Interrogating Colonial Binaries of Time and Self:

The empowerment of alternative narratives of the past and present in Gisèle Halimi's *Fritna* and Brigitte Smadja's *Le jaune est sa couleur*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Middle Eastern Studies

University of Leiden

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Hannah Falvey

S2213133

August 2019

Universiteit Leiden

Specialism: Modern Middle Eastern Studies

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Tsolin Nalbantian

Second Reader: Dr. Cristiana Strava

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

The works of Gisèle Halimi, and Brigitte Smadja each challenge the implied historical rupture constructed between the colonial and the post-colonial. In their works, they use multiple characters to subvert the accepted singular narrative of colonialism and its impacts, thereby highlighting the multiple and intersecting identities of all participants in the colonial discourse. This thesis aims to review the works constructed by these authors, placing great consideration on each of the authors' own "intrasubjective complexity"[1], the way that their intersecting identities interact to formulate identity, and the impact that this has on their portrayal of characters. Indeed, these authors' identities fall "between colonizer and colonized, Jew and Arab, occident and orient… [their positions are] historically ambiguous. The dominant narrative of [t]his life, then, has been one of a subject whose multiple belongings challenge the notion of fixed identities and easy binaries"[2]. From this vantage point, they use constructions of memory to consider the impact of the past on the present idea of self in their works. Robert Watson has studied the role of Tunisian-Jewish women in the preservation and transmission of memory, through a process that he terms 'second-hand memory'[3]. He argues that women have been entrusted with a greater role in the transmission of cultural memory. This is in part because constructions of gender norms have placed the burden of maintaining religious adherence on women. He argues that they are, moreover, the carriers of their female relatives' voices, voices which would otherwise go unrecorded. It is therefore, intriguing that both authors choose to use the relationships between female relatives, their interactions and their silences as a key motif in their works. The combination of continuity and discontinuity between mother and daughter, sister and aunt, provide a means of pushing the idea of historical rupture to its limits

[1] Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, (Allen Unwin, 2003), 140.
[2] Lia Nicole Brozgal, *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 9.
[3] He coins this term in his study of the theme or return in Tunisian Jewish women's writing. Robert Watson, *Secondhand Memories: Franco-Tunisan Jewish Women and the Predicament of Writing Return*, (Life Writing, 2013), 24-46.

and interrogating its weaknesses. Equally, by choosing to write about characters impacted by the space and place of Tunisia, the authors may be automatically refuting the rationality of historical rupture by emphasising the ongoing interaction between the past and the present in the minds and lives of their characters. As will be discussed throughout this thesis, the interaction of time and memory is important in the process of defining their characters' identities.

This thesis uses works of literature to explore the idea that there is no "chronological division [as] suggested by the nomenclature of the 'colonial' and the 'post-colonial' periods [hence] France's colonising project continues to reverberate in the present"[4]. The two works studied are *Le jaune est sa couleur*, by Brigitte Smadja and *Fritna*, by Gisèle Halimi. These works will be explored in greater depth later in this chapter; however, each provides a means to explore the present-versus-past dichotomy created by dominant discourses of colonialism. The rejection of this binary discourse of before and after colonialism is likewise made more compelling by the fact that these Tunisian-born authors now live in France. Their creative productions represent a challenge to the discourse of chronological rupture which "elid[es] the lived experiences of thousands who grew up under its rule, for whom the French empire was an inescapably solid reality"[5]. Their representations of memory and identity, therefore, interrogate the fracture between past and present because they have context and memory that stands in direct challenge. Equally, memories are constructed and given meaning within the context that they are remembered. Thus, the impact of migration on memory is significant to this study, both because it presents a further logical flaw in the idea of a clear distinction

[4] Fiona Barclay, *France's Colonial Legacies: Memory, Identity and Narrative*, (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2013), 4.
[5] Ibid., 2

between the colonial and the post-colonial and because it is a significant factor in the authors' subjective identities.

Furthermore, the creation of a discursive binary between colonial and post-colonial automatically creates a value judgement, suggesting that one period is superior, since "in western thought, binaries are never different but equal; there is always a hierarchy of values"[6]. This is a harmful idea that encourages the acceptance of a singular narrative and memory of the past, placing the present as morally superior and 'other' than the past, not intricately bound through the transmission of discourse and frameworks of knowledge. It also excludes dissenting voices from participating in the formation of discourse and knowledge in the present, by artificially segregating coloniser and colonised by time, in a highly globalised world. The works of these authors, in addition to their personal biographies, highlight the inadequacy of binaries to encapsulate, understand or explore the complexity of the individual: both in their marginalisation and in their privilege.

Theory

Postcolonial theory is an apposite framework for considering the works of these authors because it is places significant weight on the intersecting aspects of identity, including class, gender, nationality and religion. It is a relevant literary theory that allows space for the exploration of the non-binary memories and identities that create conflict in the hegemonic discourse. Moreover, it emphasises that the personal and collective experience of the impacts of colonialism present contradictions to the easy binaries that have been constructed within this hegemonic discourse. The aim of the theory, as emphasised by Leela Gandhi in *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* is to work in contrast to the inherent essentialism of colonial and, hence post-colonial narrative. It is important to note here that this thesis is following the

[6] Joanne P. Sharp, *Geographies of PostColonialism: Spaces of Power and Representation*, (London, SAGE Publications Ltd., 2009), 19.

pattern of using 'postcolonial' as a theoretical category, while 'post-colonial' is used to denote the chronological time after the end of active colonial projects. The legitimacy of the latter as a category is subject to debate during the consideration of the works; nevertheless, it is the meaning and connotation of this name, rather than the chronological factor that will be discussed. Gandhi has highlighted the relevance of many different theoretical influences on the theory. Indeed, she shows that the theory itself has been constructed by borrowing aspects of different theories and ideas, including post-structuralism, hybridity, feminist theory and Marxism. Though this has opened the theory up to criticism of flakiness and suggestions that it is a political movement rather than sound theoretical model[7], Gandhi defines its theoretical framework, demonstrating the scholarship gap that it seeks to fill. Moreover, arguably, its intersectionality and multiple origins are helpful, echoing the complexity of the processes it aims to explore.

There are many different iterations of the theory which allows it the space to variously interact with multiple layers of meaning, identity and complexity. Through this diversity of influences, including post-structuralism and feminism, the theory is able to engage with intersectional works, such as those written by Halimi and Smadja, whose layered identities straddle the space between coloniser and colonised. As outliers to the binaries of colonial discourse, the narrative constructions of these female, Jewish, Tunisian post-colonial subjects subvert the normative account of the colonial history. Nevertheless, a fundamental principle that lies over the theory is that "postcolonialism is… a… positive project which seeks to recover alternative ways of knowing and understanding"[8]. Its aims are to deconstruct discourses that limit discussions and formations of meaning to the binaries of colonialism, and empower alternative voices to be heard in at the same time as the hegemon. This aim is reflected

[7] Rita Kothari, *Postcolonialism and the Language of Power*, (International Journal of Postcolonial Studies, 1998), 35-38.
[8] Sharp, *Geographies*, 5.

in both authors' uses of multiple voices and characters to explore the diversity of experience of the colonial, which attempts to redefine the discourse, by emphasising the multiplicity of narratives and interpretations of history which each diverge from the accepted discourses in their own ways[9]. Nevertheless, a valid complaint against postcolonial theory which must be acknowledged is that

> "the issue of representation of minorities and recognising them, a crucial aspect of postcolonialism, invests elite sections with an opportunity and onus of doing the recognizing. That is what happens in practice. Baldly stated, the postcolonial predicament is academic capital for metropolitan theoreticians in the First World, or for Third World theorist now in the metropolis"[10].

Kothari's rejection of the theory on the basis of its exclusive base support is a legitimate critique, which must be addressed. It is an issue that has been firmly highlighted in response Edward Said's *Orientalism*[11], a seminal work in the formation of the theory. Said's work lacks representation of marginalised voices, hence in some ways becomes a product of the knowledge-creation category that it critiques. Indeed, Gayatri Spivak's work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* goes further than highlighting the lack of marginalised voices; she suggests that there is no way that "knowledge that is non-dominant and non-coercive can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations and the strategies of power"[12]. Indeed, she argues that "deconstruction can only speak the language of the thing it criticizes… the only things one really deconstructs are things into which one in is intimately mired"[13]. This

[9] This is one of the aspects of their works that makes them distinctly postcolonial, as "postcolonial writers tend to challenge the presentation of singular narratives and instead seek to include multiple voices in their works" (Sharp, *Geographies*, 7.)

[10] Kothari, *Postcolonialism*, 35.
[11] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London, Penguin, 2003),.
[12] Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker, *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. (Edinburgh, Pearson, 2005), 201.
[13] Gayatri Spivak and Sarah Harasym, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, (New York, Routledge, 1990), 135.

creates a challenge for the theoretical strength of the aims of postcolonial theory, because it suggests that voices participate in the discourse cease to represent the subaltern.

Nevertheless, postcolonial theory's strengths of malleability mean that it is pertinent for this thesis, when applied critically. It is important that the authors are not forced into categories by their heritage or the topics that they choose to discuss. Indeed, there is a very real "danger… that 'colonial subjects' are confirmed in their subjection to Western ideological modes whose hegemonic role is at the same time reinforced"[14] when only considered in relation to their colonial interactions. I have chosen to explore the ways in which these authors have chosen to subvert the essentialism of contemporary discourses of colonialism through their subject and character choices. My interpretations will, of course be subjective and influenced by my own surroundings. Indeed, when considering texts, subjectivity is considerable because "insider/ outsider dynamics are never fixed, and power is at work in all research constellations, as class, gender, ethnicity or status are equally important factors in the establishment of relationships between people. Again, this stresses the point that knowledge formation is always political and contextual. The resulting complexity should therefore be reflected in… the writing"[15]. The multiple possible interpretive levels of the works considered go beyond the limits of this thesis, however, they demonstrate the further complexity of the individual and the construction of memory.

The "Francophone" and the Postcolonial

Postcolonial theory has been criticised for being focussed particularly on English-language texts and the British colonial experience[16]. Whilst acknowledging the existence of this bias

[14] Selden, Widdowson and Brooker, *Contemporary*, 200.
[15] Katherine Schramm, *Leaving Area Studies Behind: the challenge of diasporic connections in the field of African Studies*, (African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal, 2008), 4.
[16] "we would argue that the main problem with Postcolonial Studies is its (often unacknowledged) focus on the British colonial experience. As it is currently constituted, Postcolonial Studies refers almost exclusively to the 'Angolophone' Postcolonial Studies, or to cite Harish Trivedi's stinging rebuke, 'the postcolonial only has ears

within the theories' application, Said's seminal work engages with both French and English-language works. Moreover, there are many French-speaking writers and scholars- including Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi- who have had an enormous influence on the direction and development of postcolonial theory. Therefore, not only is there a clear and influential precedent for the application of postcolonial theory to French-language works, but the theory has a great relevance to the study of these authors' works because of its malleable nature, which places importance on interacting identities. Equally, it is necessary to engage with the problematic "use of the term 'Francophone' [which] has often involved an ethnic or racial 'difference' from a perceived 'French norm', with metropolitan France rigorously excluded from deliberations of Francophone Studies"[17]; bearing this in mind, the aim of this work is to investigate to what extent the three works considered engage with the continuing influence of colonial memory and experience. This thesis is not trying to be exclusionary or divisive through the application of postcolonial theory; indeed, as argued by Forsdick and Murphy[18], there is merit in postcolonial theory that is able to overcome the problems posed by the French-language context.

That the literature of "francophone writers of North Africa [have] found [themselves] subject to a near foreclosure of interpretive possibilities"[19]. It has been historically pigeonholed by the artificial segregation between 'French Literature' and 'Francophone Literature', seeing the latter as inextricably linked to the biography of the author, whereas the former can be divorced from the authors' identities. During her study, Brogzal rails against the practice that places the 'postcolonial' author solely into the category of auto-biographer. She argues are that postcolonial authors, such as Albert Memmi, are placed into academic categories that explore

for English'" Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction,* (Routledge, 2003), 7.
[17] Ibid., 7
[18] Ibid., 9
[19] Brozgal, *Against*, 8.

the authors' identities and subjective histories, categories that try to read elements of the author's life into their works, claiming that they are autobiographical even when this is not explicitly stated. French-language works not placed within the category of postcolonial are not automatically assumed to be autobiographical and therefore enjoy greater freedom in interpretation of meanings and themes. This emphasises the ongoing Orientalist and colonial attitudes that affords greater generosity to interpretations of the colonisers' work. This colonial dichotomy, which limits the realms of interpretation is an important consideration; it is true that the identity of the author is incredibly important for postcolonial theory, as it highlights the contextual importance of literary construction. The author's subjectivity is formulated by her or his class, gender, sexuality, race and religion: in essence, individual experience. This is something that should be considered with regards to all authors, not simply those considered 'postcolonial' or 'Francophone'. It is the propensity to create an interpretive binary between the postcolonial author and the French author that creates an inherent and problematic hierarchy of value between works of fiction: one as free to explore every genre and experience, one limited within the author's own experience. The discursive barrier limits the reader's interpretations of the works therefore leading to a continuation of the hegemonic narrative, allowing for controlled dissent. However, the works of Smadja and Halimi explore "the interplay between the colonial past and the post-colonial present [and] reflect unfinished processes of representation and remembrance"[20]. Therefore, postcolonial theory highlights their digressive use of multiple voices and characters further the work of representation, which adds to the reformulation of meaning.

Moreover, French-language postcolonial theorists have engaged more strongly in some areas of the theoretical framework than English-language theorists have. For example, "Lionnet's concern with gender issues helped to place feminism at the heart of much

[20] Forsdick and Murphy, *Francophone*, 3.

Francophone postcolonial thought"[21]. This strengthening of the theoretical framework of gender is particularly relevant in this study, because the authors have chosen to engage with gender as an important factor in the formulation of identity and relationships. The impact of gender on postcolonial theory will be considered in greater depth in the chapter dedicated to it; however, it is a key element of the intersections that give relevance to postcolonial theory. This aspect of French-language postcolonial theorisation makes it all the more relevant to these works, in spite of criticism of Anglo-centrism.

"The Past is a Foreign Country"

The challenge of the authors' multiple and intersecting identities evokes L.P. Hartely's statement that "the past is a foreign country; they do things differently there". Those who engage with the idea of the colonial and the post-colonial being chronologically distinct recognise that "metaphorically, the term "post-colonialism" marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from "the pre-colonial," to "the colonial," to "the post-colonial" - an unbidden, if disavowed, commitment to linear time and the idea of "development"[22]. This linear model of time, however, is unreceptive to the nuances of multiple layers of experience, such as those of Halimi and Smadja, who represent hybridity. They use their experiences of conflicting subjectivity to create multiple characters who demonstrate hybridity and the intersecting of identities. Their constructions of narrative stand in contrast to "the "post-colonial scene" [which] occurs in an entranced suspension of history, as if the definitive historical events have preceded us, and are not now in""[23] . By using the complexity of time and interactions of memory, the authors construct the identities of their characters through the past and the present. It is therefore worth considering the impact that their own or their

[21] Ibid., 10
[22] Anne McClintock, The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism", (Social Text, 1992), 85.
[23] Ibid., 86

characters' chronological and geographical distance from the place and space of the past, as exemplified in their constructions of memory. Indeed, "individuals and collectivities seek to avoid dissonance between their comprehension of the present, with its values and priorities, and their image of the past"[24]. This means that there is a need to construct a linear narrative of history that may not exist. This stands in challenge to the hegemonic historical discourse because it highlights that all interpretations and constructions of knowledge are intimately and inextricably attached to their contemporary environments; they cannot be divorced from the context of knowledge creation within which they are formulated. Indeed, neither the reader nor the characters "see the world entirely as it is, but always through the distortions of cultural values and expectations[25]. Therefore, the impact of living in France rather than in Tunisia when considering memory is something that should be acknowledged. The authors, and some of their characters, are part of a diasporic population, understood here to mean those living away from their homeland. However, diaspora has its own spaces of knowledge-formation, as well as a multiplicity of stories, narratives and experiences. "Linkages that lie in the diaspora together must be articulated and are not inevitable… the diaspora is both process and condition. As a process it is always in the making, and as condition it is situated within global race and gender hierarchies"[26]. Therefore, the process and conditions of diaspora undergo constant renegotiation that change them according to their contexts. The conception of the past is always impacted by the discourse of the present, which make it seem unknowable. However, the authors are presenting the voices of multiple characters to challenge the clear distinction between the colonial and the post-colonial periods. They explore feelings of home and alienation associated with the past, thereby illustrating the its ongoing impact on identity. Though it is far away, the past is intimately linked with the present.

[24] Barclay, *France's*, 5.
[25] Sharp, *Geographies*, 9.
[26] Schramm, *Leaving*, 7.

Historical Context and Profiling the Works

In Tunisia there was no specific moment that provoked Jewish migration. Nevertheless, the formation of the state of Israel followed by the challenges of finding a space in the post-independence state[27] greatly diminished the number of Jews living in Tunisia from an estimated 100,000 in 1948 to 1,500 in 2005[2829]. Before this time, the Jewish population had been was fairly well integrated and had felt relatively secure in relations to the government and their fellow citizens, as demonstrated by the shelter offered to many Tunisian Jews by Muslim compatriots during the German occupation of the Second World War[30]. However, organisations such as the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, advocated the integration with the French colonial authority as the way to adapt to the changing world-order. To bring about this integration, the *Alliance* provided French-language schools for much of the Jewish population in Tunisia. This led to what Sebag refers to as "*la francisation irreversible d'une partie des Juifs Tunisie*"[31]. Though Jews in Tunisia were not granted automatic French citizenship[32], many were given the opportunity to gain French-language skills sufficient to pass case-by-case testing based on their ability to integrate into French society.

It is from within this context, therefore, that the reader must understand Gisèle Halimi's *Fritna* and Brigitte Smadja's *Le jaune est sa couleur*. Halimi left Tunisia permanently in 1956 at the age of 29, moving to Paris to continue to work in law. She worked as an anti-colonial

[27] Tunisian independence was declared in 1956. Kamal Salih argues that in the post-Independence period, though "the Tunisian… people have supposedly gained equal rights… [but leaders]… hoped that people would leave behind their particular identities, putting them to one side when they entered the public sphere, where they would assume the identity of a somewhat faceless, abstract citizen bearing no markers of religion, ethnicity, class, gender or caste." (Quoted Nabil Boudraa, *North African Mosaic: A Cultural Reappraisal of Ethnic and Religious Minorities*, (Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 27.) This need to become Tunisian-only caused many, including influential writer Albert Memmi, to feel unable to participate in the new state, though in remaining in many ways loyal to it.
[28] Paul Sebag, *Histoire Des Juifs De Tunisie: Des Origines À Nos Jours*, (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1991),.
[29] Haim Saadoun, *Tunis, Tunisia*, (Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2007),.
[30] Michael Laskier, *North African Jewry in the twentieth century : the Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria*, (New York, New York University Press, 1994),.
[31] Sebag, *Histoire*, 266.
[32] As was the case in Algeria.

and feminist activist, fighting for the rights of Algerians who had been tortured by the French and co-founding the organisation *Choisir*, which advocated legal abortion and access to contraception with Simone de Beauvoir. Clearly influential, therefore, her decision to write this autobiographical work personalises the activist narrative of her public persona. In *Fritna,* one of two autobiographical works, "Halimi concludes that feminism [and postcolonialism are] not just a call for justice; [they are] often a call for personal revolution"[33]: she challenges the reader to consider the beliefs and attitudes that they hold that conflict with the lived reality and to participate in self-revolution. Halimi's *Fritna* is an exploration situated within the intensity of loss. It is constructed around the thoughts and memories evoked by her mother dying, therefore flits between the distant past of her childhood in Tunisia, the past of her children's childhoods and the present. Halimi feels that she has never been loved by her mother, and this lack of maternal affection is the basis of the work. She uses an interrupted narrative centred around hospital visits and the memories provoked by the conversations she tries to have with her mother in the present. The resistance she faces from her mother when trying to heal the unspoken wounds of the past is a reflection of the contemporary political discourse of colonialism at the time of the works publication in 1999: Sarkozy, notably, argued for the silencing of voices who spoke about the abuses and tragedies caused by colonialism[34], suggesting that they ran counter to Republicanism and French values. Halimi's work argues that the past interacts with the present in her own life, and she is able to exert her power over its trauma and heal by writing it, interrogating it and constructing her own narrative of truth.

Brigitte Smadja left Tunisia in 1963, at the age of 8, moving to Paris with her family. She is predominantly a children's author and *Le jaune est sa couleur* is her first novel,

[33] Raylene Ramsay, *French Women in Politics. Writing Power, Paternal Legitimization and Material Legacies,* (New York, Berghahn Books, 2003), 139.
[34] Barclay, *France's*, 188-206.

published in 1998; it was well-received and nominated for the Femina Prize[35]. The novel is based around the high drama situation of a hospital and contextualises itself within contemporary French issues (exemplified in the novel through the slow death of a character suffering from AIDS). This basis of grief and impending death gives each of the characters both an intensity of emotion and considerable time for consideration and remembrance. It is narrated the characters of Jonas, who is hospitalised and dying, his close friend Lili, and her mother Mina. Mina is the only narrative voice who has lived in Tunisia, and she links most of her thoughts to this time. Lili, however, is more concerned with the present, and as a character and narrator, brings the reader through her present in caring for her children, working and caring for her dying friend in the shadow of her grief. These works are complementary and interact with each other thematically through their use of time, chronology and grief.

Thesis Structure

The first chapter of this thesis explores the interaction of the past and the present in the works, demonstrating the ways that the authors construct identity in contrast and compliment to their characters' surroundings. It considers the influence of the contemporary discursive norms on the authors and their characters, as well as how the authors attempt to connect the present with the past through memory and the construction of non-hegemonic identity. The second chapter considers the authors' constructions and interactions with power relations, particularly considering use of metaphor. Both works interrogate power relations in the context of marriage, therefore they engage with the gender normativity and the challenges and anguishes that it produces, as well as the impact it has on power relations. The authors, moreover, engage with the nuance of power relations, thus this chapter considers Halimi's description her mother's creation of personal power when she is limited by proscriptive gender roles subverting the idea

[35] A prize for French-language works awarded by a panel of all Female judges founded in 1904

of powerlessness. In so doing, she undermines discursive norms that separate the deeply engrained categories of coloniser and colonised, victim and perpetrator, challenging the reader to re-consider the validity of binaries, whether they are based around power or found within a chronological distinction. The authors demonstrate that their characters encounter change in the present, thus the experiences that they have had in the past impact them differently. The final chapter will consider the concept of "de-colonising the self". It explores the impact the feminist postcolonial idea that the subaltern writer, particularly female writers, go through a process of decolonising themselves. It considers how the authors use voice in their works to challenge the single narrative of the colonial discourse and discusses of the worth and limits of this concept when applied to postcolonial literature written by women, extending the concept to include the postcolonial subject. Key to this feminist-postcolonial theory is "the decentred subjectivity"[36], which emphasises the power and discursive norms of colonialism that attempt to overwhelm and undermine the often-contradictory lived experiences of the non-hegemonic character or voice. The chapter, therefore, emphasises the critical role that interrogating the internal contradictions of hegemonic discourse has on both the characters and the reader.

Therefore, the thesis as a whole employs postcolonialism to construct a challenge to the acceptance of the colonial discourse. In *Orientalism*[37], Said posits that knowledge of the coloniser and the colonised have no meaning outside of each other, because they are constructed in opposition to each other, each reliant on this same binary. Following this theory to its logical conclusion, then, the present is inextricably linked to both the collective hegemonic discourse of the past, but more significantly the subjective experience of the past and is therefore only meaningful within the framework of knowledge that has already been created. Therefore, logically, there is no "chronological division [as] suggested by the

[36] Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Life Writing: Culture, Politics and Self Representation*, (Routledge, 2009), xxi.
[37] Said, *Orientalism*,.

nomenclature of the 'colonial' and the 'post-colonial' periods, [hence] France's colonising project continues to reverberate in the present"[38]. This study explores the ways that both authors interact with the formulation of identity and memory that contradict the colonial binaries of time and selfhood.

[38] Barclay, *France's*, 4.

Chapter Two: Constructions of Time

Introduction

Time is a key narrative tool used in both Brigitte Smadja's *Le jaune est sa couleur* and Gisèle Halimi's *Fritna* as a means of deconstructing their characters' identities and a sense of the linear progression of time. By presenting events non-chronologically, the authors decentre the discourse that "sequesters colonialism tightly in the airless container of History, and casts postcoloniality as a new beginning… one that marks the end of an era"[39]. They illustrate the intermingling of the past and the present in their characters' constructions of selfhood, demonstrating the impact of colonialism on the present allegorically, through metaphors of marriage and relationships, and at times explicitly by referencing colonial discourse and performance. The authors also demonstrate the impact of discourse on the key formative memories that are vital in the construction of identity. They highlight that geography and time add new shades to existing definitions of the self, but can never sever the present from the past.

The authors use the immanence of the past as a key means of undermining the 'other-ness' of their characters. They induct the reader into the key moments that inform the narrators' identities, thereby overcoming the binary of the colonial discourse that draws a distinction between self and other. This narrative choice also gives the characters the power to critically self-define, by making the decision to confront and deconstruct, then rebuild identity and the self. By asserting power and agency in this way, the authors are placing their works into the category of postcolonial exploration. They are challenging the linearity of subjective and collective history and highlighting the mixed influence of past and present on the characters' contemporary interactions with discourse. Indeed, the control exercised by the narrative voice is particularly notable in Smadja's work, through the first-person narration of mother and

[39] Gyan Prakash, *Introduction: After Colonialism*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994), 5.

daughter, Mina and Lili, each of whom narrates in a stream-of-consciousness style. Mina's negotiation in the process of constructing the self can be seen clearly when she considers the link between the tragedy of her sister's death and learning to read:

> "*Il n'y avait plus que le panier tout jaune et, dedans, le bébé qui ne marchait pas encore. On lui avait laisse sa caisse où elle remarque les inscriptions en arabe et en français qu'elle s'entraîna à recopier sur un cahier que Georges lui donna et qui sentait l'huile. C'est ainsi qu'elle apprit à lire.*
>
> *Mina sursaute et prend conscience que l'interphone sonne sonne depuis longtemps*"[40].

Her past and present interact powerfully, as is shown by the way that the present interrupts the past and vice versa: it is the intensity of the experience that dictates its significance in the narrative, both for the reader and for Mina's own construction of self. Nevertheless, it is interrupted by the present, which occurs far away from the action of this narrative, and seems distant to her. These frequently unclear transitions between past and present highlight that both are reliant on each other for meaning and interpretation. Halimi is clearer in transitioning the reader between past and present, using time markers such as "*je devais avoir près de neuf ans*"[41], to highlight the change in time and place. Nevertheless, because her work is autobiographical and is explicitly investigating her relationship with her mother, the episodes she depicts in the past and the present merge into an interrogation of her own identity as defined simultaneously by both. She argues that during her mother's life, she was bound by the need to self-censor, but "*aujourd'hui, je peux tout dire*"[42]; she now feels liberated by the chance to vocalise her memories of the past that were so fundamental in formulating her identity (she immediately afterwards describes the events leading to death of her younger brother), without

[40] Brigitte Smadja, *Le jaune est sa couleur*, (Actes Sud, 1998), 59.
[41] Gisèle Halimi, *Fritna*, (PLON, 1999), 12.
[42] Ibid,. 37

feeling the need to censor herself or be told that the past occurred differently. This is metaphorically significant to her contemporary context, reflecting the need to acknowledge and discuss the history of colonialism, rather than silencing it.

While the authors do not bind themselves to a traditionally linear narrative framework, they are interrogating the topics of power, agency and identity throughout their works. Short fragments of memory, are presented in dream-like sequences, often induced by alcohol, heightened emotion or exhaustion. Smadja's character of Mina is particularly susceptible to this, frequently she "*chercher refuge dans la pénombre de sa chamber, ferme la porte, elle s'allonge sur son lit …"* then the narrative drifts into the past, "*Ahmed lui avait donné un carton vide*"[43]. This does not ground the reader in the place or provide background information. It simply provides a sense of familiarity and immanent importance: it places the two distinct times on top of one another as though occurring simultaneously. The impact of this lack of background narrative is summed up by Homi Bhabha, in exploration of Franz Fanon's seminal postcolonial work:

> "It is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin, White Masks* that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience. There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provides a background of social and historical facts against which emerge problems of the individual or collective psyche… It is through image and fantasy- those orders that figure transgressively on the borders of history and the unconscious- that Fanon profoundly evokes the colonial condition"[44].

Le jaune est sa couleur and *Fritna* share this transgression of traditional categories of past and present, real and unreal, a powerful feature of the postcolonial genre. They do not clearly historicise the narrative, rather leave the reader to extrapolate the complexity of the collective

[43] Smadja, *Jaune*, 45-6.
[44] Quoted in Prakash, *After Colonialism*, 8.

as experienced by the individual. The trope of memory allows the authors to emphasise that categories of power and identity should not be assumed to be fixed and unchanging; rather, these characters are constantly engaging with the discourse surrounding them. Barclay describes how "individuals and collectivities seek to avoid dissonance between their comprehension of the present, with its values and priorities, and their image of the past"[45]. In light of this need to balance and create a linear narrative of identity, the characters are in the process of negotiating with their comprehension of the past, in light of the present. This highlights that strict borders are being constantly transgressed and that history is always in the process of being rewritten. The non-linear narrative style of both authors mixes the past and present so that each is heavily reliant on the other. Hence, memory of the past becomes just as immanent to understanding the themes and characters as the present, conveying the heterogenous and contradictory experiences that contribute the formation of identity in the narrative voice. Through this narrative technique, the authors imbue their works with a sense of the complexity that transcends and transgresses the binary lines of the colonial discourse, particularly highlighting the ongoing negotiation between understandings of past and present.

The justifications of understanding marriage as a symbol of colonialism will be explored further in the chapters on power relations and decolonising the self. Nevertheless, when looking at the deconstruction and reconstruction of memory in a new 'post-colonial' scenario, the female characters in these novels are forced to redefine themselves as individuals; they are not as defined by their familial status because in this new environment, Mina's and Fritna's husbands are dead, Lili is divorced. The reader is shown the impact that marriage has had on the women through the use of memory; much of their sense of self based on their own feelings or emotions, but they are fighting against the limiting boundaries of the identity of wife and mother has on their subjective experiences, particularly given the patriarchal

[45] Barclay, *France's*, 5.

structures that compelled them to marry. The deep impact of past structures of identity are emphasised by the fact that Fritna appears unable to redefine herself away from this category of wife and mother. She uses it as a power tool, holding her sacrifice over her daughter as a means of shutting down further discussions: "*Moi, ne pas t'aimer?... Moi, qui t'ai toujours soignée, tu étais toujours malade… Comment oses-tu me dire ça, Gisèle?*"[46]. She cannot separate this past and her role in motherhood and as a wife, from the present. Thus, since "postcolonial studies critically assess the ways in which legacies of colonialism, as well as forms of neo-colonialism and imperialism, inform and shape our postcolonial world"[47], the metaphor of marriage is apt to explore the limitations of discourse on the self and the impact that past marriage has on the present identity, particularly as the women in their 'post-colonial' milieu must negotiate their relationships with their children, who represent a hybridity between past and present. Memories, therefore, are shown to be necessary for these women as the gate-keepers to their own knowledge and understanding of the present. They are continually linked to the past through their present, not only through their own constructions of self, but also through the identities of those who have or continue to surround them.

The Unreliable Narrator and Exploring Nostalgia

In both *Le jaune est sa couleur* and *Fritna,* nostalgia occurs in the context of the heightened emotions of waiting for the death of a person fundamental to the construction of identity for the narrative voices[48]. This nostalgia is the "remaining, half-remembered, trace of the point at which the past of the individual connects with the wider, collective pasts of family, society, and history"[49]. It is inherently connected to the idea of intermingling the past with the present,

[46] Halimi, *Fritna*, 24.
[47] Ina Kerner, *Relations of difference: Power and inequality in intersectional and postcolonial feminist theories*, (Current Sociology Review, 2017), 854.
[48] The character of Fritna, Halimi's mother and the character of Jonas, Lili's closest friend and whom Mina has accepted almost as a son.
[49] Dennis Walder, *Writing, representation, and postcolonial nostalgia*, (Textual Practice, 2009), 937.

as it is provoked in response to the present situation. Moreover, in remembering the past nostalgically, the characters are implicitly exploring the wider ramifications of their personal experiences; the personal becomes the public through the act of story-telling, but also as a performance of the discursive norms of the multiple layers of time. Nostalgia can be regarded as a "lost unity and coherence" demonstrating an unreliable narrator[50], who takes this intersection of the personal history and intertwines it with the, possibly more favourable collective past, to create an idealised version of events. Its presence can call into question the validity of the narrative voice. However, these authors use it as a tool to explore the multifaceted realities of experience and selfhood. Firstly, they challenge the idea of a single monolithic historical narrative, highlighting that each of the characters is an individual, hence each person, particularly those with non-hegemonic, hybrid identities, will remember things differently. The lack of clarity in the narration, however, simultaneously shows the reader that there are possible inaccuracies in their depictions. It is also clear that they choose to subvert memory to make it more agreeable or forgiving. The authors are not looking to reconstruct a clear narrative of history, rather, they are using this medium to challenge the sense that there is one accurate reality. This is clearly underlined by Hamili when she adds the fact that "*pendant les six mois que dura l'occupation allemande en Tunisie, de novembre 1942 à mai 1943, les forteresses volantes américaines pilonnèrent Tunis Presque toutes les nuits*"[51]; this is distanced and represents a historical separation from the story that she tells of her childhood memories of her unruly grandmother refusing to cooperate with the evacuations. The closeness with which she describes her feelings of frustration at having to evacuate, and the way that she made fun of her grandmother in the mornings after the air raids ("*ma joie, au matin, tenait au dialogue avec ma grand-mère*"[52]). In combining the two layers of discourse, Halimi places her

[50] Walder, *Nostalgia*, 940.
[51] Halimi, *Fritna*, 55.
[52] Halimi, *Fritna*, 56.

own gaze over the outside circumstances and emphasises the significance of the personal as impacted by the outside circumstances. The personal intersects with the public and the discourse, but also diverges because of subjective interpretations and experiences.

Each of the narrators forced to grapple with and try to understand their own subjective history; this is particularly challenging because of their chronological and geographical separation from the scenarios in which events occurred. There are also other mitigating factors, including the stress and exhaustion and waiting, as well as the influence of alcohol. In *Le jaune est sa couleur*, the two narrative voices of Lili and Mina drift in and out of memories as a consequence of drinking and exhaustion; for Fritna immense pain leads to delirium, while Giséle experiences heightened emotions as she is trying to work through the various aspects of her relationship with her mother in a time critical environment. These symbolic intoxicants demonstrate the powerful influence of the contemporary gaze on the past. At the same time, these extenuating circumstances make the characters' minds spiral towards the most significant and challenging memories, the stories that the characters feel the need to defend, either to themselves or others. As a story-telling tool, therefore, memory allows the reader to gain a sharper sense of the emotion felt by the narrator.

Melancholy and Moral Judgement

There is a redemptive negativity to Smadja's work, that manifests as a kind of "melancholia [that] comes from partial recognition of… injustices, combining nostalgia with residual guilt"[53]. Andrew Blake identifies melancholia as a feature that is bound by the temporal perspective of the post-colonial period, one which attempts to overcome an incongruity between the past and the present through discourse. He argues that in the process of melancholic remembrance, a discourse attempts to realign the memories of the past so that they

[53] Andrew Blake, *From Nostalgia to Postalgia: Hybridity and Its Discontents in the Work of Paul Gilroy and the Wachowski Brothers*, (Amsterdam, Brill, 2007), 124.

are more forgiving. For him this is a form of the continuation of the colonial discourse which creates a false image of the present, allowing the coloniser to take on a sense of victimhood. This need to re-narrate the past is something that the reader feels most acutely in *Le jaune est sa couleur*, through the character of Mina. Blake's valid objections to the process of re-narration[54] highlight the importance of Mina's need to negotiate with the past, in order to absolve herself of responsibility. This process conveys the complex processes that occur as individuals and discourses must evolve to challenge of confronting a complex, immanent, yet equally distant, past. In an attempt to grapple with her personal history, the character of Mina spends a whole chapter in conversation with her sister, Emma, defending her marriage, her past admiration for American soldiers stationed in Tunis during the war or her love of Pierre Loti's Orientalist novels and her life in Tunisia in general. It is only in the last paragraph of the chapter, however, that it becomes clear to the reader that her sister is not in fact present. It is, therefore, an imagined conversation based on Mina's need to resolve the discrepancies between her present situation, within which she feels relatively empowered, and her past, where she made choices she cannot now understand. During this conversation, she describes the past with a melancholic nostalgia, which provides both a rose-tinted glow of childhood and companionship as well as a sense that after this there was a compulsion to all of her actions:

> "*ma vie, c'était pas comme ça quand Gladys étais là. On se rappelait ensemble les citronniers de la villa, quand elle me cherchait dains tle jardin des heures à m'appeler… on se rappelait les Américains du* Carlton*, tu n'as jamais connu les Américains du* Carlton*."*[55]

In contrasting this beautiful past of living with her (now deceased) older friend and her husband, with life afterwards, she moves from childhood to adulthood. She nostalgically

[54] Based on the constructions of victimhood present in general British post-colonial discourse.
[55] Smadja, *Jaune*, 120.

remembers past's natural environment, yet she then asserts that she had no agency in the arrangement of her marriage to a much older man. This imagined Emma, however, highlights that she could have worked in the factory with her siblings; it is at this point that Mina's underlying sense of guilt and insecurity comes across, as she is defending her choice not to work to herself only. She wants to emphasise her belief that her experiences are unknowable, personal, and something with which she is grappling. The fragmented conversational structure allows her not to answer the question of why she did not start working, but she is equally suggesting that she felt compelled to marry her husband, to like the Americans and their culture and to enjoy Orientalist literature. The need to absolve herself from responsibility, in fact, places a moral judgement over everything that she narrates. Therefore, Smadja illustrates the complexity and fallibility of reconstructing narrative in the present. She shows the reader that there is a contradiction in this deconstruction of the past, because the character is not prepared to fully engage with the moral layers added to the past in the present. The discourse of the past, which was one of compulsion, remains dominant, in spite of the beginnings of critical reflection.

This emotional compulsion to critically consider the past is a consistent theme in *Le jaune est sa couleur*. The narrative voices of Lili and Mina lead the reader on a complex path that mixes the past into their current experiences, conveying a sense of the transience of the present. As a consequence, "*autour de Lili exceptée la figure nostalgique de la mère, Mina, qui incarne la lumière et la mémoire d'une Tunisie d'autrefois , les autres personnages, l'ex-mari, les anciens amants, les enfants, les élèves..., passent comme des profils perdus*"[56]. The other characters pass by relatively inconsequentially, suggesting that the construction of self occurs in the present. Some of the most formative relationships Lili forms are overwhelmed by the impact of the mourning for the loss of her closest friend. The intensity of this singular event is

[56] Florence Noiville, *Amitié trop exclusive*, (Le Monde, 1998),.

leading her to consider the truth of her personal story, as it diverges from the narrative of others. Since these are internal dialogues, the characters are often unsuccessful in fully deconstructing the past. Nevertheless, the characters' introspective gaze emphasises the significance of their subjective experience above all else. This can be seen as Lili somewhat callously disregards the feelings and experience of her husband as she ends their marriage because he asks her to sew on a button. Her emotional response to this event was so vehement, but it is clear that her husband's interpretation of their relationship is completely different, because he is shocked by what he perceives as a sudden and irrational response. This memory, which has is central to Lili's rationalisation of the end of her marriage may not make sense to the reader, and indeed, she gives few further details as to why she is so frustrated. This one event may be an accumulation of different frustrations, however, in her memory, her retelling, this is this single event that brings about the end of the relationship. Hence, emotion is at the forefront of memory and the formation of selfhood. However, Smadja also uses the reader's confusion to create empathy with the difficulty that Mina has with understanding the significance of the button. Therefore, the reader understands that events are engaged with very subjectively, and what is of vital significance to one character may be unnoticed or insignificant for another.

Alternatively, there a softness is notable in Halimi's work, which notably is highly personal and deviates from her public role as a lawyer and activist for human rights[57]. Since it is a personal exploration, the positive aspects of empathy and gentleness sometimes present in nostalgia are used to highlight the constant battle between private and public discourse, group and individual reality. Halimi uses the character of Fritna's 'public' narrative, that constructs a hierarchy between her sons and her daughter, to explore the personal hurt of being rejected for

[57] "Halimi claims that she became a lawyer in the establishment to work against its injustices, defending Tunisian independence fighters, unionists, and in the now (in)famous case of Djamila Boupacha, the adolescent militant of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN, or Algerian independence movement), tortured by the French army into confession" (Ramsay, *French Women*, 137.)

being female. Gisèle is told, in rebuke: "*ton frère s'occupera de moi*"[58], being rejected for her ambition and non-compliance with her mother's demands. However, Gisèle's brothers and sons, who represent the public side of Fritna's narrative have a deep loyalty to Fritna, and portray a different experience, one of them "*correspondait avec elle- ou lui téléphonait-régulièrement*"[59], even when he had travelled to the USA to study. It is, however, the sympathetic reflection of Halimi's work, that allows her to be simultaneously immensely critical of her mother's narrative constructions and use the autobiography as a means of redemption. As well as melancholia, thus, nostalgia can also "involve feelings of sympathetic reflection- towards others and ourselves, feelings that we may want to value positively"[60]. Halimi therefore is sensitive to the multiple layers of identity, pain and experience that formulated her mother's and her own identity, demonstrating that her own resentment is part of a bigger picture that limited her mother. She highlights the fact that her mother had been forced to marry at a young age, despite expressing the want to divorce, was dissuaded by her family. She also demonstrates the challenges that come from her own perception of her mother and their relationship and the facts she is learning that challenge her adoration of her father and vilification of her mother. By actively highlighting the inconsistencies that she encounters in the past and present, she uses the narrative voice as a tool to deconstruct the assumptions upon which she builds her narrative of personal history. It is through this critical eye that "Halimi speaks… of the companionship, the solidarity, the joys of Choisir, of different ways of speaking, of milk and tenderness… what is striking is the uncertainty about global solutions, or any single path or truth"[61]. Her personalisation of the narrative stands in contrast to the official and unofficial discourses of history, demonstrating the need to critically re-examine the

[58] Halimi, *Fritna*, 26.
[59] Ibid., 68
[60] Walder, *Nostalgia*, 939.
[61] Ramsay, *French Women*, 139.

basis of these frameworks. She demonstrates the need to go beyond a singular narrative, to acknowledge the personalisation of experience, even within the same immediate family.

Indeed, the culpability and morality of the past is also explored in Halimi's work; she emphasises that it is inescapable, hence must be critically examined. This is a particularly pertinent theme as she describes the delirious story of her mother, who is attempting to absolve herself from the guilt of the death of her son. Fritna constructs a completely false story in which Gisèle, as an older sibling, left her bucket at the seashore, and her younger brother followed it into the sea, subsequently drowning. The narrative voice then interprets this for the reader, drawing the conclusion that "*je suis coupable. Réalité du fauteuil ou délire du seau de plage, Fritna a fabriqué ainsi sa mémoire pour mieux verrouiller l'autre, celle où elle se reprochait d'être sortie te soir du drame*"[62]. Although Gisèle knows that the story of the bucket in the sea is completely fabricated, she understands the fundamental truth behind the reconstructed narrative: the story diminishes her mother's culpability, instead placing the blame on someone else, namely, her daughter. This moment of realisation prompts the reader to consider the real meaning and influence of hegemonic discourses. Equally, the incident underlines the subjectivity of story-telling. Narratives are impacted by a multitude of factors, including the need to absolve oneself from guilt or culpability. In this way, perhaps, Halimi demonstrates that the reality of personal experience must be acknowledged, as history is re-narrated in a way that white-washes perceived culpability. This echoes her postcolonial politics, within which she challenges France to critically engage with colonial history as "[France's own] problem, it is for you, it is part of your history, a page of France's history that has been completely erased by society and by us but we can no longer… we cannot invest in the future today without this resurgence of memory"[63]. As a character, Gisèle is able to recognise the blame placed onto her,

[62] Halimi, *Fritna*, 44.
[63] Halimi, quoted in Mireille Roselle, *New Gendered Mosaics*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 103.

but is unable to resolve this element of her relationship with her mother, because of the false narrative that she creates. Although she is not to placing the blame on her mother, she recognises that her guilt and fear are preventing them from engaging with reality and dealing with difficult feelings and emotions.

The critical reflection that Halimi uses to interact with memory and narrative can be seen strongly in the critique she gives of her mother's narrative of the history of Judaism in Tunisia:

> "*Enfin, à son humeur. Ainsi évoquait-elle souvent les pogroms perpétrés «il y a longtemps» contre les Juifs en Afrique du Nord. Sans plus precision, elle entendait ainsi justifier sa haine des Arabes. De tous les poncifs racists que la colonisation avait importés, ma mère n'en oubliait aucun. Sales, menteurs, voleurs, paresseux, «ils» seraient bien incapables de tenir un pays. Ces «indigènes» (ma mère utilisait quelquefois le terme, pour faire plus chic et plus objectif à la fois), s'ils avaient le pouvoir, que feraient-ils de «nous»? Ce «nous» englobait Français, Juifs, Italiens. Blancs, en un mot. La civilisation contra la barbarie*"[64].

The narrative voice expresses indignation towards this racist narrative, highlighting its inaccuracies and problems. This narrative is harmful not only in propagating ethnicised narrative, but it negates the importance of Halimi's work as a lawyer for anti-colonial activists. Moreover, it is a direct affront to her half-Jewish, half-Muslim children's identities. Fritna's own intermarriage also highlights the absurdity of the claim that she makes; the use of colonial discourse is instead, a tool to demonstrate her sophistication that she uses to seem 'chic' and contemporary. Nevertheless, Fritna's words are notably reflected in much scholarship that tries to place the non-hegemonic experience of Jewish minorities within a binary discourse. This

[64] Halimi, *Fritna*, 70.

can be seen in the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*'s section on Tunisian Jewry, which describes a relatively tranquil history of coexistence between Jews and other communities in Tunisia, particularly in the last three centuries. It then, however, argues that "French rule was both the source of the Jew's security and their means of release from the *degradation of Islam*"[65]: this the narrative of disharmony, therefore, is strong enough to overwhelm the available evidence. This demonstrates the imposing nature of the colonial discourse on remembrance of the past, something that occurs at a personal and public level. Through the use of the personal relationship and the voice of her mother Halimi identifies this colonial narrative and challenges its validity. She proceeds to test its integrity, demonstrating the contradictions it contains, including her own identity as a half Jewish, half Muslim woman. By using a critical narrator, therefore, she highlights the inconsistencies of that stem from her mother's use of an essentialising history to claim both victimhood and superiority. She demonstrates that the colonial discourse is still prevalent, but is logically flawed.

Interrogation *with* Postcolonial Reconstruction?

The characters of Mina and Fritna both engage in the action of reassessing the stories that have defined their identities. They are the characters most impacted by the shift between the 'colonial' and 'post-colonial' periods as their subjective histories and the presence of their children force them to negotiate with selfhood and identity formation. As narrative voices, therefore, they reflect on the past and use the it to define the present and to gain understanding of it. As Mina interacts with her children, she cannot detach them from her subjective experience and her marriage, a reflection of the fact that "on the metaphoric level and discourse on colonialism today can be interpreted as a manifestation of colonialist history and cannot be

[65] Haim Saadoun, *Tunis, Tunisia,* (Detroit, Thomson Gale, 2007), 185. Italics added for emphasis

divorced from the history of colonialism"[66]. The image of marriage, which symbolises the past and the colonial gendering of colonised and coloniser is something that looms over the characters of Fritna and Mina, because their identities are so fundamentally associated with this history and its impact on the present.

The idea of remembrance may be perceived as contrary to the process of reconciliation and forward progress[67]; however, the authors use the non-linear narrative of memory as a means of deconstructing the present and the past. They choose to reveal memories to convey the meaning of their overall narrative goals. This is a therapeutic process of discovering the inconsistencies of the past and its narrative, acknowledging them, but with a sympathy that recognises the impact of the present on the past and vice versa. Fritna's present identity is formulated in the context of her present circumstances, which means that she has deliberately blinded herself to the reality she experienced. This is seen in her religious edicts, which declared that "*Dieu à dit ça*" and her life as "*victime mais vertueuse*"[68] which combine the practicality of living with her non-Jewish husband, who ate pork and did not observe Shabbat, with the need and want to exert her power of self-definition as a Jewish wife and mother. Halimi uses the narrative voice to highlight the gaps and inaccuracies in her narrative. To a certain extent, therefore, she demonstrates that her present scenario is different and enables her to have some depth of separation from the situation of her mother, who in the process of decolonising has internalised the colonial narrative of binary between civilised and uncivilised.

Conclusion

When reading the works, the reader is left with a greater sense of the heterogeneous or reality, but no resolution and no clear way forward. The use of time as a structural tool creates a sense

[66] J. Jorge Klor de Alva, *The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of "Colonialism," "Postcolonialism," and "Mestizaje"*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995), 248.
[67]Walder, *Nostalgia*, 935-946.
[68] Halimi, *Fritna*, 51.

of the drudgery of waiting. This waiting and interrogation of the past leaves the reader fatigued having hardly progressed; most of the action that occurs in the works takes place in the past. Arguably, therefore, these authors employ postcolonial structures to have "something profound to say, if only in their negation of present reality"[69]; it seems that their works act as the initial deconstructing the assumptions that formulate the remembrance of the past, rather than an act of reconstructing the present and past in relation to one another. However, they are perhaps seeking to challenge the discourse that so often excludes women's voices to such an extent that they suggest there must be a total reconfiguring of understandings of the past, personal and collective. Thus, Smadja and Halimi are perhaps negating the present as an act of deconstruction, which is inherently reconstruction because of its political and activist consequences.

The central achievement of using time as a narrative tool, therefore, is the blurring of the lines between remembrance and fiction. This demonstrates that "reality should be seen no longer as a level field that can be known and dominated from one particular standpoint, but rather as an uneven and heterogeneous terrain… reality can now be seen not as an inert given that we inherit from the past without being able to question it, but rather as a common or shared possession in which all participate"[70]. The past and present selves of the characters participate in the act of knowledge-creation, but equally so do the author and the reader. Each participant in the narrative engages with the questions of contradictions and selfhood. The authors therefore emphasise the fact that there are many perceptions of history. The non-hegemonic experience presented in their narratives empower marginalised voices to be heard, even when fractured. This demonstrates that a single narrative or binary is illogical and easily subverted and challenged by those with hybrid identities. These texts are not monolithic, and explore a

[69] Vivek Chibber, *The dual legacy of Orientalism*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2019), 83.
[70] Saree Makdisi, *Orientalism Today*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019), 181.

range of topics; however, whether considering personal or public, the mixing of time allows the characters to expose the personal, as a rejection of an essentialising history. Subjective and collective history is built collaboratively within the structures and discourses that surround the characters at lots of different times. The irrationality and unreliability of the narrators is representative of the way that history is written through discourse and an ongoing negotiation between the past and present.

Chapter Three: Power Relations

Introduction

This chapter will consider to what extent the discourse of knowledge-creation has shifted in the post-colonial period for the characters at an individual level, as highlighted by their interrogations and constructions of power and agency. Power is intimately linked to knowledge and the ability to add to knowledge creation. Postcolonial theory, particularly in its feminist iterations, hence engages with this power in two main ways: "the first project is one of deconstructing and dismantling; the second is one of building and constructing."[71]. As Gayatri Spivak has argued, contemporary colonial and neo-colonial discourses negate knowledge created and held by 'subaltern' or non-hegemonic voices. This undermines the power and agency of these actors, because they are excluded from the construction of history and knowledge in the present. Spivak's conclusions that the subaltern cannot speak within the present discursive norms suggest the need for a paradigmatic shift towards the deconstruction of the framework. As seen in the previous chapter, Gisèle Halimi's *Fritna* and Brigitte Smadja's *Le jaune est sa couleur* participate in this deconstructive effort, by subverting the norms of linear story-telling. The characters participate in this postcolonial deconstruction of their senses of self and identity by being forced into a 'reckoning' by the intensity of their waiting and the process of mourning; they confront the contradictions of their own experiences of past and present. The authors, therefore, exert agency by adding complexity to discursive norms of historical narrative and emphasising the significance of the present on the interpretations of the past.

[71] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: decolonising theory, practicing solidarity*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003), 17.

The authors interrogate their characters' means of power and control, placing the multidimensional nature of identity-formation at the forefront of character construction. Halimi explores the complexity of Fritna's situation by showing the control she has over her children:

> "*Fritna imposait une surveillance et des rites de fer. « Fanatique ! » un cri de révolte, le ras-le-bol d'un libertaire, en somme. Quant à « hystérique », aucun de mes parents n'en connaissait le sens exact. Pour Édouard, traiter Fritna d'hystérique c'était lui signifier les refus de ses changements d'humeur et surtout de son arme absolue: le mutisme*"[72].

Despite the control she has over her children, however, it can be seen that her authority is undermined by her husband, as he relegates her actions or anger to hysteria. These moments, though demonstrating the power that she exerts, also highlight the multiple layers of power, which are constantly changing. As Ina Kerner states in her study advocating the uniting of postcolonial feminist theory and intersectional theory that "as we know from Max Weber, power is sociologically amorphous, and therefore both theoretically and empirically much harder to grasp than inequality"[73]. This concept of power, highlights that power is manifested in different forms and often difficult to identify. It is multidirectional: although an individual may be deprived of economic power, for example, they may have access to organisational resources or perceived power, though these manifestations of power are in constant flux. In her surveillance and rules, therefore, Fritna has exerts one layer of power, but its authority and her ability to maintain control is based on the negotiations of power between her and those with whom she interacts. It is particularly significant to acknowledge the multiple layers of power and agency so as to avoid false dichotomies of victim and oppressor when considering the hybrid identities of the authors and the characters and stories they tell: Fritna is not solely

[72] Halimi, *Fritna*, 51.
[73] Kerner, *Relations*, 859.

victim, nor solely oppressor in the above example. The voices the authors construct inhabit the past and present simultaneously through the use of memory and non-linear narrative. This allows them to inhabit "the contrary roles of friend and foe, of coloniser and colonised [which] are inextricably entwined and interdependent, part of the twilight zone where memory and history intersect"[74]. Rather than removing agency from and disempowering the non-hegemonic experiences of their characters, the authors explore the complexity of their subjective experiences and personal relationships with power. The texts also participate in the building of a discourse that is more inclusive of difference and non-binary experiences. The authors therefore explore the extent to which the post-colonial period represents a genuine shift in the discourses and the creation of knowledge.

Moreover, by constructing an individual narrative of the past the authors highlight that discourse is in the process of constant change and adaptation. The characters reflections on the past often present inconsistencies with their sense of agency and control in the present. This highlights the fact that the power of colonial discourse is multidirectional "as the authority of the 'civilised' was articulated by the speech of the 'uncivilised', colonial oppositions were crossed and hybridized. It is on this liminal site of mixtures and crossings produced by the exercise of colonial power that boundaries were redrawn and the colonizer/ colonized divide was reordered"[75]. Mina's interrogations of selfhood demonstrate the constantly changing boundaries of agency and victimhood, as she moves between defending her choice to marry her husband from a position of relative power, to considering the economic necessity that caused her to marry. Indeed, she defends this to herself, she challenges her own understanding by questioning herself in the third person: "*j'ai épouser un homme riche… comment tu as fait pour épouser un homme si vieux, Mina, je ne le comprendrai jamais*"[76]. These interrogations

[74] Walder, *Nostalgia*, 938.
[75] Prakash, *After*, 3.
[76] Smadja, *Jaune*, 116.

also demonstrate the strength of the narratives of understanding that she now approaches the past, which contrasts so strongly with who she is now that she can speak to herself in the third person. She has internalised and act out of the discourses of knowledge and binary categories, while using her internal narratives to explore the inconsistencies of her actions and thoughts as well as the insufficiency of the discourse to engage with their circumstances, agency and choices.

Power and Intersecting Identities

Through each character's individual explorations of themselves and their subjective histories, they exert agency. The authors thereby empower their characters to narrative and redefine the past and the present. Indeed, as Audre Lorde states, "difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged"[77]. By personalising the narratives, the authors highlight different perceptions and subvert the linearity of the colonial and post-colonial narrative, which is constructed around solely the hegemonic voice. Each main character and author exists within a space of intersecting and contradictory narratives of power, agency and control because of their identities as women, Jews, colonial subjects and emigres. This complex intersection of identities places the authors and their stories as subversions of the colonial narrative of the binaries of coloniser and colonised, and colonial versus post-colonial subject. This can be seen in the character of Mina, who is removed from her family, and taken to live with Victor, who "*portait une chemise blanche irréprochable, une chemise de Paris… [il était] un homme d'affaires… comme elle aurait pu dire c'est un minister*"[78]. For Mina, Victor becomes a symbolic representation of the saviour, dressed in white, idolised in a similar way to a minister and a very clear outsider who conducts much of his business in France. His

[77] Audre Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 26.
[78] Smadja, *Jaune*, 70.

true identity never becomes clear. Everything is filtered through the lens of Mina as a child and she is overwhelmed by the fact that he decides to take her away from her mother at the age of ten: "*elle habitera à Tunis dans notre maison… Je donnerai tous les mois le salaire qu'elle te rapporterait*"[79]. This is because he is impressed by her reading and suggests that it would be wrong for her begin working; nevertheless, though she is able to carry on reading, he does not provide her with the schooling that she expresses as the main concern that provokes her removal from her mother[80].

It is, however, after she has left the family home that the complexity of Mina's new situation becomes clear to the reader. She notes that upon leaving "*elle n'y retournera, Emma [*her older sister*] la détestera d'avoir eu tant de privileges*"[81]. Her new situation, symbolic of a greater colonial 'saviour-complex' narrative, removes her from her family and gives her some advantages and privileges that then alienate her from those who had previously been closest to her. This individual situation of a child highlights the complexity power relations in her own life which is partially dictated and embraced (she is delighted by her new surroundings and the chance to read and listen to music whenever she would like). The personal power of Mina's story, however, stems from the right to self-define and contain contradictions. It is important to explore the French colonial authority's narrative on Judaism and the '*mission civilisatrice*' or saviour-complex in North Africa, because this is just one illustrative example of the complexity of the directions of power for the authors and their characters, who represent a clear challenge to essentialist categories. Mina was chosen for her reading skills, and the fact that it is assumed she will adapt well to more favourable situations, while her siblings, with whom she has experienced most of life have very different experiences.

[79] Smadja, *Jaune*, 78.
[80] Her mother "*n'avait fait allusion à son départ prochaine de l'école"* (Smadja, *Jaune*, 78.)
[81] Ibid., 79

Based on Orientalist principles, the French colonial authority's '*mission civilisatrice'* found a particular focus on the Jews living in colonised lands, because it was felt that the community was able to take on the process of 'self-civilising'. The French sought to control the colonised populations by restricting practices such as communal living, which was deemed 'unhygienic' and the application of religious law, considered backwards and restrictive to women. This discourse was internalised by some in the local Jewish population, who took on a narrative of self-improvement for successful integration into the colonial framework. Many influential organisations, notably the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, advocated the integration with the French colonial authority[82] as the best way to be able to participate in modernity; this involved education in French and acceptance of the French colonial order. Nevertheless, this was clearly not a universal attitude. The character of Fritna rejects total integration into this secularism by taking on the role of spiritual leader in her home, espousing "*un mélange de traditions et de supersitions que des commandements argumentés de la Thora*"[83]. Though this may be as an exertion of her control over her family, as a means of inducing guilt in them, she is contradicting the narrative of a need for the secularisation to Jews in Tunisia in order to become acceptable to the coloniser. However, her later participation in discourses of 'natives' and 'barbarians' place her as complicit with the coloniser. The contention, then, is in considering the complex colonial relationship that Jews had with the French colonial authority. Arguably, "the *mission civilisatrice* thrived only where there was an indigenous demand"[84], being most successful in areas with segments of the populations who took it on as a "personal preoccupation"[85], such as *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, which "advance[d] the notion that the

[82] It is worth recognising that this sense of needing to secularise and integrate was also prevalent in Europe at the time. Many notable Zionists, including Herzl and Jabotinsky suggested that Jews needed to amend their own behaviour in order to resolve the "Jewish Question". Some scholars have suggested that this was a kind of internalising of rising anti-Semitic rhetoric in the beginning of the twentieth century.
[83] Halimi, *Fritna*, 50.
[84] Matthew Burrows, *Mission Civilisatrice: French Cultural Policy in the Middle East 1860-1914*, (The Historical Journal, 1986), 132.
[85] Ibid., 135

Jews were more amenable to assimilation than their Muslim neighbors"[86], but this buying into the model that created a hierarchy within society, "provided the alibi for colonial subjugation"[87].

The combination of complicity and subjugation is important to consider when looking that the directions of power of the characters; the very nature of their identities mean that they simultaneously contradict and embody the colonial discourse. Smadja uses Mina's overwhelming sense of alienation from those around her that travels from her family home in Tunisia, with her into her marriage as a means of deconstructing and challenging the neatness of the categories of colonial binaries, particularly in her contemporary situations that sees her living in France, away from her homelands in an alternative site of colonial interaction. Between the ages of ten and nineteen, she lives a life of imagination, based on a false sense of familiarity with France ("*elle pourra lire autant de fois qu'elle le voudra Pêcheur d'Island. Elle connaîtra Paris, Cannes, le Carlton*"[88]), yet when she is living in France, she feels far away from home and is reminded of her past by small things such as opening the window in summer. She is a character with a rich inner narrative, but whom nevertheless seems distant from the reader, and distant from the narrative of the present presenting a lack of active agency: "*elle se frotte les mains, elles sont sèches, elles pèlent, elles sentent la Javel, elles ont besoin de crème. Mina se lève, elle se rassoit*"[89]. Her in-between position is demonstrated by her alienation from both her past surroundings (embodied by her sister) and her present surroundings, which seem to exhaust her rather than embrace her.

The Power of the Narrator

[86] Maurice Samuels, *Philosemitism and the Mission Civilisatrice in Gautier's La Juive de Constantine*, (French Forum, 2013), 27.
[87] Ibid., 24
[88] Smadja, *Jaune*, 79.
[89] Ibid., 44

Interlinking with the previous chapter's consideration of memory as a story-telling tool, narrative control is a way that characters exercise agency. Both authors explore the ongoing dissonance within the present discourses of colonialism, which are built on the framework of silencing the 'other'. By using first-person narrative voices, the authors allow the characters to self-define and choose what to present externally in the narrative as well as internally in deconstructive inner-monologue. Smadja emphasises the right of her characters to self-define when Mina considers her wants for her funeral service:

> "*A mon enterrement, je ne veux pas du discours du rabbin au cimetière ou alors un discourse en hébreu. Personne ne comprendra rien, personne ne sait l'hébreu, ni Lili, ni mes fils, ni mes frères, ni mes sœurs, mais l'hébreu, c'est beau, c'est juif*"[90].

She recognises that only she will appreciate the significance of the presence of Hebrew in the service, as her family do not understand the words or their meaning, because they are separated from it by geography and chronology. Nevertheless, she describes how she would like her funeral to be conducted, including reading and songs that, again her family will not understand, because she wants to define her identity for herself, not to have this written for her. She does not, however, choose to explain this to her family, believing that because they were not there, they could not understand the significance she finds in the words and symbols. She therefore highlights the privacy vital to her own narrative of selfhood. Only the reader shares in her understandings and cohesive view of her life because Mina exercises her agency by isolating herself. Her joy in self-isolation is something that is developed in her childhood, as she decides to isolate herself by hiding inside a crate, to have the power to observe but not participate in the world around her. The isolation was, to a certain extent interrupted by her marriage, when she begins to be identified as a wife and mother. However, because she is married to a man so

[90] Ibid., 44

much older than her, and with whom she has little emotional connection, she still has agency to remain relatively unattached from her husband and is relatively callous in reporting his death. Hence, Mina defines her own boundaries and highlights the individuality of subjective history and self-definition. The personal supersedes the outside world in her narratives. The grief and trauma of her infant sister's death overwhelm the importance of the internationally significant beginning of the Second World War in Mina's personal experience: "*au milieu des hurlements, elle avait entendu M. Saada dire que la guerre avait été déclarée dans le monde. Il avait entendu la nouvelle*"[91]. Although the reader becomes briefly aware of this event, Mina's narrative control is able to highlight the greater personal significance of the subjective history, over the collective history.

Halimi's autobiographical work is deliberately constructed as a means of understanding and healing from the past, seeking to answer the question of why her mother did not love her. She exercises a high level of narrative control, choosing each event to inform the reader and highlight its significance to the process of considering the past. She thus exerts power over the understandings of the reader and the way that she or he are able to engage with the information that she presents. Her power, therefore, is in exploring subjective history and defining the self. Halimi represents her mother as someone who has internalised the silencing of the past, who enacts her power by refusing to engage with questions ("*comment oses-tu*"[92]), instead taking on the persona of victimhood. In pursuing questions about her own identity formation, Halimi is exercising some agency by self-defining. This is very personal thing and something that may not be expressed to others and it highlights the injustice that has been done to non-hegemonic voices, who have been stripped of their agency in the retelling of history.

[91] Ibid., 58
[92] Halimi, *Fritna*, 24.

The character of Gisèle, in Halimi's work, feels only able to explore her own personal experiences and aims to explore the reasons and justifications for her own deep emotional pain. Nevertheless, she is confronted with the dangerous and upsetting power of her mother to evoke victimhood to shut down any conversations that aim to bring about healing or resolution. Therefore, the reader sees that though Gisèle exerts her power and resistance to the narrative she has been fed, she also encounters resistance from her mother, in her power exertions. Nevertheless, Halimi finishes her works saying: "*á Fritna morte, je ne dois que la verité*"[93]. She allows her work to fit within the postcolonial theoretical framework, because after the death of her mother, her main source of power is in the exposition of multiple narratives. She empowers her own narrative by deconstructing the discourses that her mother and father adhered to, highlighting the injuries that these caused her, from a psychological perspective. She shows that there is value in engaging with the past through the present, because the psychology that she uses is something new to the narrative. She cannot go back, she cannot re-experience life as a character without the influence of her childhood, and she seeks to explore this. However, she also acknowledges that, in the death of her mother, the context of the French discursive rejection of remembrance, she is in fact left with the power to remember her own narrative, her reality and her truth.

Choice and Agency

The two works use female, non-hegemonic voices to challenge the normative discourses that silence alternative experiences. Since the novels utilise mother-daughter relationships to consider the impact of the past on the present and to construct meaning, gender plays an important role in considering the directions of power expressed and explored within the works. The authors are deliberately empowering the women to self-define and to explore their own

[93] (Halimi 1999, 219)

experiences outside of direct interaction with men. Nevertheless, "experiences of women are influenced by more components than solely femaleness… due to frictions between different influences and loyalties, these experiences [are] often discontinuous and fragmented"[94]; the characters demonstrate that their power, choices and agency are continuously changing and influenced by a great variety of factors, not just gender.

One metaphor and experience pertinent to the explorations of power relations in both works is that of marriage. Smadja's character, Mina, explores the contradictory emotions she has surrounding her marriage. When considering the circumstances, she sees that she felt little choice about whether or not to marry because of her financial constraints. She did not have a family that could support her, and after the death of her care-giver was given the option of working in a factory, something she felt beneath her, or marrying a man she did not know:

> "*Tu n'iras pas travailler, Mina, parce que nous allons nous marier. Tu devras couper cette méche blanche. Tu n'es plus une jeune fille, maintenant.*
>
> *Mina n'a rien dit quand Simon lui a pris la main; elle ne saurait pas dire si elle trouve cet homme beau, si elle veut être sa femme. Il l'a décidé*"[95].

Here, Smadja demonstrates the complexity of her situation; in the present she feels guilty for having married this man, therefore constructs an imaginary scenario within which she has the chance to defend her actions to her sister. The reader only becomes aware that her sister is not there in the very last line of the chapter, thus their conversation becomes a brief alternative reality with a redemptive quality, that seems more real than the phone call that interrupts it but is yet to occur. However, the reader sees that, although she feels guilt about her past and feels she ought to have fought against the marriage, the decision was imposed with little

[94] (Kerner 2017, 856)
[95] Smadja, *Jaune*, 98.

consideration of her own wants or needs and she agrees to it because of economic dependence. The contrast, therefore, between the present and the past is in her economic agency and the capacity to support herself. The marriage is proposed as an offer of stability, but later transpires to be almost inescapable, given her financial dependence on others. Her situation has the vulnerability of the "relations of privilege and disadvantage where some people's opportunities for the development and exercise of their capacities are limited and they are vulnerable to having the conditions of their lives and actions determined by others without reciprocation"[96]. Some major decisions are imposed by outside actors, but she feels a sense of complicity because in her current situation she cannot understand what happened in the past. This situation is a metaphorical echo of the attitude of *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, who felt compelled to advocate integration with the colonial authorities. This created an uneasy relationship of co-dependence on the colonial authorities which proved fundamentally at odds with the nationalist attitudes of the post-colonial period.

Victimhood

Victimhood and power are often seen as contrary to one another. However, power is multi-directional and by exploring the complexity of characters transgressing binary categories of oppressed and oppressor, the authors illustrate that each individual has a heterogeneous experience of agency: even those 'victimised' in some circumstances have areas of control. Applying postcolonial theory, this thesis is attempting to contradict the essentialism of homogenous discourses that characterise:

> "women… as a singular group on the basis of a shared oppression. What binds women together is a sociological notion of the "sameness" of their oppression. It is at this point that an elision takes place between "women" as a discursively constructed group and

[96] Iris Marion Young, *Structural Injustice and the Politics of Difference*, (Bristol, Policy Press, 2008), 283.

> "women" as material subjects of their own history… This focus is not on uncovering the material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as "powerless" in a particular context. It is, rather, on finding a variety of cases of powerless groups of women to prove the general point that women as a group are powerless"[97].

Clearly, the hybridity of the characters' and authors' identities mean that many factors interact to create the personal, subjective interpretation of the past and the present. The characters are neither solely victims nor solely oppressors, and their identities are constructed under the influence of the ever-changing boundaries and sources of power. This is evident as they deconstruct the past through the lens of the present: there is a dissonance between the remembrance of feeling powerless and the present reality, explored through memory and non-linear narrative. To a certain extent, the past and the present are irreconcilable. However, the deconstructive actions of the works allow them to highlight the changing discourses and means of knowledge-creation that are formulated in exclusion of subjective history, but rather develop in relation to each other.

Halimi interrogates the means of performing power that her mother, Fritna, had created: "*ma mère ne se vivant qu'en victim. Une victim tout à la fois du devoir religieux, de la morale conjugale, de l'abnegation maternelle*"[98]. Although she is limited by proscriptive gender roles that prevent her from leaving the house even to shop, she exerts her own personal power, challenging the reader to reconsider the binaries of power versus powerless. There were days when:

> "*ma mère semblait plus sûre d'elle et réglait, dans ce context où elle sentait un rapport de forces plus équilibré avec son époux, diverses questions en suspens: se faire aider*

[97] Mohanty, *Feminism*, 23.
[98] Halimi, *Fritna*, 54.

par une petite « Arabe » pour ouvrir les matelas, laver à la mer les coupeaux de laine qui les garnissaient… le tout dans la journée, nécessité oblige, pour retrouver nos lits. Aller voir aussi sa mère en banlieue et lui remettre la petite participation mensuelle d'Édouard, acheter pour elle-même un tablier léger qui ne la ferait pas transpirer ainsi à l'ouvrage. Mon Dieu, qu'elle était gracieuse lorsqu'elle le décrivait ce tablier!"[99]

Halimi highlights the ever-changing power relations of Fritna's relationship with her husband, and the fact that on days where the power dynamic shifts to become more equal, she uses her re-emphasised sense of self to provoke small actions, such as getting a new apron. She also states that: "*j'ai toujours été frappé, en observant ma mère, par le pouvoir de son non-pouvoir*"[100]. Fritna chooses to use victimhood or martyrdom as a power tool, lauding her strict religious observance over her family as a burden that she must carry; although she is in no way obliged by her husband or family to be observant, she uses this righteousness as a power to control those around her:

"*pour [Fritna], l'étranger, pour ne pas dire l'ennemi, menaçait d'entrer dans la place. Après avoir renoncé à obtenir la circoncision de Claude, le gendre, elle entreprit la bataille pour celle du petit-fils. Aucun argument négligé. C'était, [elle] disait, une mezva, l'actionpieuse qui ferait rentrer en grâce auprèse de Dieu les mécréants que nous étions… Ainsi pour les supersitions. Elle nous les présentait comme la loi incontournable, étanche à toute tentative de liberté par le raisonnement*"[101].

She uses a religious argument to justify her desire for her grandson's circumcision, however, this morality is one of a litany of tools she uses essentially irrefutable as persuasive techniques: for her, this is the only way to keep her grandson as an 'insider', as somewhat related to her,

[99] Ibid., 63
[100] Ibid., 66
[101] Ibid., 109

despite his non-Jewish 'foreign' father. Fritna similarly uses non-engagement as an exertion of agency. When angry with her husband, she punished him by using silence, forcing her children to act as go-betweens. She uses this until her death to reject the questions asked by her daughter about the past. Even though the work is based around the end of her life, as she stays in hospital, completely dependent on others to live, she still uses this tool to exert her agency. She rejects questions about the past, and if pushed simply re-iterates the burden of motherhood to her daughter. Halimi, therefore, demonstrates the damaging effect of non-engagement on those in the present trying to understand the past. This acts as a strong critique of the hegemonic view that argues for the colonial past to be totally forgotten and left unexplored. Fritna also uses emotional blackmail as a tool to exert her power. She suggests that she has a parental relationship to her grandsons, Gisèle's sons, to emphasise the ongoing sacrifice of motherhood and simultaneously disempower her daughter. She suggests that: "*tes fils? Je les élevés!*"[102]. This retelling, and Gisèle argues, inaccurate telling of the narrative, is used by Fritna to demonstrate her indispensability to her family. It is a continuation of her narrative of victimhood; however, the vehemence with which she uses the tool suggests that she is reassuring herself of her utility and importance, as part of her own construction of selfhood.

Medical interactions

Interactions with medicine are of great significance in the exploration of the directions and perceptions of power in the colonial context because hegemonic narratives present medicine as the ability to control life and death. Indeed, a key theme discourse of the colonial project, internalised by the characters, is the attempt to "conquer nature through science… [meaning that] medicine conquered illness"[103]. The characters of Mina in *Le jaune est sa* couleur and Fritna in *Fritna* demonstrate their deep entwinement with this discourse as they experience the

[102] Ibid., 78
[103] Sharp, Geographies, 21.

high stress environments of medicine. The way that these characters narrate their interactions with medicine are incredibly important in highlighting their internalisation of the narrative of the French coloniser's bio-power[104]. Mina conveys her belief that "French medicine" is infallible and has the power to choose between life and death: "*Mina ne dort pas… Lili exagère. Jonas ne mourra pas. Il ne peut pas mourir. Il est jeune. La medicine française est forte, très forte*"[105]. She cannot believe that Jonas is going to die because of the strength of her internalisation of the discourse that allows France, as a coloniser, to control the population through technology. Smadja, however, undermines Mina's naïve sense of trust and denial by constructing a narrative around death from AIDS. As a contemporary health crisis, this subverted the narrative that suggested medicine was a means of total control. By undermining the strength of the discourse of medicine and technology as an infallible means of power, the author reminds the reader of the contrasting situation of Mina's past and the present that she experiences. The coloniser-framework of knowledge she has internalised is shown to be false.

Conclusion

Power can be difficult to identify in marginalised narratives; nevertheless, it provokes pushback in both directions and can be recognised thus. The characters in these two works reckon with the complexities of their own agency and the ways that they have used this to exert their identities and senses of self, demonstrating the idea that "where there is power, there is resistance"[106];. Power is shown to be a relational force that is multi-directional and influences how individuals think, what they mean and what they do. The importance of this to the discourse of colonialism that the characters explore is in the way that they struggle to associate their own experiences with that of the hegemonic discourse, which actively disempower them.

[104] A Foucauldian concept that explores the use of bodies as a means of control, very relevant to the way that colonial powers attempted to control populations.
[105] Smadja, *Jaune*, 94
[106] Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1978), 95.

Their lives are deeply impacted by the ongoing influence of the power relations of colonialism, particularly in the high-stress environment of medical interaction. Both works follow the postcolonial principle of engaging with the empowerment of their characters' non-hegemonic voices by emphasising the power of subjectivity and understanding the self.

The authors demonstrate that the self is intrinsically linked to the power relations of dependency, particularly for these women whose agency is linked to their awareness of the control of outside forces, for example those forcing them to marry. The separation between the colonial and the post-colonial period is logically flawed if the colonial is understood as a means of dependency and control. In the context of literary exploration of the past, "on the metaphoric level any discourse on colonialism today can be interpreted as a manifestation of colonialist history and cannot be divorced from the history of colonialism"[107]. The metaphors that the authors choose demonstrate the immanence of the colonial discourse of the past, being as close to the narratives as their husbands and mothers, friends and relatives. Nevertheless, the use of mother-daughter relationships as a metaphor symbolises the right of rebellion and the need to reinterpret the values that their mothers espouse. The authors are therefore actively evaluating and dismantling the discourses of the past in relation to the present.

[107] Alva, *Postcolonization*, 245.

Chapter Four: Decolonising the Self

Introduction

Postcolonial theory emphasises that discourse is a pervasive force, defining the way that individuals and societies engage with the present through the past. It is "the internalisation of a set of values and ways of knowing the world [that] is much more difficult to overturn than the physical rule of colonial regimes"[108]. Colonial discourses create binaries that are used to make value judgements and necessarily delegitimise non-hegemonic experiences and memory. These discursive norms remain powerful because the field of knowledge-creation has been so dominated by colonising powers. When considering literature, it is necessary to deconstruct impact of discourse on the reader, the author and their characters. Frantz Fanon stated that the discourse of colonialism is "a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?"[109]. He suggested that because of the inconsistencies between the colonial discourse and lived reality, the colonised subject is force into constant self-questioning, because their experiences are delegitimised by the strength of the colonial discourse. This discourse, however, impacts all individuals, coloniser or colonised, and those with hybrid identities by implementing strict patterns of understanding. Decolonising the self, therefore, involves careful re-examination of narratives and identities that subvert the norms of discourse.

In Gisèle Halimi's *Fritna* and Brigitte Smadja's *Le jaune est sa couleur*, the authors highlight the inconsistencies of hegemonic discourse by using individual voices' explorations of the self in their works. In doing so, they represent the need to challenge the contradictions that are inherently found within this discourse when it is applied to the heterogeneous

[108] Sharp, *Geographies*, 5.
[109] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York, Grove Press, 1963), 250.

experiences of life that they and their characters have. Fritna and her daughter Gisèle have very different interactions with the same experience of the doctor:

> "*Le médicin parisien, lui, entreprit de convaincre ma mère de me laisser tranquille. « Dés qu'elle aura ses régles, ça s'arrêtera. La puberté régulera le problème. » Ma mère ne connaissait rien aux effets de la puberté et, de toute manière, exigeait un traitement. Alors il m'injecta das le dos, une fois ou deux par semaine, un produit mystérieux qu'il présenta comme miraculeux… le médicin nous avoua plus tard qu'il rempilssait sa seringue d'un produit placebo. Il tenta d'expliquer le méchanisme psychosomatique de la guérison à ma mère qui n'en crut pas un mot… Moi, je me sentais ressusciter. J'accostais au rivage de mon adolescence débarrassée de l'infirmité et de l'humiliation*"[110].

While Fritna feels unnerved and even mocked by the doctor's use of a placebo, which she does not want to engage with or understand, this very same experience is liberating for her daughter, Gisèle, who feels empowered by the knowledge that she is normal. This highlights the differing interpretations of the same event that "postcolonial writers tend to [use to] challenge the presentation of singular narratives and instead seek to include multiple voices in their works"[111]. This choice allows them to explore the complexity of identity-formation and the challenges this provokes in the context of essentialist discourses that seek to deny the past, narrating it as unrecognisably distant, hence, irrelevant.

Both authors now live in France, and are able to provide insight into the deep impact that the history of colonialism continues to have, as well as the damaging influence of its narrative on the contemporary situation and discourse. They also highlight the intersectionality of identity formation, showing that individuals such as themselves who fall into the category

[110] Halimi, *Fritna*, 104-105.
[111] Sharp, *Geographies*, 7.

of these mixed, hybrid identities of are often "women [who inherently] share many of the characteristics of colonized subject… to the extent that some commentators have spoken of the need for "self-decolonization" of the female subject"[112]. This concept provokes a reconsideration of the intersection between colonisation and gender, as well as well as other categories of 'othering'. Moore-Gilbert's suggests, similarly to Spivak, that the genres of biographical and historical writing needs to be reconceptualised and reconstructed to include the postcolonial, female, or subaltern voices that are excluded from the narrative. The authors, therefore, deconstruct the narrative and create a reciprocal need for the decolonising of both the characters and the reader as she/he engages with the complexities of the narratives.

The authors' active deconstruction of normative assumptions emphasises the striking omnipresence of the past explored in the first chapter of this thesis. The past provides legitimacy, power, meaning and identity to the Mina, in Smadja's *Le jaune est sa couleur* and Fritna in Halimi's *Fritna*. Since the past plays such a significant role on the present, on the self and on the formulation and acting out of discourse, it becomes increasingly clear that "to decolonize one's mind is a life-long process, [since] systems of domination and subordination are not necessarily easy to identify when situated within unofficial cultures, that is, in interpersonal politics within the negotiation of relation of power by individuals in interaction"[113]. The reader is also challenged to participate in decolonising the self when exposed to the characters frailties and the inconsistencies in their narratives of experiences. The reflective nature of both works means that they have a great focus on the internal experience as opposed to the outside world. This highlights the significance of the personal over the communal in subjective history but also illustrates the problems of official discourses and narratives of a singular or acceptable history. Moreover, by empowering their characters

[112] Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial*, xv.
[113] Health and Nombuso Dlamini quoted in Mukoma Wa Ngugi, *The Work of Linguistic Decolonization Cannot Be Done By Writers Alone*, (Lit Hub, 2018),.

to speak, to self-define, the authors challenge readers to participate in the de-colonising of their own selves, by representing alternatives and challenges to the hegemonic experience. Halimi, for example, undermines assumptions of the powerlessness of women confined to the house by custom, not even allowed to go out shopping. She emphasises the need to consider "*le micropouvoir particulier de ces femmes dependants de l'homme, sans le moindre autonomie financière, dépouvues de culture mais pleins de savoir-faire. Elles ont inventé une intelligence de l'interieur, une stratégie du faible, utilisent les armes bibliques de la seduction en même temps qu'elles feignent d'ignorer le jeu de l'homme*"[114]. Indeed, this choice to listen and to try to empower the voices of the traditionally silenced is an important aspect of her engagement with postcolonial theory: since "Western discourse does not care about members of subaltern classes, and does not reckon with complex self-representation on their part"[115]. Smadja also actively work to redefine and renegotiate discourse to include alternative voices by varying her narrator to include Jonas, Lili and Mina, a group of diverse, but marginalised, voices.

Halimi also uses her work as a challenge to the reader. In her advocacy work, she engages with policy and the public sphere, including being a co-founder of *Choisir*. Though there are many exceptions, women tend to write about the personal sphere, as opposed to the public; this work is a personal exploration, autobiographical, and therefore tends to revolve more around the domestic sphere. This allows for the humanisation of history, highlighting that those who lived through the "official" historical narrative have heterogenous experiences and complex, sometimes conflicting identities. Halimi's work is also strongly feminist, she is exploring her relationship with her mother, and who her mother is as a person: "in this chapter of existential reflection on life and love by a publicly strong and militant feminist, what is striking is the uncertainty about global solutions, or any single path or truth"[116]. This places

[114] Halimi, *Fritna*, 65.
[115] Kerner, *Relations*, 857.
[116] Ramsay, *French Women*, 139.

some responsibility on the reader to reflect on their own attitudes and assumptions, prompting her/him to consider the vibrancy and complexity of the individual experience.

Tracing the impact of the past

In Smadja's work, the character of Mina is highly involved in the process of identifying and trying to explain the inconsistencies that she finds in her own experiences and sense of self. She is participating in the process of decolonising her sense of self by acknowledging that her experiences are complex and their impact on her identity varies. The reader, moreover, is given the opportunity to create links that she herself is not able to make. Indeed, when considering her life in Tunisia, Mina describes the joy and empowerment of concealing herself inside a box given to her as a bribe from her neighbour, who "*était prêt à lui donner une boîte entière, une boîte géante pour arrêter les larmes*"[117]. She is delighted by the power she has to accumulate knowledge by discrete observation; she has the opportunity to observe without having to participate in a world that she, as a child, does not quite understand. Nevertheless, this ability to hide becomes intimately connected to the tragedy of her sister's death. She was given caring responsibilities that she was too young for and hid inside the box. The reader sees the complexity of her sense of responsibility in relation to her sister's death. As a child she thinks to herself that "*le bébé Suzanne n'avait pas pleuré. On doit pleurer quand on meurt ou crier très fort. Il n'y avait pas eu de cris forts. Seulement le cri d'une souris. A cette pensée, Mina se cacha dans les bras de son frère*"[118]. However, as an adult recounting the story, she includes a certain level of malevolence prompted by guilt, within which she is deliberately negligent. The reader is therefore given a sense of the complexity of story-telling and constructing a narrative, which is influenced by the past and the present sense of self and identity.

[117] Smadja, *Jaune*, 48.
[118] Ibid., 56

After this childhood tragedy, Mina becomes considerably more distant as a character. She second-guesses her emotions when narrating stories, being unsure of whether she even liked her husband. She seeks comfort in isolation, away from the responsibility of caring for others' emotional needs. In the present, she is left alone by her son: "*elle est seule. Elle n'est pas partie en vacance avec Henri. Il l'a laissée, pour un fois.*"[119]. This isolation is gratifying and demonstrates active decision she has made to spend time interrogating the past, with a combination of nostalgia and guilt. Smadja, therefore, empowers her to reconstruct and re-narrate her life based on the new information that she has in her new circumstances and is defining herself in a balance of these two features. Nevertheless, this self-imposed isolation is deeply associated with the tragedy of the past, and continues to affect her emotional state and ability to share in the present. Her need to isolate herself and remain closed as a result of the trauma reflects the pattern the authors' works stand against: "the Sephardic French women writers of North African origin are witnesses to the silent exodus experienced by their families and communities. Through their auto-fictional writings, or what Thomas Nolden has coined as "autojudeography," these women play an important role in voicing what has been forgotten through an often self-imposed silence"[120]. In order to spare others of the tragedy that she experienced, Mina internalised the story and is only able to share it with herself; however, Smadja allows the reader to engage at a personal level, thereby demonstrating the power of personal stories over systems of knowledge to begin the process of understanding and healing. Were Mina comfortable externalising her sense of culpability of surrounding the death of her sister, she would be assuaged of her guilt. This demonstrates the empowerment and necessity of the right to narrate and discuss personal experience.

[119] Ibid., 43
[120] Nina Lichtenstein, *Silent Exodus and Forgotten Voices: Sephardic Women Writers in PostColonial Discourse*, (Sephardic Horizons, 2012),.

The character of Mina is also conflicted by her displacement; she feels unattached to her surroundings in France, but uncomfortable with exposing her links with the past. As a character who lives within Edward Said's definition of the "exiled subject", she embodies the "'median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-inducements, half detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, and adept mimic or a secret outcast on the other'"[121]. This is shown by her references to the 'French' as a distant, unrecognisable other: "*ces Français laissent mourir leurs enfants, tout seuls.*" (Smadja 1998, 162). She is distancing herself from this identity, but does not exert her own or any alternative sense of identity. In response to seeing Jonas (her daughter's friend, whom she took on as a son after his family abandoned him, and around who's death the narrative is centred) in his sick-bed, "*elle a eu envie de lui chanter une berceuse en arabe mais elle s'est retenue quand elle a vu l'infirmier*"[122]. It is the presence of others and the fear of judgement that forces her to restrain herself. She does not want to share any aspects of her identity, whether French, Tunisian, Jewish or maternal, with others because she has been socialised by trauma and marriage to silence herself, even in moments of extreme emotional distress.

'Othering'

The call to decolonise the self is found within postcolonial literary theory particularly in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work, which focusses on language describing a process of "Colonial Alienation", which "is like separating the mind from the body so that they are occupying two unrelated linguistic spheres in the same person. On a larger scale it is like producing a society of bodiless heads and headless bodies"[123]. This suggestion challenges the reader and the characters' interpretive frameworks, by highlighting the flaws and destructiveness intrinsic to

[121] Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, (New York, Pantheon, 1994), 49.
[122] Smadja, *Jaune*, 162.
[123] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the mind: the politics of language in African literature* (London, J. Currey, 1986), 28.

them. It demonstrates the discourses' inherent need to 'other' the non-hegemonic experience, which leads to a dismissal of difference. Colonial discourse becomes the hegemon; "there is no 'Juive de Constantine[124]' because colonization has made her disappear, because French colonial ideology sought the radical erasure of the other in the name of the civilising mission"[125]. The concept prompts the recognition of the erasure of the 'other' from the right of knowledge-creation and participation in the construction and adaptation of discourse. In response to this erasure, Halimi and Smadja prompt the exploration of the inherent contradictions of the hybrid self. They highlight the bifocality of their characters, who live simultaneously in the space of a French present and the space of a Tunisian past, which reflects their own experiences. The intersectional identities of the authors mean that their works are under studied, neither falling into the traditional category of 'Francophone' literature in literature departments, nor that of mainstream French literature. However, their writing challenges the problematic ethnicization of colonial narratives and incorporates their experiences of the peripheries into the narration of contemporary French, Jewish and Tunisian identity. Since they represent an 'other' that does not clearly fit into one category, they construct characters who explore the pressure of being forced to reckon with identity and the meaning of the self. Indeed:

> "the colonized is refused assimilation to the other culture, that of the colonizer, but then discovers his true self through this refusal. Identity thus comes through negation. Ultimately, the negative myth is succeeded by a positive myth, or self-image. For Memmi, this is how psychological decolonization comes about"[126].

[124] Idealised idea of the 'civilised-native' Jewish woman within French colonial narrative.
[125] Samuels, *Philosemitism,* 31.
[126] Judith Roumani, *The End of Colonialism in Novels by Albert Memmi and Kateb Yacine*, (Sephardic Horizons, 2015),.

Halimi recognises her hybrid identity as a Tunisian-Jewish woman now living in France; part of the power of her work is that she acknowledges that she explores the transgressions between the categories of selfhood, particularly as embodied in her mother. Her work negates the destructive identity and relationship she has formed around her mother's rejection in order to formulate a positive sense of self and move forwards. Moreover, in her work, "difference and plurality emerge as genuinely complex and often contradictory, rather than as commodified variations on Eurocentric themes"[127]. Her construction of subjective history emphasises the value of frequently contradictory and uncomfortable elements of identity and personal experience over that of systems and essentialising colonial discourses. Unchallenged, these discursive norms would exclude her non-hegemonic voice from the narrative, while also rejecting her right to grapple with the complexity of interpersonal relationships. However, by writing she illustrates the immanence of colonial history in her own life as a hybrid subject, living in France while being spurred on by her identification with the anticolonial struggle in North Africa as her mother puts it, to "*[defende] les Arabes, en Tunisie et en Algérie*"[128]. This personal interaction with colonialism as well as the second-hand interaction she has as a daughter, means that much of her sense of self is influenced by it.

Image, Language and Binary

The construction of self is deeply intertwined with projections and internalisation of appearance and style. However, within the context of binaries of colonial discourse, racialised perceptions of beauty are placed over the linguistic framework. Halimi emphasises her discomfort with her mother's internalisation of this discursive norm, when she quotes her saying:"*« Adorable, tu étais une fillette adorable, toute bouclée… On t'appelait "Boucles d'or dans le quartier…» Elle avait même ajouté, avec quelque fierté: « Tu resemblais à une*

[127] Mohanty, *Feminism*, 9.
[128] Halimi, *Fritna*, 78.

Francais!»"[129]. This is the only nice thing that Fritna says to Gisèle during her delirium, however her pride in the child's similarity to the character of Goldilocks, demonstrating the powerful hold of the racist discourse of colonialism that renders an appearance of "Frenchness" a symbol of class and something that emphasises the separation between herself, her child, and the "Arabs" that she considers inferior and threatening. This hierarchy of value is demonstrated by the fact that that when overcome by delirium and pain, she references only her appearance; in doing so, she shows the perpetuation of dichotomies of coloniser versus colonised, where blondeness or "Frenchness" is another symbol of the differentiation between herself and her perception of the colonised 'other'. These categories are still significant to Fritna, but the reader gains from the discomfort of Gisèle's narrative voice, which challenges the meaning of exhortation and invites the reader to do the same. This consistency in illness emphasises the deeply engrained nature of this colonial attitude on the present, undermining any attempt to separate.

Indeed, Halimi demonstrates her understanding of the significance of appearance through her choice of cover art. She uses a private photograph of Fritna (Figure 1) to highlight that the narrative she produces is based around a real person. She is exploring the complexities of the struggle for identity within the context of the whole. Raylene Ramsay also suggests that the picture compels the reader to confront their own expectations and perceptions of who this woman is as they are engage with Gisèle's remembrance and constructions of the story of her life and identity (2003, 138). This is the only image used by Halimi, thus is a significant reminder of the interaction of the personal and the public. She has chosen to publish a personal photograph of her mother as a way to open up the discourse to include the real stories she explores.

[129] Halimi, *Fritna*, 47.

Figure 1. Halimi, Gisèle, *Fritna*. Plon, 1999

Imagery and photographs are similarly important to Mina's construction and interrogation of identity:

> "*Elle est gardé une photo de son marriage. Elle est seule, de profil, Simon n'a pas volou poser à côté d'elle. Elle a l'air d'une madone. Elle tient un bouquet de fleurs à la main et elle regarde au loin, très loin. Elle a dix-neuf ans*"[130]

The image she describes conveys the tragedy of her situation highlighting the personal immanence of the control exerted on her. Similarly to Fritna, she is alone and thus forced to represent herself. To add to the tragedy of the scene, however, she also reminds the reader of that she is in love with an imagined and idealised representation of the Orientalist novelist, Pierre Loti. Her image of him represents the embodiment of her desire to feel at home in spite of her hybrid identity, as he links her childhood to her adolescence. He becomes a metaphor for the colonial authorities who promised that if she was able to present herself well enough

[130] Smadja, *Jaune*, 99.

("*pour Pierre Loti, elle devait être d'une beauté exceptoinnelle*."[131]), she would be accepted and experience a sense of home that she had not experienced since the death of her sister separated her emotionally from those around her. She believes that if she waits patiently, this representative of an Orientalist dream-world will collect her and integrate her, demonstrating her internalisation of the colonial discourses of the need for assimilation. Although, she slowly accepts of the falseness of her vision of a saviour and object of desire, she never lets go of the joy he causes her when she considers the past nostalgically. Loti represents a preferred narrative of her experience of life in Tunisia, because he filters out the tragedy and discomfort Mina feels when looking back. Her experience of being let down by this imagined figure shows how tempting and comforting, but unreal Orientalist narratives were and continue to be.

Part of the process of decolonising the self is the dismantling of the binaries of 'us' and 'them' that become complex categories of exclusion and injury. Smadja explores the process of 'othering' experienced personally by Jonas:

> "*Ma mère ne sait pas qui je suis, elle ne veut pas le savoir. Je lui ai dit quand j'avais dix-huit ans, après une dépression grave, je lui ai dit, nous étions dans la cuisine, elle préparait un coq au vin, je lui aid it que j'aimais les garçons, elle m'a repondu, après s'être servi un verre de vin rouge: «Tu manques de vitamine C, tu as mauvaise mine.»…«Chez nous, ça n'exist pas.» Je n'ai jamais su ce qu'elle entendait par ce «chez nous». Chez nous, les Bonnot? ou chez nous les Juifs? A quoi a-t-elle fait allusion ce jour-là? A la famille de mon pére, ce pauvre goy impuissant qu'elle a choisi pour épous, ou à sa famille à elle, dont nous ne savons rien sinon qu'elle est juive et que ses derniers membres vivent en Israël?*"[132]

[131] Ibid., 96
[132] Smadja, *Jaune*, 23-24.

Smadja highlights the injury inflicted on the character by his mother's exclusive language. By defining homosexuality as part of an 'other' group, she alienates him and forces him to approach his self-definition through the category of an 'other', separated from the past and the people who had such a considerable impact on his subjective history. It is therefore noticeable that Mina is gentle towards Jonas, taking him on as like a surrogate son. Although she clearly does not quite understand his identity (being initially worried that he would pursue her daughter) she approaches others with a lightness that allows them to self-define because of her reflective nature. Chandra Mohanty argues that "decolonization coupled with emancipatory collective practice leads to a rethinking of patriarchal, heterosexual, colonial, racial, and capitalist legacies"[133]; through the interactions between Jonas and Mina, Smadja therefore demonstrates need for the right to self-define and the significance of language in discourse in the process of rethinking and reconstructing damaging discourse.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the idea of "decolonising the self" through consideration of the anguish of contradiction felt within various facets of hybrid identities. I have employed the concept in an attempt to gain some insight into the way that the authors formulate their characters' personal identity as a balance of between a sense of continuity of identity and the conflicting identities dictated by strong discourses of the past and the present. "The ultimate purpose of postcolonialism is to dismantle the conditions that produce such violence and anguish, then it must follow that Postcolonial Studies inherently focuses of an object that it is committed to dismantling even while necessarily analytically fixated with it"[134]: decolonising the mind, therefore, occurs not only inside the works. The reader is compelled to reconsider

[133] Mohanty, *Feminism*, 8.
[134] David T. Goldberg and Ato Quayson, *Relocating Postcolonialism*, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 2002), xiii.

her or his own understandings of the past and the present outside of hegemonic norms of his or her own personal contexts and are encouraged to engage in the process of decolonising the mind through a wholesale interrogation of the power structures that have formulated the self and continue to bind it in discourses of knowledge creations that stand in opposition to the tradition. Frantz Fanon described the colonial condition as pathological, similar to an illness from which to recover. This is the aim of decolonising the self and the mind: to promote healing based on exploring the ongoing symptoms of colonial discourse on the present.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This thesis has explored the extent to which the Brigitte Smadja's *Le jaune est sa couleur* and Gisèle Halimi's *Fritna* pose a challenge to the idea of a historical rupture between the colonial and the post-colonial. The hybridity of the authors' identities has allowed them to construct characters and narratives to explore the complex interrelation between the past and the present, the coloniser and the colonised. The chapters of this thesis interconnect, exploring the topics of knowledge, as manifested in reflection of time and the past, power and the self, all of which work together to construct identity. Much of the power of the works is in using the individual, rather than the collective, to challenge the discourse to incorporate new ideas and adapt to acknowledge the inconsistency of hegemonic forces.

Halimi and Smadja's works have a compelling similarity in themes and even narrative style, despite spanning fiction and autobiography. This is perhaps because of the contemporary situation in which they were writing: "*à la fin des années 1990, la question coloniale a surgi au cœur du débat public français. Elle a donné lieu à d'âpres oppositions, parfois définies comme une "guerre des mémoires ", entretenant souvent l'image schizophrène de deux France, celle de l'universalisme républicain et celle de l'arbitraire colonial*"[135]. The late-1990s saw a fresh recognition of the need to engage with the complexity of the relationship between the colonial and the present discourses of France as a liberal, progressive state in the past and the present. This discomfort about dissonance between the two mainstream dialogues around colonialism, therefore, allowed gave the authors a space to empower other voices. They subvert the idea of a clear, singular history. The authors are constructing characters that are empowered to self-define and describe their own subjective histories. The characters are, thus, given the

[135] Dino Costantini, *Mission civilisatrice de la France*, (La Découverte, 2008), I.

space to construct a new narrative and understand the past in relation to the present with greater personal clarity.

The authors use time as a narrative technique to challenge the validity of knowledge-creation based around a singular narrative. The reader is challenged by the complexity of the narratives, though they diverge in style. Halimi's *Fritna* is deliberately confronting the past, considering its impacts and trying to find some semblance of understanding and healing. For Smajda's *Le jaune est sa couleur*, the characters are stuck in the moment of contention. This allows the authors the opportunity to explore the negotiated nature of understanding the present. The characters seek meaning through their memories; however, these must interact with their current lived experience. It is within the heightened emotional state of grief that the characters consider their past and their present situations simultaneously. This grief leads to self-reflection and the authors' use this reflection to demonstrate the possible re-interpretation of the discourses of the past as a tool to radically redefine the means of understanding the past and the present collectively. Arguably, therefore, they construct a complex narrative that integrates the past and the present as a means to adapt present discourse to allow for an honest reflection on the ongoing influence of the colonial past on the post-colonial present. They demonstrate the emotional need to consider the past and its ongoing impact because of the need to process the pain of the past, evoked by the grief of the present. Therefore, the authors subvert the narrative of the past to propose reflection on reality of colonialism, which has so shaped, and continues to shape the contemporary period.

Furthermore, the authors use the complexity of time in their narrative to demonstrates that when history and narrative are reconstructed, they are not linear. This, in itself subverts the logic of creating a binary between the colonial and the post-colonial. Moreover, the personal significance of events is considerably more important in the characters' narrations than the collective importance. This highlights the personal subjectivity of writing history,

which is deeply entwined with individual understandings of the present and the past, and builds cumulatively. In utilising individual narratives of non-linear time, the authors work within the framework of postcolonial theory. They are actively attempting to dismantle the confines and restrictions of colonial discourse that pigeon-hole active imperialism into an unfamiliar, unrecognisable past while systematically engraining them into the present through the use of binary to create an artificial rupture between colonial and post-colonial, thereby supporting only the narratives of hegemonic voices.

The chapter exploring power relations highlights the fact that the authors and their characters are constructed by many layers of identity. They are products of their subjective histories and the discourses that help them narrate their present. The directions of power found in the works are shown to be ever-changing and complex, constructed by many different aspects of the characters' identities. The medical environment of both works provides a metaphorical look into the complexity of discourse and external power relations, because the characters are stripped of their autonomy, and left simply to wait for an ending that they have no control over. However, as they deal with this grief, Mina, Gisèle and Fritna are empowered to reflect on the past. In the characters of Mina and Fritna, the authors demonstrate the difficulty of grappling with the past, as they each experience feelings of culpability and a sense of responsibility for the past that make them very uncomfortable in their present understanding of events. This leads Fritna to use her power to disengage from the narrative, refusing to answer questions about the past, therefore refusing to allow her daughter to move forward and participate in a complete act of reckoning and begin the healing process.

The exploration of power relations prompts the reader to reconsider the binaries that place individuals into categories of coloniser or colonised, as the characters participate in both sides of the discourse. Continuing to engage in the metaphor of marriage as a symbol of colonialism, the authors demonstrate the heterogeneity of experience. Though both Fritna and

Mina are arguably coerced into marriage, by outside actors and circumstances, they demonstrate they have each seek to understand and narrate the it differently and each have their own experiences. Nevertheless, the initial coercion radically impacts the women's identities, and construction of selfhood, and both women live without their husbands in the present, the power exerted on them by this event still very prevalent in the present. This illustrates the fact that outside forces may have a tremendous impact on the way that individuals exert their agency. The colonial past and its means of knowledge-creation, therefore, impact the present. This does not mean that those impacted have no agency, it simply means that past interactions of power, control and agency continue to have an impact on the way that individuals and collectives behave and self-define in the present.

Power is shown to demonstrate the negotiations that formulate meaning and authority; power and identity are interrelated and fluid. They change depending on the present discourses, but individuals can exert their power by choosing to self-define and challenge the narratives imposed on them. Both authors empower non-hegemonic voices to participate in the construction of meaning and truth, therefore challenging the essentialism that inherently marginalises them. The authors empower their characters to explore their subjective histories, therefore highlighting the complexity understandings of meaning, and the need to challenge to the control of dominant discourses. By emphasising the need to overcome binaries of time and identity, the works contradict the logic used to clearly differentiate between colonial and post-colonial time.

Decolonising the mind is a challenge to the reader, as well as to the characters. The process involves a wholesale interrogation of the power structures that have formulated the self and continue to bind them. By undermining a variety of binary categories through the identities of their characters, the works provoke questions about the legitimacy or logic of a chronological binary between the colonial and the post-colonial. They emphasise that "the situatedness of

identity claims and cultural affiliations, which speak of power relations and diverse political placements as well as the influential role of contemporary global flows of images and idea on those locations"[136]. The hybridity of the characters as well as the authors challenges the reader to consider their own situatedness and the assumptions this entails. As an author and an activist, Halimi chooses challenge the reader from the cover of the work, presenting a photograph of her mother to emphasise the personal nature of story-telling and the construction of identity, which is often fraught and complex. Equally, the hybrid identities of the both Halimi and Smadja influence their own conceptions of identity and selfhood, and thus impact their art: their post-colonial experiences mean that their works were published in France impacting their likely audience and hence their narrative aims. To a certain extent, therefore, it appears that the authors are challenging the dominance of the discourse of forgetting and relegating the history of colonialism to the past through binaries.

The characters show that participating in decolonising the self involves critically examining the structures that formulate identity and meaning. This can then be contextualised and understood within the intersectional framework of postcolonial theory. The process involves confronting the internal contradictions of hegemonic discourse, and emphasising that identity and history are in the constant process of adaptation and formation. They are influenced by the present situation and means of understanding of the individual as well as their heterogeneous personal attributes and experiences. The authors use their characters complex, non-linear narratives to emphasise the importance of stories rather than systems to create meaning and a sense of self, thereby contradicting the overwhelming influence of essentialising discourses. They emphasise that the individual, character or reader has internalised biases, assumptions and means of engaging with the past and the present that need to be challenged through a process of sympathetic reflection. These heterogeneous narratives show that

[136] Schramm, *Leaving*, 8.

experiences vary greatly and identity is in the constant process of negotiation and change; thus, the past cannot be separated from the present.

Halimi's *Fritna* and Smadja's *Le jaune est sa couleur* both provide a space to explore the need for a paradigmatic shift, discourse challenge and the reinterpretation of historical discourses through the consideration of non-hegemonic, Jewish, Tunisian, female voices. By empowering their characters to explore and construct their own identities, their works emphasise the incompleteness of binary categories, which do not acknowledge the interrelated complexity and negotiation of discursive norms. Part of this process is explored by the characters in their new "post-colonial" contexts, which see them negotiating with the construction of identity, given the confliction between their experience of the past and the way in which they are able to engage with it in the present. Through this process, the reader is shown the continuing impact of childhood trauma through to bodily presence of Gisèle's mother, Fritna and the character of Mina's preference for isolation. In the process of considering and retelling their subjective histories, the characters demonstrate how integrally "colonised" their minds are: bound by the binaries and subjectivities that define their past which create contradictions and pain in their present. Equally, the works present non-hegemonic experiences and voices to show that self-decolonisation is an act that the reader must carry out in reflection on their own interaction with these postcolonial texts. The authors subvert time and normative constructions of identity, by empowering non-hegemonic voices. In doing so, they highlight the interconnection between the past and the present, and interrogate the ever-changing nature of discourse, which adapts in relation to the past. The authors, each in different ways, illustrate the fundamental flaw in hegemonic colonial knowledge-creation is the need to ignore the past, relegating it to history, without considering its ongoing and deep impact. They therefore show the need to reincorporate the colonial into the understanding of the post-colonial.

Bibliography

Alva, J. Jorge Klor de. 1995. “The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of “Colonialism,” “Postcolonialism,” and “Mestizaje”.” In *After Coloniailsm: imperial histories and postcolonial displacements*, by Gyan Prakash, 241-278. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Alvergue, José Felipe. 2015. “Precarious/Sense: Memory and the Poetics of Spatial Performance.” In *Biopolitics and Memory in Postcolonial Literature and Culture*, by Michael R. Griffiths, 193-206. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

Bala, Poonam, and Amy Kaler. 2009. *Biomedicine As a Contested Site: Some Revelations in Imperial Contexts.* Lanham: Lexington Books.

Barclay, Fiona. 2013. *France's Colonial Legacies: Memory, Identity and Narrative.* Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Bhabha, Homi, and John Comaroff. 2002. “Speaking of Postcoloniality, in the Continuous Present: A Conversation.” In *Relocating Postcolonialism*, 15-46. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Bhambra, Gurminder K. 2016. “Postcolonial Reflections on Sociology.” *Reflexive Essay* 960-966.

Blake, Andrew. 2007. “From Nostalgia to Postalgia: Hybridity and Its Discontents in the Work of Paul Gilroy and the Wachowski Brothers.” In *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition*, 121-136. Amsterdam: Brill.

Boudraa, Nabil. 2009. *North African Mosaic: A Cultural Reappraisal of Ethnic and Religious Minorities.* Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

2003. *Brigitte Smadja à la place de l'enfant.* 18 September. Accessed May 15, 2019. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/2003/09/18/brigitte-smadja-a-la-place-de-l-enfant_334432_1819218.html#PqrtAj72xAjycuKI.99.

Brozgal, Lia Nicole. 2013. *Against Autobiography: Albert Memmi and the Production of Theory.* University of Nebraska Press.

Burrows, Mathew. 1986. “"Mission Civilisatrice": French Cultural Policy in the Middle East, 1860-1914.” *The Historical Journal* 109-135.

Chibber, Vivek. 2019. “The dual legacy of Orientalism.” In *After Said*, 37-52. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Constantini, Dino. 2008. *Mission civilisatrice de la France.* La Découverte.

Corbett, Mary. 1995. “De/colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography: Review.” *Signs* 476-481.

Elle. n.d. *Personnalités: Gisèle Halimi.* Accessed May 15, 2019. http://www.elle.fr/Personnalites/Gisele-Halimi.

Fanon, Franz. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth.* New York: Grove Press.

Forsdick, Charles, and David Murphy. 2003. *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction.* Routledge.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *History of Sexuality.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Gandhi, Leela. 2003. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction.* Allen Unwin.

Ganguly, Keya. 2018. “Exile as Political Aesthetic.” In *After Said*, 69-86. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goldberg, David T., and Ato Quayson. 2002. *Relocating Postcolonialism.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Halimi, Gisèle. 1999. *Fritna.* PLON.

Ibrahim, Huma. 1996. *Bessie Head: Subversive Identities in Exile.* Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia.

Kerner, Ina. 2017. “Relations of difference: Power and inequality in intersectional and postcolonial feminist theories.” *Current Sociology Review* 846-866.

Kothari, Rita. 1998. “Postcolonialism and the Language of Power.” *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 35-38.

Laskier, Michael. 1994. *North African Jewry in the twentieth century : the Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria.* New York: New York University Press.

Leff, Lisa Moses. 2016. “Jews, Liberals and the Civilising Mission.” In *The Jews of Modern France: Images and Identities*, by Zvi Jonathan Kaplan and Nadia Malinovich, 127-153. Brill.

Lichtenstein, Nina. 2012. *Silent Exodus and Forgotten Voices: Sephardic Women Writers in PostColonial Discourse.* Winter. Accessed February 02, 2019. https://www.sephardichorizons.org/Volume2/Issue1/Lichtenstein.html.

Lorde, Audre. 2003. “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House.” In *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, 25-28. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Makdisi, Saree. 2019. “Orientalism Today.” In *After Said: postcolonial literary studies in the twenty-first century*, by Bashire Abu-Manneh, 179-189. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McClintock, Anne. 1992. “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism".” *Social Text* 84-98.

Mills, Sara. 2003. “Gender and Colonial Space.” In *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, 692-719. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 2003. *Feminism without borders : decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Moore-Gilbert, Bart. 2009. *Post-Colonial Life Writing: Culture, Politics and Self-Representation.* Routledge.

Ngugi, Mukoma Wa. 2018. *"The Work of Linguistic Decolonization Cannot Be Done By Writers Alone".* 23 March. Accessed April 14, 2019. https://lithub.com/mukoma-wa-ngugi-what-decolonizing-the-mind-means-today/.

Noiville, Florence. 1998. *Amitié trop exclusive.* 20 February. Accessed 04 19, 2019. https://www.lemonde.fr/archives/article/1998/02/20/amitie-trop-exclusive_3659302_1819218.html#BesGLTJWhR10LibZ.99.

Prakash, Gyan. 1995. “Introduction: After Colonialism.” In *After colonialism: imperial histories and postcolonial displacements*, 1-17. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ramsay, Raylene L. 2003. *French Women in Politics. Writing Power, Paternal Legitimization and Material Legacies.* New York: Berghahn Books.

Roselle, Mireille. 2003. “New Gendered Mosaics.” In *Beyond French Feminisms*, by R. Célestin and E., Courtivron, I. DalMolin, 97-112. Palgrave Macmillan.

Roumani, Judith. 2015. *The End of Colonialism in Novels by Albert Memmi and Kateb Yacine.* Fall. Accessed April 4, 2019. https://www.sephardichorizons.org/Volume5/Issue3-4/Roumani.html.

2007. “Tunis, Tunisia.” In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, by Haim Saadoun. Detroit: Thomson Gale.

Said, Edward. 2003. *Orientalism.* London: Penguin.

—. 1994. *Representations of the Intellectual.* New York: Pantheon.

Samuels, Maurice. 2013. “Philosemitism and the Mission Civilisatrie in Gautier's La Juive de Constantine.” *French Forum* 19-31.

Schramm, Katherine. 2008. “Leaving Area Studies Behind: the challenge of diasporic connections in the field of African Studies.” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 1-12.

Sebag, Paul. 1991. *Histoire Des Juifs De Tunisie : Des Origines À Nos Jours.* Paris: L'Harmattan.

Selden, Raman, Peter Widdowson, and Peter Brooker. 2005. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory.* Edinburgh: Pearson.

Sharp, Joanne P. 2009. *Geographies of PostColonialism: Spaces of Power and Representation.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Smadja, Brigitte. 1998. *Le jaune est sa couleur.* Actes Sud.

Spivak, Gayatri, and Sarah Harasym. 1990. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues.* New York: Routledge.

Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa. 1986. *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature.* Heinemann Educational.

Thiong’o, Ngũgĩ wa. 1986. *Decolonising the mind: the politics of language in African literature.* London: J. Currey.

Walder, Dennis. 2009. “Writing, representation, and postcolonial nostalgia.” *Textual Practice* 935-946.

Watson, Robert. 2013. “Secondhand Memories: Franco-Tunisian Jewish Women and the Predicament of Writing Return.” *Life Writing* 25-46.

Weber, Max. 2010. “The distribution of power within the community: Classes, Stände, Parties.” *Journal of Classic Sociology* 137-152.

Young, Iris Marion. 2008. “Structural Injustice and the Politics of Difference.” In *Social justice and public policy: Seeking fairness in diverse societies*, 280-295. Bristol: Policy Press.