

Accumulated Testimony: Layering French Girls'
Diaries on the Algerian Exodus

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When the seven-year-long war for Algerian independence officially ended on March 18, 1962, a dramatic exodus of Algeria's French citizens began. The majority of this community, commonly referred to as the Pieds-Noirs, scrambled to find a way to France—a country most of them had never before visited. From January to August 1962, approximately 580,000 people fled Algeria definitively (Jordi 136) with the mass majority leaving between June and July and the total number of exiles reaching almost one million during and after the Algerian War. Many had endured traumatic attacks that spurred their hurried departure and, according to historian Jean-Jacques Jordi, the French government was poorly organized for an exodus of such scale. Believing the influx of Pieds-Noirs to France would only be temporary, the government failed to provide sufficient transportation out of Algeria or adequate lodging in France (21). Jordi explains:

Cet accueil reste toutefois sans aucun suivi. Rien n'est prêt pour ceux qui ont absolument besoin d'un hébergement provisoire. Ceux qui ont un point de chute en France s'y rendent comme ils peuvent, les autres restent à Marseille dans ce qu'ils ressentent comme une indifférence totale. (28)

This welcome remained without a follow-up. Nothing was ready for those who were in desperate need of temporary lodging. Those who had a place to land in France made their way there however they could; the rest remained in Marseille where they felt they were received with complete indifference.¹

More than the unpredictable, hurried departure, and the cramped conditions of their journey and arrival, which for most is now only a blurred memory, it was this indifference and sometimes overt discrimination that contributed most to the Pieds-Noirs' suffering. According to testimonial about the exodus given in the 2007 documentary film *Les Pieds-Noirs: Histoires d'une blessure* ('The Pieds-Noirs: Stories of a Wound'), as soon as they arrived at the French port, hateful attacks on the community began. Some dockworkers in France reportedly dipped the containers arriving with the Pieds-Noirs into the Mediterranean, ruining the few possessions they were able to bring as they fled their homes.²

The exodus was a devastating time, and those alive to recount the story today were children or young adults when they left Algeria. In the meager

Pied-Noir testimonials of the departure, individuals frequently recount departing without their parents and staying with friends and distant relatives in France until their families arrived. Exiles saw burned cars on the docks and at the airports as some practiced a scorched-earth policy as they left. Many waited for days for a ticket out of Algeria. Adding to the chaos of the time, on July 3, 1962 when Algerian Independence was officially declared, large-scale massacres of Europeans in the region of Oran began. While intensely traumatic, this period in French history was almost entirely silenced from its occurrence until the mid-1990s. France was relatively unsympathetic to the newly arrived exiles who represented a shameful colonial past, and few wanted to hear about the experience. Even today, testimonial generally only emerges in fragments, and the confusion of the events surrounding the exodus is inevitably filtered through memory now more than fifty years later. Adults struggle to piece together what was incomprehensible during their youth, and the most violent and previously suppressed accounts are just starting to emerge.³ In the interstice between the frantic departure and the time of recounting, all sorts of debris has gathered. By sifting through and scraping together fragments of both a communal and personal trauma, a few authors have managed to recount their exodus.

In 1997, French-Algerian author Leïla Sebbar published an illustrated children's book, *J'étais enfant en Algérie, juin 1962* ('I was a child in Algeria, June 1962') which gives the fictional account of a young girl from the interior of Algeria leaving her home during the great exodus just prior to independence. Using the genre of diary writing, Sebbar writes a testimonial of the long wait on the docks for a boat, the surrounding chaos, and the family's intense emotion while fleeing their country for a homeland they do not yet know. Although this text is intimate, the prolific author never autobiographically recounts her own exodus. Instead, throughout her oeuvre, she relies on collective experience that when joined to her own creates a community in writing. She effectively fills in her lost homeland with accumulated scraps from diverse representatives from France and Algeria rather than dwelling on rupture.

In early 2013, Algerian-born French artist Nicole Guiraud published *Algérie 1962: Journal de l'Apocalypse* ('Algeria 1962: Diary of the Apocalypse') comprised of her personal diaries kept before and during her exodus from Algeria in 1962. Her harrowing and traumatic personal account is raw and authentic, yet Guiraud's writing is couched in a rich paratext that includes her artwork, personal and journalistic photographs, prefaces and epilogues, dense footnotes, as well as a chapter-by-chapter German translation. Through this process of layering her words with history, art, and the translation, Guiraud simultaneously intensifies her account and distracts the reader from the extreme pain behind her words.

This article attempts to demonstrate how fictional and real accounts of a dramatic exodus published in very different historical contexts approach the trauma experienced by almost one million individuals, and how each author

deploys a layering technique to simultaneously draw in and distance the reader from extraordinarily intense personal experience. While Sebbar compiles communal memory of separation and relies on fiction to mask the wound, Guiraud displays a personal wound layered with historic and communal accounts, thereby emphasizing the scars she bears.

Leïla Sebbar's Accumulated Pasts

Leïla Sebbar was born in 1941 in Aflou, Algeria to an Algerian father and a French-born mother who were both schoolteachers. Although Sebbar's parents stayed until 1968, Sebbar like so many others left at the height of the Algerian war in 1961 so that she could continue her studies in France. When asked in an interview with UNSA Education what themes weave through her work to repair her wounds, Sebbar responded:

Lorsque je viens en France à Aix en Provence pour poursuivre des études supérieures de lettres (à Alger l'OAS sévit) c'est une décision de mes parents à laquelle je souscris. En France, il n'y a pas la guerre. La France c'est la liberté. Durant une décennie environ j'oublie l'Algérie. C'est l'amnésie volontaire. L'Algérie fera retour avec mai 68 et le mouvement des femmes, deux révolutions culturelles qui bouleversent toutes les protections. (n.p.)

When I arrived in France in Aix en Provence to continue my higher education in literature (in Algiers the OAS was clamping down), it was my parents' decision that I went along with. In France, there was no war. France was freedom. For about a decade, I forgot Algeria. It was willful amnesia. Algeria would come back in May 1968 and the Women's Movement, two cultural revolutions that would overwhelm all defenses.

Because of her mixed heritage, Sebbar has consistently avoided simple labels and prefers to call herself “une croisée” (*Lettres parisiennes* 147), at the crossing of multiple identities—not quite not French and not quite not Algerian (Hayes 216), but not Pied-Noir, not Maghrebien, and not *beur* (Laronde 166).⁴ While she does not belong specifically to any of these identity groups, she has worked to create a community in writing through both her fictional and autobiographical pieces that combine accounts of various so-called immigrants who were born outside of France. She is specifically interested in how she and they experienced childhood in other countries as recounted in *Une enfance d'ailleurs* (‘A childhood somewhere else’), *Une enfance algérienne* (*An Algerian Childhood*), *J'étais enfant en Algérie* (‘I was a child in Algeria’), and *Une enfance outremer* (‘An overseas childhood’); how they experienced France in Algeria (expressed in *C'était leur France* [‘That was their France’]); and how they experience Algeria in France (*Mes*

Algéries en France, *Journal de mes Algéries en France*, and *Voyage en Algéries autour de ma chambre. Abécédaire* ['My Algerias in France,' 'Diary of My Algerias in France,' and 'Voyage to Algerias around my room. An alphabet book']).

Sebbar's collections provide a flexible approach to a past that has often been recounted by others in unified terms. For the author herself, however, exile is the only binding part of her identity.⁵ As she explains on her official website, "L'exil, comme territoire de l'écriture, devient une terre singulière où s'écrit une littérature étrangère, où s'invente un monde qui mêle l'intime et le politique, où s'exerce un regard qui rend visible l'invisible d'un réel déplacé, complexe, souvent violent" ("Biographie de Leïla Sebbar") 'Exile, as a written territory, becomes a singular land where foreign literature is written, where a world is invented that mixes the intimate and the political, where a form of looking is practiced that renders visible the invisibility of a displaced, complex, and often violent reality.' She has recently claimed that "L'exil me structure, m'inspire toujours..." (UNSA Education) 'Exile gives me structure and still inspires me...' To maintain this source of inspiration, Sebbar must insist on being "étrangère" 'foreign,' stating in *Mes Algéries en France*, "C'est moi l'étrangère, séparée de la langue et des corps" (70) 'I'm the foreigner, separated from language and bodies.' Rather than choosing one homeland, the writer wants to float "entre deux rives" (*Lettres parisiennes* 147) 'between two shores' to articulate her identity. As Patrice Proulx points out, in Sebbar's 1986 published correspondence with author Nancy Huston *Lettres parisiennes* ('Parisian Letters'), both authors "make repeated reference to the idea that exile has come to signify a salutary space in which they seek refuge, and from which they are motivated to write" (85).

Sebbar, who is known as much for her fiction as her autobiography, states that fiction is a means of masking pain or suturing a wound: "... me placer au cœur, au centre, dans la fiction fictionnelle, c'est me placer dans un lieu unitaire, rassembleur des divisions, des discordes meurtrières [...] pour moi, la fiction c'est la suture qui masque la blessure, l'écart entre les deux rives" (*Lettres parisiennes* 147, my emphasis) '... placing myself at the center, in the heart of fictional fiction, is placing myself in a unifying place that reassembles divisions, deadly dissent [...] for me, fiction is the suture that masks the wound, the gap between the two shores.' Sebbar is fully aware that fiction, while potentially healing, is only superficially unifying. Nonetheless, fiction feels like her only homeland:

C'est dans la fiction que je me sens sujet libre [...] et forte de la charge de l'exil. C'est là et là seulement que je me rassemble corps et âme et que je fais le pont entre les deux rives, en amont et en aval... Ailleurs [...] je suis presque toujours mal, en risque permanent d'hystérie ou de mélancolie... (147-48)

It's in fiction that I feel like a free subject [...] and driven by the

weight of exile. It's there and only there that I assemble body and soul and that I make a bridge between the two shores, upstream and downstream... Elsewhere [...] I am almost always ill at ease and at constant risk of hysteria or melancholy...

Sebbar's identity as "crossed" causes her to seek ties to a broad community, yet the author persistently claims to seek out the disjunctions and divisions in her identity as her source for writing.

As a woman who has suffered multiple forms of exile both within colonial Algeria and after Algerian independence in France, Sebbar constantly writes stories of separation. Because she approaches exile in an attempt to rejoin France and Algeria, the author avoids autobiographically recounting her physical separation from her homeland. *J'étais enfant en Algérie – juin 1962*, however, is an unusual text that combines a fictional account of a young girl's exodus from Algeria with historical fact in an illustrated children's book. Sebbar tells a story that could very well be her own, yet the details are sufficiently removed to clearly categorize the text as fiction. The fifty-five-page text, part of a series on childhood during difficult historic situations (i.e. the Paris Commune, World War I, and Occupied France during World War II), is laden with pastel illustrations and it includes both a map and a short chronology of Algerian colonial history. The story is presented as the diary of a Pied-Noir girl, around ten years old, with her father, mother, grandmother, and little brother, waiting on the docks of Algiers for a boat that will take them to France as Algerian independence is about to be officially recognized. Resonating with previously published pictorial books on the Pied-Noir community, the images are mostly melancholic and nostalgic, with for example an image of the family smiling as they wait on the docks, seated on the ground with their few belongings, or of children smiling in a field on their farm (34-35).⁶ Belying the comforting illustration, the text describes confusion, silence, sadness, and uncertainty. The child writes, weaving back and forth between the wait on the dock and the time on the farm before the departure. She pretends to sleep, so as not to hear her parents' concern, as she already remembers the beauty of her country. The girl carefully recounts memories of Algerian neighbors and of the events leading up to the departure. Although relatively subdued, the story gets at the emotion and tension of others during the exodus:

9 heures 50 du matin

J'entends des cris, des pleurs, des appels. Les familles s'agitent, les hommes vont et viennent, les femmes sont debout. Le bateau arrive, certainement. Tout le monde regarde vers la mer. Qui a dit que le bateau va accoster? On ne voit rien. Je suis trop petite, mais les grands disent qu'ils ne voient pas de bateau pour nous. J'avais fermé mon carnet. J'attends avant de l'ouvrir. Rien de nouveau. J'écris. (16-17)

9:50 a.m.

I hear screaming, crying, yelling. Families are bustling about, men are pacing back and forth, women are standing up. The boat is arriving, most certainly. Everyone is looking towards the sea. Who said the boat was coming to the dock? I can't see anything. I'm too little, but the grownups are saying that they don't see a boat for us. I had closed my notebook. I'm waiting before opening it back up again. Nothing new. I write.

The observing child continues to document her family's stress and sadness as they prepare to leave while she withdraws into her writing.

Historic Reality and Communal Memory

Written in 1997, *J'étais enfant en Algérie* is a rare look at the exodus of the Pieds-Noirs and one of a very small number of fictional accounts to date. This absence of documentation is largely due to the French government's official silence that shrouded the Algerian War until 1999⁷ and also due to the trauma the witnesses and participants suffered at the end of colonial rule. Because of France's wilful amnesia on the war, the vast majority of narratives about Algeria published from 1962 to 2000 were nostalgic representations of a lost paradise written by the Pieds-Noirs.

In Sebbar's short version of the exodus, she relies on communal memory to portray the difficult moment. In a complex layering process, she interweaves iconic images into her text. For example, the most famous recurring image of the Pied-Noir exodus is a photograph known as "L'Exode" 'The Exodus,' published in *Paris Match* in 1962, of two young girls and a grandfather with his face hidden by a white handkerchief, all three sitting very glumly on a curb waiting with their luggage while a French soldier with a machine gun crouches behind them with his back supported by a wall. The black and white image is ubiquitous in Pied-Noir text and film. It appears in the documentary film *Les Pieds-Noirs: Histoires d'une blessure*, on the front and back cover of the collected memoirs in *Je me souviens... L'Exode des Pieds-Noirs (1962-2012)* ('I remember... The exodus of the Pieds-Noirs') which tells very little about the actual exodus, it is available on Pied-Noir Internet sites, and in recent critical work *Contesting Views: The Visual Economy of France and Algeria*, authors Joseph McGonagle and Edward Welch discuss this image as part of an "iconography of exodus" (45-46). Sebbar uses ekphrasis to evoke "L'Exode," describing the image as though the young girl were sitting across from that family as she wrote:

Un vieil homme pleure, le visage caché par un grand mouchoir blanc, une petite fille à côté de lui va pleurer. Les soldats s'ennuient appuyés à un haut mur, ils regardent ces familles abandonnées, ces familles,

c'est nous. Je ne sais pas où nous allons. On ne m'a rien dit. *Je n'ai pas demandé.* (17, my emphasis)

An old man is crying, his face hidden by a large white handkerchief, a young girl next to him is about to cry. The soldiers are bored, leaning on a high wall—they are watching the abandoned families. It's us these families. I don't know where we are going. No one has told me anything. *I did not ask.*

Here traumatic memory is reduced to an iconic image that is repeated across texts becoming emblematic of the hardened memory of the Pieds-Noirs exiles.

The young heroine's diary ends with the boat's arrival at 7 a.m. the following day with another iconic image copied by the illustrator from a photo immortalized for the Pieds-Noirs in Marie Cardinal's photo-documentary book *Les Pieds-Noirs* in 1988, "C'est le bateau" 'It's the boat' (Sebbar *J'étais enfant* 50). In both texts, the image constitutes the end of the story recounted on behalf of the community of Pieds-Noirs, thereby creating a solitary backdrop to the story: Algeria. The pain of separation that would confront them in France is neatly avoided with the image of the boat.

J'étais enfant en Algérie, published two years prior to the end of official silence on the war, is surprising for its time. This is one of the few works in which Sebbar chooses a Pied-Noir heroine, but she also creates a rather neutral account by demonstrating concerns of a broad Algerian community affected by French rule. By using photos and stories others have related to her, Sebbar relies on what she later calls a "borrowed memory": "Je me fabrique secrètement une mémoire d'emprunt, artificielle, avec les Algériennes sur cartes postales que je n'ai pas montrées à mon père..." (*Mes Algéries* 48) 'I am secretly fabricating a borrowed, artificial memory with Algerian women on postcards that I never showed to my father...' Understanding that this gathering constitutes a fiction, Sebbar enmeshes borrowed memory in her already layered narrative to cover deep emotions of dread and fear.⁸ The accumulated pieces of the community's past fill the gap between France and Algeria in Sebbar's work.

Guiraud's Layering of Personal and Communal Trauma

While Sebbar's fictional account relies on common representations of departure that are recognizable by a broader community of participants and witnesses of the Algerian exodus, artist Nicole Guiraud published *Algérie 1962* based on her personal experience of the war and the exodus while it was happening. Her book, a bilingual version of her diaries kept from April 2 to July 1, 1962, was published in early 2013 when full disclosure on the terror of the Algerian War had become possible, and Guiraud is one of the most vocal in her community about the traumas endured. Guiraud was a victim of the *Front de Libération Nationale's* terrorist bombing of the Milk Bar in Algiers

in 1956, which is famously depicted in Gillo Pontecorvo's *La Bataille d'Alger* ('The Battle of Algiers'). Guiraud was ten years old, and she survived the devastating explosion with an amputated limb. Born in 1946 in Vergers, Algeria, growing up in Algiers and spending her adult life between France and Germany, the artist has worked through her multiple layers of trauma over the past fifty-seven years, primarily through her art exhibitions that represent her wounds as well as those of her community.⁹

In *Algérie 1962*, Guiraud gives an exceptionally violent and verifiably real account of her experiences as a young teenager fleeing Algeria. She directly addresses the political specificity of her context all while demonstrating the daily concerns of a teenager in the war. Having been violently traumatized six years prior to her departure, her position is all the more spectacular: Guiraud's amputation has become a highly visible representation of the Pied-Noir separation from Algeria and she has continually put herself on display through her art, political activism, and now her writing. Still, as visceral as her work is, she employs a layering technique in both her art and writing to create a protective façade even as she transmits her suffering. She effectively cements the trauma in place, pinning it down through her complex accumulation of visual and paratextual elements.

While Guiraud's diary is raw and the horrific nature of her experience is clearly articulated, she distances herself from the pain it details through a dense paratext. This paratext includes a preface by her friend, the esteemed Algerian author Boualem Sansal, an introductory passage written by her editor Wolf Albes, and then her own prologue, each accompanied by a German translation. Her eighteen-page diary is also followed by a translation. To conclude, Guiraud writes a detailed historical account of the routinely hushed Rue d'Isly Massacre on March 26, 1962 (when confused French military fired on peaceful French demonstrators in Algiers killing eighty and wounding two hundred [Guiraud *Algérie* 70]). She then includes a short historical description of her childhood paradise in her hometown Vergers and adds an epilogue by her friend and professor Gérard Lehmann. Finally, there are several pages of photographic evidence and reproduced artwork to clearly illustrate her story and to validate the authenticity of her experience. For example, she provides photographs of journal pages for readers to see the same words printed in the book and in Guiraud's own handwriting. The visual examples create a sense of intimacy with the author, but the layering of words and images upon words creates a dense text surrounding the bare and vivid testimonial of her diary. In addition to the aforementioned paratextual elements, Guiraud documents her journaling with footnotes that give historical explanations and cultural context to her writing. As she delves into the terrifying past, she anchors her story so that she might climb back out again, in a way protecting herself from pain.

In spite of the rich layers that protect the artist and her readers from her words, there is an obvious and veracity in her account: Guiraud recounts the daily worries of a teen who is bored because her school is closed and it is no

longer safe to go to her favourite beach, but this is combined with horrific detail of carefully stepping over corpses in the street:

27 avril 1962

Je descends en ville avec Mado. Dans la rue Michelet, il y a des cadavres sur les trottoirs, c'est affreux. On les enjambe pour éviter les flaques de sang. Quelqu'un a jeté une couverture ou un journal sur le visage. Mado dit qu'il ne faut pas regarder leurs yeux. On fait comme tout le monde, on regarde ailleurs. (32)

April 27, 1962

I go into the city with Mado. On the Rue Michelet, there are cadavers on the sidewalks. It's horrid. We step over them to avoid the puddles of blood. Someone has thrown a cover or a newspaper on their faces. Mado says we shouldn't look at their eyes. We do just like everyone else: we look away.

Guiraud's brief pages become increasingly intense. On May 8, 1962 she writes:

Je descends au Golfe avec Gi. Nous voyons un attentat : deux Arabes tués par balles, des marchands de légumes. J'ai tout vu. Deux garçons en scooter ont tiré sur eux à la mitraillette avant de disparaître. Le vieil Arabe est tombé sur les genoux comme pour la prière puis s'est affaissé face contre terre dans une mare de sang. C'est impressionnant et affreux. Mais ça ne fait aucun effet sur nous, on est trop blasées pour ça, on en voit tous les jours. (35)

I am going down to the Gulf with Gi. We witness an attack: two Arabs killed by bullets, vegetable merchants. I saw everything. Two boys on a scooter fired at them with a machine gun before disappearing. The old Arab fell to his knees as if he were praying and then he slumped facedown in a pool of blood. It's impressive and horrid. But it has no effect on us. We are too jaded for that, we see it every day.

While the account is shocking, the young woman writes her testimonial with surprising distance from the event. As Guiraud explained to me in a personal interview in 2012, this was her daily reality for so long that she could not stop to consider the enormity of the violence she witnessed until after she was in France. After the exodus, the suffering began.

In the diary, the documented events begin to affect Guiraud directly: she is personally aggressed but does not tell her parents, her mother exploits Guiraud's absent arm in public to make a political statement, and finally her father is arrested on May 11, 1962. The family decides the following day to leave Algeria before discovering that her father was deported to France and

had been on the FLN's blacklist as a suspect (40). On May 14, Guiraud writes, "Les voisins nous racontent qu'en ville on a retrouvé dans un appartement deux bébés égorgés par le FLN, que des dizaines d'Européens sont enlevés. On entend des fusillades, des explosions de stroungas [note: Bombe artisanale, charge de plastic], et les hélicoptères sur la ville" (37) 'Our neighbors tell us that in town they found two babies in an apartment with their throats slit by the FLN. We hear shootings, homemade bombs exploding, and helicopters above the city.' The girl's journal entries become increasingly shorter and more accentuated with shootings and explosions that eventually enter her neighborhood:

22 mai

J'entends nos voisins raconter à maman des choses horribles sur des attentats, des gens enlevés, des corps affreusement mutilés retrouvés dans des charniers... En ville, on entend sans cesse des tirs de bazooka et de mitraillettes, et aussi des stroungas. Les gens paniquent et partent en masse. Ce soir, j'ai du mal à m'endormir. Les gens font un concert de casseroles sur leur balcon. (39)

May 22

I hear our neighbors tell mom horrible things about the attacks, people taken away, bodies horrifically mutilated found in mass graves... In the city we constantly hear bazookas and machine guns firing, as well as homemade bombs. People are panicking and leaving *en masse*. Tonight, I can't sleep. People are beating on their pans in concert on their balcony.

25 mai

Cet après-midi une balle perdue a traversé les persiennes dans la chambre des parents et elle est allée se ficher dans la penderie. Ça a fait un trou énorme dans le mur. Heureusement que personne n'était là ! (39)

May 25

This afternoon a stray bullet came through the blinds into our parents' room and it went and landed in the wardrobe. It made an enormous hole in the wall. Fortunately no one was there!

On June 1, a bomb explodes in the grocery on the ground floor of her building. Guiraud is shaken: "Les vitres sont cassées, le bruit est énorme. Je panique, je me mets à hurler et j'essaie de me cacher sous le lit. Je crois que je deviens folle, moi aussi" (41) 'The windows are broken, there is a huge noise. I am panicking, I start to scream and I try to hide under the bed. I think I'm going crazy, too.' By June 10, the girl's mother is seeking to send Guiraud and her sister to France as soon as possible. The city is in disarray with trash piling up

and the family is exhausted from the pressure. Still the teen meets up with friends and complains of constant boredom. On June 14, Guiraud is attacked again while getting groceries:

Je me suis fait agresser par une petite Arabe du quartier. [...] Au moment de se croiser, elle vient vers moi avec des yeux de haine, elle fait un geste de cisaille sur son bras gauche et me jette : Toi, on t'a fait ça. Elle refait le geste sur sa gorge en disant : Si tu restes on te fait ça. C'était rapide mais j'ai compris le message. Au retour, maman demande ce que j'ai, je lui raconte. Elle répond : Allez, on fait les valises. (43)

I was assaulted by a small Arab girl from the neighborhood. [...] At the moment we passed each other, she came toward me with eyes full of hatred. She made a gesture like she was cutting her left arm with scissors and she snapped at me: You, we did that to you. She made the same gesture on her throat and said, "If you stay here, we'll do that to you." It happened quickly but I understood the message. When I got back mom asked me what was wrong with me and I told her. She answered, "Go on. Let's pack the suitcases."

The city descends into chaos and everyone who can leave does. The family has no news from their father. Guiraud descends into nostalgia for her hometown and for the beach with her departure imminent. Finally at 4 a.m. on June 19, they leave towards the airport. Guiraud recounts:

19 juin 1962

Sur la Route Moutonnière qui va à l'aéroport, je vois des carcasses de voitures abandonnées, d'autres brûlent encore, il y a des ordures partout. Beaucoup de monde à Maison Blanche, couchés sur le sol et les valises. Je monte seule avec ma sœur dans un avion bondé. Tout va très vite... Autour de nous, les gens pleurent.

ADIEU ALGER, Adieu belle ALGERIE !!

Pour toujours certainement ! Je crois que cette fois, ça y est... c'est vraiment fini.

Le jour se lève. A travers le hublot, je regarde la côte d'Afrique s'éloigner. Je n'aperçois pas encore la France. Je vole... au-dessus du bleu de la Méditerranée.

Je viens tout juste d'avoir 16 ans. (45)

June 19, 1962

On the road that goes to the airport, I see abandoned car carcasses, some still burning. There is trash everywhere. A lot of people at the Maison Blanche airport, sleeping on the ground and on suitcases. I

board the packed airplane alone with my sister. Everything goes very quickly... Around us people are crying.

GOODBYE ALGIERS, Goodbye beautiful ALGERIA!!

Forever, certainly! I believe that this time, this is it... it is really over.

The day breaks. Through the window, I watch the African coast move further away. I can't see France yet. I'm flying ... above the blue of the Mediterranean.

I have only just turned 16.

Guiraud's final entry is written on July 1, 1962, the day Algerian Independence was voted by referendum. She adds it as an "Annex" to her diary: her father has returned to Algiers to complete the move. Guiraud says that Algeria is no longer French, it is independent, it's all over now, and she concludes: "L'indifférence des patos est écœurant. C'est à VOMIR, à VOMIR !" (45) 'The French are so indifferent it is disgusting. It makes me want to VOMIT, to VOMIT!'¹⁰ Her singular commentary on the French and being in France demonstrates her visceral resistance.

While the teen's writing is unrestrained, the traumatic account is quickly swallowed up again by the fifty-five pages of paratext that follow. Guiraud continues to lay history, epilogue, and images onto her testimonial and she thus replicates her artistic technique of collecting real shreds of her Algerian life and carefully layering and enmeshing them into her deep trauma. This process is especially evident in her work *La Valise à la mer* ('The suitcase in the sea') in which Guiraud has collected and categorized fragments of Algeria in the very suitcase she took during the exodus and she has scattered debris around the floor of the exhibit as though the bomb planted at the Milk Bar has exploded her memories. Yet the debris is mostly hermetically sealed and still inside the suitcase, piled in and carefully arranged. Like her diary, it is visible but encased, untouchable and preserved. On the top of that collected rubble in the suitcase, Guiraud has positioned the famous photograph "L'Exode" 'The Exodus' from *Paris Match*, representing how her own traumatic memory is enmeshed in that of the community. The same is true of Guiraud's painting of the Milk Bar explosion and of other traumatic events she witnessed or endured. She works from the photograph and adds layers that express her suffering through words, paint, and unconventional objects. The violence is piled upon itself in a scarification process. The permanent marks in artistic patterns simultaneously intensify and cover over the lacerations.

Guiraud's wound, like Sebbar's, is filled in and sutured through the layering process. Yet where Sebbar taps in to a communal memory, allowing it to accumulate in her texts and layering it over her own intensely painful separations both in and outside of Algeria, creating a mask for her wound, Guiraud's pain is ever visible in the form of her prosthetic arm. The artist embodies her community's separation from Algeria and she draws attention to the deep gashes and their enduring consequences even fifty-plus years later. In both of the diaries studied here, the painful experience of leaving Algeria and

confronting exile is displayed, but the spectator and reader must sift through the accumulated images to uncover the dreadful reality of what these French girls experienced during the Exodus.

Notes

1. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. For a detailed look at the foundation of Pied-Noir identity, see my article in French, “L’Algérie récurrente et l’Algérie errante dans l’écriture des Françaises d’Algérie” (‘Recurring and Wandering Algeria in the Writing of French-Algerian Women’) in the volume on migrant writing *Frictions et devenirs dans les écritures migrantes au féminin. Enracinements et renégociations*, edited by Névine El-Nossery and Anna Rocca.

2. For an in-depth study of this film and the importance of the slogan “la valise ou le cercueil” ‘the suitcase or the coffin,’ see my article in *Revue Diasporas*, “‘La valise ou le cercueil’: un aller retour dans la mémoire des pieds-noirs” (‘The suitcase or the coffin: a round trip in the Pieds-Noirs’ memory’).

3. See Jean-Baptiste Ferracci’s 2012 collected testimonials in *L’Adieu. 1962: le tragique exode des Français d’Algérie* (‘Adieu: 1962 and the tragic exodus of the Français d’Algérie’) Ferracci is not a Pied-Noir but a journalist who was conscripted in the Algerian war. His book joins together the testimonies of another drafted soldier who was kidnapped and tortured by the Front de Libération Nationale (pro-Algerian independence), Pieds-Noirs whose family members disappeared without a trace, and the wife of a *harki* (Algerian soldier who fought for the French) who was killed and cut up into pieces. Although exodus is in the title of his work, Ferracci instead assembles visual and written testimonials about those who were tortured or killed in Algeria. The level of violence depicted falls in line with Guiraud’s testimony and other traumatic accounts that have come to light since approximately 2005. Well-known Pied-Noir author Geneviève de Ternant writes in the preface to *L’Adieu*, “après les deux décennies de presque silence, de reconstruction douloureuse, bien des livres ont été écrits sur ce sujet mais bien peu ont passé la barrière idéologique de l’ostracisme des médias” (5) ‘after two decades of near silence, of painful reconstruction, many books have been written on this subject but very few have surmounted the ideological barrier of ostracism from the media.’ Other recent accounts of the exodus are the collected autobiography *Quatre sœurs* (‘Four Sisters’) by Frédérique Boblin, Eve Calo, Nelly Collet, and Fabienne Rozotte, which explores the sisters’ exodus and neuroses after exile, and Danielle Dahl’s memoir in English *Sirocco*, which ends at the moment of departure.

4. The Maghreb is comprised of the countries from the western part of North Africa and “beur” is a person born in France to parents who emigrated from an Arab country, most frequently from Algeria.

5. As early as 1979, Sebbar wrote stories of a Pied-Noir woman and her departure from Algeria. See “Chronique Rapatriée I, II, III” (‘Chronicle of a Repatriate Woman’) in the feminist newspaper *Histoires d’elles*. Part III was photographically reproduced in *Mes Algéries en France* (131).

6. This specific illustration is evocative of photographs included in Marie Cardinal’s 1988 photo-documentary book entitled *Les Pieds-Noirs*.

7. The National Assembly voted in June 1999 to officially use the expression “La Guerre d’Algérie” (‘The Algerian War’) to replace “opérations effectuées en Afrique du Nord” ‘interventions undertaken in North Africa,’ and in a discussion on October 5, 1999, Marcel Lesbros confirmed, “La guerre d’Algérie a en effet été vécue comme une ‘guerre sans nom.’ Pourtant, les conflits d’Afrique du Nord ont été lourds de conséquences humaines” (Algeria-Watch) ‘The Algerian War was indeed lived like a “war without a name.” However, the conflicts in North Africa were heavy in human casualties.’ See also the film *La Guerre sans nom* (‘War without a name’) by Bertrand Tavernier and Patrick Rotman (1992) and Benjamin Stora’s seminal work *La Gangrène et l’oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d’Algérie* (‘Gangrene and Oblivion: Memory of the Algerian War’).

8. While Sebbar never clearly recounts her own exodus, she does document painful encounters in Algeria, focusing on racism and separations she suffered while growing up in a mixed family. In her autobiographical story “On tue les instituteurs” (‘They are killing school teachers’) in *Une enfance algérienne* (*An Algerian Childhood*), the author uses a child’s perspective on traumatic events that strike close to home when two school teachers known to her family are shot and killed. She evokes a flight towards her hometown in a chaotic sequence using language that resonates with *J’étais enfant en Algérie* and she layers autobiographic detail from one text to the other insisting on her own silence, “Je n’ai pas posé de question” (“On tue” 214) ‘I didn’t ask any questions.’

9. See Guiraud’s 2012 exhibit *Survivre* (‘Survival’), commissioned by the city of Perpignan, France for the opening of the *Centre de documentation des Français d’Algérie* ‘Information Center for the *Français d’Algérie*’ on January 27, 2012, the year that marked the fiftieth anniversary of Pied-Noir exile.

10. The Algerian-born French citizens use the term *potos* to label someone who was born in France. The word comes from the Spanish word for duck.

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