

Title: Affect, Postmemory, and Gender in Nina Bouraoui's *Sauvage* and *Garçon manqué*

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Abstract: This article explores the affective and gendered transmission of 'postmemory' in *Garçon manqué* (2000) and *Sauvages* (2010) by Nina Bouraoui. These two narratives take place at the end of the 1970s in Algiers, a transitional period in Algerian history, but also a key moment where the generation born *after* independence in 1962 express and create their own memories of colonialism and the Algerian Revolution. The focus of the article will be to reveal the representation of postmemorial transmission across forms of mediation which are simultaneously affective, embodied, and gendered. From this perspective, it analyses generational memory as a 'mauvais cadeau', photographs and other affective objects, and gendered multidirectional memory to show how Bouraoui's novels trouble singular, normative expressions of gendered and national identity. Bouraoui's protagonists from the post-generation are thus characterized as 'mnemonic agents' who cross gendered and national borders.

Résumé : Cet article propose une étude sur la transmission affective et genrée de la ‘postmémoire’ dans deux récits de Nina Bouraoui – *Garçon manqué* (2000) et *Sauvages* (2010) – se déroulant à Alger à la fin des années 1970, une période de transition où une génération née après l’Indépendance en 1962 exprime et crée leurs propres souvenirs du colonialisme et de la Révolution Algérienne. Il s’attache plus précisément à mettre en lumière la représentation de la transmission postmémorielle au travers des formes de la médiation, à la fois affectives, incarnées, et genrées. Dans cette perspective, il examine la mémoire générationnelle comme ‘mauvais cadeau’, la représentation des photographies et d’autres objets affectifs, et le genre de la mémoire multidirectionnelle pour perturber des expressions singulières et normatives de l’identité nationale et genrée. Il s’agit ainsi de voir les protagonistes bouraouien(ne)s de la génération ‘d’après’ comme des ‘vecteurs de la mémoire’ qui traversent les frontières du genre et de la nation.

Keywords: Nina Bouraoui, postmemory, affect, gender, performativity, Algeria

Affect, Postmemory, and Gender in Nina Bouraoui's *Sauvage* and *Garçon manqué*

In *Garçon manqué* (2000) and *Sauvage* (2009), two novels by Nina Bouraoui, the French-Algerian protagonists interrogate their bicultural belongings as they enter adolescence in the final years of the 1970s. As members of the post-1962 generation, this process also involves an engagement with the violent past of colonialism, decolonisation, but also, I suggest, the Second World War. By bringing these texts into dialogue with Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory (1997; 2012), this article proposes a new engagement with Bouraoui's works by raising questions surrounding the acquisition of memory by the post-Independence generation. The following analysis focuses on the gendered consequences of the affective modes by which Bouraoui's protagonists negotiate and mediate postmemory. It aims to clarify how Bouraoui's literary depiction of the late 1970s, as a postmemorial era but also a transitional period in Algeria's history following the death of President Houari Boumediene in 1978, engages with the belated and delayed knowledge of the past. This means looking at the ways memories are transmitted to, but also created by, the protagonists of these narratives, who engage with the past through 'affective' objects (both conceptual and physical) in the form of artefacts (photographs, song) and experiences (of violence and loss).

Since the publication of *La Voyeuse interdite* in 1991 (an unsettling novella about cloistering, voyeurism, and the repression of adolescent sexuality) Bouraoui has been a major voice in French-language literature concerning gender, sexuality and memory in a dual French and Algerian context. While her more recent work has focused on the fluid mediation of homosexual desire (*La vie heureuse* 2002, *Poupée bella* 2004, *Avant les hommes* 2007), identification, and mental well-being (*Mes mauvaises pensées* 2005, *Beaux rivages* 2016), much of her work concerns memories of a childhood spent between Algerian and French homes and histories. Throughout her career, Bouraoui has consistently returned to an auto-fictional

form of story-telling. As in the texts studied in this article, she frequently draws on elements from her own biography and especially her childhood spent in Algeria during the 1970s.¹ Born in Rennes, France in 1967, Bouraoui spent most of her childhood in Algiers before spending the rest of her adolescence between France, Switzerland, and Abu Dhabi. On the one hand, like the author, many of her protagonists have an Algerian father and a French mother, grew up in Algeria but spent their summers with their French maternal grandparents in Brittany. On the other hand, while homosexuality is a major theme in many of her novels, Bouraoui has spoken out against being labelled a lesbian writer and the risk of being ‘cataloguée par sa sexualité [...] cela me dérange profondément. L’homosexualité n’est pas une identité’ (Harrington 2013: 97). While Bouraoui is suspicious of the category ‘lesbian writer’, her writing nonetheless engages with questions pertaining to sexuality and, most importantly for my argument in this article, non-binary gender identification. While much work on Bouraoui’s writing has been undertaken in terms of psychoanalysis and memory (Grasset 2015), the following analysis is situated in an approach to memory from the perspective of ‘affect’. We can explore the ways her literary works reflect a preoccupation with these sensitive questions pertaining to the performativity of gendered, national, and racial identity, by examining how her narrators, who belong to the generation born just after Algerian Independence, engage with the history of colonialism and decolonisation during the 1970s in ‘affective’ and imaginative ways.

This article has four sections. The first section will clarify the theoretical framework for exploring Bouraoui’s novels in terms of affect, postmemory, and gender. The second section reappraises the notion of inherited memory in *Sauvage* as a ‘mauvais cadeau’. Generational memory, the unwanted gift, contrasts with the protagonist’s own affective understanding of the traumatic legacies of the Algerian Revolution, mediated through her own experience of loss. The third section develops the relationship between photography and embodiment in postmemory as a creative and mediated structure of transmission, in which

descriptions of photographs in *Garçon manqué* (2000) and *Sauvage* (2011) provoke an embodied memory in the children who look at these images. This is shown to have gendered consequences, where the memory of the Algerian Revolution is mediated via performative masculinity. If postmemory can be a mode by which the narrators re-engage with narratives of national and gendered identity, the final section examines the multidirectionality of memory in *Garçon manqué*. Presented as a bicultural and gender-fluid agent of postmemory, the autofictionally named Nina reframes her experiences of gendered violence in terms of the ‘concentrationary’ (Silverman and Pollock 2011), while critically re-assessing the inherited narratives of her grandparents’ memories of the Second World War and her parents’ memories of the Algerian Revolution.

Affect, Postmemory, and Gender

There is a strong and pervasive relationship between affective experience and memory in everyday life. Sara Ahmed theorizes affect in relation to ‘happy objects’ and ‘things’ and claims that ‘[t]o be affected is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn toward things. To give value to things is to shape what is near us’ (2010: 31). What Ahmed shows us is that to be affected requires an encounter between a ‘thing’ and a ‘body’. In *Strange Encounters* Ahmed suggests that face-to-face encounters are always mediated by the general context that frames the encounter. This means that during encounters in the present, subjects are also historically situated and carry ‘traces’ of power relationships from the past (Ahmed 2000: 8). In *Garçon manqué* and *Sauvage*, Bouraoui shows how the racialised and gendered bodies of her protagonists react to affective ‘things’ in ways that trigger an embodied reaction to, and ‘evaluation’ of, the past and historical knowledge. To use Ahmed’s words, Bouraoui’s narrative makes observable the affective process by which knowledge of the past is ‘given value’. Furthermore, as we shall see, when the bodies of these protagonists ‘turn toward’ the

affective ‘things’ (both physical and conceptual), this evaluation of the historical knowledge also entails a performative re-engagement of gendered norms and practices.

Here, knowledge of the past refers less to intellectual understanding of History than to the acquisition of a belated and affected sense or feeling for the narratives, images, and constructions that formulate the past in everyday life – including the gendered effects of these narratives. The historian R. G. Collingwood famously argued that acquiring historical knowledge involves an experiential encounter with the past. This encounter can be understood as a kind of imaginative labour in which ‘the historian must re-enact the past in his own mind’ (1993: 282). This encounter takes place within the imaginative space of the mind but, as Alison Landsberg has argued, such an experiential re-enactment also entails the body. Transgressing a Cartesian dualism, Landsberg insists that the historical encounter can be *felt* through the body as well as understood cognitively through the mind. Calling such encounters ‘affective engagements’, Landsberg identifies those moments where visual and cinematic media immerse the spectator in order to trigger a sensorial and corporeal response, such that ‘one’s body is touched, moved, provoked’ (2015: 3). In her study of historical fiction films, TV historical dramas, reality history TV and virtual history exhibits, she finds that historical knowledge does not result from an intentional ‘act’ of thinking historically but is rather an outcome of embodied, mediated and affective engagements with the past. As we shall see in the following analyses, Bouraoui’s works present the process of affective encounters with the past in the context of the late 1970s in Algeria and, like Landsberg, suggest that ‘affective engagement’ undermines the notion that one must be a historian in order to be historically situated.

Embodied and affective engagement with the past is part and parcel of the postmemorial structure of memory transmission for those who have no lived experience of the event in question. In Hirsch’s terms, postmemory is the belated articulation of a remembered event where the memories of the Holocaust generation are *felt* by the children and grandchildren of

survivors ‘so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right’ (2012: 5). While Hirsch frequently focuses on visual media, literary production also offers productive ground for the study of postmemory. As the ‘imaginative investment, projection and creation’ (2012: 5) of memory, postmemory can be understood as a form of imaginative labour based on a *structure* of transmission and the ‘inter- and transgenerational *returns* of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience’ (2012: 5-6 added emphasis). If Hirsch’s notion of postmemory stresses how the belated and citational structure of memory is facilitated by inter- and transgenerational ‘returns’ of embodied experience, this is particularly relevant to the ways Bouraoui’s writings reflect the affective creation, transmission, and acquisition of memories for the ‘post-generation’ of Algerians.

Memory, history, and embodiment are of central importance to Bouraoui’s work (Vassallo 2012). This article seeks to clarify *how* engagements with the past challenge singular expressions of normative gender and the stratified narrative of French and Algerian histories, simultaneously. Collingwood’s idea of history as re-enactment, Landsberg’s elucidation of this as an experiential or embodied mode of historical knowledge, and Hirsch’s notion of the ‘returns’ of embodied experience in postmemory all lend themselves to critical enquiry from the perspective of gender performativity. Judith Butler’s argument that gender performativity involves the ‘re-experiencing’ (1988: 326) of established norms affirms gender as a historically situated action. Gender is a performative repetition, reiteration, and transformation which takes place with the passing of time and transgenerational transfer. Butler demonstrates that gender is an ‘ongoing discursive practice, [...] open to intervention and resignification’:

Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the ‘congealing’ is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means. It is, for Beauvoir, never possible finally to become a woman, as if there were a *telos* that governs the process of acculturation and construction. Gender is the repeated

stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. (2006: 43)

Gender as ‘congealing’ conveys the notion of gender as a malleable and fluid substance, but also as a temporal phenomenon. Gender takes time to congeal, to (not quite) settle, to take shape. It is regulated by a repetition of actions ‘over time’. Butler states that the appearance of gender is misrecognised as an ontological, timeless essence rather than as an enactment or re-enactment *over time*. It is this notion of congealing, repetition, and duration that makes Butler’s theory of gender performativity so relevant to questions of postmemory, transmission, and affective engagements with the past. Simply put, if gender is an act, it is an act of memory. In this sense, gender, too, is a form of historical knowledge. I thus situate the following textual analysis of Bouraoui’s representations of postmemory in the late 1970s in relation to Landsberg’s development of historical knowledge as an embodied experience in order to stress that, on the one hand, this is a performative iteration that produces gendered effects. On the other hand, it is important to be attentive to the affective transmission of certain forms of historical knowledge in the ‘repeated stylization of the body’ itself that congeals into a gendered experience (Butler 2006: 43).

Memory as ‘mauvais cadeau’

Sauvage is a novel about the childhood bond between the 14-year-old narrator, Alya, and her best friend Sami, which is violently shattered by his sudden and unexplained disappearance. The narrative takes the form of a testimony in which Alya gives her account of Sami’s life, retracing the months before his disappearance leading up to New Year’s Eve 1979. She is compelled to bear witness to what history will not record: ‘De tout raconter pour Sami. Pour

qu'il sache' (Bouraoui 2011 : 14). As the novel progresses, the foreboding knowledge of Sami's fate intersects with Alya's anxiety for the impending 1980s: 'On attend une catastrophe mais on ne sait pas de quel côté elle va surgir' (12). The disappearance of her friend seems inexplicably connected to the political landscape in Algeria surrounding the death of Boumediene in 1978. The 'present' of the final years of the 1970s and the new horizons ushered in by the year 1980 are significant for Alya's narrative since it underscores the theme of transition, whether from the past to the present, from childhood to adulthood, or from different historical periods. The denouement of the novel takes place on New Year's Eve 1979 during which Alya's family host a party to celebrate the beginning of a new decade which, for Alya, only seems to usher in the end of something: 'C'est la dernière nuit des années 70 [...] Ce sera comme une fin de tout, la fin du monde' (2011 : 126). For Alya, this transition from the 1970s to the 1980s also entails a working through of the knowledge of the violent years before her birth, as well as the new trauma of Sami's disappearance. Alya explains that she is burdened with the task of mediating the past and her fear of the future: 'il faut que je me souviene de tout pour toujours faire le lien entre les choses qui existent et les choses qui arrivent' (61). However, the future does not offer the cure to the wounds of the colonial past; she offers no such teleological progression. During this transmission from one period (life before 1980) to another (life after 1980), the past is not guaranteed closure and nor is the present guaranteed a fresh start; one is always contaminated by the other.

As James McDougall summarizes, the 1970s is generally remembered in Algeria as the 'golden age' of independent Algeria, 'a time of promises for industrial development and agrarian reform, educational opportunity and rising standards of living' (2017: 328). Remembered rosily as the Boumediene years, the decline of and transition from this period can be explained by 'the deliberate abandonment of Boumediene's project by Benjedid and those around him, and the sudden irruption of Islamism onto the scene in the early 1980s' (Ibid).

Similarly, in his study of social memory in Bab-El-Oued, Ed McAllister suggests that the ‘belle époque’ of the Boumediene era continues to represent a ‘blueprint against which present political standards are judged’ (2017: 59), even for those who never lived those years of authoritarian, state-led industrialization and modernization. The transitional years of the late 1970s and early 1980s is therefore typically conceived in terms of social decline.

Furthermore, these corrupted hopes for an independent Algeria are communicated in gendered ways. McAllister notes that, in these retrospective narratives, Boumediene personifies the masculine concept of *redjla*, conveying notions of upstanding honour and respect (57). Contested concepts of femininity are also mobilized in memories of the immediate post-Independence period; as Natalya Vince has shown, the tropes of a post-1962 Algerian war between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ in the 1960s and 1970s often boil down to generalising statements regarding how ‘women were sent back into the kitchen’ (2015: 13). Vince has pointed out the difficulties of writing a history of Algeria post-1962 because of the commonly held perception, domestically and abroad, that the post-colonial period was caught in a war between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’, themselves gendered categories. She shows that such narratives are politically coded and deconstructs the way in which they have consequently limited the scope of historiographical responses to the post-1962 period, especially for women. Bouraoui’s narratives, set during the transitional period of the 1970s to the 1980s, reveal how such narratives can be reproduced and transmitted generationally.

This is also a transitional period for the child protagonist who, as Amaleena Damlé has put it, experiences the ‘wild becomings of childhood’ and the messy interaction of the ostensible purity of childhood and the violent challenges of ethical responsibility in adult life (2013: 170). This is significant for Bouraoui’s representation of the 1970s as a postmemorial era, a period of memory acquisition where the past of the Algerian Revolution and hope for the future had an overwhelming influence on the ‘post-generation’ adolescents who enter into early

adulthood in the 1970s. For Alya, the father's memory of the Algerian War of Independence is represented as the forced gifting of a 'mauvais cadeau'. For example, memory is transferred to Alya via the father's entreaty to 'jamais oublier' the sacrifices of the revolutionary war, echoing other familiar moral injunctions such as 'Never again' and 'Never forget' of Holocaust commemoration. Alya, however, acknowledges the affective limitations of these slogans:

C'est difficile d'imaginer l'Algérie d'une autre façon. Pour moi ce pays a toujours été tel que je le connais. Mon père dit qu'il ne faut jamais oublier. Que la guerre n'est pas si loin. Qu'il restera toujours une part de cette souffrance dans chacun des êtres et même à l'intérieur de moi. Parce qu'il a une lignée de la douleur. *Que tout se transmet comme un cadeau ou plutôt un mauvais cadeau mais que l'on est obligé d'accepter, par respect* (2011: 91, added emphasis)

Alya repeats the father's entreaty but admits that, despite this, she struggles to imagine her father's Algeria, to recall Algeria 'd'une autre façon'. She cannot imagine her country differently; for her, it has only ever been as she has known it. In this instance, the father's memory is an 'object' (Ahmed 2010) to which she fails to turn affectively, blocking her ability to engage empathetically with her father's memory.

There is, therefore, a tension between Alya's received understanding of the pre-established scripts of memory, handed down by her father, and her affective engagement with the past. The notion of 'un mauvais cadeau' illustrates the narrator's childlike reluctance to go through the creative and imaginative labour of 'never forgetting'. Alya's struggle to adopt the memory narratives of the father reflects the fact of growing up during the frenzied years of state-building in Algeria and what Aleida Assmann calls the trend of 'remembering in order to forget' in memory practices immediately following the end of conflict. Assmann argues that, in the immediate post-conflict era, the focus is on recovery and healing. As such, only certain

narratives are ‘prescribed as a potent remedy against socially dangerous and explosive forms of remembering to foster a speedy integration’ (2010: 16). In *Sauvage*, the affective and creative structures of postmemory seem to contradict the ways in which the ‘prescribed’ narratives of her father can be affectively experienced by the daughter. For example, immediately following this extract Alya reframes her father’s melancholic imperative to remember by layering it over with her own feelings of loss in the wake of Sami’s disappearance:

Souvent je pense que l’absence de Sami a un lien avec cela, avec l’histoire de ce pays. Puis je me dis que c’est à cause de mon oncle porté disparu au maquis. Et je me dis que la disparition c’est comme un trou dans la vie des autres. Un trou qui ne cesse de s’agrandir. Un trou dans lequel je tombe parfois. (2011: 91-2).

It is only by dialogically engaging with the disappearance of her friend Sami (who is increasingly transformed into the memory of a past friend) through an understanding of her uncle’s disappearance during the Revolution that she can begin to articulate a postmemory of colonialism and the struggle to independence. Mediated via the memory of the lost uncle, the growing ‘trou dans la vie des autres’ is one into which she can fall. The indirect and vicarious postmemory also becomes an empathetic gesture towards the pain of others. Whereas the familial transmission of the national memory narrative via the father seems to be blocked, her mediated, citational, and performative memory of Sami and her uncle creates a structure of remembrance which allows for the child’s imaginative and empathetic engagement with the past.

While the daughter muses on Sami’s absence and what this means for the future, the father is preoccupied with the trauma of the war and continues to grapple with the loss of his brother. Alya interprets her father’s loss by superimposing it over the present-day

disappearance of Sami in her narratives, reading a diachronic connection between Sami and her uncle:

Ils parlaient du Pays. Et pour mon père, le Pays, c'était très important. Parce qu'il abritait le corps de son frère disparu. Et je me suis dit que pour moi aussi la terre d'Algérie deviendrait importante si Sami ne revenait pas. Le Pays c'était un jeune homme que l'on avait tous les deux perdus, mon père et moi. (2011: 153)

Past and present temporalities are superimposed in the image of 'Le Pays' as the body of a young man, uniting father and daughter in their sense of loss. The allegorical function of the young man's body is an interesting twist on the gendered synecdoche that typically imagines Algerian territory as a woman's body (present in both French colonial and Algerian nationalist discourses).² The metaphor of the young man's body therefore indicates the incomplete act of mourning which is transferred across generations from her father (for his brother) to Alya (for Sami). This could be interpreted as another case of repetitious trauma, echoing the common and tired conception of Algerian society as trapped in a cyclical pattern of violence and trauma. Rather, it is more accurate to suggest that Alya highlights the affective quality of postmemory as a structure of transmission. The father's loss is felt bodily by Alya as she grieves for Sami. In the course of her testimonial diary, she recalls a dream in which she occupies Sami's body: 'Je suis l'autre. Quand je regardais Sami j'avais l'idée que j'étais en train de me regarder [...] Parce qu'il y avait une partie de moi dans son corps' (36). The lost bodies of Alya's uncle and Sami are thus transported imaginatively and empathetically via Alya's own embodied subjectivity.

In her affective and embodied engagement with the past, Alya retraces and superimposes her memories of Sami's disappearance over and within those of the Algerian War in a way that is dialogic and palimpsestic. Max Silverman (2013) suggests that palimpsestic memories

simultaneously contain overlapping traces of the present and the past. This often involves an aesthetic process of layering, superimposition, and doubling, which are frequent motifs throughout the novel. For example, Alya describes her time with Sami as ‘une deuxième vie’ (Bouraoui 2011: 74) and she becomes fascinated by the concept of parallel supernatural realms inhabited by ‘les esprits qui verraient dans un autre temps que le nôtre’ (24). She considers the metaphysics of ‘la superposition des deux mondes’ and is attracted to the idea of being ‘écrasée par un monde invisible’ (25). This image of two separate but interconnected worlds illustrates how she sees the present time of her family life and friendship with Sami in the 1970s as being irrevocably linked to the violence of the past. To use Michael Rothberg’s term, Alya is an ‘implicated subject’, where implication describes the ‘various modes of historical relation that do not necessarily fall under the more direct forms of participation associated with traumatic event [... to] encompass bystanders, beneficiaries, latecomers of the postmemory generation and others connected “prosthethically” to pasts they did not directly experience’ (2013: 40). As a member of the postmemory generation, Alya’s story is implicated in a past to which she bears witness *belatedly*, while also implicated in Sami’s disappearance in the present of 1979.

In *Sauvage*, the thematic concern for superimposition and layering supports the idea that the postmemorial era of the 1970s is placed dialogically between the past of the revolution and the foreboding sense of coming tragedy. Alya recalls how, in a premonition of his sudden and unexplained disappearance, Sami is gripped by a sense of paranoia which is linked to his own apocalyptic vision of the wider world:

Sami disait qu’il fallait apprendre à se défendre. Parce que la fin du monde approchait. Ou la fin de quelque chose. Dans sa chambre, en écoutant *Yellow Submarine*, il déplaçait la carte des souterrains d’Alger que son père lui avait confiée. Il était sûr de lui. La guerre allait revenir. C’était écrit. C’est sa mère qui le lui avait dit. (19)

In Alya's memory, the unfolding map of subterranean Algiers reveals the physical city below the one the children recognize as their home. A hidden layer of reality beyond the one the children take for granted, this underground world is off-limits to the children, an adult form of knowledge that has only been granted to them through Sami's father. The periodic and nostalgic reference to *Yellow Submarine* contrasts with the map, juxtaposing childhood with the omnipresent and inevitable threat of adulthood to which they are moving connoted by the lyrics of the song 'Full speed ahead Mr Boatswain, full speed ahead' (Lennon-McCartney 1966).³ It is with this evidence of the map, supported by the themes of the song that Sami becomes so assured of the inevitable threat of another war. Sami's morbid fascination with weaponry, war, and global destruction is nurtured by his mother's own paranoia contradicting the notion of childhood as being utterly isolated from the adult world. Neither Sami nor his parents are wrong, of course. Sami's life is suspended, if not ended, by his unexplained disappearance, and another brutal conflict did arrive in the form of the national tragedy of the Black Decade. In her work on complicity and perpetration in transnational Holocaust memory, Debarati Sanyal explores the 'folding' of memories into each other to suggest that '[a]rt can be the site of an ethical encounter with other(s') memories, provided we remain attuned to our complicity' (Sanyal 2015: 16). Sanyal suggests that theorists maintain the 'multidirectional ethics' (2015: 16) of this connective gesture between disparate memories while recognising the dangers of banal empathy. Like the unfolding and refolding of the subterranean map, the act of bearing witness *folds* Sami's story into others, *implicating* his disappearance into the history of the lost hopes for decolonisation in an act of convergence and contamination (Sanyal 2015: 10). With her belated testimony, the map and the song function as affective objects which mediate Alya's memory and understanding of Sami's life as being folded into other unseen or submerged histories to which she might not be directly connected.

Whereas the memory of the father is a ‘mauvais cadeau’, these affective objects – the map, the song – activate postmemory as a messy contamination of temporalities, the trauma of the past and the terrifying unknown of the years to come. The transition from one period to another is, therefore, never a clean movement, but a messy process of superimposition, overlapping, and folding. Traces of the past *and the future* make their mark on the lives of the young narrators. For Alya, her understanding of this transition is mediated by her memories of Sami’s loss but also by these affective artefacts of his childhood.

Photography and Embodiment

Embodied and gendered engagements with the past are staged in Bouraoui’s novels through photography. Hirsch’s *Family Frames* (1997) focused on photography’s role in the production of a postmemory of the Holocaust, where the children of survivors recall the memories of their parents and grandparents as their *own* memories through the medium of family photos. Bouraoui also ekphrastically stages encounters with family photographs in *Garçon manqué* and *Sauvage* in ways that illustrate the affective and embodied qualities of postmemory. As the narrators of the two novels reflect on photographs of their uncles, who died in the Algerian revolution before they were born, they foster postmemorial transmission in embodied and gendered ways. In *Sauvage*, looking at a photograph of the uncle, Alya seeks out visual clues that draw a line of connection between her loss of Sami and this sacred family artefact:

Dans son sourire j’essaie de comprendre l’histoire de ma famille, l’histoire de ce pays.

Ce n’est pas l’histoire de Sami, mais il y a toujours un lien entre eux. (2011: 91)

As established in the last section, the history of the uncle, representing the violence of decolonisation, is strangely anchored within Sami’s disappearance. Considering the photograph of her uncle is also a way to contemplate the violence of Sami’s disappearance: it

is a source of historical knowledge as well as a precious family artefact. Alya recognizes that the violence of the Revolution continues to haunt her family and casts a shadow on instances of contemporary violence. As she grieves for Sami, she also grieves for an uncle who, according to the national discourse, has sacrificed himself for an independent Algeria. In this sense, Alya's postmemory of her uncle turns the photograph into an affective artefact that allows her to politicize the present-day tragedy of the unexplained disappearance of a little boy. Likewise, the present loss provides the affective framework through which she can engage with the memory of her uncle and the War of Independence.

The role of the body in this affective remembrance comes to the fore in Bouraoui's earlier novel *Garçon manqué*. As a bicultural child, the autofictionally named Nina must navigate between her, sometimes antagonistic, French and Algerian families. Throughout the narrative, it is Nina's body which functions as a reminder of the political rupture of decolonisation:

Longtemps je crois porter une faute. Je viens de la guerre. Je viens d'un mariage contesté. Je porte la souffrance de ma famille algérienne. Je porte le refus de ma famille française. Je porte ces transmissions-là. La violence ne me quitte plus. (2000: 32)

Throughout the text, the child refers to the war as a burden that she carries with the insistent repetition of phrases beginning 'Je porte [...]'. As Helen Vassallo (2012, 2013), Amaleena Damlé (2014) and Ching Selao (2005) have all noted, the child-narrator experiences the legacy of the Algerian war as an *embodied* 'faute', or even an illness (Vassallo 2007). Her body does not sit well with the antagonisms of her French and Algerian families, and designates an uncomfortable interaction between '[t]he "outside" of the public story and historical context' and 'the "inside", the private experience and the personal story' (Vassallo 2013: 143). Both the family's memory of the war and the public history of the Algerian War are *felt* corporeally by

the child. Selao argues that the child's embodied legacy of Algerian and French conflict is, in itself, an act of physical and corporeal testimony (2005: 77). If her body represents the paradoxical unification (her parents' marriage) and rupture (following decolonisation), this paradox, for Selao, is also characteristic of testimony itself being, first, an expression of the past and, second, an expression of the impossibility to ever fully bear witness to take account of the past. We can add to these commentaries on the body in *Garçon manqué* that the repetition of the verb 'porter' draws our attention to the affective and performative nature of this embodied memory, rather than suggesting that the memory is an inherent result of her biculturalism. This does not mean that her memory is artificial; indeed, the memory inflicts pain and wounds on the child-narrator as these critics have shown. However, it remains to be seen what agency the remembering subject is in possession of vis-à-vis their embodied memory. By what affective and performative means do the narrators come to embody this postmemory?

In *Garçon manqué* and *Sauvage*, child-narrators do not acquire memory as an intentional or self-conscious work of history, but nor is it an essentialist characteristic of their biculturalism. Rather, postmemory is produced affectively through their engagements with their surroundings, the artefacts that they discover, and through a growing understanding of their own performative gendering. In *Garçon manqué*, Nina plays with several different identities during her childhood, notably those of Algerian boys and men (Brio, Ahmed) based on her re-enactment of the perceived masculinity of her best friend Amine and her late uncle, Amar. When Nina learns of her late uncle, Amar, and his death fighting in the Algerian War of Independence, the memory of the war and his death are transferred in an affective and bodily manner which reinforces her fascination with normative expressions of masculinity: 'Mon nouveau rôle. Je coupe mes cheveux. Je jette mes robes. Je cours vite. Je tombe souvent. Je me relève toujours. Ne pas être algérienne. Ne pas être française' (Bouraoui 2000: 33). As in

Sauvage, Amar's body was never found and the lack of closure through burial continues to haunt Nina's father which, in turn, is imparted to Nina transporting her into the heart of a war of which she has no living memory: 'Je suis dans la guerre d'Algérie. Je porte le conflit. Je porte la disparition de l'aîné de la famille, sa référence' (2000 : 31). Again, the repetitive use of the verb 'porter' is notable. In the absence of the buried body of the uncle, the burden of representation seems instead to fall on Nina.

This idea of *bearing* the past in one's body becomes evident when Nina reflects on her uncle's portrait in a photograph. Never having known her uncle, who died before she was born, she has no living memory through which to memorialize him or, by extension, the War of Independence which claimed his life. Instead, the child invents and reiterates his memory on his behalf, via the spectral medium of his portrait:

Longtemps je garde la photographie d'Amar. J'invente son histoire. Longtemps je force la réalité. Je deviens Amar. Je joue à être un homme. Je suis captivée [...] Je deviens violente. Avec moi. Avec les autres. Je cherche mon identité. (32)

The photograph mediates a form of postmemory that seizes Nina and compels her to act out her uncle's subjectivity as a form of empathetic and gendered performativity. Nina studies her uncle's portrait and draws out her own image-text (Hirsch 1997: 10). In other words, she reads her own narrative into the image of her uncle, one in which she becomes the subject of the portrait. Within the image of the young man, the Barthesian punctum, the point of recognition and of shock, is herself. This affective engagement with the photograph compels her to play at being a man: 'Je deviens Amar. Je joue à être un homme'. However, during her performative reimagining of his masculinity, she is 'captivée', and nonetheless genders herself as feminine. Grief, memory, and affective engagement are demonstrated here to be inherently gendered

actions, a messy performative ritual in which the binaries of normative identification are rendered fluid.

We can also understand the embodiment of her uncle's memory in terms of Landsberg's 'prosthetic memory'. The photograph mediates the memory of Amar as a prosthesis so that Nina 'wear[s] the body' of another and so that his memory is mediated as her own (Landsberg 2004: 61). In Nina's encounter with the photograph, the imaginative effort of inventing his story is a bodily effort, as we can see from 'Je force la réalité', 'Je suis captivée', referring both to an imaginative and a physical effort of forcing and being held. This emphasis on Nina's embodiment through *wearing* highlights the performative nature of Nina's engagement with the memory of the late uncle. Rather than simply passively receiving the postmemory of her uncle's tragic disappearance (the father's 'mauvais cadeau' in *Sauvage*), the photograph mediates a form of masculine performativity which functions as a 'prosthetic' to her own memory. In addition, while the negotiation of Nina's feminine and masculine identities could be read as evidence of the novel's preoccupation with individual identity formation, we can add that this is also an integral element of coming to terms with herself as a historically-situated subject in relation to the legacy of the Algerian War of Independence. In the same episode, Nina's prosthetic memory is conditioned by violence:

La violence précède ma naissance. Elle reviendra, ici, en Algérie, entre ses habitants. Je deviens violente. Avec moi. Avec les autres. Je cherche mon identité. Mon regard est triste parfois. *Je prends les yeux de mon père* qui cherche le souvenir d'Amar. [...] C'est une guerre contre le monde. (Bouraoui 2000: 32-3 added emphasis).

In remembering her uncle, on the one hand, Nina plays with the extreme violence of the period, made present as she becomes increasingly violent with herself and others. On the other hand, she prosthetically takes on the eyes of her father in a performative act of postmemory evoking

her father's masculine perspective *and* his act of mourning as he seeks out memories of his lost brother, Amar. The family photograph is thus a key affective 'object' in Bouraoui's representation of postmemory which triggers an embodied and gendered engagement with the past in the child-narrators. In *Garçon manqué*, Nina's performative reiteration of her uncle's masculinity – 'the repeated stylization of the body' (Butler 2006: 43) – is itself shown to be an act of memory.

Gendered Multidirectionality

If Nina and Alya both express an affective engagement with the past of the Algerian War of Independence, what is the political significance of this engagement in the present? Hirsch has suggested that postmemory can be extended beyond the framework of family transmission to create 'affiliation across lines of difference' (2012: 21). In other words, affiliative postmemory need not be restricted to the transmission of memory within the family as a form of hereditary inheritance. In fact, it is effective for the creation of unexpected connections and affiliations between diverse histories and remembering subjects. Although *Garçon manqué* is Bouraoui's most frequently analysed text, there are currently no commentaries shedding light on the ways in which the narrator draws on her knowledge of the German Occupation of France and broader history of the Second World War and Holocaust, as well as the Algerian War of Independence. Although Martine Fernandes reads the War of Independence in *Garçon manqué* as a metaphor for Bouraoui's coming to terms with 'son identité écrivaine "mixte" ou "hybride"' (2007 : 247), we can add that Bouraoui's postmemory of the Algerian Revolution converges multidirectionally with the Second World War. Indeed, the 1970s saw greater public discussion of the history of the occupation and collaboration in France, with the emergence of cultural products such as the influential 1971 documentary *Le Chagrin et la pitié*. Multidirectional references in *Garçon manqué* offer important insights into how historical knowledge informs

Nina's gendered and racialised subjectivity as a French-Algerian child and also offer a critique of the ways her parents and grandparents' generations frame the narratives of occupation and decolonisation.

In one particularly disturbing extract, for example, a man attempts to abduct Nina from the street outside her family home, and the violence of this attack forges strange and unexpected historical connections. The trauma of the attack wipes out her memory of its immediate aftermath and she works through this gender-based violence by evoking the space of the attack in terms of the 'concentrationary':

Ma mémoire ne rentre pas dans ce lieu. C'est un lieu interdit et peuplé. C'est le lieu des rêves. C'est un camp. C'est une concentration. C'est mon âge blessé, Amine. (48)

The staggered metaphor of her memory as a camp and then a concentration conjures a concentrationary space and opens up some disturbing questions regarding the comparison of victimisation in vastly different historical contexts. However, Nina is not making a historical comparison between her experience of gender-violence in 1970s Algeria and the totality of the concentrationary system in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. In their influential reformulation of David Rousset's concept of 'l'univers concentrationnaire' (1946), Max Silverman and Griselda Pollock suggest that the concentrationary can be understood as the space of the concentrationary system, a space of totalitarian terror and violence which is 'enacted in a historically specific time and space, but not identical with that moment alone' (Pollock and Silverman 2011: 8). In other words, the concentrationary is mobile and its aesthetics can appear in historically-situated moments other than the network of Nazi camps in Europe. In her insistence on the 'space' of the attack, of its dream-like qualities, we can understand this reference as an affective engagement with the past, where the emotive and

corporeal experience of historicised terror (the concentrationary) is evoked in order to comprehend her own experience of violence in a very different context.

In this respect, the concentrationary is evoked here as a mnemonic framework to mediate and articulate the memory of the attack. In the chapter following this episode, Nina's mediation is extended and worked through by her internalisation of her attacker's masculinity; 'Je deviendrai un homme pour venger mon corps fragile' (2000: 46). In a similar manner to the embodiment of the uncle's masculinity via the family photograph, Nina takes on and internalises the masculine features of her attacker; 'Ses traits derrière mes traits. Son masque sur mon masque. Je me travestis' (Bouraoui 2000: 49). Husung (2014) and Arenberg (2015) are correct to describe Nina's performative masculinity as a response to the violence of patriarchy in the time of the narrative, the late 1970s. However, we can also acknowledge that this is mediated through an affective engagement with a concentrationary memory. The concentrationary aesthetic refers to representations of the psychological (as opposed to judicial) experiences of victimhood, perpetration, and testimony in terms of a suspended and in-between state (Silverman 2013: 41-8). For Nina's attack, the concentrationary is therefore an effective, although uncomfortable, framework by which her performative gendering incorporates the masculinity of her attacker, superimposing *both* victim and perpetrator psychologies in a single subjectivity. In this scenario of patriarchal sexual violence, Nina's performative masculinity internalises this subject-position by adopting her attacker's bodily traits. Her masculine performativity is, however, not a straightforward act of theatre or parody; it is an cumulative and productive sedimentation of different encounters with violence. It is a complex series of reiterations based as much on the memory of a revered uncle as the internalisation of patriarchal violence that she experiences in the streets of Algiers. Both these subjectivities are influences and contributors to her masculinity as her alter-ego 'Ahmed', precariously balanced between two polarised narratives of masculinity: on the one hand, the martyred hero, and on the other,

the paedophile predator. Through the frame of the concentrationary, she can introduce these contradictions and tenuously open up memory links between gendered violence in post-colonial Algeria and other historical trajectories.

In *Garçon manqué*, Nina's postmemory of the Second World War is further stimulated by her summer holidays with her maternal grandparents in Brittany, France. The grandparental home is a site of personal memory where she searches for traces of her mother's childhood as a French girl in France – a childhood which is drastically different to her own as a French-Algerian in Algeria: 'Chercher une trace de ma mère. Ses copies de philosophie. Ses cours de droit civil. Son écriture, inchangée' (2000: 125). In addition, the house is also a site of collective memory for the child, producing postmemories of historical cases of racism and imperial conflict. Her French grandparents explain to Nina and her sister that they were forced to give up the house as accommodation for German soldiers during the Occupation. This wider historical narrative intermingles with Nina's personal memory of her mother's childhood, and she starts to re-imagine and retrace the history that led to her and her sister, French-Algerian 'métisses', to also lay claim to this house:

Qui l'aurait pensé, en 1960? [...] Et plus loin encore. Après la libération. Quand ils ont retrouvé leur maison confisquée par l'armée allemande. Qui aurait pu penser à ce tableau-là? Deux petites métisses le nez dans le chocolat Poulain. Les filles de Rachid. Qui dorment dans la maison. Qui vont au jardin. Qui montent aux étages. Qui fouillent le dernier étage. [...] Dans la maison des officiers allemands. Là où ils vivaient. Où ils s'étaient installés. Le temps de la guerre. Une autre guerre encore. Avec les boches, il fallait marcher droit. Il ne rigolait pas, l'Allemand. Dit-il. Allemagne-France-Algérie. La marche de la guerre. (Bouraoui 2000: 125-6)

The child imagines her presence in the house as a new kind of occupation by ‘deux petites métisses’ and juxtaposes the proper nouns of Poulain and Rachid to exaggerate the shock of the diverse historical trajectories that have led them there. The child refers to her multidirectional knowledge of her own family history and the intersecting histories of the German Occupation in France and French colonialism in Algeria. As a result, the two histories are layered over each other in the single site of the grandparental home. By superimposing the present with these two layers of history – France in 1980, French-Occupied Algeria in 1960, and German-Occupied France in the 1940s – the child-narrator understands these histories in terms of connections and affiliations, rather than antagonism. In the above extract, Nina affirms this triangulation of memory in terms of geography: the house of the grandmother is simultaneously ‘Allemagne-France-Algérie’ (126), not a static site of memory, but a place of nebulous interconnection, what Rothberg, Sanyal, and Silverman have described as a ‘nœud de mémoire’ (Rothberg 2010).

The knotted and intersecting trajectories of memory in her grandparents’ home corroborate Nina’s rejection of singular categories of identity. These memories allow her to leave the following questions unanswered:

Une fille? Un garçon? L’arrière-petite-fille de Marie? La petite-fille de Rabiâ ?
L’enfant de Méré ? Le fils de Rachid ? Qui? La Française? L’Algérienne? L’Algéro-
Française? De quel côté de la barrière? (Bouraoui 2000: 141)

In leaving these question unanswered, Nina’s character appears to be resisting their interpellation. Butler engages with Althusserian interpellation in her study *Excitable Speech* in which she suggests that, while hailing makes the subject, the subject can resist the subjectivation in an act of ‘discursive agency’ (1997: 127). Discursive agency is enacted when a subject can act with intent *within* a discourse by performatively engaging with the terms of

their hailing, and transform the ‘terms through radical acts of public misappropriation’. As a result, the meanings and interpretation of the terms become ‘tenuous and even broken over time’ (1997: 100). In leaving these terms in the interrogative mode, Bouraoui enacts this kind of ‘discursive agency’ in which there is the potential for the narrator to ‘misappropriate’ the terms of hailing. In her grandparents’ house, Nina lives with the demands of these questions but refuses to pick a side, leaving them suspended in their failure to fully account for her subjectivity. Pamela Pears has argued that Nina’s place in the grandparental house is an uneasy one, somewhere in-between the immigrant guest and the being-at-home of the granddaughter (2012: 70). The child recognises her grandmother’s resentment of her parent’s marriage that she herself perpetuates through her presence in the multidirectional home: ‘Quelle faute alors? D’être la fille des amoureux de 1960. De rendre ce temps éternel. Par ma seule présence’ (Bouraoui 2000: 124). Her presence in the house seems to perpetuate the time of the 1960s, condemning the present to the status of an unending screen for the war, for terrorism in France and Algeria, and her grandparents’ shame concerning their daughter’s marriage to an Algerian man.

Conversely, Pears later suggests that it is by never being-at-home in the grandparent’s home that she can reject the national and gendered categories: ‘Her refusal to be the guest in France and to be the host in Algeria translates also into her rejection of the gender roles assigned to her in both countries’ (2012: 73). I suggest that we can add to Pear’s point that this is also a rejection, therefore, of the grandparents’ temporal perspective of a ‘temp éternel’ (Bouraoui 2000: 124) introduced by the presence of Nina and her sister. In rejecting the dichotomous roles of guest/host, Algerian/French, masculine/feminine, Nina is also liberating herself as a mnemonic agent, as someone who can move freely around the ‘nœuds de mémoire’ and seek out the ways in which these histories are connective, and not simply antagonistic. The fluidity of her gendered and cultural identity differentiates her relationship with the past from

the lived memory of her mono-national parents and grandparents. Nina announces how her childhood in the 1970s has been framed by the memory of her parents:

C'est la mémoire de nos parents qui est important. De leur souffrance. De leur humiliation. Notre berceau. Ce qui nous attendait. Le contexte. Ce qui a été fait. Ce qui a été dit. Leurs blessures transmises. Cet héritage-là. Ces regards sur eux, en France, en Algérie puis encore en France. C'est cela qui nourrira le désir de vengeance. (Bouraoui 2000: 130)

The bicultural, gender-fluid child, born after the events of war, occupation, and genocide, understands, perhaps more than her parents or grandparents, the implications of 'cet héritage-là' of the past, which has become her 'berceau' in the present. From her postmemorial perspective, she can see that 'leur souffrance' and 'leur humiliation' will only feed 'le désir de vengeance' in the future. Nina's understanding of the role played by the French and Algerian past gives her insight into the politics of the present and echoes Gabriele Schwab's argument that if the term 'collective memory' is to be meaningful, it must emerge from the dialogical point where 'histories intersect and different participants or agents read them in conflicting ways, especially when they come from different sides of the divide between victim and perpetrator' (2010: 29). Bouraoui's narratives open up to the intersecting and conflicting 'participants or agents' of collective memory by highlighting the knotted memories in her Algeria/France/Germany paradigm and the production of memory across the divide of victim and perpetrator in the post-1962 generation.

The narrator of *Garçon manqué* therefore gains political insight and agency by experiencing memory in *belated* terms. Although she receives and explores the knotted memory of her grandmother's house within the context of inter-generational transmission, she

expresses and imagines this memory in terms of a future anterior, a past-futurity, where her memory not only recalls what *was* but what *will have been*:

Je sais. Je sais l'avenir de l'Algérie. Comme je savais le séisme. Je sais le sang, bientôt. Il suffit de regarder. La tristesse. Ces visages fermés. Ces nouveaux gestes. Les visions de ma mère. Ce sera facile d'écrire. De le dire après. Mais c'est vrai. Il suffit de regarder. D'écouter l'Algérie. (Bouraoui 2000: 86)

This extract appears to be the meta-narrative of a writer who writes about her childhood from the position of hindsight. This shift in temporality points to the ways in which memory can also be a process that enables us to imagine the future. Here, Nina's postmemory is an expression of the future anterior, or an expression of the past that equally looks forward. In these typically Bouraouian sentences (short and fractured), the narrator hints that it will *only* be 'easy' to express this history after the fact – the past, therefore, cannot offer a utopian solution to the problems of the future. However, as Marta Segarra notes, the refusal of 'cette obligation de choisir son camp' is inherently connected to anti-racist politics throughout Bouraoui's writing (2010: 113). This is, essentially, Bouraoui's politics of memory. By privileging narratives which engage performatively with the borders of gendered and national affiliation, Bouraoui highlights how the belated testimony of postmemory can be mobilised to complicate the categories of present day injustice, although they offer no singular way to solve them.

Conclusion

In these two texts, Nina Bouraoui writes from the perspective of the postmemorial generation, those who were born after the decisive year of 1962, but grew up with the mythology of the Revolution. Both narratives are at times remarkably similar in that they develop a perspective of a childhood in-between French and Algerian histories during the last years of the 1970s, at

a specific transitional moment in both the history of Algeria – remembered as the end of the ‘golden era’ of the Boumediene years – and their own personal development from childhood to adulthood. Historical knowledge pertaining to their French and Algerian backgrounds is not confined to the usual channels of intellectual discipline or family memory. Rather, their knowledge of the past is transmitted via a postmemorial structure, a belated act of witnessing, via their engagement with affective objects and experiences. Such affective engagement provokes embodied and gendered responses to the past in a complex and performative contamination between past and present, which also oscillates between the pre-determined narratives that defined Nina and Alya: ‘Française? Algérienne? Fille? Garçon?’ (Bouraoui 2000: 163). Importantly, it is this fluid, unfixed, and unbound approach to memory in Bouraoui’s writing that also enables her protagonists creatively to reimagine – through the affective labour of postmemory – the singular politics of national and gendered belonging and, in so doing, to challenge the repetitive cycle of violence associated with trans-generational trauma in Algerian and French societies.

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¹ As Pamela Pears has argued in her analysis of the publication history of Bouraoui’s texts, the author’s image is frequently included in the cover image of Bouraoui’s texts, and in *Garçon Manqué* her image on the cover ‘strengthens the idea that she is, consistently, the subject of her own writing. Bouraoui has built her career with autofiction’ (2015: 139).

² This is also a theme in Bouraoui’s 1999 lyrical ‘récit’ *Le jour du séisme* (1999), which introduces a sense of gender trouble through the oscillating use of ‘il’ and ‘elle’ pronouns. For Amaleena Damlé, Bouraoui’s repetitive use of gender pronouns in *Le Jour du séisme* is a way to emphasise ‘the presence of postcolonial tensions in her evocation of the quake, in its appropriation of the feminisation of Algeria’ (2014: 161-2).

³ Given that Bouraoui also has a career as a song writer for the likes of Céline Dion, it is not surprising that she herself admits that ‘la musicalité est toujours au centre de mon travail’ (Mandor 2016). As with this reference to The Beatles, her works frequently play on lyrics of popular songs in French and English, especially in her most recent work *Beaux Rivages*.