdie –quien se define, como Edward Said, desde una posición de exilio ontológico que despliega en su escritura– describe la necesidad que los escritores como él tienen de retornar al pasado para explorar el sentimiento de pérdida que les aflige (1992: 10). En sus obras, El Hachmi y Kerchouche miran al pasado para compensar las ausencias que se materializan en sus presentes respectivos. Repasando los procesos migratorios que vertebran las estructuras familiares de sus textos, El Hachmi nos demuestra de qué distintas maneras es posible hacer las paces con los “duelos migratorios” que la autora inscribe en *Jo també sóc catalana* (2003: 193). Su resolución puede tomar formas distintas: desde actos de venganza, huidas y abandonos, hasta reivindicaciones que, desde la escritura, reclaman pertenencias múltiples.

Dalila Kerchouche (re)visita, simbólica y literalmente, la Argelia en la que no nació pero en la que sí que fue criada, con el fin de desvelar y revelar los matices y las complejidades que conforman el apelativo *harki*. Su voz escrita, que nace de un gesto casi antropófago, rompe silencios (en este sentido comprendo su “je l’écris et je le crie” [2003: 180]) y se une a la de muchas otras personas que, atravesadas por el elemento harki, a día de hoy siguen buscando compensación por el maltrato que los antiguos combatientes y sus familias recibieron por parte de la administración francesa desde que se proclamara la independencia de Argelia. En

Metafísicas caníbales, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro afirma que “[e]l Otro de los Otros es siempre otro. Y si el equívoco no es error, ilusión o mentira sino la forma misma de la positividad relacional de la diferencia, su opuesto no es la verdad, sino más bien lo unívoco, en cuanto aspiración a la existencia de un sentido único y trascendente.” (2010: 79)

Ya hemos comprobado que los harkis no eran simplemente el Otro en Francia o en Argelia, sino que su inscripción en territorio francés revestía un pliegue extra de otredad, eran “el Otro de los Otros”, entendiendo los Otros como los magrebíes, los “musulmanes” –etiqueta usada por la administración francesa. La obra de Kerchouche permite dar cuenta de la imposibilidad de entender *harki* de modo unívoco, de igual modo que a partir de su obra entendemos que quienes interactúan con dicha categoría también dialogan con ella de modos distintos y la inscriben en sus subjetividades de formas variadas. Ambas autoras también demuestran de qué modo categorías que son utilizadas para colocar a los sujetos que marcan en posición de víctimas pueden reescribirse y resignificarse. Los personajes que construyen El Hachmi y Kerchouche demuestran agencia y aportan valiosas contribuciones críticas a los entornos con los que se relacionan.

Llegado este punto, quisiera reseñar las ausencias que también forman parte de esta tesis, porque además de ausencias son posibles líneas de investigación en las que podría ramificar este estudio. Me hubiera gustado abordar con más detalle el análisis de las fotografías incluidas en la edición de tapa dura de *Mon père, ce harki* y las lógicas de identificación que articulan. En *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag asegura que “[t]o the militant, identity is everything. And all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions.” (2003: 11) En esta tesis no he escrito de modo exhaustivo los pies de foto a esas fotografías, que capturan las múltiples caras en las que se han transformado las experiencias dolorosas surgidas de una aplicación dogmática de la etiqueta *harki*. También he dejado en el tintero la posibilidad de llevar a cabo análisis más atentos de las dinámicas de retorno hacia Marruecos y Argelia que se apuntan en las obras de El Hachmi y Kerchouche. Resultaría asimismo interesante estudiar de qué manera abordaron su inscripción en Francia o sus vidas en la nueva Argelia las familias harkis (y en general cualquier harki) que no terminaron en campos. El hecho de que esta sea una investigación que puede ser deshilachada desde estos y otros muchos frentes da cuenta de la complejidad de los distintos pilares en los que se sustenta.

La voluntad comparativa que estructura esta tesis está ligada al convencimiento de que el ejercicio de comparación, que es también un poner en relación, evidencia la imposibilidad de pensar en movimientos poblacionales, en construcciones identitarias, en prácticas lingüísticas y culturales de modo único y estático. Los casos de estudio elegidos nos permiten abordar unos mismos espacios desde miradas heterogéneas. Ambas autoras plantean personajes que se mueven entre el norte y el sur del Mediterráneo, pero este espacio se nos presenta como constituido por experiencias tan diversas como las que construyen El Hachmi y Kerchouche en sus obras. Es cierto, sin embargo, que el carácter líquido que configura la “frontera” mediterránea, es decir, el mar Mediterráneo, termina permeando las subjetividades de las protagonistas de ambas autoras.

Repensado como si fuera “la línea” –la frontera que separa Estados Unidos y México que las Chicanas teorizaron como lugar de cruce y no de división–, el Mediterráneo permite la circulación de los distintos elementos culturales que configuran el espacio que este dibuja. Como he analizado, la mediterraneidad suele pensarse, desde Europa, de manera poco matizada; las obras analizadas ponen de relieve que el espacio transmediterráneo que escriben las autoras está vertebrado desde las transformaciones que posibilita. A partir de los ensayos y las novelas de Kerchouche y El Hachmi propongo una idea de este espacio como el lugar que permite la creación de subjetividades híbridas, mestizas, en proceso constante de traducción, siguiendo los postulados teóricos chicanos.

Desde la individualidad irreductible de la que nace la escritura literaria, tanto El Hachmi como Kerchouche nos empujan a llevar a cabo análisis contextualizados que den cuenta de las particularidades de toda experiencia. A desplegar procesos de identificación que se constituyan desde un conocimiento situado. Así, nos alientan a escribir, a pensar en plural, y a aceptar las contradicciones que puedan surgir en esos despliegues, a incorporar ese zumbido que, como constataba Anzaldúa, surge de la conjunción de todas las voces que “hablan simultáneamente” (2007: 99).

En *Storia di Irene*, la voz mediterránea de Erri de Luca habla, escribe e inscribe desde la suma. Yo la recupero en catalán, que también es mi lengua de herencia; en traducción, entendida como eco multiplicador, siguiendo a Walter Benjamin:

Les frases d'Irene no fan servir la conjunció *i*, lletra que indica un nus. Les llengües que conecno en poden prescindir, per lligar.

L'escriptura sacra la posa al començament de les frases: *i va dir, i va dir, i va dir*.

Des que llegeixo llibres antics, he après que el món és un alfabet format per lletres que es combinen entre elles.

Les consonants són la matèria i les vocals, en canvi, són aigua, llum i aire, l'alè de l'oxigen dins de la substància mineral.

Al final del recorregut d'aquests pensaments rodamóns, que arribaven com si fossin onades, em va sortir dir: tu ets la conjunció *i*, que uneix la terra i el mar.

(2014: 28-29)

Jo també sóc catalana, L'últim patriarca, La filla estrangera; Mon père, ce harki y Leïla: Avoir dix-sept ans dans un camps de harkis nos invitan a pensar las construcciones identitarias como edificios erigidos desde la concatenación de conjunciones; conjunciones que, como indica la voz narrativa de De Luca, son nudos. Los nudos no son rotura, pero sí señalan diferencias en la linealidad de la cuerda que los crea; de manera gráfica visibilizan una "herida" –entendida como discontinuidad– y sin embargo hacen posible la unión de medios, de texturas distintas. En sus textos, El Hachmi y Kerchouche anudan una serie de reflexiones que buscan dialogar con la Cataluña y la Francia en la que sus textos se inscriben para problematizar las etiquetas que los categorizan. Extrapoladas a otros tiempos diferentes a los años en los que se publicaron, y filtradas desde aparatos teóricos diversos, estas obras nos ofrecen las claves para una mejor comprensión de las complejidades que sustentan cualquier proceso de construcción subjetiva. Desde ese (re)conocimiento, se facilita un entendimiento social que se muestra atento a la diferencia, a las diferencias.

Como doctoranda –una denominación que toma prestada la marca del gerundio y la idea de movimiento que el gerundio entraña–, a partir de esta tesis, he podido añadir aportaciones críticas a mi bagaje académico. La investigación también ha supuesto un punto de inflexión en el modo como entiendo tanto mi lugar en el mundo como a mí misma. Muy significativo ha sido el hecho de que a raíz del proyecto doctoral empecé a estudiar el árabe clásico, un sistema lingüístico que ha supuesto una experiencia de aprendizaje casi corporal. Mi aparato fonador ha tenido que modelarse para dar cabida a fonemas que antes no conocía; mi cuerpo ha tenido que aprender a moverse en una direccionalidad que no conocía a la hora de escribir. Esta

distinta manera de decir y nombrar el mundo traduce también los descubrimientos que me han acompañado en este proceso. Hallazgos que me empujan a hilar nuevas “y” a la lista de afiliaciones con las que me identifico y que me identifican.

Y desde este *aquí* que ubico en la escritura, espero seguir sumando.

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