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**Women Rewriting History and Writing a Literary  
Tradition:  
An Intertextual Reading of  
Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Alice  
Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1996), and Assia  
Djebar's *La femme sans sépulture* (2002)**

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctorate**

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Date: 11/03/2016

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## ***Abstract***

"Women Rewriting History and Writing a Literary Tradition" is a work that shows interest in the novel written in western languages by postcolonial Africana female writers, who write to re-examine the history of Africana women, which was either forgotten or distorted in existing accounts about it. In fact, this doctoral project is a critical evaluation of three novels, two continental: *The Joys of Motherhood* by the Nigerian Buchi Emecheta and *La femme sans sépulture* by the Algerian Assia Djebar and a novel from the diaspora, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by the African American Alice Walker. The three novels are selected as samples for a case study aimed to explore the motivations, aspirations and challenges of this novel.

This research project has been motivated first by the need to show the role of this literature to challenge historical injustice towards Africana womanhood whose lives have been distorted in different accounts. It has also been inspired by the need to demonstrate that beyond experimentation with the fictional rewriting of history, the novels enact techniques that underlie consciousness to requirements of continuity in literature—or consciousness to write within a literary tradition, which constitutes a rationale for self-evaluation among writers. Finally, this project has been motivated by the need to highlight the challenges that this literature has to observe in order to be accurate and faithful to the experiences it aims to represent and to the history it projects to rewrite. Such challenges require awareness to the risks of writing from without, or writing from a position that does not allow sufficient knowledge and understanding of the history revised, and awareness to the risks of using the language of the ex-colonizer, and of addressing a double audience.

This research project is a comparative contrastive study woven into the textual analysis of three representative works, which undertake the fictional rewriting of history using several innovative techniques for the recuperation task. Such techniques include writing in western languages, which have been remodeled and reworked to include rhythms and even syntax from indigenous languages and using western art forms, which are also reshaped to reflect art styles from the oral tradition. This study has been focused on demonstrating the intertextual relations between the three novels while elaborating on the convergence and divergence of two related elements, colonialism and tradition and their effects on women's wellbeing in three different contexts.

This study is divided into three parts, one historical and two literary. Owing to the nature of this project, historical analysis theory with focus on comparative historical analysis theory, informed the reading of the historical part, which is intended to provide a general socio-historical and cultural context to the literary material presented in the literary chapters. Additionally, different complementary approaches of literary criticism from modern and postmodern traditions informed the literary analysis. We used Practical Criticism slightly amended by Structuralism to closely read the novels with focus on how language works to determine meaning or to recover history in examined texts. We also needed Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, which provided the critical basis to explain the intertextual relations between the novels under scrutiny. Moreover, we found Jacques Derrida's deconstruction useful to uncover repressed meanings, underlying such binaries as those opposing men to women in selected texts. Finally, we relied on feminist criticism to read the gender issues depicted in the novels, as we relied on postcolonial criticism to show the relations of the colonized woman to her space and time and to show the effects of change on women's wellbeing in colonial and postcolonial environments in the novels under scrutiny.

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# Introduction

"Women Rewriting History and Writing a Literary Tradition" joins other recent critical interventions<sup>1</sup> in focusing upon a range of creative texts by Africana<sup>2</sup> women with reference to an eclectic body of works written in the language of the colonizer. According to Elia Nada, Clenora Hudson-Weems, or Gay Alden Wilentz, Africana women writers share an interest in history. Their interest is motivated by the need to rewrite history and to contest the exclusion and/or the misrepresentation of women's experiences in existing literature, whether written by the colonizer or by male writers or written by the states in postcolonial African countries in official history books.

The objective of this study is to examine the theme of rewriting history in postcolonial creative texts by Africana women writing in Western languages. We examine representative works sharing thematic interests—interest in rewriting the history of African womanhood—as well as artistic affinities, stemming from the use of the language of the colonizer which has been modified to install a new language, which is artistically rich with the creation of new artistic techniques. We specifically address ways in which women deploy voice and vision in the transformation of experience into art, and ways in which women use artistic skill to transform creative experiences into a literary tradition.

Writing about African women has always fascinated writers as early as the colonial period. However, women's lived reality has been distorted in different accounts about it. Most of what has been written represents women as oppressed ignorant victims and therefore strips them of agency. Colonial literature represented women as oppressed victims of ignorance and restrictive cultures and religions. Similarly, women's experiences were either ignored or represented yet with the repetition of the colonial

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1Elia Nada, *Trances Dances and Vociferations: Agency and Resistance in Africana Women's Narratives* (London: Garland Pub., Inc., 2001); Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanist Theory* (Africa World Press, 2004); Gay Alden Wilentz, *Binding Cultures: Black Women in Africa and the Diaspora* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1992); Janice Lee Liddell and Yakini Belinda Kemp, eds., *Arms Akimbo: Africana Women in Contemporary Literature* (Florida: Univ. Press of Florida, 1999).

2 The term "Africana" refers to Continental Africans and Africans in the diaspora.

prejudice in the literature written by African males and in official historiographies. Attempts to rewrite history have been undertaken by many historians, writers, and scholars, but much of what has been written risks the effacement of women's reality.

Rewriting the history of African womanhood is a common concern in the novel written in western languages by postcolonial African female writers. This novel has suffered long exclusion and critical condescension, and it was until recently that this novel has started to gain serious critical attention. This research project is a critical evaluation of three novels, two continental namely *The Joys of Motherhood* by the Nigerian Buchi Emecheta and *La femme sans sépulture* by the Algerian Assia Djebar and a novel from the diaspora *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by the African American Alice Walker. These novels are selected as samples for a case study aimed to illuminate fundamental research questions namely, what are the motivations, the aspirations, and challenges of this novel? How far has this novel been successful to reevaluate female experiences and female literature against silence and prejudice?

This research project has been motivated first by the need to show the role of this literature to challenge historical injustice towards African womanhood whose lives have been distorted in different accounts. It has also been inspired by the need to demonstrate that beyond experimentation with the fictional rewriting of history, the novels enact techniques that underlie consciousness to requirements of continuity in literature—or consciousness to write within a literary canon which constitutes a rationale for self-evaluation among writers. Finally, this project has been motivated by the need to highlight the challenges that this literature has to observe in order to be accurate and faithful to the experiences it aims to represent and to the history it projects to rewrite. Such challenges require awareness to the risks of writing from without, or writing from a position that does not allow sufficient knowledge and understanding of the history revised, and awareness to the risks of using the language of the ex-colonizer, and of addressing a double audience.

We have focused our analysis on Emecheta, Walker, and Djebbar first because the three writers belong to the same historical period, which gives them large opportunities of dialogue and explicit or implicit reproduction of each other's world view, for as Ralph Ellison says: "all novels of a given historical moment form an argument over the nature of reality and are, to an extent, criticisms each of the other."<sup>3</sup> Second, our choice of the three writers is justified by the fact that Djebbar, Emecheta and Walker are contemporary writers who are very actively writing and rewriting the histories of Africana womanhood, providing available material for research. Each of the three writers takes a special quality of uniqueness reflected in the techniques she chooses to represent the unwritten stories of women, out of her own experience in a conscious struggle with forms and techniques. This conscious struggle gives each of them a specific role and definition within what may constitute a literary tradition.

We choose to examine *The Joys of Motherhood*, *La femme sans sépulture*, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy* because of the different facets of women's lives and thoughts they represent, offering us the possibility to demonstrate the artistic dialogue evolving between texts. While Djebbar writes about Algerian women, and Emecheta writes about Nigerian women, Walker, who claims the continent within "I do not know from what part of Africa my African ancestors came, and so I claim the continent,"<sup>4</sup> chooses to write about the pains of her "great-great-great-great- grandmother who came here [United States of America] with all that pain in her body" as she comments in an interview with Paula Gidding.<sup>5</sup>

The three writers return to the past to bring back stories that have been consciously or unconsciously distorted or forgotten in different historiographic projects. These women writers have been artistically engaged in the restoration of occulted

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3 Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (NY: Vintage Books, 1972), 117.

4 Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* [1992] (London: Vintage, 1993), 267-8. All subsequent quotations from *Possessing* will be taken from this edition, and page references will appear in the text in parentheses.

5 Alice Walker in Paula Gidding, "Alice Walker's Appeal," *Essence*, July 1992, 58-62.

stories trying to give voice to what they perceive as silence. Female voices, recounting especially women's experiences, are set against the silence of the historical and literary discourses. The two continental writers rewrite the histories of their peoples to write a literature which tends to share not only similar themes but similar aesthetics as well, and which repeats Western literary forms with a difference that manifests itself in a specific language use. Walker returns to write about the pains that the African woman has carried with her to the New World and that have ever been neglected in historiography.

The three writers undertake the task of rewriting history. Thus, Emecheta tries to rewrite history through focus on women's trauma in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria; she places woman between tradition and modernity in order to find out the effect of each on the wellbeing of women. She thus rebels against the neglect of the dilemma of women caught between tradition and modernity in colonial and postcolonial times. Equally, while revisiting the colonial past motivated by the need to illuminate and understand the reasons behind the reiteration of violence in postcolonial Algeria, Djébar places woman between discourses focused on victimization, erotization and gendering recurrent during the colonial and postcolonial periods. The novel confronts the reiteration of discourses restricting women's roles and misappropriating their voices in postcolonial Algeria where tradition has been manipulated to justify the silencing of women. From another perspective, Walker attempts to confront the victimization of women in culture and the deliberate silencing of women's plights by what she considers as monolithic patriarchy. Her attempt to rewrite history is motivated by a need to unveil the harmful effects of some local practices she identifies as hostile to the integrity of a woman's body.

Those writers try to revive the past through their writings in English or in French, which are languages they were brought up to speak. Mastering these languages, these writers write with ambiguity and ambivalence in a double and polyphonic discourse. Those women writers however stress their alienation from these languages since these are the languages of the ex-colonizer or of the White oppressor. Thus though writing in the language of the ex-oppressor, French used by Djébar, English used by Emecheta and

Walker—each installs, through modification, a new language that is artistically rich with the creation of new artistic techniques. Djebbar's French or Emecheta's English are modified enough to include expressions, syntactic or semantic peculiarities specific to Algerian Arabic or Nigerian Igbo dialect, effectively integrated in the narratives. Walker who writes in an English specific to the African Americans has also created a fictional language in which she blends the vocabulary of one African language with that of another, and she has even invented many words, that she says come from her "unconscious."

Actually, these languages are reworked and transformed to allow the writers to translate the experiences and the culture, which are traditionally oral into written literary texts. These writers use the oral tradition in their writings as a method of uncovering and recovering the past. Indeed, these women writers vacillate between valuable oral discourses they consider as a source of knowledge in their communities, and the written text they produce prescribing this oral heritage. Their works retain elements of the oral tradition properly integrated in their texts. The oral heritage from which they collect stories is rich enough to provide with a story line and a narrative strategy; and our writers, as other postcolonial writers described by Bill Ashcroft, insert in their written texts, "unglossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or concepts, allusions or references," standing for the oral culture.<sup>6</sup>

This research project is a comparative contrastive study woven into the textual analysis of three representative works, which undertake the fictional rewriting of history using several innovative techniques for the recuperation task. Such techniques include writing in western languages, which have been remodeled and reworked to include rhythms and even syntax from indigenous languages and using western art forms, which are also reshaped to reflect art styles from the oral tradition. This study has been focused on demonstrating the intertextual relations between the three novels while

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6 Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2001), 75.

elaborating on the convergence and divergence of two related elements, colonialism and tradition and their effects on women's wellbeing in three different contexts.

Therefore, a major aspect of this study is the examination of the dynamics of rewriting history and the subsequent artistic dialogue expressed by our three Africana writers. Our objective is to show how each writer has attempted to confront the ways in which women have been written out of history while underscoring the emergent artistic dialogue between the respective texts of the three novels. The underlying aim of this study is to show that this artistic dialogue, which underlines the awareness of Africana women writers to the need of revising each other, may stand for the aspirations of the respective writers to write within a literary canon, which may reevaluate Africana woman's experience and literature against silence and prejudice.

This study is divided into three parts, one historical and two literary. The historical part, which is an integral part of the study, is intended to provide a general socio-historical and cultural context to the literary material presented in the literary chapters. This part is divided into three chapters. Through the first two chapters, each focused on one society, the Algerian and the Nigerian, and each divided into two sub-chapters, we first describe the status of women in pre-colonial times and show the effect of colonial intervention on women's lives. We then describe women's attempts to cope and understand social change as brought by colonialism. We describe women actively engaged in their societies. The underlying aim of the two chapters is to convey the complexity of women's lives, which are described as meaningful against colonial assumption of women's powerlessness and victimization in the colonized societies.

Through these two chapters, we try to peer into how women in Algeria then how women in Nigeria lived the experience of colonialism. Therefore, each chapter is an overview of what life was like for women in two different societies in Africa during the precolonial and colonial periods. We focus on the joys and the triumphs; we focus on the richness of women's lives reflected in their different everyday activities, in their domestic occupations and artistic creations, in their social roles in the fields of religion

and folk culture, and finally in their economic roles and their participation in public or political affairs.

The third chapter is aimed to underscore the common historical sub-text that links the three novels under scrutiny. It describes the debates associating women with culture in colonial, feminist, and nationalist discourses. Through this chapter, we try to peer into those debates, which are part of colonial history and often return in postcolonial references to women. The chapter outlines the debates about veiling and clitoridectomy, the cultural practices relevant to our purposes discussing the novels under scrutiny.

Part two is literary. It is divided into three chapters. The first two chapters—chapters 4 and 5—are aimed to explore how the two continental authors, Djébar and Emecheta, have transformed the experiences described in the historical chapters into art. The two chapters explore how through the attempt to rewrite history, the two novels *The Joys of Motherhood* and *La femme sans sépulture* transform occulted experiences and women's voices in an artistic language. Therefore, through two chapters, each focused on one novel, and each divided into two sub-chapters, we first describe the setting, the place and time, which each writer has chosen for her novel. We choose to explore through the discussion of setting in each novel, how each author has projected in literature the important changes that affected women's wellbeing with the advent of colonialism and the changes, which affected them in their postcolonial societies. Then we describe the dynamics of rewriting history in each novel. In other words, we examine the narrative and aesthetic strategies used in the inscription of female experiences and female voices in history. A third chapter—chapter 6—explores the attempt of rewriting history by the non-continental voice and novel, Alice Walker and her *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. This chapter shows the author's reconstitution of the history of clitoridectomy and its effects on women's lives, and then explores the author's dynamics of rewriting history.

Part three is divided into three chapters. It examines how each writer has attempted to confront the ways in which women have been written out of history

through underscoring the intertextual relations that link the three novels. We try to highlight the relations between the texts of the three novels with focus on the position of each writer to tradition and colonialism. We show how each has explored the effect of culture and colonialism on women's wellbeing, and how each has challenged what is considered as restrictive and oppressive to women.

Owing to the nature of this project, different complementary approaches of literary criticism from modern and postmodern traditions informed the study in addition to historical analysis theory with focus on comparative historical analysis theory. To start with, T.S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" helped define the principles of evaluation relevant to the purposes of this study. We have been particularly interested in T.S. Eliot's emphasis on the importance of history, culture and tradition, which form a rational for self-evaluation among writers, who are conscious about the importance of the "historical sense" to achieve continuity in literature. The "historical sense" requires writers to be conscious both of the pastness of the past and its presence, and compels the critic to value a work of art according to the principles of aesthetic criticism.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, a literary tradition forms a rational for self-evaluation among writers and a rational for critical evaluation. The principles of aesthetic criticism of the literary tradition we want to define through this study establish the relation between text, context, and the reader's role to reconstruct the text. This is why we relied on a set of approaches in literary criticism, which allow intrinsic, extrinsic, and reader response analysis.

Since this study is primarily a textual analysis, we used Practical Criticism slightly amended by Structuralism to closely read the novels with focus on how language works to determine meaning. In other words, the close reading has been focused on how language works to recover history in examined texts. We, therefore, tried to dissect then articulate texts in accordance with the context that created them and

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<sup>7</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and Individual talent," in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, vol. 2. 3rd ed, ed. Paul Lauter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 1405-1410.

not independent from context. Our reading of the representational, figurative and rhetorical strategies employed in the recuperation task has been focused more on how strategies work to achieve meaning within a context than on the intrinsic artistic worth of the text transcending particularities of time and space.

This has been evident in the second part of the study. For instance, we shall show how the text of *La femme sans sépulture*, which questions the different representations of Algerian history and their ability to recover history without risking its effacement, works through a complex and accomplished narrative mode underscored by the use of free indirect discourse allowing different voices to participate in the recovery of the past. We shall also show that the text of *The Joys of Motherhood*, which questions the myth of motherhood and women's valorization in Igbo culture, works through irony also underscored by free indirect discourse to mockingly challenge all the discourses past and present emphasizing the dialectical relation between womanhood and motherhood as a means to rewrite history. Finally, we shall show that *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, which questions the tension between culture and women's rights, works through a metonymic sensual style to expose the effects of ritual clitoridectomy on women's bodies and their wellbeing, and to challenge the oppression of women in culture.

An important theoretical underpinning of our investigation is Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, which encourages readings of history and culture as well as language. Bakhtin's ideas of heteroglossia and intertextuality are particularly useful to the examination of the three novels as they allow us to evaluate the relations between texts that take their style directly, parodically, or ironically from the languages of others. Additionally, our approach concentrates on an intertextual reading of the three novels using Bakhtin's categories of the double voiced discourse, namely stylization, parodistic narration and hidden polemic.

Deconstruction strategies, basically, as defined by Jacques Derrida have also been useful for our demonstration. Deconstruction has been important to read the three

novels from two contradictory interpretations, through which we shall show for instance that contemporary Africana women's writings can be interpreted as feminist but also as "reversal and displacement"<sup>8</sup> of this literature, which seems to show concern with the larger issues of colonialism and postcolonial changes despite the fact that it focuses on women's experiences. Actually, we shall read some texts as demonstrations of feminist thought with an attempt to show that these texts, which put much emphasis on the gender issue, respond to feminists' requirements; For this sake, feminist theory has been useful. Using the principles of deconstruction, we ultimately shall read those same texts as revisions of the feminist conventions allowing a contradictory interpretation of the feminist attitudes proved in the previous reading.

Likewise, deconstruction philosophy allows us to revise our reading of selected texts as projections of postcolonial theories' perspectives. Selected texts will be read as justifying postcolonial theorists' claim that a postcolonial writer needs to depict the effect of colonialism on colonized societies. While we shall read these texts as responsive to postcolonial theorists' claims, deconstruction theory allows us to deconstruct our first reading to reread the texts as revisions of postcolonial theory. Actually, throughout the different parts of the study, key passages in the novels under scrutiny will be read and reread to create new meanings that might be contradictory to previous meanings and that would even contradict the author's intentions. In fact, our attempts to read and reread stem from Derrida's own deconstructive readings, which Spivak describes as follows, "one consistent reading continually erases itself and invokes its opposite, and so on indefinitely."<sup>9</sup>

Revising Western feminism and/or postcolonial theory, Djébar and Emecheta seem to respond to Postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminists have reacted against the universalization of women's experiences and against the focus on the victimization

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8 This phrase is used by Gayatri Spivack to describe deconstruction strategies, see "Translator's Preface," in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), lxxxvi.

9 Spivak, "Translator's Preface," in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xxxvii.

of women by Western feminists. They have also reacted against the neglect of gender issues in mainstream postcolonial thought. They have been critical of the reticence of postcolonial theory to examine the failures of anti-colonial nationalism, which has reproduced the social and political inequalities predominant under colonial rule. On the other hand, repeating Western feminist concepts about the universal victimization of women and repeating concepts about the victimization of women in culture, Walker has been trapped to repeat orientalist attitudes decried by postcolonial feminists.

Therefore, in addition to Derrida's work on deconstruction (*Of Grammatology*), the works of such Western feminists as Mary Daly (*Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*<sup>10</sup>) and Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*<sup>11</sup>), as well as the works of postcolonial theorists as Homi Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*<sup>12</sup>) and Edward Said (*Orientalism*<sup>13</sup>) have informed our reading of the novels under scrutiny, which more or less justify some of the claims of Western feminists or those of the postcolonial theorists. Additionally, the works of many postcolonial feminists including Chandra Talpade Mohanty ("Under Western Eyes"<sup>14</sup>), Gayatri Chakravory Spivak ("Can the Subaltern Speak?"<sup>15</sup>), and Marnia Lazreg ("Feminism and Difference"<sup>16</sup>) have been useful to show that while repeating Western feminism or postcolonial theorists, the novels under scrutiny are revisions of those very theories.

Especially germane to this study is Africana Womanist theory. This theory is primarily "created and designed for all women of African descent" as defined by

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10 Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

11 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956).

12 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (NY & London: Routledge, 1994).

13 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

14 Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, "Under Western Eyes, Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991), 51-80.

15 Gayatri Chakravory Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 66-111.

16 Marnia lazreg, "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria," *Feminist Studies* 14:1 (1988): 81-107.

Clenora Hudson-Weems. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily "focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women."<sup>17</sup> Our interest in this theory stems from its emphasis on the importance of culture and history for the analysis of Africana women's texts. Basic to the theory's interest in culture is the emphasis on the need to approach Africana culture from an insider's perspective. Weems cautions against non-endemic approaches to Africana cultures; she writes, "We are familiar with the established reputation of traditional anthropologists and the traditional non-endemic work that they have created, usually studying so-called "primitive" cultures from the perspective of the outsider."<sup>18</sup>

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17 Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Troy, MI: Bedford Publishers, 1993), 24.

18 Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Africana Womanism and the Critical Need for Africana Theory and Thought," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 21.2 (Summer 1997): 79-84.

## **PART 1: Africana Women, a History of their Own**

This part is intended to provide a general socio-historical and cultural context to the literary material presented in the literary chapters through the description of the changes that affected women's lives under the effect of colonialism in two countries in the African continent, Algeria and Nigeria, and the presentation of the debates associating women with culture in colonial, feminist and nationalist discourses. Through the first two chapters, we will describe women's lives as meaningful focusing on their attempts to cope and understand the changes brought about by colonialism. Through the third chapter, we will describe the debates addressing women's condition as reflecting the failure or the valorization of native culture.

Actually, to deal with this historical part of the study, we have relied on historical analysis which requires reviewing, interpreting, and analyzing sources, and the historical comparative analysis which “is defined by a concern with causal analysis, an emphasis on processes over time, and the use of systematic and contextualized comparison” as James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer set it.<sup>1</sup> Comparative historical analysis informs the reading of the status of women in pre-colonial and colonial Algeria and Nigeria—with focus on showing the effects of colonial intervention on women's lives, then describing women's attempts to cope with social change brought about by colonialism. Using the comparative method, we shall explore the underlying similarities and differences between the two different experiences.

Then using historical analysis, we shall read the historical debates associating women with culture, which constitute the historical subtext which links the three novels, through reviewing, interpreting and analyzing sources to show that despite women's ability to overcome limitations of life under colonial rule, their lives have been mystified in colonial, feminist and nationalist discourses.

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<sup>1</sup> James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.



# **1 Algeria and Colonialism, a Woman's Experience**

## 1.1 A Brief Survey of the Position of Women in Precolonial and Colonial Algeria

The nature of gender relations in precolonial and colonial Algeria varied from region to region, and from whether the region was rural or urban. It was much affected by the economic and political changes that affected the Algerian society in the nineteenth century. In urban centers, women's life revolved around specific institutions, the home, the extended family, the public bath or the saint's temple or the graveyard. In the rural areas where women could go freely out of their homes, women's lives revolved not only around the home and the extended family, but also on fields, the *zawiya*—a religious educational institution—and the market. With colonial intervention, women's status was harmfully affected, and their lives were detrimentally changed. The scarce material that is available about precolonial and colonial life is marked by prejudice and misconception.

### 1.1.1 Women in Precolonial Algeria

According to Algerian scholar, Marnia Lazreg, in precolonial Algeria, especially in urban centers as Algiers, which was the main political and economic center, women's position and status were influenced by the modes of production, which characterized the period. Algeria was an important territory in the Ottoman Empire<sup>1</sup>. In *The Eloquence of Silence*, Lazreg has witnessed that the Algerian society

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<sup>1</sup> Osama W. Abi-Mershed says that the history of Algeria during the Ottoman period still needs to be researched in full as it relies on colonial orientalist representations. He writes, “The bulk of our current understanding of Algeria’s Ottoman past is, to some degree, still drawn from sources produced in the nineteenth century and burdened accordingly with the particular perspectives and epistemologies of the dominant colonialist and Orientalist schools of historiography.” See Osama W. Abi-Mershed, *The Apostles of Modernity: Saint Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010), 43.

was part of merchant/peripheral capitalism playing a role in the economies of the Ottoman Empire and European states such as France. Ottoman rule, [...], domestic slavery (or the use of slaves for household labor), as well as the capture of Europeans in maritime skirmishes between Algerians and Europeans as a result of the collapse of Arabo-Berber rule in Spain in the sixteenth century combined to reinforce women's family vocation and their sense of place as members of extended kinship groups.<sup>2</sup>

Lazreg explains that Algerian ship activity in the Mediterranean Sea resulted in the capturing of Europeans who were kept in Algiers until they were ransomed. Many of these Europeans were used for domestic service. Women went to the port to wait for the ships returning from the incursions in the Mediterranean. There they could get the male European captives that they used as servants "to help them to clean their homes, run errands, care for animals and carry their paraphernalia to the Turkish baths" Lazreg wrote.<sup>3</sup> These servants could be found in rich as well as modest households, as Charles Tailliarat witnessed, "from the royal palace to the most modest household, there were Christian slaves in domestic service."<sup>4</sup> Lazreg explains that urban women who used to wear veils did not veil themselves before these captives. These women believed that these servants "could not see" noted Tailliarat.<sup>5</sup> Commenting on the underlying meaning of the practice of European domestic service, Lazreg wrote, "The idea behind this practice, which remained in force later during the colonial era, was that no Muslim woman could be interested in a Christian captive. [...] this attitude was testimony to Algerians' sense of superiority over Christian Europeans, and was noticed by travelers at the time."<sup>6</sup>

In urban centers, the social status of women depended on the status of their fathers and husbands. Turks who held the highest positions in the country enjoyed all the

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2 Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence, Algerian Women in Question* (New York & London: Routledge, 1994), 3. We relied heavily on Lazreg's work to describe the life of women in precolonial Algeria.

3 Ibid., 22.

4 Charles Tailliarat, quoted in *The Eloquence of Silence*, 22.

5 Ibid.

6 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 22.

privileges. The Offspring of the Turkish native marriages came second in the social hierarchy; they had wealth but few privileges. Among native Algerians, kinship and tribe or clan formed the framework of identity.<sup>7</sup> Though the society seems stratified, Lazreg notices that "there were no rigid class barriers that created specific class cultures as happened in European societies."<sup>8</sup> Lazreg explains that well-to-do women displayed "a surplus of gold jewelry, velvet, silk and satin clothes," and the less disadvantaged women would also appear as richly clothed. They would even borrow "gold jewelry from friends and neighbors to adorn themselves at wedding ceremonies. For a woman to appear in public without some gold jewelry was a sign of social failure."<sup>9</sup>

Education was an important factor to define status for men and women. Yet there was much controversy about female education in Ottoman Algeria. Education was not seriously encouraged by the Turks, and educational opportunities varied from one region to the other according to Lazreg who has noted that if education in general suffered with the Turks, it was obvious that the education of women suffered as well. Lazreg has explained that in some urban centers, "education was scholastic" and "girls generally attended school with boys until the age of nine, or were tutored at home."<sup>10</sup> Education was based on "the knowledge of the *Quran* and the Traditions, to which were added grammar, poetry, epistles and often elements of the history of Islam," added Lazreg who has also emphasized, "Well-to-do women tended to be literate, and were taught to play musical instruments, especially the '*ud*.'"<sup>11</sup> However, Osama Abi-Mershed, who confirmed that education suffered a lack of intentional interest as it relied mostly on private resources, doubts that females attended school with boys, as he has noted that only "male pupils" attended the *kuttab* supervised by an educator called

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7 See *The Apostles of Modernity: Saint Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria*, 43 about the social organization during the Ottoman period and the relations between the Turkish rulers and the indigenous population.

8 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 24.

9 *Ibid.*, 24-27.

10 *Ibid.*, 25.

11 *Idem*.

“(mu\_addib = moadeb).”<sup>12</sup> He adds that recent studies in the field of education during the Ottoman rule confirm, “literacy before 1830 was almost exclusively male, except for the daughters of urban notables and elites.”<sup>13</sup>

In rural centers, a woman’s position was defined by the status of her family. Lazreg has described status in rural Algeria and showed its effects on women. She writes that status “was based on lineage, education and occupation.” She therefore explains that we may find some families “who claimed descent from the prophet Muhammed [and who] were considered nobility or *shurfa*,” they were highly respected. Equally respected were the “learned men,” known as the *Ulama*. In addition to the *shurfa* and *Ulama*, people, “who held administrative positions for the Turkish government, the *beylik*, enjoyed higher status than the tribesmen who lacked access to the centers of power, or could not stake any claim to noble ancestry.” Women enjoyed the privileges of their status group; and “they married within their extended family or tribe to preserve the purity of their lineage. They would however marry “outside their tribe to cement political alliances.”<sup>14</sup>

Lazreg has also explained that in the rural areas where women could go unveiled freely out of their homes, women held a complementary role to that of men. They ruled the homes, participated in agricultural activities, and met in the *zawiya* where they could benefit from many social and educational services. Girls could attend religious courses, with boys in the *zawiya* or mosques; these courses were based mainly on the learning of Quran and on reading and writing Arabic. Additionally, women took part in the commercial activities held once a week in the markets in neighboring villages.<sup>15</sup> Being so busy and involved in social life, women as noted by Lazreg had less restricted relations with men than in urban centers, as “relations between women and men were generally freer” in rural areas. In some southern rural regions, in the region known as

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12 *The Apostles of Modernity: Saint Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria*, 51.

13 Ibid., fn. 31, 265

14 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 28-29.

15 Ibid., 28-9.

the Ouled Nail Mountain and in the Eastern Mountain of the Aures, Lazreg explains that women enjoyed a kind of freedom “in sexual matters,” as they “would typically leave their rural milieu and settle temporarily in one of the nearby towns, where they entertained men with dances and songs.”<sup>16</sup>

While in rural areas women seemed to enjoy much freedom, in urban areas, a strict control was imposed on women's appearance and behavior in public. Women could not leave their homes unveiled, and they should be accompanied by a male parent, an old woman, or a servant when they have to go outside. The places women had free access to were the housetops, the public baths, the saint's temples and graveyards. These spaces constituted social networks for women according to Lazreg who writes that that urban women's

lives revolved around the home, the extended family, the *hammam* (or public bath) and the wali's (or saint's) temple. [...] the institution of the *hammam* was, for women the functional equivalent of the café for men. Here, women had their bodies cleaned, massaged, pampered, and sometimes healed while exchanging views and information about personal and social events. Visits to saints' mausoleum were occasions for congregating and exchanging tips about how to deal with marital and parenting problems, and about the degree of efficacy of the saint's grace. Friday visits to the dead were an occasion for all women to get reacquainted with friends, reflect upon their lives, shed cathartic tears and honor the memory of their loved ones.<sup>17</sup>

This segregation of space and control over women's visibility were subjects of much prejudice repeated in colonial literature, condemning veiling and seclusion as signs of oppression of women in culture.

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16 Ibid., 29-30. See also the songs by Nayliyat collected in Emile Dermenghem, *Le Pays d'Abel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

17 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 25.

### 1.1.2 Colonial Intervention and Women

Colonial intervention with the Algerian life was very detrimental and women were subjected to different kinds of humiliations. As early as the French set foot in Algeria, the people and the land were subject to fanciful representations, which projected the colonized as different, primitive, and uncivilized, which as Lazreg puts it stripped "Algerians of their lived history by subsuming them under the abstract concept of the 'Orient.'"<sup>18</sup> On one hand, women provided an opportunity to reinforce the French belief in the superiority of their culture by presenting it as more liberating to women. Attempts to "liberate" and "civilize" women however started only when the French realized that the infiltration of Algeria could be achieved through women. On the other hand, women endured gendered violence, loss of economic security which led to the wide spread of prostitution.

The situation of seclusion and veiling in Algerian cities was the cherished subject in many colonialist writings, and the veiled secluded woman was the concrete evidence for the colonizer about the primitivism of the Algerians and about their need to change. Those hidden women fascinated the imagination of the French writers and painters. Many French writers, nourished by a romantic imagination, represented secluded women in their harem in minute details. They described their look and their clothes as well as the furniture of their households. Eugène Fromentin as early as the nineteenth century observed that "les deux grands mystères de ce pays: la fortune mobilière et les femmes."<sup>19</sup> Later, Paul Bourde wrote: "Les maisons sont à la fois prison et forteresse, prison où l'on cache les femmes, forteresse où l'on cache les biens mobiliers."<sup>20</sup> According to Ernest Feydeau, Algerian women "adorent le mariage des beaux vêtements, des fleurs et des bijoux."<sup>21</sup> However, he sees them as apparitions outside their harem, wearing their outside clothes, "Elles ont l'air d'apparitions sous le blanc

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18 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 37.

19 Eugène Fromentin, *Une Année dans le Sahel* (1859) (Paris : Editions Sycomore, 198) 42.

20 Paule Bourde, *A travers l'Algérie* (Charpentier éditeur, 1880) 275.

21 Ernest Feydeau, *Alger* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1884), 52.

soleil d'Afrique;”<sup>22</sup> likewise, they looked like “des paquets de linge ambulants” according to Rozet and Carette.<sup>23</sup>

Politicians, army officers, and administrators also showed interest in depicting Algerian life and the Algerian family as they saw them, with much prejudice of course. Eugène Dumas, author of *Mœurs et Coutumes de l'Algérie*, observed that in societies that did not confine women to the household as the Kabyle, women held important roles in society. Yet he recapitulated to assert that even in those societies where no seclusion was practiced, women were considered inferior to men. He argued that the superiority of the male could be seen in the segregationist behavior and the attitude they had towards new born infants; the birth of a male infant was always celebrated whereas a female was received with great indifference. He thus wrote,

Chez les Arabes quand il naît un enfant mâle, on se réjouit, on se complimente, mais la fête reste en famille; si la mère est accouchée d'une fille, les femmes seules font une réjouissance. Chez les kabyles, la naissance d'un enfant male donne lieu à la convocation de tous les voisins et des amis des villages environnants. On fait des décharges d'armes, on tire à la cible. Sept jours après, le père donne un grand repas.... Si c'est une fille qui vient au monde, on ne change rien aux habitudes de la vie, à l'aspect de la maison, parce qu'elle n'accroît en rien la force de la tribu.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to those early writers, the prejudice is repeated in other more recent works. In *Les Nouvelles Tendances du Roman Algérien de Langue Française*, Guy Daninos has written that the Algerian woman "est toujours considéré comme une enfant, bien plus comme un objet qui, lors du mariage passe des mains de son père à celles de son mari."<sup>25</sup> Repeating the same prejudice, in *Des Mères contre des Femmes. Maternité et Patriarcat au Maghreb*, Camille Lacoste-Dujardin, who claims to speak about the position of women not only in Algeria but in all the Maghreb, argues that a woman in

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22 Ibid, 275.

23 Rozet et Carette, *Voyage dans la Régence D'Alger* (Tunis: Editions Bouslama, 1980), 9.

24 Eugene Dumas, *Mœurs et Coutumes de l'Algérie* (Paris : Sindbad, 1988), 150.

25 Guy Daninos, *Les Nouvelles Tendances du Roman Algérien de Langue Française* (Sherbrooke: Naaman, 1979), 47.

those societies was treated as an "eternal minor,"<sup>26</sup> who passed from the authority of her father to that of her husband. In the absence of a husband, authority over the eternal minor should pass to her eldest son she argues.

During the colonial period, French historians, sociologists, ethnographers and artists or even army officers and colonial administrators who studied Algeria and Algerians saw the power of this colony lying in the traditionalism of its women. The fascination of those French writers with the representation of the Algerian woman in their works shows that for France as Winifred Woodhull has convincingly noticed "Algerian women are key symbols of the colony's cultural identity."<sup>27</sup> The infiltration of Algeria through its families, especially women was thus the project of the colonial administration helped by French intellectuals. This aim was directly claimed by Octave Depont who wrote,

As long as ... the miserable condition of the native woman is not improved, as long as endogamy causes Muslim society to close in on itself, the door to this society will open to outside influences only with difficulty. We can attempt rapprochement and fusion, but these efforts are liable to weaken, if not shatter, at the feet of this woman, unyielding or faithful guardian of the home, its traditions and, in a word, the preservation and conservation of the race.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, the French administration tried to use women as a means of effective colonial domination. They thus adopted the strategy of what Frantz Fanon called "unveiling" Algeria," that is, regulating families through instituting campaigns of medical assistance and education aimed at women to encourage them towards westernization.<sup>29</sup> Lazreg explains that colonial attempt to manipulate women and to

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26 This is the translation of the French expression "éternelle mineur" used by Camille Lacoste-Dujardin in her *Des Mères Contre des Femmes. Maternité et Patriarcat au Maghreb* (Paris: La Découverte, 1985).

27 Winifred Woodhull, "Unveiling Algeria," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory, A Reader*, eds. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2003), 573.

28 Octave Depont, qtd. in Winifred Woodhull, "Unveiling Algeria," in Reina Lewis and Sara Mills, eds., 573.

29 See Frantz Fanon, "Unveiling Algeria" in *A Dying Colonialism* [1959] trans, Haakon Chevalier (NY: Grove Press, 1965), 1.

appropriate their voices was evident in “the forced unveiling” of a “handful” of Algerian women in the demonstration of May 16, 1958 “organized by rebellious French generals in Algiers to show their determination to keep Algeria French.” Lazreg adds that the event concretizes the obsession of the French with women, “to unveil women at a well-choreographed ceremony added to the event a symbolic dimension that dramatized the one constant feature of the Algerian occupation by France: its obsession with women.”<sup>30</sup> Describing this event, Fanon wrote, “French colonialism, on the occasion of May 13<sup>th</sup>, reenacted its old campaign of westernizing the Algerian woman. Servants under the threat of being fired, poor women dragged from their homes, prostitutes, were brought to the public square and symbolically unveiled to the cries of ‘Vive l’Algérie Française!’”<sup>31</sup>

Other effective evidence showing the ruthless manipulation of women by the French administration was the enfranchisement of women in 1958, which was intended to promote women’s support for a French rather than an independent Algeria. Indeed the same measure proposed by the Paris government in 1947 had been vigorously opposed by the colonial administration who even called their male “Muslim friends” to stop what they called “the evildoers who are weakening the age-old foundation on which our households rest.”<sup>32</sup>

The attempts of the French to use Algerian women to support colonization can also be seen in the contradictions of the colonial educational policy. As early as the second decade after colonization, the French realized that the success of the colonial mission could be achieved through the westernization of women. The story of Eugénie Allix Luce, collected by historian Rebecca Rogers in an attempt to save from forgetfulness the gratifying efforts of the French woman who “devoted her youth, her intelligence, and her heart to the education of Arab girls”<sup>33</sup> is significant to our context.

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30 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 135.

31 *A Dying Colonialism*, p, 62

32 Algeron, qtd. in Winifred Woodhull, “Unveiling Algeria,” 574.

33 This is from a note written on Mme Luce’s obituary, quoted in Rebecca Rogers, *A Frenchwoman’s*

Rogers has collected the letters written by Mme Luce to convince French officials about the necessity to finance her project of a school for “Muslim girls.” These letters constitute an important material testifying about the early insistence on the importance of women for the successful achievement of the colonizing mission. In these letters, “She reiterated frequently her belief in France’s civilizing mission and that her goal coincided with that of the French as her school would lead indigenous women to support the French conquest thanks to their recognition of ‘the benefits of a European education’” Rogers writes<sup>34</sup>.

The letters underscore much prejudice about the degradation of the manners and the morals of “Moorish women,” who sometimes need to be elevated to the level of “accomplished” womanhood, others to be saved from idleness, unskillfulness, dishonesty, depravity, ignorance; and sometimes to be saved from falling into prostitution. Her ambitions would sometimes enclose not only “Morish” but “Muslim women” who need to be raised “from the state of abjection in which ignorance keeps them.”<sup>35</sup> Mme Luce writes, describing the condition of women in Algiers,

The life of Moorish women has been until now a life of idleness. The ideas and customs among Moors are opposed to the idea that their wives and daughters exercise any honest work, aside from the ordinary details of the household. Rendered incapable of any serious occupation by their education and not having been raised in the principles of morality or modesty, which serve in Europe as the first base of girls’ education, they are led early into debauchery. [...]; anything that is done to change this morality and these ideas, and to moralize the population is a useful and meritorious enterprise that deserves the encouragement and support of the Government.<sup>36</sup>

She also writes explaining the objectives of her project and its benefits, for women and their families and for France,

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*Imperialist Story: Madame Luce in nineteenth-century Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 72.

To teach them the tasks which are the exclusive prerogative of womanhood: needlework, household chores, grooming. To inspire them with love for what is beautiful and good, the habits of cleanliness, moral well-being, and the instinct of refinement [typical] of their sex. Later, to establish with these regenerated young women genuine workshops for sewing, embroidery, drapery and lingerie; [...] to return them to their grateful families one day as accomplished women, hardworking, orderly, familiar with all that constitutes physical and moral well-being, precious for all these reasons in the eyes of the men of their nation, and thus the natural intermediaries for the civilization that has conquered them, and the mothers of a new generation that will belong to us by heart and by mind.<sup>37</sup>

In another letter addressed to the members of the Administrative Council of Algiers in 1846, five months after the opening of her school, asking for finances that would allow her to enroll more girls, Mme Luce wrote,

Woman is the most powerful of all influences in Africa as in Europe, but even more so in Africa. If you convert to our civilization 100 young native girls in all classes of society and in all the races of the Regency, these girls will become, in the nature of things, the privileged wives of the most important men of their class; they will become our guarantee of the country's submission to our authority, as well as the unimpeachable pledge of its future assimilation.<sup>38</sup>

Mme Luce's different letters collected from the colonial archives, all echo supremacist orientalist overtones that Rogers overlooks when she seems much impressed by the role of this influential woman "who was undoubtedly the loudest female voice in the mid-1840s asserting women's role in the civilizing mission"<sup>39</sup> and who succeeded in her mission of civilizing the "Muslim girls" as "Within a decade Eugénie Luce had succeeded in anchoring her school within the Algerian educational landscape, drawing in students, inspiring imitations, and attracting outside attention. This included attention from British feminists who were similarly engaged in promoting women's rights through education in their home country and in British colonies."<sup>40</sup>

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37 Ibid., 73.

38 Ibid., 65.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 87.

Here it is worth mentioning that though education under colonial rule, as under the Turks, generally suffered, it suffered further with women. As witnessed by Alain Calmes, "by 1880, fifty years after the conquest of Algeria, education standards had fallen well below precolonial times."<sup>41</sup> Describing the deterioration of education with colonialism, Emir Khaled wrote, "there are 1,200 schools serving 110,000 pupils for a population of 700,000. Natives' schools including goubis schools (or rudimentary rural schools usually held in homes or tents) number 520 for 38,000 children out of a population of 5 million."<sup>42</sup> Lazreg adds to those statistics that though later the number of Algerian boys attending schools reached 225,289 by 1954, the number of girls was "not higher than 81,448."<sup>43</sup>

Actually, though many attributed the deterioration of the colonial educational institution to the rejection of the Algerians to French schools, others denoted the contradictions of the French educational policy as a major cause of the failure of colonial education. Lazreg explains the causes of the failure of colonial education; she writes, "in the first place, there were not enough schools built for Algerians at any time during the colonial era. In addition, and especially during the first hundred years, the French government was more interested in selective education for boys rather than girls."<sup>44</sup> Osamaq Abi-Mershed confirmed the gender-bias of colonial education; he writes,

both military officer and civil servant were in agreement that the education of Muslim girls was to be restricted to the primary level and to workshops on embroidery and needlework. Until the 1880s, the public schools made available to Muslim girls in the civilian territories consisted effectively of workshops (ouvriers d'apprentissage) or orphanages delegated to Catholic missions rather than to the departmental Arab Bureaux.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>See Alain Calmes, in *Trances Dances and Vociferations*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> Emir Khaled, quoted in *The Eloquence of Silence*, 62.

<sup>43</sup> *The Eloquence of Silence*, 62.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>45</sup> *Apostles of Modernity*, 135-6.

Not only was education selective with underlying male-privileging tendencies, but the curriculum was also gender-based as explained by Lazreg. Actually, when the French were convinced about the need to build schools for girls, they were not ready to undertake the project seriously, nor did they believe in educating native girls. Describing early schools, Lazreg explains, "schools for native girls were not meant to prepare their students for careers or non-traditional marketable skills. Instead, they reinforced their homebound vocation, thereby revealing the colonial gender-bias in all its starkness."<sup>46</sup> The curriculum described in the letters of Mme Luce is a good example of the gender-bias of colonial education. The male privileging tendencies in colonial education did not change; Lazreg adds, "Until the 1950s the education of girls remained essentially the same in its general orientation as it was in the nineteenth century. The curriculum, however, no longer included the teaching of Arabic language in grade schools, or the *Quran*. [...] Women simply did not benefit equally with men from the educational opportunities available at the time, no matter how limited they were."<sup>47</sup>

The French rule had other devastating effects on women. On the psychological level, women generally suffered the consequences of the alienation and dehumanization of their men by the colonizer who misappropriated their lands, reduced them to tenants in the lands of their ancestors and thus to extreme poverty. Men who became unable to provide for the needs of their families, and who were constantly humiliated outside, withdrew to the harem where they expressed a pathological self-assertion by over dominating their women. In *Algérie, femme et écriture*, Ahlem Mosteghanemi has summed up this situation in the following: "la femme algérienne a largement fait les frais de la colonisation et de la guerre d'indépendance. Le choc colonial semble avoir replié les 'masculins' sur le harem. La femme est apparue de la sorte aux yeux de l'homme aliéné et depersonalisé, comme le dernier exercice de sa liberté."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *The Eloquence of Silence*, 65.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>48</sup> Ahlem Mousteghanemi, *Algérie. Femmes et Ecriture* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1985), 15.

Lazreg has analyzed the circumstances of what she entitles "transforming men into women" which she argues was caused not only by the seizure of his land but by the tampering with his "religious self-understanding." She writes,

French colonization was equated with the appropriation of Algerian people, stripping them of the protective device of their beliefs, thus leaving them exposed to a number of ills brought upon them by the colonists. [...] Hence a recommendation that the good Muslim should avoid contact with the outside world, now polluted by the French. The devout Muslim should rarely venture outside of his home. If he must, he would lower his hood over his face and walk with his eyes averted 'just like a woman wrapped in her veil.' The recurring comparison with women denotes Algerian men's concern with losing all the trapping of masculinity and being rendered helpless as they perceived women to be.<sup>49</sup>

On the social level, the seizure of lands and the increase of poverty split the large family structure forcing its members to move to cities where many women were at times reduced to prostitution.<sup>50</sup> The Algerian woman's body and sexuality haunted the French male colonizers, who used their power to reduce desperate unpowered women to prostitution. Lazreg has explained that while men were transformed into women, women were transformed into prostitutes. She has disclosed how under colonial rule of pauperization and social coercion many women were reduced to prostitution; she has described through reference to Nayliat dancers how with colonialism, these dancers were reduced to prostitutes when the French encouraged sex tourism in the town of Bousaada. She writes, "one of the earliest impacts of colonists control of Algerian women's sexuality was the emergence of sex-tourism, which turned dancers from the south, who were free to marry men of their choosing, into prostitutes."<sup>51</sup>

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49 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 52-3.

50 Accounts about the spread of prostitution in Algerian cities appeared in the majority of works written by French writers who wrote about Algiers, and who witnessed that the prostitutes in the city of Algiers came from rural areas. Such writers are: Lucienne Favre, Ernest Feydeau, and Paule Bourde.

51 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 55. See Lazreg's representation of the effect of the French colonial rule on Nailiyat (dancers from the region of Ouled Nail in Algeria) in *The Eloquence of Silence*, 29-33.

One of the services fulfilled by those women was posing for photographers and painters allowing the misappropriation of the natives' private life, which was the most cherished aim in the colonizing project. Those photographs of native veiled and unveiled women were used as postcards, which not surprisingly found a great circulation among the colonizers and European tourists. In his *The Colonial Harem*, Malek Aloula argued that the photographer who allowed the public display of formerly secluded and veiled women had hidden motives. The photographs hide the desire of the colonial photographer, who allied with the colonial administration, to denigrate Algerian identity after the misappropriation of the land.<sup>52</sup>

Yet the most devastating effect of French rule on Algerian women was violence. As early as the French invaded Algeria, French troops used different forms of violence against Algerian women. Women were raped and tortured; their bodies were *cut* for different reasons. French troops used to *cut* women's ears and hands to get their jewelries. Marnia Lazreg has reported what shows some of the brutality suffered by Algerian women under colonial troops; she writes: "As women they were subjected to more indignities than men. They were raped, forcibly held by military officers to satisfy their sexual desires. Such assaults took place on live as well as dead women's bodies."<sup>53</sup> Lazreg has also reported that sometimes women's bodies were "cut" in barbarous ways to satisfy pathological violent desires of some French officers; she writes,

Women were more vulnerable to French troops and their occasional Algerian allies not only because they were women, but also because they were generally unarmed and often wore gold jewelry, an object in demand by the French. Colonial troops were known to have cut off women's ears and hands as a quick way of getting their earrings and bracelets when they seized Algiers. The practice of cutting off ears was often ordered by military chiefs such as General du Barail, who claims that his victims' ears were proof that his execution orders were carried out. A collection of

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52 Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: Univ of Minnesota Press, 1986).

53 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 42.

these trophies were kept in the French city of Bordeaux by the family of Carayon Latour, a lieutenant of General Yussuf.<sup>54</sup>

Torture remained the most ingenious means used by the colonial powers to punish women prisoners during the Algerian War of Liberation.<sup>55</sup> In 1958, the army established women's camps where captured female combatants were tortured. In "Sexual Violence in the Algerian War," Raphaëlle Branche, who consulted diversified sources about gendered violence in the Algerian war, writes

Military authorities considered rape a banal form of torture, useful for making prisoners (male or female) talk, or to terrorize them. Violent penetration, often using a piece of wood, a bottle, etc., was frequent. The genitals were a preferred site for inflicting violence, such as when electric shocks were applied. The sex organs were the entry point for pain. This pain was immediate, but it could also be permanent, though invisible, meant to hurt not just the victims but their close relatives as well.<sup>56</sup>

Eventually, even if some of the Algerian women were reduced to prostitution, or had endured the oppressive assaults of their alienated depersonalized male partners, or tortured by the French military troops, Algerian women were not reduced to inaction. The bulk of the women population in Algerian cities and rural areas were conscious of the importance of their roles in a colonized Algeria and were thus able to build a world that could not be dominated by frustrated males or by the oppressive colonizing rule.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>55</sup> Actually the gendered violence experienced by Algerian women at the hands of the colonizers has only recently started to become a subject of interest because of the amnesty rules which resulted from the armistice following the independence. See Ranjana Khanna, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to Present* (Stanford Univ. Press, 2008); Raphaëlle Branche, "Sexual Violence in the Algerian War," in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, ed. Dagmar Herzog. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 247-261.

<sup>56</sup> Branche, 250.

## 1.2 The World Women Made

The Algerian women lived a full and extremely busy life before and under colonialism. They were active in fulfilling their domestic duties, and contributing in the cultural, economic, social and political life with dignity and sense of responsibility in both rural and urban areas. Describing women's lived reality in and under colonial society, Marnia Lazreg writes, "In many ways, they made their own history quietly, organized and furnished their world with activities and thoughts that gave it meaning. Their historical time was unique to them, yet it also cut across colonial historical time."<sup>57</sup>

### 1.2.1 Domestic, Agricultural and Other Activities

At a very early age, women could fulfill different and even hard tasks. In addition to domestic duties, women practiced craft works. In rural areas, they also practiced agricultural activities. Marnia Lazreg has described some of the activities practiced by all women: "All women rural as well as urban, prepared cosmetic products such as henna, soap, hair rinse (*ghassoul*), eye liner (*kuhul*), hair remover and perfume. Throughout the year, women produced food, curing skives, preserving vegetables and fruit as well as meat. They also processed sheepskins for domestic use, made mattresses, comforters and pillows with wool, wove thin veils, blankets, men's coats and rugs."<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, in rural areas, domestic and agricultural activities were fulfilled alternately within one busy, long day of toil. During one day, which started as early as the first religious prayer "El Fadjer," they could clean the house, prepare food, fetch water and firewood, and take care of animals. Rural women, who were not retained at

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<sup>57</sup> *The Eloquence of Silence*, 98.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

home and did not wear the veil like urban women, participated actively in the agricultural life of their villages. After fulfilling their domestic duties, they might join their men in the fields to help in the cultivation of cereals, or accomplish some gardening, or even joined the fields of fruits to collect with children the fruit specific to the season and area. Women, as asserted by Lazreg, even participated in commercial activities, "Rural women did not wear the veil, and took part in agrarian activities. [...] Rural women wove rugs, blankets, clothes and pillow covers for their use and for the market. Like men, they took part in the network of commercial and cultural exchange that linked rural and urban Algeria."<sup>59</sup>

Among the nomadic desert peoples, while, in rich families, servants fulfilled domestic work, including the preparation of food and fetching water and firewood, in less fortunate families, these duties were left to women who should also take care of animals. During removals, they also fulfilled all the packing, including the packing and resetting of tents. Lazreg describes the life of women within rich families; she writes, "The well-to-do among them enjoyed life in what has been termed as 'large tents' meaning tents made of hand-woven wool cloth, and usually filled with comfortable silk and wool cushions.[...] Life centered not only on the home, but also on the *zawiya* (the social and educational services provided by many mosques) and the market, usually held once a week in a neighboring village."<sup>60</sup>

Domestic and agricultural activities were generally fulfilled by groups of women and were characterized by collaboration at family and social level. Solidarity was installed within the family where work was divided according to age, and capacity. For instance, young girls took care of animals while mothers assured the nourishing and the clothing of all the family, in addition to gardening and other more important tasks. Significantly, some tasks were known for a high level of assistance; these included: weaving, building houses, or the cultivation of some crops in large fields. This

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59 Ibid., 28-29.

60 Ibid., 28.

assistance was known as *twiza*, which means the benevolent help needed to achieve some activities.

In urban areas, women's life was not less active. Retained at home, after finishing their domestic duties, women practiced craft work. The most renowned activities were sewing and embroidering. In the Casbah of Algiers for instance, women and young girls met on housetops—which were spaces reserved exclusively for women—formed groups led by skilled women to learn and practice embroidering and sewing, and many other craft works. Housetops were schools for craft works, young girls could learn there different skills, including even the art of cooking and baking. "Before the end of *Ramadan* women also baked large quantities of cakes to exchange with friends, family and neighbors," writes Lazreg.<sup>61</sup>

During autumn and summer, rural and urban homes turned into minimized firms for the production of what is known as traditional industries. Rural women practiced weaving, which was a seasonal activity, practiced generally during autumn. In groups, and through *twiza*, women produced carpets, blankets, tents, clothes and other useful items. In addition to weaving, through the practice of pot making, women produced most of the plates and pitchers for use at home and for sale. Most of the time, women's craft works exceeded the needs of their families, so they became objects of exportation. In urban areas, in addition to weaving, women practiced embroidering and sewing. In rural or urban areas, women took great care to decorate their productions to make of them valuable artistic items used for practical purposes. (The economic and artistic value of women's craft work will be discussed below).

### **1.2.2 Cultural Life**

Women participated largely and effectively in producing a rich culture either while fulfilling their everyday duties or simply during moments of pleasure and

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 25.

entertainment. This culture witnesses that women had a large mastery over manual arts as well as a mastery of words, which were their means of survival over the hardships of toil and life under colonialism. Women knew how to make of the useful items of textiles, of pottery and other crafts, that they produced for everyday use, beautiful works of art. They consequently gave art a social significance. They equally knew how to reduce the hardships of everyday life and toil when they celebrated all their activities in song. Additionally, they knew how to save and maintain the most significant values of their societies through tales, or folk sayings during moments of entertainment.

Distinctive crafts and artistic styles characterized rural and urban areas as well as the Sahara. Important common features of this art are the link between the agreeable and the useful and adaptation to environment. Women produced superb items especially out of weaving, embroidering, sewing, pot-making, and leather arts. Nearly all these major technologies were practiced by women in the different areas, but they were not used in the same way. For example, while leather was extensively used among nomadic women for clothing, tents, shields, and containers (food storing), women in urban areas used their skills in creating magnificent costumes through embroidery where leather was a necessary tool.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to manual arts, the cultural life was celebrated through voice and song. These songs, which were not the artifice of well-known poets, represent a crude art, marked by spontaneity, freshness, innocence and simplicity. As noticed by Jean Amrouche, “ces vers ne sont pas des fleurs de serre. On ne les a pas forcé.”<sup>63</sup> They were the spontaneous and fresh output of what most of the time emerged from necessity, either to exhibit an emotional state or to celebrate joy, peace or even to express the weariness and troubles of the community. Thus whether exhibiting personal or collective troubles or joys, women expressed while singing simple experiences in simple words and simple emotions. The simplicity of the experience is reflected in the

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62 See Youcef Nacib, *Eléments sur la Tradition Orale* (Alger: SNED, 1981).

63 Jean Amrouche, *Chant Berbère de Kabylie* (Paris: l'Harmattan: 1989), 24.

themes of this art, which crystallized moments of everyday toil as they eternalized special and significant moments in the life of the individual and the community as birth, circumcision, marriage, drought, or famine. Spontaneously and in a fascinating simplicity, the songs reflect social and individual preoccupations; their themes were much diversified. Women sang individually or collectively to celebrate life; their songs thus celebrated everyday activities. They sang to dance or to play games; they sang to meditate or to lull their children; they sang for love as they sang the return of the exiled.

This joy in life gave birth to a special musical genre *hawfi* or *el haoufi*, which is claimed by many researchers as exclusively feminine.<sup>64</sup> In his *El Haoufi, Chants de Femmes D'Algérie*, Mohamed El Habib Hachlaf informed that women in Algeria sang the poems known as *el haoufi* while doing different activities, mainly while practicing textile crafts, including washing wool beside rivers, weaving carpets or clothes, knitting, sewing or embroidering on housetops. To define this genre, he wrote:

Le haoufi est un genre qui tient son nom du mot (haoufa حوفا) qui veut dire 'roder autour de quelque chose' comme il est dit dans ce haoufi:

Rode ma belle, rode et je roderai  
Autour de ta maison  
Lance des youyous et je roderai  
Tu es un vase de basilic en fleur  
Que j'arrose de mon amour  
Et le jour où tu t'épanouiras  
Je viendrai sentir ton doux parfum.<sup>65</sup>

If some of the songs known as *el haoufi* commemorate women's activities, the majority sang their pains and suffering, their love and passions, their dreams and

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64 For a full analysis of *el haoufi* see: Mourad Yelles, "Un Aspect de la Poésie populaire Tlémécénienne: le Genre Hawfi—Etude Linguistique et Ethnographique," unpub. Dis. (Univ. Paris III, 1978). The poems are collected in Mohamed El Habib Hachlaf, *El Haoufi, Chants de Femmes D'Algérie* (Alger: éditions Alfa, 2006).

65 Mohamed El Habib Hachlaf, *El Haoufi*, 13-14.

fantasies. In the following song, the theme is the celebration of the most common and famous activity in rural and urban homes, textile craftwork:

O laveuses de laine  
O vous qui débarrassez la laine du domran  
A qui appartient cette laine?  
C'est la laine de Aicha bent Nekrouf  
Celle qui file dans la journée une  
Demi-livre et dans sa veillée  
Une once (de fil de chaîne)<sup>66</sup>

Other poems celebrate love as the following:

O mon dieu, donne au cœur  
Ce qu'il attend d'amour  
Toi qui peut réunir  
Réunis les gens qui s'aiment<sup>67</sup>

Others express deception in love, and the consequent pains:

L'oiseau que j'ai apprivoisé  
Ne devait pas s'envoler  
Il a abandonné ma cage  
Pour remplir la cage d'autrui  
Il m'a rejeté à la mer  
Me Laissant dans l'égarement.  
Mes voiles sont déchirées  
Et mes rames brisées.  
La vie est ainsi faite  
Il y a un temps pour l'union  
Et un autre pour la séparation.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 24. Mohammed El Habib Hachlef explained in a footnote that the word "*domran*" is a plant which hangs on the wool of sheep. He also explained that "Aicha bent Nekrouf" is the name of a woman from ancient times, famous for her skill in textile crafts.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 108.

Notably, if in urban areas the themes of most of *el haoufi* songs express intimate passions and emotions, in rural areas the most common themes of songs were those celebrating everyday activities. In rural areas, women celebrated nearly all their tasks in song; they sang their activities whether soft or hard. Some of these songs may be indicated. Rural women sang while churning milk to produce butter:

O Clément, o Miséricordieux!  
C'est par (ces mots) que les étudiants commencent leurs planchettes,  
C'est par (eux) que les cultivateurs entament leurs travaux.  
Mon lait commence à se séparer  
Au nom du Dieu et avec (sa) bénédiction!<sup>69</sup>

They sang with their men in the fields all the steps of the cultivation of cereals. While ploughing and sowing, they sang:

Au Nom de Dieu, Clément et Miséricordieux!  
Je sème! Que dieu fasse pousser (le grain),  
Les hommes mangeront et les oiseaux aussi!<sup>70</sup>

Then while harvesting, they sang:

Je supplierai les cultivateurs  
Qui restent tous les jours dans les champs.  
Ils ont à la main des faucilles  
Avec le tablier de cuir ils essuient la sueur; le paradis leur apparaît,  
Ils font leur prière avec le Prophète!<sup>71</sup>

In addition to celebrating life in song, women preserved all the wisdom of their communities in folktales and sayings, which reflect an existential reality where sometimes it is not easy to discern the real from the legendary. Through folktales and sayings, women were also vigilant to satirize misbehavior. Actually, life in traditional

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69 See Germaine Laoust-Chantréaux, *Kabylie Côté Femmes. La Vie Féminine à Aït Hichem, 1937-1939* (Aix-en Provence : Edisud, 1990), 83.

70 Ibid, 100.

71 Ibid, 101.

societies appears with all its forms through folktales. At the social level, through these tales, which represent features from women's everyday experiences and their different tasks within their families and their social group, we learn much from what was expected from women. The tales were generally transmitted from grandmothers or mothers to a young feminine audience as daughters and grand-daughters who were fascinated by the qualities of the female heroine who, the teller insists, incarnates high moral values such as hard work, perseverance, devotion, politeness, courtesy, fidelity, and respect, in addition to physical beauty. Just as the tale and the teller perpetuated positive qualities, they also condemned evil behavior and warned against its tragic consequences sometimes through moralizing and, at others, through humor.

Women were very skillful in preserving to folktales their beauty as well as the wisdom they incarnate. Women narrators possessed the gift of making the qualities of a heroine like *Loundja*<sup>72</sup> the most cherished and deeply desired among the young feminine audience, and they also possessed the gift of reproving such evil behavior common among women as that of the stepmother who punishes unjustly her young and naïve stepdaughter, who lives under her protection. Taos Amrouche, in the prologue of *Le Grain Magique* told about the skill of her mother as a tale-teller who enriched the folktales she transmitted to her; she wrote: “J'avais la chance d'avoir en elle (her mother) une admirable narratrice. J'entends encore sa voix inspirée prononcer sur le ton de l'incantation la formule initiale qui nous faisait pénétrer comme par magie dans l'univers de la légende: 'Que mon conte soit beau et se déroule comme un long fil,' et la formule finale: 'Mon conte est comme un ruisseau, je l'ai conté à des Seigneurs' qui nous indiquait que le conte devait passer en nous comme un ruisseau, nous enchantant pour toujours, et poursuivre sa course de bouche en bouche et d'âme en âme, jusqu'à la fin des temps.”<sup>73</sup>

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72 *Loundja* is the name of a famous heroine that is found in folk stories and that is known for her beauty and virtue.

73 Taos Amrouche, *Le Grain Magique: Contes, Poèmes, Proverbes, Berbères de Kabylie* [1966], (Paris: éditions la Découverte, 1996), 10.

### 1.2.3 Social Life

While women held important roles in agriculture, manufacturing, and trade, they also possessed an important, if restricted, social role. They participated actively but rarely publicly in the social life of their communities. Women tried eagerly to maintain the rich heritage of rituals common in their societies, and participated in the celebration of religious feasts as well as familial ceremonies, which offered them a chance to rejoice and celebrate life and to show their culinary gifts. However, because of the little spread of education, conjure and divination were used by women to change fate and to have or at least believe that they could control their lives and protect themselves against the hardships of life.

Indeed, traditional Algerian societies were very rich with rituals that women were very careful to maintain. Women accompanied some of their activities with special rituals. Rituals were generally accompanied by spiritual songs, representing a quest for protection and/or prosperity before some superior powers. The most common rituals were “protection rituals” and “rituals of rain” or “prosperity rituals.” The latter consisted of special practices fulfilled by women to protect their goods which they thought might be harmed by evil forces. For instance, the production of butter and that of olive oil in Plateau regions was frequently accompanied by “protection rituals.” Women used a pot that they held in their hands and turned seven times around the recipient containing the milk used to produce butter, or around the one containing olive oil and sang:

O faucille, o faucille brune  
Que le cultivateur porte à la ceinture!  
Préserve le lait et le beurre,  
Même si on les emporte à Fès!<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See Germaine Laoust-Chantréaux, 84.

One of the most famous rites in rural areas were “rain rituals;” these were aimed to favor the development of cultivation and the good progress of some agricultural works. During times of drought, women waited for rain with the same interest as farmers; they even tried to bring it about as we notice in this song commonly sung by women:

Donne-nous pluie à verse  
Pour que vive la veuve  
Donne-nous pluie qui inonde  
Pour que vivent les laboureurs.  
Madame mère de la pluie  
L'eau dégoutera  
La terre sera abreuvée  
Nous ferons des crêpes.<sup>75</sup>

During one of those rituals known also as pleading rituals, women or children in some regions would walk in groups asking for charity in neighboring villages singing:

Le blé atteindra (la taille) des quenouilles  
Les grains gros comme des fèves  
Et les gens mangeront!<sup>76</sup>

Women at home gave them semolina, and they threw water outside. This troupe would then share what they collected. These rituals were generally accomplished in times of drought and were aimed to obtain rain or again to expulse evil.

In addition to rituals, religious feasts as *Achoura*, *Mouloud*, *Eid el fitr* or *Eid el adha*, which return yearly, offered women the opportunity to participate as actively in the social life of their community as they offered them a chance to rejoice and celebrate life. In some rural regions, women organized visits in groups to the *zaouia* where resided the saint of their village during the days of religious feasts. Their pilgrimage

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<sup>75</sup> *Eléments sur la Tradition Orale*, 16.

<sup>76</sup> See Germaine Laoust-Chantéreaux, 96.

was celebrated by songs. These women might spend the whole night praying in the *zaouia* as shown in this poem:

Nous sommes montées voir le chikh  
Et avons passé la nuit à El-Hamel.<sup>77</sup>

In some regions, especially in urban areas, religious feasts were an opportunity for women to organize religious meetings celebrated through songs. These women, who were known as *meddahat* in western Algeria, reproduced some of the classical songs of *el melhoun* making sometimes improvisations. Among these *maddahat*, Khaira Es-sebsajiyya from Mostaganem, became a famous singer who produced some religious poems which were recognized for their originality. In these poems, she celebrated the deeds and the virtues of many saints known in the regions of western Algeria.<sup>78</sup> Her songs were well-known in the region especially among women who sang them at different occasions especially religious feasts.

In some urban centers in the region of central Algeria, religious feasts offered women an opportunity to accomplish religious functions and to be leaders of religious rituals. During the feast *El Achoura* for instance, women used to meet in the village *zaouia*, each would bring the necessary ingredients to prepare traditional dishes. Food would then be distributed throughout the village among the poor. In addition to food preparation, women fulfilled rituals. Actually, during these feasts, though the role of women was insignificant at the spiritual level, they played the most important function at the social and cultural level. Thus women participated in preserving for these feasts their most significant values, namely, social solidarity, and hospitality. These feasts were also a chance for women to show and exchange their culinary gifts.

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<sup>77</sup> *Eléments sur la Tradition Orale*, 17.

<sup>78</sup> Some of the poems of Khaira Es-sebsajiyya can be consulted in Mohammed Belhalfaoui, "Khaira Es-sebsajiyya: Poétesse et chanteuse d'Oran et Mostaganem (morte en 1940)," in *Littérature Orale* (Alger: OPU, 1982), 24-33.

In addition to religious feasts, occasional family ceremonies like weddings, circumcisions, and births offered endless opportunities for women to celebrate life collectively through dance, music and song. Women sang collectively in choirs directed by a famous singer who might also be a famous poet in the community. *El haoufi* animated nearly all the feasts where this genre was known. Many women singers of *el haoufi*, who animated through the beauty of their voices and songs family ceremonies in Algerian cities, gained a public renown and became professionals of this genre. It is the case of Maalma Yamna Bent El Hadj El Mahdi, Chiekha Tetma Tlemçania, Meriem Fekkai, Fadela Dziriya and many others.<sup>79</sup>

Each occasion was celebrated by special songs. To celebrate circumcision ceremonies, women might sing:

Priez le prophète et chantez les louanges de Dieu  
Pendant l'heureuse nuit, tu te réjouiras mon cœur  
O parfum de l'aromate, o parfum de la rue  
Pendant l'heureuse nuit, tu te réjouiras mon cœur  
O parfum de l'aromate, o parfum du benjoun  
Pendant l'heureuse nuit, se réjouissent les frères de maman  
Circoncis, o maitre, circoncis-le, n'aie peur  
Circoncis-le, o maitre, par-dessous le drap<sup>80</sup>

To celebrate weddings, many songs, which reflect women's experiences, were addressed to the bride. Some of these songs accompanied the ritual of *henna*; while a woman would cover the bride's hands with *henna*, other women might sing:

O douce, mets le henné  
Dans le plat de verre  
Mets-le, aidée par les anges  
Et par le Prophète.<sup>81</sup>

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79 See *EL Haoufi : Chants de Femmes d'Algérie*, 15.

80 *Eléments sur la Tradition Orale*, 12.

81 *Ibid*, 13.

Other songs, with a didactic purpose, insisted on the qualities of a good wife including honesty, coyness, respect of the husband, etc. The bride might hear:

Cette haute échelle  
Seules les étoiles sont hautes  
Fonde un foyer, o jeune fille,  
La maison paternelle n'est pas éternelle.<sup>82</sup>

Some songs consoled the bride who might feel worried about her future life, and sad about leaving definitely the paternal home. The songs might celebrate the beauty of the bride who might hear,

Ne pleure pas, o perdrix,  
Tes beaux-frères sont là, devant la porte  
Si moi je suis exilée  
J'ai laissé mon village seul<sup>83</sup>

Entertainment in some urban regions, where women spent most of their time at home, took a special form. Women celebrated their time at home through games. One of the most famous games in the central regions of Algeria, Algiers, Blida and surrounding areas,<sup>84</sup> was *buqala*. This game was basically based on divination. The game consisted of the meeting of a group of women with a central object, a pitcher, late at night where some magical-poetic practices would occur. It has the objective of foreseeing the future.

What is significant about those meetings was the poetic atmosphere which reigned where women recited from memory and also improvised poems, generally in a dialectical Arabic used in urban centers. The poems are pregnant with images, rich with metaphors and symbols. The themes are varied; we find predominantly poems of love,

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82 Ibid, 14.

83 Ibid, 14.

84 The poems which constitute the game were also found in other urban centres in the Maghreb as: Fes in Morocco, Tlemcen, Mostaganem, and Mazouna in the west of Algeria. For a detailed account of the game *buqala*, see Mustapha Lacheraf, *Islam et Occident* (Publications Collectives des Cahiers du Sud, 1947), Bencheneb S., "Le Jeu de la *Buqala*."

but also poems about solitude, absence, and nostalgia for the past. Structurally, the poems are short and are built on rhyme and word play. These poems are what constitute *el haoufi* songs. Another significant feature of the game *buqala* is its divinatory nature. Women in urban centers tried to go beyond their enclosure by trying to know beyond their present. While listening to those highly symbolic poems, which each could interpret according to her condition, they entertained each other and allowed each to express her worries and hopes. Describing *el haoufi* and *buqala*, Aida Adib Bamia writes,

*buqala*, played during the month of *Ramadan*, [...] is limited to women and consists of reciting short poems, mostly quatrains in colloquial Arabic. The term *buqala* is derived from the name of a container, *buqal*, possibly from the French *bocal* ('jar'). During the recitation a personal object belonging to one of the participants is pulled out of a special, two-handled pot, the *buqal*. The words of the poem predict a future event in the life of the object's owner, thus combining divination with entertainment. Men are usually excluded from the game, giving women greater freedom in the choice of the poems and their interpretation, often consisting of explicitly sexual or sentimental topics. There are variations in the way the game is played as reported by other researchers [...], but its significance as a link between the closed world of women and the outside world is stressed by all. Although the poems cover a wide variety of topics, the majority describe amorous encounters, the longing for an absent beloved, or unrequited love.<sup>85</sup>

Actually, women in both urban centers and rural areas sought to know beyond their present, during a time which offered them but little to be satisfied, especially as they were generally denied the chance to access education. Women sought to know beyond or to protect present acquisitions or even to acquire what was beyond their reach through appeal to magic. They sought to manipulate their fate. In *La Guerre des Femmes: Magie et Amour en Algérie*, Nadjima Plantade explains that magicians were generally consulted in affairs of love and marriage. Young unmarried girls, especially those who might have waited a lot for a suitor, sought the services of magicians. The latter were also consulted by married women who might want to gain the love of their

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85 Aida Adib Bamia, *The Graying of the Raven: Cultural and Sociopolitical Significance of Algerian Folk Poetry* (The American Univ. in Cairo Press, 2001), 15-6.

husbands or even shun the conflicts which might threaten their matrimonial life, or who needed to preserve their men against union with other women, in a society where polygamy was common. Generally, at the request of the magicians, these women fulfilled certain rituals, which usually consisted in the recitation by the magician of poetic verses. In those verses, we find mainly hopeful statements, the remedies that the client should follow, and the happy resolution as in the following verses designated to remedy the spinsterhood of a young girl:

Il te dit  
Ils t'ont préparé un bassin  
Bientôt ta souffrance sera terminée.  
Je vois qu'ils t'ont donné des branches  
On te fera un métier à tisser,  
On te donnera un burnous,  
Tu ne seras plus comme un reclus  
Je vois que tu dois aller seulement avec la bonne poche (l'homme fidèle)  
Finie pour toi la nourriture fade.  
Mais je vois, Ha!  
Ce qui prospère est utile, ne dit pas non  
On ira du côté de la main droite,  
On te laissera beaucoup décider, les malheurs cesseront.<sup>86</sup>

Another kind of magic was motivated by jealousy and hatred and was aimed to harm. A woman might use magic against another woman to destroy her matrimonial life. This was commonly done either by a mother in law against her daughter in law, or a sister in law or any other woman whose jealousy might make her want to destroy the union of a couple. Additionally, during colonial times, magic was used by women in affairs other than love and marriage. Women consulted magicians to learn news about

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86 Nadjima Plantade, *La Guerre des Femmes: Magie et Amour en Algérie* (Paris: La Boîte à Documents, 1988), 22.

their absent relatives—a son, a husband, a father, a brother...etc., who left homes to escape the colonial army.<sup>87</sup>

#### 1.2.4 Economics

The economic role of women during the colonial period was related to women's extra-domestic activities. Algerian homes before and during the colonial period were minimized firms. In rural homes, most women practiced the weaving of cloth, carpets or blankets and pot making not only to supply for the needs of their families, but they produced what they might take to the market. Lazreg has written that rural women, "like men, [...] took part in the network of commercial and cultural exchange that linked rural and urban Algeria."<sup>88</sup> In urban homes, in addition to weaving, embroidery was a distinguished commercial activity. However, the importing of cheap manufactured goods from Europe led to the decline of craft industry except for some activities related to the industry of traditional costumes, which were practiced by women at home. This change in the economic life led to the impoverishment of the Algerian families, forcing some women towards servitude in European homes.

Actually, the distinguished role of the craft industry practiced in Algerian homes in both rural and urban areas was discouraged by colonial economic policies. R. Lespes described this change as it affected the city of Algiers in his *Alger-Etude de Géographie et d'Histoire Urbaine*; he wrote "A côté des petits ateliers que l'on peut rencontrer en flânant dans les rues du vieil Alger, il existe tout un personnel de femmes et d'enfants indigènes travaillant à la maison pour le commerce local."<sup>89</sup> He then added that this commerce declined before European products "Tous les ustensiles domestiques de

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87 Idem.

88 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 29.

89 R. Lespes, *Alger- Etudes de Géographie et d'Histoire Urbaine* (Paris : Librairie Félix Alcan, Paris, 1930), 754.

potiers, chaudronniers, fondeurs, batteurs de cuivre, étameurs d'Alger ont cédé la place à la quincaillerie européenne.”<sup>90</sup>

Under these conditions, women sought jobs outside their homes, sometimes in industrial firms, but the majority were forced to work as servants in European homes. Lespes informed that “La femme indigène ne trouve place que dans quelques manufactures, celles des tabacs et allumettes entre autres, et pour une faible part d’ailleurs ; le nombre oscille autour de 200. Celles qui travaillent hors de la maison—et elles sont nombreuses—sont attirées par les métiers de domestiques, de femmes de ménage, de femmes de peine.”<sup>91</sup>

Despite their close relation to the colonial families, those women servants kept their cultural identity; they could appropriate the best that they could get, and contribute through the best of themselves into the European world they integrated without risk of self-effacement. Lucienne Favre represented Algerian servants in her *Dans la Casbah*. Despite the fact that Favre represented these servants with some prejudice as she wrote, “une servante arabe peut être menteuse, chapardeuse, fainéante, mais elle amène toujours dans une maison un élément de fantaisie, de variété, une douceur dans les gestes, un pittoresque,”<sup>92</sup> we can notice that the woman she represented as a servant provides a good example of how servants preserved their cultural identity as well as their integrity even if they intruded the European cities and homes. This servant was able to appropriate enough medical knowledge from the doctor who employed her, to be able to install herself as a traditional medicine woman within her original group in the Casbah.

Actually, not all women were reduced to servitude. Some were very skilled in craft industry to defy the colonial economic machine. Some craft industries practiced by women defied the colonial economic policies such as traditional embroidering. In urban

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90 Idem.

91 Lespes, 780.

92 Lucienne Favre, *Dans la Casbah* (Paris : Grasset, 1937), 54.

homes, the preparation of the trousseau of the bride, which consisted of traditional embroidered clothes as well as traditional costumes worn especially during ceremonies, continued to employ an important feminine working force. The savoir-faire of this working force accumulated in the ancient families installed in urban centers, could not be threatened by European things. The homes of some renowned women were not only minimized firms but also market places, which brought together a producer and consumer. In addition to those artist home workers, some women known as *dallalat* practiced home trade. *Dallalat* were a particular group of women who especially in urban centers were specialized in selling jewelry, in particular gold.<sup>93</sup>

### 1.2.5 Politics

The political role of women in Algeria can be discussed in relation to their engagement with the struggle for national independence. Algerian women devoted their life for freedom as early as the colonial powers put their feet on the Algerian land. However, their most effective role is noticeable especially during the Revolutionary War, which changed the life of women in Algeria.

Women's commitment to the independence of their country can be traced back to the very earliest years of colonialism through the movement of Lalla Fatma N'Soumer against the French occupation of the region of Djurdjura, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Known as "the rebel" and considered as a saint, she had a great influence over her people who had a great faith in her, and followed her advice and call for resistance against the French expeditions advancing towards the East, led by Marshal Randon. Under the leadership of Lalla Fatma N'Soumer, Marshal Randon and his generals endured one defeat after the other. Lalla Fatma and her dedicated soldiers prevented the

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93 See Chafika Dib-Marouf, "Dot et Travail Féminin à Domicile en Algérie: Procès de Reproduction Sociale et Culturelle," in *Femmes du Maghreb au présent, la Dot, le Travail, L'identité*, eds. Monique Gadant & Michel Kasriel (Paris : Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1990), 19-36.

huge 7<sup>th</sup> army and the famous Marshal Randon from conquering the region of Djurdjura for five years.<sup>94</sup>

This rebellious woman, who could neither read nor write, displayed amazing ingenuity and excellent managerial skills as she poured her time and energy into organizing resistance against the advance of the French army into the Djurdjura, initiating attacks to assist neighboring villages. Years before the French reached the region, Lalla Fatma had visions of the menace and warned her people to prepare for resistance. When the French reached the great Kabylia, lalla Fatma called for assistance from the neighboring villages, which were under the threat of the French army. Her first intervention cost the French captain Wolf a ruthless defeat in Oued Sebaou. This victory, which spread hope around the kabylian villages, alarmed Marshal Randon who, in June 1854, called the assistance of the 8<sup>th</sup> army led by Marshal Bugeaud from Constantine. The two armies who conquered many villages in the great Kabylia, suffered a succession of defeats against the combatants led by Lalla Fatma, in the battle of Icheriden, on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1854, then in that of Tachkirt on July 19<sup>th</sup> 20<sup>th</sup>, 1854.

Nothing stopped her, but treason. After a truce of two years, during which she prompted the villagers to restore the damages resulting from the French offensive, she also prepared for war. In May 1857 when the French conquered the region of Larbaa Nath Irathen, and before the reluctance of the villagers to resist, she gathered their chiefs and delivered an influential convincing speech which had a salutary effect on her audience who decided to resume the struggle. Then even before defeat, in the battle of Icheriden (July, 10<sup>th</sup> 1857) she returned to the villages to recruit volunteers to reinforce resistance. She was however defeated by treason. The famous Marshal Randon realized that the gates of the Djurdjura could be opened before him only if he got rid of “Jeanne

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94 Tahar Oussedik, *Des Héroïnes Algériennes dans L'Histoire* (Alger : Editions ENAG, 2005), 41-91.

d'Arc du Djurdjura” as he named her. He therefore did not hesitate to use treason to capture the heroine and stop resistance altogether.<sup>95</sup>

Of course, most women did not act on such a heroic scale as Lalla Fatma N'Soumer. Women shared all the high hopes and enthusiasm for the prospects of freedom that arose on the eve and during the Revolutionary war, taking part in whatever activity was open to them. Women supported in different ways the struggle for freedom. In the numerous attacks and the frequent harassment of the colonial powers, women played their part. They engaged in guerilla activity; they took arms and fought in the mountains; they assumed commandment roles and led warriors to fight gloriously the colonial army. They hid FLN soldiers in their houses, transmitted messages, carried arms and explosives in their bags and under their veils and nursed injured soldiers. They formed groups to raise money to assist the revolution or to help the soldiers' families with food and clothing.

Women participated in all the many organizations and movements that from the beginning of the struggles against colonialism loudly protested despotism and claimed the freedom of Algeria. In his *Histoire du Nationalisme Algérien*, Mahfoud Kaddache provides many instances about the participation of women in the struggle for freedom, which started before the Revolutionary War. One of the examples he cited goes back to July, 14<sup>th</sup> 1939 where a woman, the wife of Messali el Hadj led the demonstrations of 1700 militants, and where 13 women were injured. In 1947, the first women's organization was created by a group of students and teachers (Association des Femmes Musulmanes d'Algérie). Their main activities were “conférences, propagande de foyer en foyer, aide aux familles nécessiteuses et aux détenus politiques”<sup>96</sup> as witnessed by Mahfoud Kaddache, who then adds that “ces femmes ont été les premières à donner au

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95 See Tahar Oussedik, *Des Héroïnes Algériennes dans L'Histoire* (Alger : Editions ENAG, 2005), 41-91.

96 Mahfoud Kaddache, *Histoire du Nationalisme Algérien 1919-1951* (Alger: SNED, 1980), 810.

peuple l'image de la femme évoluée, acceptée par le milieu social Algérien et considérée comme un exemple à suivre sinon par la mère et l'épouse mais par la fille.”<sup>97</sup>

Women who profited from education and enfranchisement knew how to manipulate the ambiguities within both the Muslim and French codes to improve their economic and social conditions. Educated women could gradually get out of the seclusion as well as the veil, which were imposed on women in urban centers. They could work outside, and thus occupied different jobs that were exclusively reserved to men. During the Revolutionary War, the majority of women who engaged with the armed struggle used their education in practicing especially nursing.

Additionally, even uneducated secluded women in urban centers took new roles. During the Revolutionary War, most households were left to the exclusive care of women as men were absent either because they were engaged with the revolutionary army or left homes fleeing persecution. As Sonia Ramzi-Abir puts it, women “ont appris à prendre des responsabilités, elles travaillent, elles s’occupent de leur budget, de leur enfants.”<sup>98</sup> Likewise, an FLN combatant recognized “Since 1954, there have been many changes. In most households, men are absent—they are in prison, in combat, or dead. Women have learned to get along on their own; they work, they manage their own money, they take care of their children. Habits have changed, too...I think men understood that it is in their interest to give their wives some responsibilities.”<sup>99</sup> Actually, within the combatant’s “give their wives some responsibilities” and the scholar’s “ont appris à prendre des responsabilités,” we sound the repetition of the prejudice based on the assumption that women had no “responsibilities” before the revolution. In contrast, we would rather say that women’s responsibilities increased with the changing conditions, which also increased liberty and self-confidence among

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97 Ibid., 811.

98 Sonia Ramzi-Abir, *La Femme Arabe au Maghreb et au Machrek. Fiction et Réalité* (Alger : Entreprise nationale du livre, 1986,) 57.

99 Qtd. in Winifred Woodhull, “Unveiling Algeria,” 568.

the previously secluded women, among whom some even took arms and fought the colonizer participating actively in the struggle for national freedom.

## **2 Nigeria and Colonialism, a Woman's Experience**

## **2.1 A Brief Survey of the Position of Women in Precolonial and Colonial Nigeria**

The nature of gender relations in precolonial and colonial Nigeria varied from one ethnic group to another. Actually, though there were many ethnic groups, three major communities constituted precolonial Nigeria namely, the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. Women were treated differently in the different groups. Their position therefore varied according to the kinship structure of the group and the socio-economic roles they achieved within their societies. However, among all these groups, women's lives revolved around their homes, the fields, and the market.

### **2.1.1 Women in Precolonial Nigeria**

While all the material we could consult for this review comes to an agreement that the precolonial past was a period of relative prosperity for women who used to enjoy control over economic resources and shared some political power, there is much controversy about the position of women in those societies. In fact, much material emphasizes the victimhood of women repeating much of the prejudice adopted in early Western ethnographic, anthropologist and missionary depiction of Nigerian life. Other material romanticizes women's powers and exaggerates their political and social status. A tendency to reconcile the two positions can be noticed in other works, which acknowledge that women held a complementary, rather than subordinate, position to men though patrilineal and patriarchal kinship structures predominated Nigerian societies, and some authors as Ife Amadiume describes Nnobi Igbo life as structured

around matriarchal and patriarchal structures.<sup>1</sup> Other works consider precolonial societies as generally "ungendered" and assume that it was the attempt to describe them as gendered in colonial literature, which altered the precolonial structure of these societies.<sup>2</sup>

Some scholars assumed that patrilineal and patriarchal kinship structures predominated in some Nigerian societies. In "The position of women among the Afikpo Ibo," Phoebe V. Ottenberg writes that among the Afikpo, "relations between men and women are characterized by strong male domination. The ideal of the innate superiority of men over women is backed by men's control over land, the supernatural and by sanctions of the village men's society."<sup>3</sup> Similar prejudice about the inferiority of women can be found in *Among the Ibo of Nigeria* by George Thomas Basden who lived among the Igbo; however, he could repeat that, "Women have but few rights in any circumstances, and can only hold such property as their lords permit. There is no grumbling against their lot; they accept the situation as their grandmothers did before them and, taking affairs philosophically, they manage to live fairly contentedly."<sup>4</sup>

According to Ottenberg, Basden and many other scholars,<sup>5</sup> Nigerian societies associated women with weakness. In *Things Fall Apart*, the famous novelist Chinua Achebe seems to confirm this view. He depicts the role of women among the Igbo. He shows how the Igbo ironically named men who have no fighting titles *Agbala*, which could also mean a "woman." Okonko, the protagonist of the novel who has achieved

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1 Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed, 1987.

2 Nzegwu, Nkiru Uwechia. *Family Matters, Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy and Culture*. Albany: State Univ. of NY Press, 2006; Oyewùmí, Oyèrónke. *Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

3 Phoebe V. Ottenberg, "The position of women among the Afikpo Ibo," in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, ed. William R. Bascom and Melville Herskovits (Chicago: Phoenix Books the Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), 207-208.

4 G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1983), 88.

5 See also Stitcher, S. B. & J. L. Parpart eds. *Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and the Workforce*. London: Westview Press, 1988; Eberregbulam Njoku, John E. *The world of the Africa*. Scarecrows press Inco., 1980.

many titles, contrary to his father who has been called *Agbala*, laments the weakness of his son Nwoye; he ponders how he, "a flaming fire could have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate?"<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, he wishes that his favorite daughter Ezinma were a boy, "If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier,"<sup>7</sup> he claims. In keeping with the Igbo's view of female nature, they allowed wife beating. The novel describes two instances when Okonkwo beats his second wife, once when she does not come home to cook his meal. He beats her severely and has been punished but only because he beats her during the Week of Peace. He beats her again when she refers to him as one of those "guns that never shot."<sup>8</sup>

To oppose this view, some writers have romanticized women's lives. The idealization of women's lives appears in works influenced by the Negritude movement,<sup>9</sup> which undertook the rehabilitation of African heritage against Western denigration, and defined this heritage as the sum of precolonial African values as yet uncontaminated by Western culture. These writers idealized women, who are described using the image of the "Earth Mother;" in most works woman becomes a symbol of Africa idealized for her sensuality, fertility and nurturing potential.

In *Male Daughters Female Husbands*, Ife Amadiume argues that among the Nnobi Igbo, patriarchal as well as matriarchal structures determined gender relations. She stresses the relation of complementarity that existed in the traditional Igbo family. Describing precolonial Nnobi life, she explains that the principal religious deity was the river goddess, *Idemili*.<sup>10</sup> Amadiume has explained that many ritual beliefs and practices in the Nnobi culture supported female ascendancy and power; she writes, "there was a body of beliefs and practices embedded in a matriarchal ideology derived from the worship of the Goddess Idemili. This generated and supported favorable female ideas

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6 Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* [1958] (London: Heinmann Educational Books, 1996), 108.

7 Ibid., 46.

8 Ibid., 28.

9 See Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkhan [1950] (New York and London: Monthly Review Press 1972).

10 See the myth of origin of the goddess *Idemili* in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 100.

and strong matrifocality in Nnobi culture."<sup>11</sup> However, Amadiume adds, there were also beliefs which legitimated anti-female practices which were embedded in "the ancestor cult;" these beliefs and practices were "derived from a patriarchal ideology and expressed in the ancestor cult."<sup>12</sup> Amadiume explains that despite these contradictions in the Nnobi system of belief, women had much power in the society inspired from the fact that the principal deity was a female goddess. Amadiume writes, "Most of the activities which marked the traditional calendar were ritual ceremonies and festivals of thanksgiving to the goddess Idemili. The impression is of a society and culture completely coloured by the veneration of this goddess."<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to Amadiume, in *Family Matters, Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy and Culture*, Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu argues that prior to colonialism, Igbo society was ungendered and nonpatriarchal. It was governed by symmetrical political structures representative of both men's and women's interests, which give "both sexes the same level of significance while accommodating their biological differences."<sup>14</sup> To explain this symmetry, Nzegwu writes,

Historically, the Igbo social structure and philosophical scheme expose the error of presuming that the society is patriarchal. Prior to colonialism, numerous northwestern Igbo communities possessed a dual-sex system in which there were separate political lines of governance for men and women. This separation between the sexes did not imply the exaggeration of differences, a suppression of similarities, the superordinate status of one sex over the other, or the creation of irresolvable conflict between the sexes. Rather the political division of duties and tasks seemed designed to make men and women interdependent. Because sociopolitical powers were assigned to each group, each group required the assistance and collaboration of the other.<sup>15</sup>

Other writers have found out that other Nigerian societies de-emphasized gender as a basis for status. Niara Sudarkasa, author of "'The Status of Women' in Indigenous

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<sup>11</sup> *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 99.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Family Matters*, 227.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

African Societies" has observed, "many other areas of traditional culture, including personal dress and adornment, religious ceremonials, and intragender patterns of comportment, suggest that Africans often deemphasize gender in relation to seniority and other insignia of status."<sup>16</sup> According to Sudarkasa, the social de-emphasis on gender as a designation for behavior is strikingly seen in the absence of gender in the pronouns of many African languages and the interchangeability of first names among females and males.

This emphasis on seniority as a basis for status in traditional societies is also emphasized by Thelma Awori in "The Myth of the Inferiority of the African Woman":

Status and prestige in most but not all African societies was based on seniority (this might be in terms of age or a gradation of social or kinship relations) and performance (the fulfillment of role expectations and the possessions of status symbols). [...] Even though the wife-mother role is normally given to the female sex, an older woman would definitely be accorded a higher status in most traditional societies than a younger man who does not stand a real or classical relation of being father's brother or some other relation which is senior by cultural norm. In the same way a venerable old woman who had born her husband's clan many children may have a higher status in society than that of a commoner male.<sup>17</sup>

The position of women in those societies could improve with time. A woman might gain more respect as she grew older, bore children, and earned approval from older members. Thelma Awori wrote, "when she [a wife] joins the kin group of her husband who live together, her status amongst them is indeed very junior. It improves with time and her ability to assimilate herself into the new family group. When she bears a child, she can then be considered a full member of the group because she now becomes a 'mother' of their child." She then adds, "a woman's acquired status as a

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16 Niara Sudarkasa, "The Status of Women' in Indigenous African Societies," in *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, eds. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, Sharon Harley, and Andrea Benton Rushing (Howard University Press, 1987), 36.

17 Thelma Awori, "The Myth of the Inferiority of the African Woman," in *La Civilisation de la Femme dans la Tradition Africaine*, Hile Nlea Juls, ed. (Abidjan : 1972), 32.

mother earns her deference from her husband and the community in their realization of her fulfillment of a very vital role in society.”<sup>18</sup>

Among the Hausa, the position of women could be defined by their growing old in a polygamous society. M.G. Smith wrote, “L’une des conditions du mariage polygame est le rang attribué aux co-épouses en fonction de leur ancienneté dans le mariage au commun époux.”<sup>19</sup> The same position was attributed to senior wives among the Igbo. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe, who portrays the Igbo society, shows that the senior wife of a man is paid much respect. This deference is illustrated by the palm wine ceremony at Nwakibie's obi. Anasi, Nwakibie's first wife, has not yet arrived and "the others [other wives] could not drink before her.”<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, in *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Oyèrónké Oyewùmí acknowledges the importance of seniority principle in precolonial Oyo Yoruba social organization. She explains, "in the Yoruba world, particularly in pre-nineteenth century Oyo culture, society was conceived to be inhabited by people in relation to one another. That is, the "physicality" of maleness or femaleness did not have social antecedents and therefore did not constitute social categories. Social hierarchy was determined by social relations. [...] the principle that determined social organizations was seniority.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, while she confirms the emphasis on seniority as an organizing principle in Yoruba, she claims that it involves responsibility; she writes, "it should be stressed however that seniority is not just a matter of privilege in everyday life. It is also about responsibility.”<sup>22</sup>

As opposed to the Western gender categories focused on the body, or the physicality of maleness or femaleness, Oyewùmí explains that when seniority

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18 Ibid, 38, 39.

19 M. George Smith, "Annex 1," in Mary F. Smith, *Baba De Karo: L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, *Textes de Baba Giwa*, trans. Geneviève Mayoux (Plon, 1969), 308.

20 Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* [1958] (London: Heinmann Educational Books, 1958), 22.

21 *The Invention of Women*, 13.

22 Ibid, 41.

encompasses responsibility, it is also relational and dynamic. She writes, "Seniority is relational and situational in that no one is permanently senior or junior position; it all depends on who is present in any given situation. Seniority, unlike gender, is only comprehensible as part of relationships. Thus, it is neither rigidly fixated on the body nor dichotomized."<sup>23</sup>

Discussing social roles within a seniority-based social organization, Oyewùmí, examines the responsibilities couples had in the family. Couples had reciprocal duties towards each other. Each conjugal partner had his personal property. She writes, "Inside the marriage, couples had obligations to and certain expectations of each other. To that extent, they had reciprocal claims on each other's labor and time. They both had differing responsibilities to both lineages. [...] within marital lineages, these responsibilities included monetary and labor contributions made as an *aya-ile* (member by marriage)."<sup>24</sup> In society therefore access to power, exercise of authority, and membership in occupations all derived from the lineage, which was regulated from within by age, not sex.<sup>25</sup>

When much controversy was raised about the status of women within the different societies in Nigeria, in all studies, it is agreed that women had independent access to income in all pre-colonial communities. Since land was usually owned communally, whoever worked or tilled the land derived the benefits. A senior wife, who as she grew older gained assistance from younger wives, would spend less time in the home and more time engaging in activities outside the household as farming, craft making, or trading. These activities allowed them access to income and therefore to provide the material resources needed in order to care for their families. While neither the Yoruba nor the Igbo denied access to economic activities and therefore financial independence to women, even among the Hausa, where women were secluded after marriage, access to independent income could be achieved. While young confined Hausa women made

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 55-56.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 83.

use of the services of their children to trade the homemade food or craft products, old women could raise animals for trade purposes, which allowed them to be financially independent.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to economic independence, women in most societies had political influence. Pre-colonial societies considered the work women did complementary to the work of men, and some women achieved impressive status in the social and political realms. More commonly, women achieved power thanks to their wisdom and common sense. By achieving such power, they obtained direct political influence. This influence was generally gained through what was known as women's associations prevalent especially in the West African coast especially among the Igbo in Nigeria.

In Precolonial Nigeria, except in the Northern part of the country in Hausa land, there was no formal system of education. During the precolonial time, women among most ethnic groups had therefore access to no formal education, but they were prepared for the work of life through what many scholars now define as "indigenous education." As witnessed by Okoro N. P, before the introduction of formal education, "indigenous education was being practiced. This was non-formal and non-certified in terms of competencies, and took place at various stages of a child's life, knowledge was presumed to be static and the pedagogic techniques used were basically memorization and the strict imitation of adults' behavior."<sup>27</sup> Among the Hausa, with the advent of Islam to Hausa land, Quranic schools were introduced. Enid Schildkrout wrote, "Formal education is not new in northern Nigeria, for children in the past attended Quranic schools from an early age."<sup>28</sup> Those Quranic schools, which used to teach Arabic and Islamic studies, were expanded by Uthman Dan Fodio who extended access to education also to women. Nana Asman, Uthman Dan Fodio's daughter, played a

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26 Baba De Karo: *L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, 47-48.

27 Okoro N. P., "Comparative Analysis of Nigerian Educational System," in *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 21 (Nov. 2011): 235.

28 Enid Schildkrout, "Dependence and Autonomy: The Economic Activities of Secluded Hausa Women in Kano, Nigeria" in *Women and Work in Africa*, ed. Edna G. Bay (Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), 67.

tremendous role in the education of women in Northern Nigeria, witnessed Abdulraheem Nimah Modupe.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.1.2 Colonial Intervention and Women

Many scholars affirmed that contact with the colonizer introduced patriarchal ideas into Nigerian societies. Colonial administrators and Christian missionaries introduced the assumptions that women should be confined to the home where they could better serve their families and bring up their children. These ideas affected the structure of those traditional societies where women's role included providing for the financial support of the family and exercising social and political functions through women's councils and organizations, and when rearing children was shared among the members of the extended family.<sup>30</sup> In "Women in Colonial Nigeria," Maria Rojas has written, "The ideas of the colonizers resembled the patriarchal European assumption that women belonged in the home, engaged in child rearing—an exclusively female responsibility—and other domestic chores. The colonizers expected African societies to consider women as subordinate to men because Europeans considered women subordinate to men. They thought that if a woman obtained financial independence she might not give her husband and his family their entitled respect."<sup>31</sup>

In fact, many scholars have argued that colonialism has interrupted women's useful participation in society. In *The Invention of Women*, Oyèrónke Oyewùmí has demonstrated that colonial administrative, evangelical, legal, economic, and educational

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29 Abdulraheem Nimah Modupe, "Rights Of Women In The Pre-Colonial And PostColonial Era Prospects And Challenges" in

[http://www.unilorin.edu.ng/publications/abdulraheemnm/RIGHTS\\_OF\\_WOMEN\\_IN\\_THE\\_PRE\\_COLONIAL\\_AND\\_POST\\_COLONIAL\\_ERA.pdf](http://www.unilorin.edu.ng/publications/abdulraheemnm/RIGHTS_OF_WOMEN_IN_THE_PRE_COLONIAL_AND_POST_COLONIAL_ERA.pdf) (Accessed April 9, 2014).

30 Oyewùmí, Oyèrónke explains that among the Yoruba child-rearing was not an individualized experience that was delegated only to mothers. Women used to share child-care responsibilities among themselves allowing each other to engage in whatever other activities they pleased. *The Invention of Women*, 73.

31 Maria Rojas, "Women in colonial Nigeria," in African Postcolonial literature in English in the postcolonial web, [www.postcolonialweb.org/nigeria/colonwom.html](http://www.postcolonialweb.org/nigeria/colonwom.html)

institutions converged to systematically remove the Nigerian women from the domain of social and cultural power to which they were privy prior to the advent of colonialism.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, Ife Amadiume argues that prior to significant European contact, the Nnobi Igbo maintained a flexible gender system, which was reversed and calcified through contact with Christianity and colonialism. She writes that colonialism,

was followed by the violent suppression of indigenous institutions, the imposition of Christianity and Western education, the introduction of a new economy and local government administration through the warrant chief system. These new institutions, with their linked ideologies and cultures, greatly affected the structural position of women in modern Nnobi society. Whereas indigenous concepts linked to flexible gender constructions in terms of access to power and authority mediated dual-sex divisions, the new Western concepts introduced through colonial conquest carried strong sex and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions; a woman was always female regardless of her social achievements or status.<sup>33</sup>

The effect of colonialism in changing the structure of Nigerian societies from relying on what Amadiume calls a "flexible gender system" to a more or less "rigid gender ideology" might be discussed through showing the effect of the imposition of Western education and the introduction of a new economy and local government administrations.

With colonialism, Western formal education was introduced. The earliest schools were started by the Christian missionaries, so the curricula emphasized religious instruction and clerical skills for boys and domestic skills for girls. Later the colonial government started giving assistance to those missionary schools, and gradually, the government began the intervention in education, encouraging the education of males and providing different curricula for girls and boys. In *Family Matters, Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy and Culture*, Nkiri Nzegwu argues that Western education, like all other colonial institutions, encouraged male privileging values, which

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32 Oyèrónke Oyewùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 123.

33 *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 119.

inverted "Igbo traditions of women's autonomy and assertiveness."<sup>34</sup> Nzegwu explains that under the influence of the male privileging culture on nineteenth century Igbo society, parents fostered the education of their male children at the expense of the education of female offspring; she writes describing this effect,

By the early 1920's, the male-dominant emphasis of the colonial government, the labor market, and Christian missions had become apparent. Young men did not have to convince their families that they offered the best hope of bringing the rewards of the new European system to the family. Aware of the male privileging values of the colonial economy, some mothers and fathers sent their sons to primary schools and to either secondary schools or teachers' training college, and sometimes to England for a professional degree.

Parents sold family land they had received from their lineages and tapped the services of female relatives to educate their sons. Such services were ungrudgingly given because in a labor market that favored only males, kin looked forward to their share of wealth, prestige, and the good life once those sons became lawyers, doctors, and engineers.<sup>35</sup>

Under the effect of that colonial male privileging economy, more boys than girls had access to Western education; and even where schools for girls were established, the curriculum for girls enabled them to become good housewives, rather than income earners. To describe these schools and this curriculum, Nkiri Nzegwu writes, "Although fourteen Onisha girls and thirty boys were in the first CMS schools for boys and for girls as early as 1858, by 1912, the Annual Report on Education showed that boys had outpaced the number of girls in schools. [...] The basic curriculum was reading, writing, and arithmetic, but in the intermediate class, the girls focused on domestic skills—cooking and needlework—and the boys went to trade classes that included woodwork or agriculture."<sup>36</sup>

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34 Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters*, 15. Oyèrónke Oyewùmí shares Nzegwu's views about the effects of the male privileging colonial culture in changing the values of the Nigerian societies. See her study of British colonialism and the privileging of males in the acquisition of Western education in Oyèrónke Oyewùmí, *The Invention of Women*.

35 *Family Matters*, 75.

36 Idem.

Other scholars however assume that colonial policies in combination with indigenous attitudes operated to deny girls access to education. In "Feminist consciousness and African literary criticism," Carole Boyce Davies observes:

The selection of males for formal education was fostered by the colonial institutions which made specific choices in educating male and female. Then too, the sex role distinctions common to many African societies supported the notion that western education was a barrier to a woman's role as wife and mother and an impediment to her success in these traditional modes of acquiring status. With few exceptions, girls were kept away from formal and especially higher education. The colonial administrations were therefore willing accomplices because they imported a view of the world in which women were of secondary importance.<sup>37</sup>

Another detrimental effect of colonial intervention in Nigeria altered the socio-economic and political institutions that allowed women to achieve power and influence in their societies. "Colonial policy displaced women from their place in the social structure. The colonial denial of women's active participation in socio-economic and political processes prevailed, despite the reality of women's active economic production in agriculture, and their role in processing and distributing products through trade," witnessed Felicia I. Ekejiuba.<sup>38</sup> Describing this effect, Nkiru Nzigwu writes, "Historical records show that by the late 1920s in Eastern Nigeria, the fictions created by the native courts had pushed women into marginal space of nightmarish existence."<sup>39</sup>

With the beginning of the colonial rule, the economic role of women declined. The position of women and their important economic role began to change with colonialism, which brought to the Nigerian societies the notion that women belonged in the home, while focusing on the economics of men. About this change, Maria Rojas writes, "with the incorporation of Nigeria into the international economy as a supplier

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37 Carole Davies Boyce, quoted in Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 8.

38 Felicia I. Ekejiuba, "Down to Fundamentals: Women-Centred Hearth-holds in Rural West Africa," in *Reading in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andea Cornwall (London : International African Institute in association with Oxford: James Cerrey; Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2005), 42.

39 Family Matters, 78.

of raw materials, new patriarchal conceptions of the appropriate social role for women dictated by colonial administrators and missionaries changed the position of women in economic and social endeavors. Males began to dominate the cultivation of cash crops for the international market and confined women to the growing of food crops, which received lower returns.”<sup>40</sup>

However, some scholars claim that in some regions, the economic condition of women changed positively with the British occupation. Phoebe V. Ottenberg claims that in the Afikpo Ibo region, the British rule brought an important improvement in the standard of living for all the Afikpo and mainly women. Ottenberg summed these changes in the following, "Following the British occupation, several changes in the economy occurred which may be summarized under the following headings: a marked increase in physical mobility as a result of the cessation of the slave trade and intergroup warfare, an increase in resources with a consequent rise in the standard of living, and a growth in the economic independence of women."<sup>41</sup>

Ottenberg explained that for women the major change, which occurred as a result of the increase of mobility, was the introduction of cassava from a neighboring Igbo group. This crop was considered as a woman's crop. By cultivating cassava, women were liberated from dependence on men to feed them. This situation is explained in the words of an elderly Afikpo woman: "Nowadays women do not care if the husband doesn't give them any food, for they can go to the farm and get cassava. If a woman has any money she buys [rents] land and plants cassava. The year after she does this she can have a crop for cassava meal, which she can sell and have her own money. Then she can say, 'What's man? I have my own money!'"<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, M. George Smith supported the same view concerning the positive effects of colonialism on women in Hausa land. Smith argued that among the Hausa, the

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<sup>40</sup> Maria Rojas.

<sup>41</sup> Ottenberg, 214.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Ottenberg., 215.

abolition of slavery resulted in a simultaneous ending of the confinement of women, who became more active in fulfilling commercial activities for which they were highly trained when they were young girls, that is, before marriage. Smith explained that the abolition of slavery following the British occupation permitted confined Hausa women to end their seclusion and to engage in better remunerating activities as trading,

la formule du mariage impliquant la claustration de l'épouse a connu ces dernières années, à travers tout le pays haoussa, une faveur accrue, dans la mesure où il y a corrélation étroite entre ce régime et le refus des femmes—pour autant dire qu'il se peut—de travailler au champs ou de ramasser du bois, autrement dit, corrélation étroite entre ce régime et leur préférence pour les activités manuelles et commerciales plus rémunératrices.<sup>43</sup>

It is worth mentioning here that this very argument about the Hausa women who ended their seclusion under the effect of British colonialism is controversial. In "Women and Leadership in Nigerian Islam: The Experience of Alhaja Sheidat Mujidat Adéoyè of Òsogbo," by David O. Ogungbile, we read the direct opposite of this argument. David O. Ogungbile claims that seclusion, which was adopted as a consequence of the prominence of Islam in Hausa land, was used as a means of resistance against colonial taxation; as a consequence, women's political and civil rights were affected negatively. Ogungbile writes,

As Islam gained prominence among the ruling groups and rich merchants, the seclusion of women became a status symbol, and women's formal roles began to lack recognition. During the colonial period (1862–1960), seclusion was used as a means of resistance, most especially against the British colonial authority's heavy taxation. Thus, there was an adaptation of local customs of the Bori—spirit possession—into Islam to produce a different kind of identity, which was designated Hausa-cum-Islamic identity, with women assuming a somewhat hidden status and roles.<sup>44</sup>

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43 M. George Smith, "Annex 1," in Mary F. Smith, Baba De Karo: L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria, 305.

44 David O. Ogungbile, "Women and Leadership in Nigerian Islam: The Experience of Alhaja Sheidat Mujidat Adéoyè of Òsogbo," in *Gender Epistemologies in Africa. Gendering Traditions, Spaces, Social Institutions, and Identities*, ed. Oyeronke Oyewumi (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 86–87.

In addition to the decrease of women's role in the economy, women's political influence was deeply affected by colonialism. Actually, the British, who ruled through a form of indirect rule, relied on what was known as High traditional rulers who acted as agents for the colonial government. The local governments excluded women from access to political power as the rulers rarely if at all consulted women in their decision-making. In addition to direct exclusion, the male privileging attitudes of the British officers discouraged women's access to power. Nina Emma Mba writes that women's loss of status was fostered by the "prejudices and assumptions of the British colonial administration officers who worked for a government in which there were scarcely any women and who therefore did not expect or wish to find women involved in Southern Nigeria."<sup>45</sup>

Women's role was restricted by state legislature. According to Nkiru Nzegwu, the state under colonial rule passed legislation restricting women's roles in society and used corrupt agents to enforce the respect of these laws. Legislation was passed by what was known as "native courts" which exercised their power through agents known as "warrant chiefs" and "court clerks," who were very corrupt, and who "functioned as agents of oppression of women," as witnessed by Nkiru Nzegwu,<sup>46</sup> who describes the corruption of the court and its effects on women in the following, "powerful and increasingly corrupt, egotistical, and selfish, these male officials were hardly perturbed by the erosion of women's social and political rights. [...] these men were not only directing the destabilization of Igbo social scheme and determining the areas to be subverted, they were also the sole beneficiaries."<sup>47</sup>

The new legislation adopted by the native court decreased women's powers and eroded important indigenous institutions, which protected women's autonomy and power. For instance, the restrictions imposed on women in the social field as the ruling

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45 Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 11

46 Family Matters, 79.

47 Ibid., 79.

which forbade women to make “war” or in other words to apply punishment against all offenders of social order led to the decline of the Women’s Councils which relied on punishment to enforce rulings.<sup>48</sup> In addition, when the Native authorities adopted a system of direct taxation imposed also on women, women's role in processing and distributing products through trade declined, and the economic support women provided for their families through trade waned.

Colonial governments did not hesitate to use violence against women when the latter manifested discontent against the reduction of their status. Maybe the most outstanding incident showing the brutality of British colonialism and its administrations was what was known as the "Women's War" or the " Abat riots."<sup>49</sup> In 1929, Igbo and Ibibio women rose against the changes imposed by the new legal system, enforced by corrupt court agents, which introduced new patriarchal ideals and diminished or swept women's powers and autonomy. Ignoring the ruling which banned "women's wars," Igbo Women's Council decided "to wage a war" against the taxation of women traders. As soon as women started their demonstration, the colonial state allowed its police to open fire on women peacefully demonstrating in a manner consonant with women's traditional exercise of power in the villages; more than fifty Igbo women were killed and fifty were wounded.<sup>50</sup>

Eventually, even if the changes brought by colonialism disrupted the traditional system of social organization and economic production by introducing systems of social inequality embedded within a male-privileging culture, Nigerian women remained active in their households and outside. Their zeal for economic activities never waned,

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48 Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women, A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD., 1939), 109.

49 See Judith Van Allen's reading of the incident in "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, Stratification, and the Invisibility of Women," in *Women in Africa*, ed. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1976); "'Sitting on a Man': Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women" in *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 4.2 (1972): 165-181.

<sup>50</sup> See *Family Matters*.

and they even held protest throughout the colonial period against particular colonial policies and against colonialism.

## **2.2 The World Women Made**

Nigerian women contributed in building a world by fulfilling activities not much different from those women in Algeria achieved. They fulfilled domestic duties but most importantly contributed in the cultural, economic, social, and political life.

### **2.2.1 Domestic, Agricultural and Other Activities**

Like women in Algeria, women in Nigeria fulfilled many tasks including domestic, agricultural activities as well as craft works. Indeed, in addition to everyday domestic activities, women fulfilled agricultural tasks. Nigerian women who spent less time in the household as compared to women in Algeria could clean the house, prepare food, fetch water and firewood, and took care of animals. They however spent more time in the fields, generally to farm their own pieces of land where they grew crops aimed to produce food for the whole family.

Here it is worth noting that in some rural areas, women were allotted pieces of land to farm and produce the necessary crops to feed their families. Thelma Awori noticed that women had “the right to a piece of land for producing food to feed herself and her children and husband.”<sup>51</sup> Sylvia Leith-Roth noticed that among the Igbo “The woman ...has crops of her own which she sometimes plants apart, sometimes on the same land as the yams, for apart from the regular farm often a little distance away, the women of the compound have their own gardens close by, either within the compound

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<sup>51</sup> Thelma Awori, in "The Myth of Inferiority of the African Woman," in *La Civilisation de la Femme*, 34.

wall or just outside.”<sup>52</sup> In *Parenté et Mariages chez les Rukiba*, Jean-Claude Muller wrote that among the Rubika “chaque femme du groupe domestique cultive ses champs personnels alloués par son mari si elle est mariée ou par son père si elle est encore jeune fille. La femme serre ses récoltes dans un grenier qui peut être un modèle réduit du grenier collectif ou qui peut être construit à l’intérieur de sa chambre. C’est, théoriquement, seulement lorsque les provisions de la femme sont terminées que l’on ouvre le grenier collectif.”<sup>53</sup>

Husband and wife farmed their crops separately, and each owned the crops he might produce. In “The position of women among the Afikpo Ibo,” Phoebe V. Ottenberg wrote that “responsibility for the support of the household is divided between husband and wife.” While husbands provided for meat, fish and yams, the prestige crop of Afikpo, wives provided for “staple root crops from approximately February to September and salt, palm oil, peppers, and other vegetable crops throughout the year.”<sup>54</sup> Sylvia Leith-Ross equally noticed this division of labor among the Nneato Igbo, but she said, “division of labor is strict in theory, variable in practice.” Men and women mutually helped each other throughout the whole process of the cultivation of yams, which is the main crop. Leith-Ross explained that there were 'men's' yams and 'women's' yams cultivated on the same field.<sup>55</sup> Among the Rukuba, Jean-Claude Mullet explained that husband and wife mutually helped each other in their separate fields. He added that women were more obliged to participate in the accomplishment of certain tasks during the agricultural cycle. They practiced sowing, participated jointly with men in the harvest, and ensured the transportation alone.<sup>56</sup>

Among the Hausa, women did not practice agriculture. When slavery was practiced, that is, before the British occupation, slaves fulfilled domestic chores, and

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52 Sylvia Leith-Ross, 91.

53 Jean-Claude Muller, *Parenté et Mariage chez les Rukuba* (Etat Benue-Plateau, Nigeria) (Paris : Mouton, 1976), 48.

54 Phoebe V. Ottenberg, 207.

55 Sylvia Leith-Ross, 90.

56 See Jean-Claude Muller, 55-57.

women practiced weaving and prepared different sorts of sweets and cakes, or bread which were sold by their children, especially girls, at the village market. In *Baba De Karo : L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, Baba de Karo witnessed: "Quand on avait des esclaves, c'est eux qui faisaient le travail domestique [...] Ma mère et sa co-épouse filaient et vendaient, elles faisaient des galettes de haricots, des arachides grillées et salées, des arachides frites, de l'huile d'arachides—et vendaient tout."<sup>57</sup>

All those tasks were fulfilled with a high level of collaboration among the members of the extended family. Generally, while young wives fulfilled domestic activities, and young girls took care of children, older women, largely freed from childcare and domestic duties could fulfill agricultural activities to help feed the whole family, or even practiced craft works. Sylvia Leith-Ross noticed this collaboration and noted its positive effects on Igbo women; she wrote: "the woman's day is full and sometimes heavy but it must be remembered that she is not often alone to do the work but is helped by her co-wives, (...), by her children, and by the elderly female relations of her husband."<sup>58</sup>

### 2.2.2 Cultural Life

It seems that elsewhere, in Algeria or in Nigeria, the colonial machine failed to annihilate the power of the colonized people who could, while politically and economically disempowered, produce a culture as rich as the folk songs and tales and the craft works that women created. As Algerian women, Nigerian women were artists who sang their everyday activities, which might include the creation of beautiful craft items produced for everyday use or for trade. They were also gifted storytellers. What characterized this art is pragmatism. Though women spontaneously sang their everyday

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<sup>57</sup> *Baba de Karo: L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, 37.

<sup>58</sup> Sylvia Leith-Ross, 88.

activities and told folktales to entertain each other or to amuse their children, they produced craft works for everyday use and for trade.

Combining every day toil with pleasure, while adapting their craft works to environment, women in the continent, north and south, seemed to develop a special gift for some craft works as pot-making and weaving which were traditional industries, in addition to dressmaking which found a special preference among city dwellers. Significantly enough, women in some regions of Nigeria especially among the Igbo and the Yoruba used the same loom—the single heddle looms mounted upright against a house wall—used in Algerian rural homes to produce tapestries and clothes. And just like Algerian rural women, the Nigerian women produced what satisfied the family needs and what could be exported. Duncan Clarke noted that Nigerian clothes produced by women were traded even outside the continent; he wrote, “Portuguese slave traders bought huge numbers of indigo dyed cloths woven on these looms from the Ijebu and Benin for sale in Congo, Gold Coast and even Brazil.”<sup>59</sup>

Following the British occupation, very few women kept the tradition of weaving in some Nigerian rural regions. Actually, while in Algeria weaving was a very important preoccupation among women who secured self-sufficiency in clothing and tapestries for all Algerians before and during colonial times, the tradition of weaving as well as other craft industries declined in most Nigerian homes. The decline was due partly to the fact that weaving was an extremely slow and laborious process, but also to the fact that after the decline of the slave trade following the British occupation, women had wider opportunities for trading—an occupation which was not very popular among women in the Algerian society which confined women to the home in urban areas, and which allowed women in rural areas to practice trade but it did not really encourage it. However, although weaving as many other craft arts declined in most regions, fine

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59 Duncan Clarke, “Nigerian Women’s weaving,” in *Adire African Textiles*, in <http://home.clara.net/adire/nigerianwomen2.htm>

examples of older cloths could be found in some regions, and where weaving continued to be practiced, some very high quality fabrics were woven.

Indeed, Nigerian women weavers were best known for the production of fine examples of distinct styles of cloth. For instance, among the Yoruba, weaving has different functions that are classified into four groups, described by Aretha Oluwakemi Asakitikpi, in "Functions of Hand Woven Textiles among Yoruba Women in Southwestern Nigeria." Asakitipi writes that these groups include,

(1) Basic cloth (these are cloth used for everyday use); (2) Ceremonial cloth of traditional design (these are cloth used for specific ceremonial occasions such as marriage, chieftaincy etc; (3) Cloth replicating aso oke (these are cloth forms woven on the broadloom in smaller strips than the normal wide panels produced on the broad loom. Such cloth forms were usually used for ceremonial occasions) and (4) ritual cloth (these are cloth forms made specifically for ritual purposes for example, sacrifices).<sup>60</sup>

Besides weaving, women in some Nigerian communities practiced pot-making. This activity was particularly practiced by Igbo women. Ottenberg noticed that among the Afikpo Igbo, this activity was motivated by economic needs. Pots were made to be sold in markets. Ottengerg wrote, "Pot-making is a third economic activity of Afikpo women (after farming and trading), though this craft is found only in scattered Ibo communities. Afikpo women do not learn to make pots until after they marry, but thereafter the majority spend much time making pots during the dry season, when farming duties are relatively light. Motivation is almost wholly economic."<sup>61</sup>

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60 Aretha Oluwakemi Asakitikpi, "Functions of Hand Woven Textiles among Yoruba Women in Southwestern Nigeria," in *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007), 103. For further references about weaving in Nigeria, see: Aremu, P., "Yoruba Traditional Weaving: Kijiipa Motifs, Colour and Symbols" in *Nigeria Magazine* 140, (1982); Marisa Candoti, "The Hausa Textile Industry: Origins and Development in the Precolonial Period," [http://www.academia.edu/3126175/Being\\_and\\_Becoming\\_Hausa\\_Interdisciplinary\\_Perspectives](http://www.academia.edu/3126175/Being_and_Becoming_Hausa_Interdisciplinary_Perspectives); Aronson, L. "Ijebu Yoruba Aso Olona: A contextual and Historical Overview," in *African Arts* 25 (1992).

61 Ottenberg, 211.

In addition to weaving and pot-making, women in some regions among the Igbo practiced mat-making. Sylvia Leith-Ross who lived among the Igbo wrote, "The only woman's craft is mat-making. These mats are made from strips of the narrow leaf of the screw pine (*pandanus*) (...) the mats are mostly self-colored though sometimes one will be seen with strands of red or yellow raffia woven into it in a simple pattern or just round the edges. The best of these mats are very good indeed, wonderfully strong and supple and almost silky to the touch."<sup>62</sup>

Nigerian women, as women in Algeria, celebrated life through music, song and dance and therefore produced a rich cultural background. Music and song were closely related to their everyday tasks. Women used highly complex rhythmic songs to fulfill household tasks, craft works, or agricultural activities. Accompanied by dance, music assumed a functional role as it was performed to mark rituals common during weddings or funerals. The output of what women sang while fulfilling everyday tasks or what they sang during weddings and funerals can also be classified as a crude art, which is marked by the spontaneity, freshness and simplicity we have noticed in the songs of women in Algeria.

They sang while fulfilling everyday activities. The following was a very famous song, common among women weavers:

O weaving reeds, may you never be poverty stricken  
May you never be taken for sale in the market  
May none be ignorant of your maker  
May no unworthy man ever tread on you.<sup>63</sup>

Some songs were meant to teach girls some virtues. In *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, Ife Amadiume collected some Igbo maternity songs that emphasized the importance of marriage for girls,

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<sup>62</sup> Sylvia Leith-Ross, 94.

<sup>63</sup> Anonymous women's work song quoted in V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (London: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 154.

Be you as beautiful as a mermaid, the beauty of a woman is to have a husband. Be you one who has been to the land of white people the beauty of a woman is to have a husband. If a woman does not marry, her beauty declines...<sup>64</sup>

Significantly enough, most of the songs were produced through a framework of improvisation that was directly related to the special context where they were sung. In the autobiography of Baba de Karo, where we can find a varied and diversified number of Hausa songs, most of the songs cited were improvised to celebrate common events or to satirize misbehavior. We thus may read such songs as:

Ahmadu au tam-tam des champs  
Pour l'amour d'Allah, apporte ton tam-tam  
Nous irons à Saurawa  
Nous irons voir les gens riches.  
Chez toi on cultive la terre, chez toi il n'y a pas de bois inutile  
Ahmadu au tam-tam des champs.<sup>65</sup>

This song was about a man called Ahmadu who married a girl who eloped from her parents to find refuge among the people of Ahmadu with whom she desired to marry despite the refusal of her parents. The song celebrates the marriage of Ahmadu, a hard working farmer who takes good care of his farm, with the run-away girl who seems to come from a rich family. The song seems to criticize class stratification and the boundaries that the rich put against mixing with the poor.

Other songs praised virtue and morality. In Baba de Karo's autobiography, we read many songs celebrating and encouraging some of the virtues common among the Hausa women. Some of the songs celebrated friendship,

Q'Allah me donne un ami véritable, petit ou grand,  
Même un bébé qui tète ou qui est dans le ventre de sa mère,

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64 *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 72.

65 *Baba De Karo: L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, 68.

Quand il naîtra nous serons amis.

Qu'Allah me donne un ami véritable, petit ou grand.<sup>66</sup>

In addition, Baba de Karo explained that friendship among Hausa women was so important that it had special rituals. If two women would decide to become what was known as “heart friends,” they should exchange presents throughout all their lives at different occasions. Women therefore celebrated not only friendship through song but also the rituals they associated with friendship. The following are two songs collected in *Baba de Karo* celebrating friendship and praising the virtues of two friends, Zalia and Baba. The first song was dedicated to Zalia,

Zalia venue d'une ville lointaine  
Zalia venue d'une ville lointaine  
Qui voit Zalia lui donne mille cauris  
Même si c'est une ruine pour un homme pauvre  
Ou bien il lui en donne cinq cents.

The second rhythm was dedicated to Baba,

Baba aux nombreux Gwari  
Baba aux nombreux Gwari  
Tout le monde voit Baba avec de nombreux Gwari  
Dans ta maison ils ne disent pas 'yar kwaliya, ils disent dan kwaliya,  
Dans ta maison ils ne disent pas 'yar koko, ils disent dan koko,  
Baba aux nombreux Gwari  
Baba aux nombreux Gwari<sup>67</sup>

Among the Igbo, songs were also a means to satirize misbehavior. Criticizing misbehavior was known as “making a song.” Sylvia Leith-Ross wrote “‘making a song', i.e. bringing shame and ridicule on the victim by means of more or less ribald improvisations concerning his or her personal appearance, character, and conduct, is a

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 41.

popular and very effective form of Ibo punishment.”<sup>68</sup> The same attitude was witnessed among the Hausa, who also used songs to criticize misbehavior and therefore to punish publicly the wrongdoer. The following Hausa song for instance was about a man, called Madangari, who committed incest with his daughter:

Père d’Alila, père d’Ajuma,  
Madangari de Doka, tu es le père d’Alila,  
Tu es le père d’Ajuma, tu es aussi le mari d’Ajuma.<sup>69</sup>

Otherwise, they sang to blame the friend who betrayed her friend when she fornicated with her husband; the song says:

La Kawa<sup>70</sup> a été déloyale.  
La Kawa inutile, la kawa déloyale.  
Jamais plus je ne serai yaya.  
Je ne prendrai jamais plus de kanwar rana.  
Femmes, ne prenez pas d’autre yaya  
Ne prenez pas d’autre kanwar rana,  
Yaya a été déloyale  
Yaya inutile, yaya sans valeur.<sup>71</sup>

Among the rural Hausa, music included dances such as the spirit possession dance, boorii. The dancers used special songs to call for the spirits, which were said to possess the dancers who entered into trance. Each spirit was called by its own litany and tam-tam beats. One of the spirits was called *Dangaladima*, a spirit which was believed to be very generous with women; thus, it used to be summoned through the following song, which stressed the important position of women in the Hausa society:

Vous les femmes, seigneurs de la ville,  
Vous les femmes, seigneurs de la ville,

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68 Sylvia Leith-Ross, 97.

69 *Baba de Karo: L’Autobiographie d’une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, 269.

70 A ritual friend among the Hausa is called Kawa, see *Baba de Karo: L’Autobiographie d’une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, 231

71 Idem.

C'est avec les femmes que nous nous distrayons,  
 Oui, ce sont les seigneurs de la ville !  
 Prenez votre argent et donnez-le aux joueurs de tam-tam,  
 Prenez votre argent et donnez-le aux chanteurs,  
 Cherchez, appelez-moi, vous m'oubliez,  
 Fils d'Ahamman, que vous arrive-il ?  
 Daudu aux joueurs de tam-tam,  
 Ahamman, que vous arrive-il ?  
 L'un se bat avec l'autre dehors,  
 Ahamman,  
 L'un se bat avec toi, l'autre fait le tuwo.  
 Prenez votre argent et donnez-le aux joueurs de tam-tam.  
 Prenez votre argent et donnez-le aux chanteurs.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to songs and music, storytelling was highly appreciated by women; the stories were basically aimed to entertain. As a means of relaxation, men women and children gathered regularly after supper inside the compounds during the cold season, and in the moonlight when the weather was fine for storytelling. Sylvia Leith-Ross witnessed that "After supper, the sounds of chattering and story-telling go on and on within every compound wall. Should there have been a wedding or a death or a birth or a 'second burial', the singing and the dancing, the drumming and the wailing do not cease till far into the night. Moonlight brings out the whole village."<sup>73</sup> Notably, storytelling was more common among men than among women. In most Nigerian communities, the ritual of tale-telling following supper gathered the whole family where the teller was most of the time a man as opposed to what we noted earlier in Algeria where storytelling was basically a women's art which gathered a female audience around a female tale-teller.

However, women story-tellers were not rare, and storytelling was more than a means of entertainment. It strengthened the bonds among family members. In *Literature and National Consciousness*, Emmanuel Emenyonu affirms that storytelling

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72 Baba de Karo: *L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, 263.

73 Sylvia Leith-Ross, 86.

strengthened the relation between children and mothers among the Igbo. He writes, "The bond of affection between mother and child in the Igbo culture is a very strong one, especially when the child happens to be a son. When the dishes of the evening meal have been washed ... children sit round the fireside to be entertained by the mother till bed time."<sup>74</sup> Storytelling was also a mode of transmission among women. Most of the stories had some kind of message or moral. The stories were used to pass on the ethics, knowledge, virtues, values, and lifestyle of their people. They served as a bank for the preservation of ancient experiences and beliefs. Much of the evidence that related to the past of Nigeria, therefore, could be found in oral traditions.

### **2.2.3 Social Life**

Traditionally, Nigerian women, like women in Algeria, held important roles in agriculture, manufacturing, and trade, and equally possessed an important, if restricted, social role. The welfare of society depended on their roles as mothers, wives, cooks, but also as active community members who could officiate religious functions and be leaders of ritual cults, and who animated ceremonies whether religious or secular. In African societies, Awori wrote "women are known to officiate in high positions at religious functions and themselves to be ritual leaders of cults."<sup>75</sup> Following the British colonization, the roles of women started to be restrained. Colonialism alienated women from the participation in public affairs especially in rural areas. The few women who had opportunity for education in urban centers achieved success and were highly respected in society. The bulk of the community of women, who were refused access to education, found in conjure and divination a means to achieve what they could not attain in their societies.

Women in most Nigerian societies could participate in religious rituals at the same time as men, and they could have exclusively feminine services. Additionally, women

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<sup>74</sup> Emmanuel Emenyonu, *Literature and National Consciousness* (Owerri: Heinemann 1989), 3.

<sup>75</sup> Awori, 41.

were often called by the principal deity through its priest to offer sacrifices in order to receive blessings. Among the Igbo in Nneato, the principal deity *Ajala*, the Earth and Fertility spirit, was a woman. People believed women were closer to her and could obtain quicker blessings. Although *Ajala* had no priestesses, it had women *dibia*. When applied to a woman, a *dibia* means “a native doctor and only very occasionally a diviner, that is to say, a woman who by means of various forms of divination, [...] is able to foretell the future, the outcome of a journey, the propitiousness or non-propitiousness of a season for undertaking a given task,” wrote Sylvia Leith-Ross.<sup>76</sup> *Ajala* also had women doctors, who were very numerous, and who were chiefly employed as gynecologists and midwives. Besides, women could be rainmakers, which was a highly respected function.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, among the Igbo, women could participate in rituals together with men. In *African Women: a Study of the Ibo of Nigeria*, Sylvia Leith-Ross described a ritual fulfilled by both women and men in Nneato. She wrote: “if a man has much in his house (sickness or misfortune), four men and four women [...] go to the shrine of the *juju* who is supposed to have sent the trouble, take mouthfuls of palm-wine presented to them by the victim and spit it out, thus symbolically spitting out the evil that was in his house.”<sup>78</sup> Likewise, Amadiume shows the importance of the goddess Idemili in Nnobi life; she writes, “Most of the activities which marked the traditional calendar were ritual ceremonies and festivals of thanksgiving to the goddess Idemili. The impression is of a society and culture completely coloured by the veneration of this goddess.”<sup>79</sup> Nnobi women played important roles during rituals to worship the goddess *Idemili*; Amadiume writes that,

The public group worship of the goddess was performed at her shrine in Afo central market-place called *chi Idemili*. For this ritual, women would take goats to the shrine. The ritual of cooking and feeding the family, performed by mothers during the private worship, was performed by the wife

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<sup>76</sup> Sylvia Leith-Ross, 118

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>79</sup> *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 10.

of the priest of the main shrine. She would pound cocoyam and cook the great sauce for the shrine and the men. Other women would take their own food to the shrine and eat there. In this worship, therefore, men acted as guests or participated in the sense of accompanying their wives to the shrine.<sup>80</sup>

During religious ceremonies related to *Idemili* worship, women also played major roles. They had monopoly over singing and dancing, and their songs reflected women's critical views about life based on their observation of people's behaviour in their society. According to Amadiume,

The women have always monopolized singing and dancing during most ceremonies. Sometimes, their songs contained statements from dominant Nnobi models which they shared with the men. At others they contained ideas generated by the women as commentaries on dominant ideas or as statements of facts from the women's point of view. Nnobi women were not, and are still not, tongue-tied. According to a popular Nnobi saying, [...] 'the mouth of women opens at random or pops like the pod of the oil-bean tree'<sup>81</sup>

In addition to their role in religious rituals and ceremonies, women in Nigeria found in family ceremonies as weddings an occasion to celebrate life in song, music and dance. The songs with the tam tam beats as well as dance accompanied the different rituals of marriage. Celebrated among the Igbo was the *cut* ritual, which was an operation that the bride undergoes; it was usually accompanied by songs in which the bride herself joined. Sylvia Leith-Ross described the "cut ritual" as follows:

Before going finally to her fiancé's house, the girl is cut, a ceremony which takes place in her parent's compound. (...) the girl lay on two banana leaves spread on the ground, her head between the thighs of a young man (...a near male relation), her hands above her head and the arms held down by the same young man. Her only clothing was a skimpy Kirtle; her body was freshly decorated with *uri* marks and she had some medals in her hair.

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80 *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 104.

81 *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 69.

The 'cuts' were already marked out in white chalk (...) an oldish man performed the operation with a native knife (...) With it, he lifted the skin by making a small cut and when the requisite number of cuts were made, he lightly rubbed powdered charcoal over them.<sup>82</sup>

Among the Hausa, the marriage of a young girl was accompanied by a ritual of passage, which marked the passage of the bride to the status of adulthood. The bride achieved a set of rituals including the ritual of *henna* and purification rituals. A week before the marriage ceremony, the young girl should go to her maternal grandmother's home where her maternal aunts and grandmother bathe her; after the washing, they would provide her with some advice to prepare her for her new life and status. The purification ritual is followed by the *henna* ritual, which consisted of putting the decorative substance *henna* on the hands and feet of the young girl. These rituals were accompanied by songs such as the following:

Désormais tu n'iras plus danser  
Désormais tu n'iras plus aux danses  
Désormais tu n'iras plus danser  
Tu danseras seulement sur le chemin de la rivière.<sup>83</sup>

During the *henna* ritual, the unmarried girls sang what shows their fear of the unknown with marriage. The following song dramatized this fear, the girls called a savior, *hankaka*, a raven, to save the bride from marriage:

Sauve-moi la vie, hankaka, sauve-moi la vie,  
Sauve-moi la vie, hankaka, sauve-moi la vie,  
le jour de mon mariage;  
Sauve-moi la vie, hankaka, sauve-moi la vie,  
bazara est venu,  
Hankaka à la gorge blanche  
Créature à la gorge blanche, le mariage est venu.<sup>84</sup>

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82 Sylvia Leith-Ross, 98.

83 *Baba De Karo: L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, 83.

84 *Ibid.*, 84.

They also might sing while accompanying the bride to her father's house. The songs show that changing the status required that women should lose some of the freedom they enjoyed before marriage, and women in their songs seem to regret this.

Le chanceux, le préféré,  
Le chanceux de la famille,  
Le chanceux a été fiancé  
Le chanceux l'a eue  
Résigne-toi, jeune fille patiente  
Le mariage est un mal que tu ne peux venger  
Seule la mort pourra te soulager.<sup>85</sup>

Women in the different Nigerian societies used divination and sorcery to help them overcome their fear of the unknown. Sorcery and even witchcraft beliefs were discussed as forms of medicine, or as coming from "bad people" whose spirits or souls were diagnosed as the cause of misfortune. There were also special ways in which the outcomes of a stressful future activity, long trips, lingering illnesses, family and other problems could be examined. Soothsayers provided both therapy and divinatory foreknowledge in stressful situations.

#### **2.2.4 Economics**

Nigerian women's time was divided between home, farm and market in both rural and urban areas. As opposed to women in urban Algeria whose homes were the field of their economic activities, Nigerian women marketed the surplus of their agricultural crops, or craft works. Therefore, the economic role of women depended largely on their skill and personal abilities in farming and trading.

In pre-colonial Nigeria, women could acquire wealth, owned independently from their activities in trading; this wealth would not belong to their husbands or fathers.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 86.

Women thus were economically as well as socially independent. The predominant economic activities were farming, craft making and market trade. Therefore, women could farm, create craft works, and buy and sell altogether. Some women achieved impressive status in the economic and social realms of their societies thanks to their physical strength and skill in farming and trade, in addition to their personal ambition and freedom from childcare. "African women have always been an economic asset to both their husbands and their fathers and this single factor made their subjugation and domination a little more difficult," wrote Thelma Awori.<sup>86</sup>

In *Male Daughters Female Husbands*, Ife Amadiume has explained that among the Igbo the gender ideology governing economic production depended on female industriousness which was culturally valued. Amadiume demonstrates that among the Igbo the economic life depended largely on women's hard work, industriousness and perseverance; Igbo women, especially those who belonged to cultures having female deities as the Nnobi, were very industrious. She explained, "Nnobi myths of origin associate hard work with the female gender and praise of women depended and still depends on their industriousness and economic achievements. [...] *Ide uchu*, perseverance and industriousness, and *ile uba*, the pot of prosperity, were gifts women were said to have inherited from the goddess *Idemili*."<sup>87</sup>

Actually, trading was a very important activity among Igbo women, and markets were therefore more than a place of trade; they were places which reinforced communal life as noticed by Sylvia Leith-Ross:

The market is more to them than a mere shopping-centre. More perhaps than their homes, it is the centre of their homes, it is the centre of their individual lives, it is their battlefield, their opportunity, their channel of expression; it is their club and their theatre, their newspaper and their post office. Here in fierce bargaining and quick calculation, they can show what stuff they are made of, here they can talk and laugh and shout and chaffer to their heart's content, here they meet friends and relatives, visitors from other villages they may not have seen for months, they can hear

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<sup>86</sup> Thelma Awori, *La Civilisation de la femme Africaine*, 35.

<sup>87</sup> *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 21-27.

the news and gossip of the whole Province and, most important, they can send messages to right and left, immediately passed on from woman to woman, from one market to another.<sup>88</sup>

Likewise, Hausa women were equally skilled in trading. Indeed before marriage, trading was a very important activity among Hausa girls, who were confined to stay at home after marriage. In *Baba De Karo: L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, Baba of Karo explains that before marriage she, as young girls belonging to her age group, used to be skilled traders who would sell food or craft objects prepared by mothers and buy other provisions which could also be traded. After marriage, Baba of Karo informed that she used to raise sheep which she would sell to meet her financial needs. Describing the skill of young girls in trade, Baba of Karo said,

Ce dont je me souviens le mieux du temps avant mon mariage, c'est des expéditions marchandes des filles. Nous prenions notre argent et nos grandes calebasses; nous allions à Doka acheter des ignames, nous allions à Fillata acheter des arachides, nous achetions des patates douces chez nous, à Karo, et à Dunkusuba, Sundu, Wawaye, Guga. Nous allions dans des quantités de villages acheter des choses que nous rapportions chez nous pour les faire cuire. Quand c'était prêt, on allait les vendre au marché. [...] Nous étions de vraies commerçantes !<sup>89</sup>

Where farming, craft making, and trading were practiced by women in rural areas, in urban areas, the vocations of women were divided into occupations of educated and uneducated people. The largest proportion of women, who were uneducated, were employed in trade. "The scale of trade is variable, ranging from small quantities of cloth, soap, salt, palm oil, or foods to the large-scale trade of the 'big' woman trader who buys commodities such as cloth wholesale and may have several assistants in her employ," wrote Ottenberg.<sup>90</sup> A few women, who had access to Western education, practiced teaching, nursing, welfare work, and midwifery. To stress the importance of education in changing the economic position of women, Ottenberg wrote, "the factor responsible for the most fundamental change in the economic position of women [...] is

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<sup>88</sup> Sylvia Leith-Ross, 87.

<sup>89</sup> *Baba De Karo: L'Autobiographie d'une Musulmane Haoussa du Nigeria*, 47-48

<sup>90</sup> Ottenberg, 219-220. For the description of urban women's trade see also Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 339-340.

schooling, which in most cases draws an irrevocable status line in the women's relations to members of their community."<sup>91</sup>

Dressmaking, another important occupation which resulted from the introduction of the sewing machine by Europeans, attracted both schooled and unschooled women. Women considered the acquisition of a sewing machine as a very important acquisition which was as valuable as education and which could substitute for title-taking,<sup>92</sup> which was regarded as the most valid means of investment. Ottenberg wrote, "most Ibo think of schooling first as a means of obtaining prestige positions with high pay. [...]. The implication of reinterpreting a sewing machine as a 'title' are similar, for dressmaking is a profitable activity throughout Ibo country."<sup>93</sup>

### 2.2.5 Politics

Women in pre-colonial Nigeria were an integral part of the political set up of their communities. Most often, they carried out separate functions from men. These functions were fully complementary. With the colonial rule, women were denied these roles and therefore lost the political influence in their societies. However, many women revolted against this alienation and imposed important political changes.

In Pre-colonial Nigeria, women could achieve political influence. This influence was generally gained through what was known as women's associations as the Associations of Daughters and the Association of Wives, or what was known as Women's Councils prevalent especially among the Igbo. Traditionally, through these associations, women "controlled their own affairs and possessed political influence on the basis of their collective strength,"<sup>94</sup> writes Emma Nina Mba. In this context, Ann

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91 Ottenberg, 222.

92 Men and women used to join title societies; this required that a person would pay a fee, which was divided among the title-holders.

93 Ottenberg, 216-7.

94 Emma Nina Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilised: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria*,

Lobeuf wrote, “associations such as the Ninn, of the Ekoi of Southern Nigeria or the Akejuju of their neighbours, the Bini give women powers which are in some respects greater than those of men, who dread the effects that might result.”<sup>95</sup>

One eminent example of this power were Women’s Councils common among the Igbo societies. Sylvia Leith-Ross accounted for the important role played by women in religious, social, and judicial fields through these councils. She observed that:

The councils would decide upon sacrifices to be made to Ajala, the Earth spirit, would consult a diviner as to the planting of women's crops upon certain pieces of land, would meet for ritual songs and dances. ... In all cases, the councils appeared to pass certain 'laws' relating to the protection of crops from theft or damage by live-stock and these laws were unquestioningly obeyed by men. (...) But apart from these laws regarding crops, the councils (...) settled, sometimes alone, sometimes in conjunction with the senior male members of the families concerned, marital disputes, disputes between women, disputes between a widow and her husband's family, cases regarding extra-marital relations and pre-nuptial conception.<sup>96</sup>

Sylvia Leith-Ross added that the rulings of these councils were backed by war. Women could even make war to punish the offenders of the social order.<sup>97</sup>

As discussed earlier, women in all Nigerian societies lost the privileges they enjoyed before colonial intervention in the country. The direct taxation system, which included women, placed women in the most disadvantaged position in the country. Nearly twenty years after the Women's War (1929), Yoruba women rose against the colonial disempowerment and distancing of women.

In the Forties, women gathered around a common and educated woman Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978) to realize change. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was a Yoruba educator who was one of the rare women who could have access to Western

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*1900-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 36.

<sup>95</sup> Ann Lobeuf, quoted in Thelma Awori, “The Myth of the Inferiority of the African Women,” in *La Civilisation de la Femme dans la Tradition Africaine*, 40.

<sup>96</sup> Sylvia Leith-Ross, 108.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 109.

education thanks to the efforts of her father who used to believe in the importance of education for females, and therefore he even sent her to the UK for further studies at a time when such an action was an exception. After her return to Nigeria, she was employed as a teacher in 1922. She realized the need to organize women, and therefore she started with "young ladies clubs" in the towns she lived in. In 1932, she founded the Abeokuta Ladies Club (ALC) that was aimed at instructing relatively privileged young women in handicrafts and the domestic sciences. These early organizing efforts would soon transform themselves into far more explicitly political activity when in 1944 Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti approached market women, listened to their plights, and realized that her focus should shift to those poor illiterate women. She started capitalizing her efforts around the needs of these women.

Together with market women, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti started a long term battle against the multiple oppressions endured by women first in her hometown Abeokuta then in the whole country. As she was fighting for women's rights, her struggle was also directed against colonialism, that she considered responsible for much of the troubles endured by women in Nigeria. In March 1944, the ALC expanded its ranks to include market women, and in 1946 it became the Abeokuta Women Union (AWU) signaling the new emphasis on poor women's issues with class and gender as basic concerns of F. Ransome-Kuti's activism. The AWU adopted the motto "Unity, Cooperation, Selfless Service and Democracy;" it also set as objectives "...to unite women, to defend, protect, preserve and promote social, economic and political rights and interests of women; to cooperate with all organizations seeking and fighting genuinely and selflessly for the economic and political freedom and independence of the people." The AWU regrouped literate and illiterate women Christians, Muslims and followers of indigenous religions and its membership reached twenty thousand.<sup>98</sup>

The issue of taxation was the most important issue for the women of the AWU since trading was one of the major occupations of women in Abeokuta and in all

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<sup>98</sup> *For Women and the Nation*, 73.

Nigeria. The first protest actions were aimed to end government control on trade, to decrease the taxation of women traders, and to allow women to have a voice in the government. The slogan of AWU against taxation was “no taxation without representation.” Therefore, in Daily Service 8.8.1946, F. Ransome-Kuti declared, “Inasmuch as Egba women pay taxes, we too desire to have a say in the management of the country, because a taxpayer should also have a voice in the spending of the taxes. We...request you please to give consideration to our being represented in this (SNA) council by our own representatives at the next general election.”<sup>99</sup>

The AWU used varied means of protest and accomplished historical achievements. Against excessive oppressive taxation, F. Ransome-Kuti organized tax strikes, demonstrations and a wide spectrum of measures of civil disobedience. Protest led to the most powerful achievement of the AWN, the dethroning of Alake (King) Ademola II, the traditional ruler of the Yoruba Egba in January 1949. Actually, women's protest resulted in the abdication of the Egba government, constituted of the Alake and the Sole Native Authority (SNA), which was under the authority of Great Britain. In *For Women and the Nation*, Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba have written that protest led to “dynamic and protracted struggles, culminating in the temporary abdication of the Alake and reform of the SNA.”<sup>100</sup> Led by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, a crowd of 50 000 women marched to the house of the Alake, made him flee out of Abeokuta and chased him into exile. Protest also resulted in the successful abolition of separate tax rates for women.<sup>101</sup>

The dethroning of the Alake and his government acquired national and international recognition, and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti became a nationally and internationally recognized heroine in the struggle for women's rights. During the protests, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was very active in sending reports to different

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99 F. Ransome-Kuti, quoted in *For Women and the Nation*, 78.

100 *For Women and the Nation*, 67.

101 Raisa Simola, "The Construction of a Nigerian Nationalist and Feminist, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti," in *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 8(1) (1999), 100.

British politicians. In "For Their Freedoms': The Anti-imperialist and International Feminist Activity of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria," Johnson-Odim wrote that "Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti had kept in touch with her friends in England, notably writing to Reginald Sorensen, a Member of Parliament for the Labor Party, and Arthur Creech-Jones, who was Secretary of State for the Colonies."<sup>102</sup> Thanks to Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's efforts, on August 18, 1948, an article entitled "They Made the Ruler Run," chronicling the women's protests, appeared in the left wing London based newspaper the *Daily Worker*.<sup>103</sup>

The achievement of women also acquired legendary significance, and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti turned into a legendary figure among her people. As witnessed by Johnson-Odim and Mba, she became a legendary figure who was compared to historical figures as Madam Tinubu, who had defended the Egba against invasion, or Lisabi, a legendary hero among the Egba, and to Moses. She was hailed as the 'Lioness of Lisabi' and the 'daughter of Lisabi.'<sup>104</sup> Fela Kuti, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's son, refers to his mother as "tireless" and "amazing" as he describes the incident, "My mother was against the Alake because he was working for the white District Officer. He was a lackey of the colonial system."<sup>105</sup> The novelist Wole Soyinka dramatized this incident in his *Aké, the Years of Childhood*.<sup>106</sup>

Women used many tactics in their protests. They used traditional protest tactics. Johnson-Odim and Mba accounted for the demonstrations which resulted in the abdication of the Alake as an evidence about women's use of the traditional technique known as "sitting on a man" since during their demonstrations, women surrounded the Alake's palace while singing derisive songs to insult him and his protectors, the British.

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102 Cheryl Johnson-Odim, "For Their Freedoms': The Anti-imperialist and International Feminist Activity of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria" in *Women's Studies International Forum* 32 (2009), 56.

103 Idem.

104 For Women and the Nation, 63.

105 Fela Kuti quoted in Raisa Simola, "The Construction of a Nigerian Nationalist and Feminist, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti," in *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 8(1) (1999), 100.

106 Wole Soyinka, *Aké: The Years of Childhood*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

During those historical demonstrations, they used to sing, “Ademola/ Big man with an ulcer/ Your behavior is deplorable/ Alake is a thief/ Council members are thieves/ Anyone who does not know Kuti will get in trouble/ White man, you will not get to your country safely/ You and Alake will not die an honourable death.../ You pale-faced one keep off/ That we may have a chance/ To chat with father [Alake].”<sup>107</sup>

Using songs during protest demonstrations was very common. The Abeokuta Women’s Union composed over two hundred songs in Yoruba to use in their protests, and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, together with her husband who was interested in traditional African music, co-authored songs that were used during demonstrations.<sup>108</sup> The efficiency of using songs as a tactic of protest is witnessed in many other incidents. Johnson-Odim and Mba recounted that when some protesting women were arrested and put into jail, hundreds of their supporters went out demonstrating not far from the jail. Women supporters used to sing and imprisoned women then responded with their song. The women stayed until the next afternoon when those arrested were released on bail.<sup>109</sup> Using traditional tactics as “sitting on a man” and singing were more than expressions of women’s protest skills but also an affirmation of the traditional power of women against colonial disempowerment of women.

Besides fighting the abusive taxation of women, the AWU had other objectives. One of these objectives was raising the standard of womanhood through education. F. Ransome-Kuti claimed that one of the targets of the organization was “to help in raising the standard of womanhood in Abeokuta... to help in encouraging learning among the adults and thereby wipe out illiteracy.”<sup>110</sup> She established a series of schools with and without support from the local and national government. She also started the first adult education program for women in the country, which she called “the social welfare club for market women.” Members of the extended Ransom-Kuti family were recruited as

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<sup>107</sup> *For Women and the Nation*, 83.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>110</sup> F. Ransome-Kuti, quoted in *For Women and the Nation*, 64.

tutors including the Noble Prize author Wole Soyinka and his mother, and the cousins of F. Ransome-Kuti.

After her successful achievements in Abeokuta, F. Ransome-Kuti saw the importance of organizing women on a national level and of moving into the international arena. In May 1949, the AWU resolved to increase the support for its objectives through a call to all women in Nigeria, and F. Ransome-Kuti proposed the founding of a national union. The AWU became the Nigerian Women's Union (NWU) which soon established autonomous branches throughout Nigeria. F. Ransome-Kuti herself was invited to talk to women groups across the nation. In August 1953, as NWU president, she organized a conference of all women's organizations in Nigeria, where many ethnicities and classes were represented. During this conference, the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies (FNWS) was founded with F. Ransome-Kuti as its first president. Later, the federation founded an alliance with the Women's International Democratic Federation.<sup>111</sup>

Even if class and gender issues were the basis of her protest, F. Ransome-Kuti's activism and protest was aimed to demystify the evils of imperial colonialism. She criticized the British colonial administration by referring to British legal principles; she attacked the authoritarianism of colonialism by contrasting it with British democratic ideals such as the ideal of "no taxation without representation." She used the law to attack actions that were deemed 'legal' by the colonial code but that she considered unjust. In an interview with *New Breed* magazine in 1975, F. Ransome-Kuti noted, "What people are saying is that I attacked Ademola [the Alake at the time]. I didn't really attack Ademola, I attacked imperialism. Those Europeans were using him against his people...I was attacking Europeans indirectly and they know it."<sup>112</sup>

F. Ransome-Kuti attacked colonialism with her pen. She wrote many articles to denounce colonialism. In 1947, while in London as part of a National Council of

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111 Cheryl Johnson-Odim (2009), 56.

112 Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, quoted in Cheryl Johnson-Odim (2009), 56.

Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) delegation, she gave many talks about the state of women in Nigeria, and she wrote a controversial article, entitled “We had Equality 'til Britain Came,” which was published in the British Communist Party paper, the *Daily Worker*, and reproduced for Nigerian papers. In this article, she argued that colonialism had marginalized Nigerian women in the political and economic spheres and oppressed them with unjust taxes while denying them the right to vote.<sup>113</sup> She wrote, “Before the British advent in Nigeria....there was a division of labour between men and women;.... Women owned property, traded and exercised considerable political and social influence in society.... With the advent of the British rule...instead of women being educated and assisted... their condition has deteriorated.”<sup>114</sup> Johnson-Odim and Mba have explained, “She maintained that women were poverty stricken, disease ridden and malnourished,” and that they were forced to pay taxes that they could not afford to pay and in return did not get even basic amenities. In this article, she compares women's status to that of slaves, and she appealed to British women to help liberate Nigerian women from “slavery—political, social and economic.”<sup>115</sup>

In addition to writing against colonialism, she realized the importance of affirming traditional values and rejecting Western cultural influences in her daily life as an expression of her anti-colonial attitudes. For instance, as early as the 1920s, she dropped her European given names, Frances Abigail, and used only Funmilayo, and she gave her children Yoruba names. She also insisted that pupils at her schools use their African rather than European names.<sup>116</sup> Then when she started her struggles with the market women, she began to believe that educated women were living outside the daily life of the people, and as a way to identify with them, she abandoned Western clothing, wearing instead the traditional Yoruba wrapped cloth. In addition, she began using

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113 Cheryl Johnson-Odim (2009), 56.

114 F. Ransome-Kuti, quoted in *For Women and the Nation*, 136.

115 Idem.

116 Raisa Simola (1999), 106.

Yoruba rather than English in public speeches, which often meant that British officials required a translation.<sup>117</sup>

Despite her affirmation of traditional cultural heritage, F. Ransome-Kuti was critical of those elements of indigenous Nigerian cultures that she felt were oppressive to women. She criticized polygamy and bride price that she considered as customs that reinforced male domination in marriage and considered that these customs subdued women to men as she wrote, "As women we still feel that we are inferior to men, we inherited this feeling from our mothers whose spirits had been subdued with slavery."<sup>118</sup> Interpreting this position to marriage customs, Johnson-Odim and Mba considered F. Ransome-Kuti a feminist claiming "she propounded a feminist consciousness and ideology. She acknowledged that women were victimized by their social conditioning, which led them to internalize a negative self-image and to be passive and apathetic."<sup>119</sup>

Actually, F. Ransome-Kuti seems ambiguous about how far these customs were oppressive to women before colonialism and how colonialism reinforced male domination through these customs. Regardless of this ambiguity, we need to praise the achievements she accomplished through being able to capitalize on being simultaneously Western educated and grounded in tradition. We admire her ability to make use of this double heritage in helping illiterate market women, who were disempowered by colonial intervention in Nigeria, to regain confidence and power that allowed them to defy colonial male-privileging culture. And we admire more through the struggle F. Ransome-Kuti all those market women who despite being "victimized by their social conditioning" showed strength and power during their demonstrations against taxation as they showed a great ability to step beyond ethnic differences when they initiated projects of unity against colonialism. We admire more the positive self-image, the spirit of defiance and sense of connectedness to national concerns, and we

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117 *For Women and the Nation*, 66-7.

118 F. Ransome-Kuti, quoted in *For Women and the Nation*, 102.

119 *For Women and the Nation*, 102.

regret to read that even a F. Ransome-Kuti would acknowledge that these proud women had once internalized a negative self-image and that their mothers had been submissive.

After this comparative contrastive review of two different experiences of women in two parts of the continent, we could outline the underlying similarities and differences between the two different experiences.

As a major difference noticed, the status of women affected by socio-historical and cultural conditions differed not only from one country to the other, but from one region or one social group to the other in the same country. For instance, women in Algerian rural centers enjoyed more freedom of movement and exercised more socio-economic roles compared to women in urban centers, and women in the different Nigerian social groups exercised more freedom and more social and economic roles than women in Algeria did.

Though the experiences we have explored have taken us to different parts of the African continent with two different experiences, with French colonialism in Algeria and British colonialism in Nigeria, the colonial impact was detrimental on women's lives in both countries. Not only had colonialism strengthened the gender inequalities already existing in those societies, but also it violently intervened with women's lives while trying to justify the superiority of the colonial civilization. Women in those two parts of the continent, however, made a world of their own where they could overcome some of the limitations of the changing conditions of life under colonial rule. In both Algeria and Nigeria, women engaged in constant struggles to be themselves against the different attempts to define them as 'oppressed' categories or as 'brutal amazons' and equivalent definitions pregnant with prejudice emphasizing their victimization in culture or their brutality.

Despite women's ability to overcome limitations, their lives have been mystified in colonial, feminist and nationalist discourses. The mystification of women's condition and the condemnation of native cultures draw on a long history in which colonized women's bodies "have been simultaneously exoticized and eroticized," to use Christine

Walley's words.<sup>120</sup> Among the favorite figures in colonial representations of colonized women were veiling and clitoridectomy, which provided an opportunity for the colonizer to intervene with women's lives in the guise of saving colonized womanhood from oppressive cultures. We will explore how these cultural practices which were used to condemn local cultures and prove women's 'oppression' were also used to defend local cultures requiring women to be the guardians of culture.

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120 Christine J. Walley, "Searching for 'Voices': Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Aug., 1997), 422.

### **3 Women and Culture: 'Oppressed Victims, Brutal Amazons or Guardians of Tradition'**

Associating women with culture was an early “colonial discourse,”<sup>1</sup> which was based on the assumption of the inferiority of the colonized cultures where women were either 'oppressed victims' or brutal 'amazons'. These assumptions were repeated by Western feminists, western-oriented feminists, and by cultural nationalists who, in contrast to feminists, celebrated denigrated cultural practices, requiring women to be the guardians of traditions. This chapter outlines the debates and describes the response of non-western scholars, some known also as Postcolonial Feminists, who have challenged these discourses. Such scholars as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Marnia Lazreg among others have disclosed not only the link between early colonial discourses associating women with culture and the need to justify imperialism, but also the reasons behind the continuing reiteration of these discourses in different ways in the discourses held by Western feminism and Western-oriented feminism and/or by decolonization nationalists.

Common debates, about the inferiority/superiority of the colonized cultures on a basis that associates women with culture, include such famous discourses on clitoridectomy<sup>2</sup> and veiling. On one hand, such cultural practices as clitoridectomy and veiling were used sometimes to condemn local cultures and prove women's 'oppression' and sometimes to defend local cultures and require women to be the embodiment of cultural authenticity. On the other hand, sometimes the inferiority of the colonized cultures was attributed to the brutality and savageness of women depicted sometimes as dangerous and brutal as reflected in the stereotype of the 'amazons.' This chapter

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1 Colonial discourse is the equivalent of what Edward Said calls “orientalist discourse” which he uses to describe how colonialism has relied not only on military intervention and political rule to dominate the colonized, but also on a large variety of texts from different disciplines which associate the will to know the other with the will to maintain colonial domination. See Edward Said, *Orientalism*.

2 The naming of this ritual is as controversial as the debate which is held about the practice. In “Searching for Voices,” Walley describes the controversy about the naming of the ritual in the following: “existing usages are deeply embedded in the “either/or” perspectives characteristic of discussions of female genital operations, with *circumcision* signaling relativistic tolerance and *mutilation* implying moral outrage” ( 408). We will use “mutilation” to refer to the position of those who adopt this naming, but we will otherwise use the neutral word “clitoridectomy.”

outlines these debates, as repeated by western feminists and western-oriented feminists and then by nationalists, as it describes the recent non-western feminist challenge with focus on those famous discourses.

### **3.1 Women “Oppressed Victims or Brutal amazons” and ‘Colonial Discourse’**

As early as the beginning of colonialism, local cultures were decried as antonymic to human progress. Most of the time, arguments tried to prove that local cultures were patriarchal, and women in colonized societies were oppressed victims. In this sense, "The barbarity of native man becomes a major justification for colonial rule, impels colonial policy, and shapes and directs colonial confrontations," writes Ania Loomba.<sup>3</sup> However, where women exerted some power, they were designated as dangerous and savage; non-Western women were also presented as 'amazons' to use the words of Ania Loomba who says, "we should note that not all 'brown' or 'black' women are represented as victims, or as desirable or passive. The non-European woman also appears in an intractable version, as 'Amazonian' or deviant femininity. The Amazons are located by early colonial writings in virtually every part of the non-European world, and provide images of insatiable sexuality and brutality."<sup>4</sup>

Local customs such as veiling and clitoridectomy provided a good opportunity to interfere with the colonized life. For instance, as previously noted, veiling in Algerian cities was a cherished subject in many colonialist writings, where the veiled woman was the concrete evidence for the colonizer about the primitivism of the Algerians and about their need to change. The unveiling of Algerian women in 1958 is a famous example

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<sup>3</sup> Loomba gives a cursory view about the Orientalized images about native colonized women produced through history in European and Euro-American writings; see *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 151-172.

<sup>4</sup> *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 154.

showing colonial intervention with Algerian life through association between culture and women. Likewise, clitoridectomy was subject to much criticism and ban as early as the Christian missions arrived to the colonized land, and it was also hailed as a good justification to interfere with the colonized life to change his 'barbaric' customs oppressive towards women.

Other debates associating women with culture include discourses emphasizing the brutality of women. For instance, the interference of colonial powers with the colonized life can also be traced within the circumstances surrounding the historical event known as 'Women's War.' The transformations resulting from the introduction of a new legal system which imposed restrictions to limit the powers that the indigenous system afforded women in Igbo land led in 1929 to 'Women's War' misnamed in the British archives as the 'Aba Riots,' "a name which limits the scope and de-politicizes its [the War's] feminist impetus" as Susan Z. Andrade adequately puts it.<sup>5</sup> The colonial state allowed its police to crush violently Igbo women's demonstrations, that the British colonial officer, Lord Lugard, described as "a strange phenomenon."<sup>6</sup> To see women demonstrating against what they judged as injustice was a "strange phenomenon," for a nineteenth century British Lord.

Ironically, where women enjoyed some power and freedom, these were judged dangerous and 'strange,' and this power and freedom needed therefore to be limited even through the use of violence. The prejudice of 'Amazons' or 'femmes sauvages' was invented to cast non-Western women with brutality and savagery. In three cases—the unveiling of Algerian women, the ban of clitoridectomy, and the crush of 'Women's War,' to use Ania Loomba's words, "colonial intervention often coincided with internal desire for reform and change."<sup>7</sup>

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5 Susan Z. Andrade, "Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion: Naming an African Women's Literary Tradition," *Research in African Literatures*, 21(1990), 96.

6 Lord Lugard, quoted in Nkiru Nzegwu (2006), 79

7 Loomba, 168.

Colonial intervention with the colonized life was very detrimental in some African societies where colonial “desire for reform and change” affected the structure of the family; this reform affected the status of women negatively. In *Family Matters*, Nzewu explains that the contemporary structure of the family in some African societies based on gender subordination can be traced back to the colonial policies in the continent. These policies have been consolidated by African males during colonial and postcolonial periods. "The consolidation of the husbands and son's rights has resulted in a patriarchal consciousness in which the subordination of daughters and wives is taken for granted and is assumed to be culturally rooted and based on their natural inferiority. This lends support to the characterization of African societies and African families as historically oppressive to women,"<sup>8</sup> writes Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu.

Colonial intervention with the structure of the family was made possible through the efforts of early colonial ethnographers, anthropologists, missionaries and educationists who used their own imagination and their own beliefs to represent the new living spaces they landed on. In *The Eloquence of Silence*, Marnia Lazreg, the Algerian scholar, describes with pertinence the misrepresentation of the Algerian life in the works of French writers, which she terms as "the orientalizing of Algeria" which “meant its dehistoricization.”<sup>9</sup> Equally, exposing the misrepresentation of Igbo life and its effect on the family structure, Nzegwu writes, "Early Western ethnographers, Christian missionaries, colonial anthropologists, and educationists viewed Igbo families and society through their patriarchal lens and the male-privileging value scheme of Western epistemology."<sup>10</sup>

The process of dehistoricization, which was launched with the framework of misrepresentation, was reinforced by the violent misappropriation of the riches of the colonized land and the consequent loss of economic security and social stability and was completed by reforms in the legal system, which influenced family law. Colonial

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8 Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu (2006), 2.

9 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 37- 38.

10 Nzegwu (2006), 6.

intervention with the family law in some societies altered the structure of the family. Depicting the effect of colonial intervention with the Igbo life, Nzegwu contends "Certain 'traditions' of male privilege were legislated and subsequently produced in order to bring Igbo society in line with European norms. Meanwhile, Igbo traditions of women's autonomy and assertiveness were simultaneously inverted."<sup>11</sup> She then adds "ever since the Christian mission arrived in Onitsha in 1857 and colonialism by 1892, neither the Igbo family ideology nor the Igbo family itself has been the same."<sup>12</sup> Nzegwu argues that the colonial experience initiated the transformation of the Igbo family system into a patriarchal one through its effect on the judicial system. This transformation worked its way through the judicial system made of a set of male-privileging customary laws. These laws which were collected and codified by the colonial state in Nigeria have continued ever since to institutionalize the rights of men through the judicial system of postcolonial Nigeria.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.2 Feminist Discourse, that Old Prejudice**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Western feminist scholars used ethnographic literature to condemn the indigenous structures of inequality embedded in indigenous traditions, which they described as responsible for the modern subjugation of women in Africa. Western feminism interest in African womanhood relies on the old prejudice, which associates women with culture and tradition. Following women's experiences, most scholars and critics dwell more on the oppression and victimization of women in all areas of human endeavors by indigenous patriarchal cultures. Local customs such as clitoridectomy, polygamy or veiling provided those Western feminists the opportunity to interfere with women's lives. Those feminists therefore required that scholarship on non-Western countries must recognize the oppressive nature of indigenous traditions.

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11 Ibid, 15.

12 Ibid., 16.

13 Ibid., 19-20.

Western feminism interest in non-Western womanhood relies on the old prejudice, which associates women with culture and tradition. Western feminist scholars used colonial ethnographic literature to condemn what they considered the structures of inequality embedded in indigenous traditions, which they described as responsible for the subjugation of women in non-Western countries. Those feminists, therefore, required that scholarship on non-Western countries must recognize the oppressive nature of indigenous traditions, and the victimization of women in culture, as it must expose the deliberate silencing of women's plights by monolithic patriarchy.

Clitoridectomy<sup>14</sup> and veiling have had an obsessive impact on many scholars and writers, Western and non-Western.<sup>15</sup> With a complete ignorance of the complexities of those local practices, western feminists waged wars against those practices under the guise of liberating their sisters in non-western countries from the shackles of patriarchy imposed by culture. "Culture and traditions are often coded as harmful, coercive, and superfluous," writes Walley.<sup>16</sup>

For instance, the veil has been held as a symbol of the oppression of women by religion. Pejorative images of the veil were generally associated with images of the 'harem' encoding the seclusion of women. The veil since the 19th century has symbolized for the west the inferiority of Muslim culture. M. E. Hume Griffiths described the veil as a living grave, "When Mohammed, acting under what he declared to be a revelation from Allah, introduced the use of the veil, he swept away forever all

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14 In Benita Shell-Duncan & Ylva Hernlund, "Female Circumcision in Africa: Dimensions of the Practice and Debates," the authors provide an interesting overview of the debates about clitoridectomy from different disciplines where they highlight the emerging perspectives and current dimensions of the debates. Benita Shell-Duncan & Ylva Hernlund, *Female "Circumcision" in Africa: Culture, Controversy, and Change* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2000).

15 Since clitoridectomy and veiling were common in some African societies and in the Middle East, the debates included references to the Middle East, and therefore our references would sometimes include some Middle Eastern names.

16 Christine J. Walley, 420.

hope of happiness for Moslem women. By means of the veil, he immured them forever in a living grave."<sup>17</sup>

In recent feminist criticism, with some exceptions, the veil has been identified with the oppression of women in the name of religion too. Western feminists as Kate Millett, Elisabeth Badinter, Patricia Jeffrey and Francine Pelletier among others actively engaged in debates aimed to liberate the Muslim women from the yoke of religious oppression symbolized in the veil. For instance, Juliette Minces describes "the veil and female circumcision" as "two symbols of women's oppression."<sup>18</sup> Minces waxes the "Arab world"<sup>19</sup> in one entity making easy generalizations and sometimes inaccurate portrayals;<sup>20</sup> however she claims objectivity in the foreword of her book, "I have tried not to make my Western experience the criterion for universal and absolute judgments. [...] nonetheless, societies which continue to hold that fifty percent of their population—the women—should remain subordinate, and be relegated to the status of minors and inferiors, cannot but be a problem for us."<sup>21</sup> With similar prejudice, Patricia Jeffrey describes a veiled woman as "anonymous, a non-person, unapproachable, just a

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17 M. E. Hume Griffiths, *Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia* (London: Seeley & Co. LTD, 1909), 222.

18 Juliette Minces, *The House of Obedience, Women in Arab Society* (London: Zed Press, 1980), 49.

19 Indeed, *The House of Obedience* is the English translation of the French book entitled *Femmes dans le Monde Arabe*. The description of the book in the Google search page states: "The House of Obedience" is about women in the Arab world who *are still largely subject* to a traditional set of beliefs and customs employed to justify a multiplicity of practices against them. The veil, physical mutilation, forced marriage, incarceration in the home, repudiation..." [italics mine]

20 Describing the veil worn by women in some eastern regions in Algeria, Minces writes: "Certain eastern regions in Algeria favor the black veil, a long cloak which covers the entire face and body except for one eye" 50. Of course, this account is inaccurate since this type of black veil didn't cover the entire body and face except for one eye. Ironically, Minces seems to mix between two types of veils common in Algeria, one common in the east and the other in the west. The veil which covered the entire body and face except for one eye was common in the west, and this veil was white. The common veil in some eastern regions was actually black, but it did not cover the entire body; it covered the back part of the body; the lower part of the face was covered by a separate device made generally of muslin cloth and decorated by embroidery; the eyes were not covered.

21 Minces, viii.

silent being skulking along, looking neither left nor right."<sup>22</sup> Simone De Beauvoir confirms in *The Second Sex*, "The veiled and sequestered Moslem woman is still today in most social strata a kind of slave."<sup>23</sup> More recently, Western representations of veiled Muslim women have multiplied. In 2001, alleged moral arguments for the United States' war on Afghanistan were formulated through appeals against the wearing of the veil, which was identified as a symbol of Islamic gender oppression. These recent appeals testify upon the unchanging orientalist attitude to the veil.<sup>24</sup>

Equally, in their fight against female genital operations, western feminists named the practice, declared patriarchal, as "Female Genital Mutilation," which becomes the symbol of oppression in culture. Feminist activists as Gloria Steinem, Mary Daly, Fran Hosken, Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar and others, called women to break the barriers of patriarchal oppression. In "African Genital Mutilation: Unspeakable Atrocities," Mary Daly hails against what she chooses to name "barbaric rituals/atrocities" or "the ritual genital mutilations" that were practiced in the past in many cultures but which persist in Africa. Daly even warns, "Mentally castrated," African women who 'actively' "participate in the destruction of their own kind."<sup>25</sup> Daly therefore calls for a universal action to break "the conspiracy of silence"<sup>26</sup> which allows the perpetuation of patriarchal oppression. To break "the conspiracy of silence" Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar waged a war using different means, written and visual to fight against the "wounds" of tradition<sup>27</sup> perpetuated through what has become generally known as FGM, for "Female Genital Mutilation."

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22 Patricia Jeffrey, quoted in Shahnaz Khan, "The Veil as a Site of Struggle," *Canadian Woman Studies/ Les Cahiers de la Femme* 15.2&3(1995), 146.

23 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), 108.

24 See Alia Al-Saji, "The Racialization of Muslim Veils: A Philosophical Analysis," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36: 8 (2010): 875-902.

25 Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, 164.

26 Ibid., 155.

27 Actually, Alice Walker published her novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) which was followed by a documentary film accompanied by a book, *Warrior Marks: Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Binding of Women*, made in collaboration with film maker Pratibha Parmar (1993).

Associating women with culture is a discourse repeated by Western-oriented scholars and writers in response to Western feminist requirements. Echoing Western feminist condemnation of culture and religion, Somali activist Raqiya Haji Dualeh Abdalla refers to clitoridectomy as "the ancient custom of genital mutilation of women."<sup>28</sup> Equally, freelance Egyptian-American journalist and commentator Mona Eltahawy writes that women who "had their genitals cut in the name of modesty" are abused by "a toxic mix of culture and religion that few seem willing or able to disentangle lest they blaspheme or offend."<sup>29</sup> The veil has also been considered by many western-oriented feminists as a means of oppression by religion.

In addition to repeating colonial discourses repeated by western feminists, some feminist writers use the very language they denounced when disclaiming Eurocentric representations of women in non-European countries. Among these writers, Leila Ahmad, who has always tried to show the ironies in the discourses representing women in Middle Eastern and North African societies focused on the oppression of women by patriarchal culture and religion, sees in the veil a means of religious identification. In *A Quiet Revolution*, she explores the resurgence of the veil in the Middle East and in the west. She explains that this resurgence plainly signaled the presence of Islamism—a particular and very political form of Islam that had been gaining ground in Muslim societies since the Islamic Resurgence of the 1970s, a resurgence significantly fueled by the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>30</sup>

Ahmad's explorations helped her to understand the newness of this resurgence. She explains that the veil is used by Muslim women as an instrument to oppose the growth of anti-Muslim feelings in the west. The veil has once again been used as a means to assert difference in Western societies where racist behavior against the

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28 Raqiya Haji Dualeh Abdalla. *Sisters in Affliction: Circumcision and Infibulation of Women in Africa* (London: Zed Press, 1982), 2.

29 Mona Eltahawy, "Why Do They Hate Us", *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2012.

30The Brotherhood is an Egyptian social, religious and political organization whose teachings spread to other Islamic countries. See Leila Ahmad, *A Quiet Revolution: the Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America* (New Heaven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 2011).

Muslim minorities is pushing them to identify differently. The veil, "this emblem supposedly of Islamic patriarchy and oppression of women emerged today in America as an emblem of a call for justice, and even for gender-justice" she writes.<sup>31</sup> While Ahmed has always been aware of the complexities of association between women and culture, she seems to repeat the same discourse that she has always criticized when she fails to recognize that these young women in the west are not much different from the women who under the influence of the Brotherhood's teachings found in the veil a means of religious identification.

### **3.3 Women “Guardians of Tradition” and Nationalist Discourse**

The prejudice associating women with culture was repeated but with a difference by nationalists in postcolonial debates. The same old colonial discourse, which fuses women with culture and tradition, was adopted by nationalist leaders in their fight against colonialism. Nationalists advocated that such local practices as the veil and clitoridectomy constituted the embodiment of religious and national identity

For instance, the practice of clitoridectomy among the Gikuyu in Kenya fluctuated between Christian missionary ban and nationalist revival. When missionaries banned the ritual viewed as barbaric, it was revitalized by the young nationalists of the Gikuyu Central Association. Jomo Kenyatta, leader of the Association and later president of independent Kenya, institutionalized the practice. In his *Facing Mount Kenya*, he wrote defining the importance of the ritual as an institution with various implications:

a very important fact in the tribal psychology of the Gikuyu namely, that this operation is still regarded as the very essence of an institution which has enormous educational, social, moral, and religious implications, quite from the operation itself. For the present it is impossible for a member

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31 Ahmad (2011), 8.

of the tribe to imagine an initiation without clitoridectomy. Therefore the abolition of the surgical element in this custom means to the Gikuyu the abolition of the whole institution.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, Kenyatta demonized "uncircumcised" women and discouraged Gikuyu youth from marrying them. He insisted that only a detribalized African will marry an "uncircumcised" woman, and his account of the ritual stresses its high cultural valence in traditional Gikuyu culture, "In the matrimonial relation, the rite of passage is the deciding factor. No proper Gikuyu would dream of marrying a girl who has not been circumcised, and vice versa. It is taboo for a Gikuyu man or woman to have sexual relations with someone who has not undergone this operation."<sup>33</sup>

*Facing Mount Kenya* is thus an exemplary text of nationalist repetition of colonialist discourse underscoring the marginalization of women and the misappropriation of their bodies for the nationalist cause. Kenyatta, who addressed his work to both African and European audiences, set nationalist against Eurocentric anthropology, which describes ritual circumcision as barbaric. He wrote, "The real anthropological study, therefore, is to show that clitoridectomy, like Jewish circumcision, is a mere bodily mutilation which, however, is regarded as the condition sine qua non of the whole teaching of tribal law, religion, and morality."<sup>34</sup>

In the same vein, nationalist leaders in Muslim countries advocated the importance of veiling as an expression of religious and national identity. For instance, the history of veiling in Algeria has also fluctuated between colonial and nationalist intervention. As already noted, colonial interference with women's lives was concretized with the unveiling of women in 1958. After this event, as witnessed by Frantz Fanon, the immediate response of many women "who had long since dropped the veil once again donned the haik, thus affirming that it was not true that woman liberated

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32 Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya, the Tribal Life of the Gikuyu* [1938] (London: mercury Books, 1961), 133.

33 Ibid., 132.

34 Ibid, 133.

herself at the invitation of France and of General de Gaulle."<sup>35</sup> While women's immediate response reflects a personal choice, the response of the FLN to the event stripped women of choice. FLN leaders and most men in society advocated the need for veiling or re-veiling as a means of resistance to French rule, and unveiled women were soon demonized and fiercely flung into "the camp of evil and depravation" as witnessed by Fanon.<sup>36</sup> Thus the event, which stands as the most significant indicator of the colonial association between women and culture, is also significant to show the association between women and tradition by nationalists who also misappropriated women's voices and choices vis-à-vis veiling.

### **3.4 Re-reading Colonial, Feminist and Nationalist discourses**

Associating women with culture is a discourse challenged by non-Western postcolonial feminist scholars who disclosed not only the link between these colonial discourses and the need to justify imperialism, but also the reasons behind the continuing reiteration of these discourses in different ways in the discourses held by Western feminism and Western-oriented feminism and by postcolonial nationalism. Such scholars as Gayatri Spivak, and Chandra Mohanty explored the connections between colonial discourses and contemporary Western feminist discourses, which all aimed to justify western imperialism and to preserve western hegemony. Lazreg discusses the same connections and discloses the aims implied behind the reiteration of those prejudices in nationalist discourses with focus on the Algerian woman's experiences. These scholars challenged the misappropriation of women's voices and choices in the different discourses associating women with culture.

In "French Feminism in an International Frame" (1981), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak questions French Feminism. She writes "Reflecting a broader Western cultural

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<sup>35</sup> *Dying*, 62.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

practice, the 'classical' East is studied with primitivistic reverence, even as the 'contemporary' East is treated with realpolitikal contempt" to fit with the conclusions that the French feminist Julia Kristeva wanted to reach about Chinese women.<sup>37</sup> Spivak therefore urges "in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged as a woman."<sup>38</sup>

In "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984), Chandra Talpade Mohanty explores the connections between colonial discourses and contemporary Western feminist discourses which all aimed to justify western imperialism and to preserve western hegemony exercised today through "the monopoly of scientific knowledge and ideal creativity."<sup>39</sup> Mohanty exposes the implicit self-serving strategies, grounded in sweeping generalizations; "discursive homogenization;" "systemization of the oppression of women in the third world" and their victimization,<sup>40</sup> used to approach "other" women's lives by both "writers who codify others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western" and by "Third World scholars who write about their own cultures and employ identical analytical strategies."<sup>41</sup> In her later article, "Revisiting 'Under Western Eyes'" (2003) she sums up her aims through "Under Western Eyes" "I [...] wanted to expose the power-knowledge nexus of feminist cross-cultural scholarship expressed through Eurocentric, falsely universalizing methodologies that serve the narrow self-interest of Western feminism."<sup>42</sup> She therefore urges, "Any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of "Third World feminisms" must address itself to two simultaneous projects: the internal critique of

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37 "French Feminism in an International Frame," 160.

38 Ibid., 156-7.

39 Anouar Abdel Malek, qtd. in "Under Western Eyes," 54.

40 "Under Western Eyes," 54.

41 Ibid., 52.

42 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28, 2 (2002): 501.

hegemonic “Western” feminisms and the formulation of autonomous feminist concerns and strategies that are geographically, historically, and culturally grounded.”<sup>43</sup>

While many scholars have written about the complexities of the representation of third world women past and present, none has explored these complexities more persuasively than Marnia Lazreg when she writes on Algerian women. In “Feminism and Difference,” as well as in *Eloquence*, Marnia Lazreg discloses the repetition of colonial discourses in Western feminists’ and Western oriented feminist writings about women in Algeria as well as on women in the Middle East and North Africa, which are dominated by “geopolitical categorizations,” “sweeping generalizations,” and the “religion/tradition paradigm.” She explains that focused on “geopolitical categorizations,” research is based on addressing women’s experiences through the geopolitical group they belong to with little regard to historical and cultural specificities, allowing sweeping generalizations; thus the living experience of one society is used to interpret gender relations in other societies. She thus warns non-western feminists who repeat these categorizations adopted by Western feminists using such terms as "Middle Eastern/African/Arab/Muslim" in addressing the woman question. Lazreg notices that such categorizations are noticed even in the works of famous feminists who seem aware about the complexities of addressing the women question in non-western countries.<sup>44</sup> She also shows how research on women in the Middle East and North Africa has always been dominated by what she calls “religion/tradition paradigm” which she defines as a “a combination of orientalist and evolutionary assumptions, [which] constrains its critics by compelling them either to ritually refer to its parameters or to submit to them. Tradition in this case is seen as exemplified by the veil, seclusion, clitoridectomy, and so on.”<sup>45</sup> Lazreg explains that

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43 “Under Western Eyes,” 51.

44 She cites Nawal El-Saadawi's famous book about Egyptian women, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, subtitled "*Women in the Arab World*." "Feminism and Difference," 88.

45 Ibid., 85

such constraining approaches result into “a reductive, ahistorical conception of women.”<sup>46</sup>

She explores as a case study the relation between colonial and contemporary feminist discourse about Algerian women. She writes, "what was written about Algerian women by women in the first part of this century is reproduced in one form or another in the writings of contemporary French women and U.S. feminists about the same subject matter. More importantly, the themes defined by the French colonial or neocolonial discourse as significant for understanding Algerian women are the ones found today in Eastern feminists' writings."<sup>47</sup>

Lazreg also asserts that some Western-oriented Third World feminists have reinforced the existing prejudice about their societies and about the position of women within. She criticizes the position of these feminists who feel comfortable acquiring a Western-style feminist identity and therefore prefer to look "at themselves through Western feminists' eyes." She writes, "the research of the disreputable which reinforces the notion of difference as objectified otherness is often carried out with the help of Third World women themselves."<sup>48</sup> She scorns the role of those feminists reinforcing the prejudice about the history and the institutions, which regulate women's lives in Third World countries. She explains that their critique of gender difference is not carried out "with a full knowledge and understanding of the institutions it rejects." In this sense she adds, this feminist critique "reinforces the existing 'meconnaissance' of these societies and constitutes another instance of knowledge as 'cutting'. Only this time, the cutters are also those who are generally 'cut out' of the fellowship of sisterhood."<sup>49</sup> She therefore exhorts that writers dealing with the woman's question "should refrain from thinking in terms of a 'Middle East' and realize that what is useful to geopolitics is not necessarily so to sociology. Concrete women (like men) live in concrete societies

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46 Ibid.

47 "Feminism and Difference," 83.

48 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 10

49 Ibid, 10-13

and not in an ideologically uniform space. There are Turkish women and Egyptian women and Algerian women. Subsuming some under others' results is obscuring, rather than improving, our understanding of gender relations."<sup>50</sup>

In as far as the veil prejudice is concerned, Lazreg opposes the manner in which Muslim women have been portrayed in books and the media. In her works, she has tried to disclose the colonialist orientalist attitudes underlying the associative discourses of women's oppression and Islam held by colonials or Western and Western-oriented feminists. She writes, "the orientalist tradition supports the notion that Islam is an archaic and backward system of beliefs that determines the behavior of the people who adhere to it."<sup>51</sup> She also refers to how the veil has persisted in those discourses as the most tangible sign of women's oppression by a misogynous religion and by cruel men who use Islam for political aims. She also finds it ironic that women's uses of the veil are still veiled by stereotyped images; she writes, "while the veil plays an inordinate role in representations of women in North Africa and the Middle East, it is seldom studied in terms of the reality that lies behind it. Women's strategic uses of the veil and what goes on under the veil remain a mystery."<sup>52</sup>

Lazreg also discloses the relation between the colonial discourses associating women with culture and postcolonial nationalism. In *The Eloquence of Silence*, she discloses the attempts of political leaders, past and present, to use religion and women in their power-motivated battles. She shows how Islam has been used as "a tool of justification and acquisition of political power,"<sup>53</sup> just as she has shown how "The use of women by men in their ideological battles is in keeping with the historical tradition established since the colonial era."<sup>54</sup>

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50 "Feminism and Difference," 95.

51 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 13.

52 Ibid, 14.

53 Ibid., 209.

54 Ibid., 218.

In *Questioning the Veil*, Lazreg's most recent work about the subject of veiling, she explains that as a result of early colonial discourses which have been perpetuated by feminists and nationalists, the veil "has been so politicized that it threatens to shape and distort the identity of young women and girls throughout the Muslim world as well as in Europe and North America."<sup>55</sup> She therefore challenges both secularists who reject the veil seen as an outmoded and oppressive and those Muslim women who consciously reduce their religion and their sex to a matter of veiling or non-veiling.<sup>56</sup> She discloses the aims of "radical secularists and Wahabists, Islamists and Shi'i Muslims" who all distrust women to have "the capacity to decide for themselves how to manage their bodies and whether to wear a veil"<sup>57</sup> and who as a consequence want to control them. Lazreg therefore exhorts women to be aware of the complexities of the issue of veiling and to be vigilant about the misappropriation of their sex and their bodies to serve a power-motivated struggle.

After this brief cursory view of the debates associating women and culture which actually constitute the common historical sub-text which links the three novels we aim to read intertextually, we move to discuss how these texts emerging within such a background confront the ways in which Africana women have been written out of history reflecting the attempts of their respective authors to rewrite history.

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55 Marnia Lazreg, *Questioning the Veil, Open Letters to Muslim Women* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009), 2.

56 Ibid., 2.

57 Ibid., 61.

## **PART 2 : Africana Women Rewriting History**

This part is literary; in three chapters, we shall explore how each of the three writers has reconstituted the specific history she has chosen to rewrite. We shall show how each author has reconstituted history and projected in literature the important changes that affected women's wellbeing in their respective societies during colonial and postcolonial times. We shall then describe the dynamics of rewriting history in each novel. In other words, I shall examine the narrative and aesthetic strategies used in the inscription of female experiences and female voices in history with focus on how strategies work to achieve meaning within a context.

In the first chapter, we shall show through the description of setting in *La femme sans sépulture* that the history of Algeria paralleled with that of the Algerian woman has always been appropriated then effaced since colonial time. The setting of the story is a complex interplay between past and present, and a movement from a modern city Algiers to an antique space Césarée. Three historical periods are retrospectively represented through what, on its surface structure, depicts the recovery of the story of Zoulikha, a forgotten heroine of the Algerian war of independence who was tortured and killed by the French, and whose body disappeared. This quest is underscored by the return of a narrator-author to her hometown, the antique city Césarée, which is described as haunted.

Through the idea of return to a haunted postcolonial space, Djébar repeats a common requirement in postcolonial theory, basically, as defined by Homi Bhabha, who emphasizes the imperative of the return to the site of past struggles to relieve this past from its traumatic effect through recognition and representation. Yet Djébar repeats then reverses Bhabha's imperative by projecting a postcolonial Algeria which is still haunted by the specters of a colonial past which could not be healed from their traumatic effects despite the different attempts to rewrite colonial history. At different levels, the novel criticizes the way this history has been represented and effaced in different accounts including official historiography, which repeats what Michael

O’Riley describes as the imperialist dynamics of “appropriation and effacement,”<sup>1</sup> or to appropriate the past through an act of representation that allows its effacement. Therefore, the quest for the forgotten involves the writer in a deep level quest, namely, how to recover the past without risking its effacement.

To rewrite history without repeating the dynamics of “appropriation and effacement,” Djebbar uses a set of devices that we shall discuss in the second sub-chapter. She relies on a number of narrative and representational strategies like framing, plot subversion, shifting points of view and free indirect discourse (FID). Through framing, Djebbar undertakes the representation of Algerian oral forms of storytelling, allowing characters not only to speak for themselves in whatever artistic way they can, but also to tell their framework-stories, which generally do not form part of the actual plot of the novel. This framing strategy, which allows the novel to draw upon the diamonds of the Algerian oral tradition, is coupled with plot subversion, which consist of revising the conventional plot and adopting a new design that allows the different voices narrating the separate elements of the plot to recapitulate, control, and narrate their own stories. Djebbar also uses a very complex narrative mode; she has engaged the first person as well as the third person narrative voices in addition to monologues in the voice of the dead martyr who participates in the recuperation task. To describe this complex narrative mode, we shall use Wayne C Booth’s ideas about how to evaluate the voices of narration and Gérard Genette’s concept of focalization as expanded by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in *Narrative Fiction, Contemporary Poetics*.

Focalization is Genette's term that can be the equivalent of what we know as point of view. However, Genette saw the need to use a more precise term than point of view to distinguish between who sees and who speaks while describing narrative perspective. According to Genette, focalization can be either external or internal to the story. “In what Genette calls internal focalization the narrative is focused through the

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1 Michael F. O’Riley, “Haunting: Anxiety, Affect, and the Situated Encounter,” in *Postcolonial Text* 3, no. 4 (2007): 2.

consciousness of a character whereas external focalization is something altogether different: the narrative is focused on a character, not through him”<sup>2</sup> writes Jonathan Culler.

External focalization is felt to be close to the narrating agent or third person point of view, and its vehicle is therefore called ‘narrator-focalizer.’ External focalization can also occur in first person narratives. External focalization with first person occurs either when the temporal and psychological distance between narrator and character is minimal or when the perception through which the story is rendered is that of the narrating self rather than that of the experiencing self as explained by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan interpreting Genette. With internal focalization, focus is inside the represented events. This type generally takes the form of a character focalizer.<sup>3</sup> Reading point of view in the novel in terms of focalization has allowed the distinction between who speaks and who sees in Djébar’s text where several focalizers speak while being spoken about by a third person voice, which shifts between internal and external focalization.

In addition to Genette’s focalization, to elaborate on point of view in the novel, we have used some of Wayne C. Booth’s concepts of narration in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Booth distinguishes ‘disguised’ ‘reliable, unreliable,’ ‘dramatized’ ‘conscious, unconscious’ narrators. Disguised narrators “are used to tell the audience what it needs to know, while seeming merely to act out their roles.” A ‘reliable narrator’ speaks and acts in accordance with the norms of the work, a dramatized narrator is a character narrator who is as vivid as those he tells us about, and an unconscious narrator is a narrator who seems unaware that he is writing, thinking, speaking, or “reflecting” a literary work.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Culler, “Foreword,” *Narrative Discourse: an Essay on Method*, Gerard Genette, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell West Univ., 1983), 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> See Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Seuil, 1972), 210 and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction, Contemporary Poetics* (London & New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005), 76.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), 151-

Additionally, Djébar uses free indirect discourse (FID) as an ideal rhetorical device to translate Algerian women's experiences and culture, which are traditionally oral, into a written literary French text. Our understanding of FID relies heavily on Monika Fludernik's readings in *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction*. According to Fludernik, studies of FID need to consider linguistic and contextual issues that “influence the determination of free indirect discourse passages as well as accounting for the uses and meaning effects of the technique”<sup>5</sup> (5). From a linguistic perspective, FID can be defined through comparison with direct and indirect discourse; Fludernik thus writes,

free indirect discourse preserves some of the expressive elements of direct discourse as well as its syntactic independence, but shares with indirect discourse the temporal and referential consonance with the quoting instance. [...] for the pragmatic purposes of demonstration [...] free indirect discourse comes to stand between indirect and direct speech: with regard to grammatical form (subject to the concordance of tense and to the referential shift) it is closer to the indirect; with regard to syntax and mimetic truthfulness (syntactic independence, preserving a large set of expressive elements), closer to the direct.<sup>6</sup>

Fludernik has however emphasized that in addition to the linguistic features, the study of FID needs to take into consideration:

a number of macro-textual and interpretative aspects of the reading process in general. Some of the contexts involved are more restrictedly literary, as for example the question of point of view, the narrative situation, mood or voice; others are of a more conceptual nature, involving, for instance, the reading conventions that trigger an interpretation in terms of speech or thought representation. Even ‘simple’ grammatical features, such as the use of tense in narrative, can be of great significance for more general narratological issues.<sup>7</sup>

In the second chapter of this part, we shall show through the description of setting in *The Joys of Motherhood* that the history of the Nigerian woman is lost between

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<sup>5</sup> Monika Fludernik, *The fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction. The Linguistic Representation of Speech and Consciousness* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 6.

tradition and modernity. Emecheta plays with the notion of time in the novel where we notice interplay between western time and traditional African time, determined by the movement of the protagonist Nnu Ego between two different spaces, rural Ibuza where time is cyclical, and urban Lagos where time is rather diachronic. The novel chronicles the personal dilemma of Nnu Ego, whose life is torn as a consequence of her immersion in cyclical time and alienation in modern life and diacronicity. So her hardships, which emanated in Ibuza have been overburdened by modernity in Lagos.

Actually, through the depiction of Nnu Ego's dilemma, the novel questions the myth of motherhood and women's valorisation in Igbo culture in a way which allows warring interpretations that the closing passage of the novel has dramatized into the gossip which follows the death of the protagonist Nnu Ego debating the privileges of motherhood. We shall show that if we read the novel according to a feminist perspective, or again if we read it from a postcolonial perspective as the novel has been read by some critics, we will be searching for a fixed meaning which will not allow the recovery of hidden or forgotten history.

To dig up what has been buried, Emecheta offers irony coupled with the use of FID, which are her excellent dynamics of rewriting history, and we shall use deconstruction strategies and what Bakhtin describes as "parodic stylization," to uncover hidden meanings in the novel. In other words, to uncover the hidden in the novel and in this closing passage focused on the opposition between motherhood and womanhood, we shall dismantle this hierarchy through breaking the text and reconstructing it in a way that undermines the contradictions underlying the violent hierarchy. This would allow the recovery of the voice of Nnu Ego, which though lost in this closing passage repeating the gossip, it could be recovered in an earlier text, repeating the deathbed plea of Nnu Ego's mother. (Then, in the third part of the study, we shall reconstruct the text by reading intertextually to explore the virtues of motherhood and those of womanhood as depicted in a predecessor text *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa.)

In the third chapter of this part, we shall show how *Possessing the Secret of Joy* reconstitutes the history of clitoridectomy, a ritual surgery that the author calls Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In a varied and diversified setting shifting place and time between two continents Africa and America, and between past and present, the novel reconstitutes the history of clitoridectomy through rewriting the controversial debates between detractors and defenders dramatized in the story of Tashi, the protagonist of the story represented as a victim of gendered violence caused by culture. Tashi has been saved from the surgical operation when a child thanks to the missionary sanction of the ritual, but she decides to undergo the surgery when a maiden in response to the nationalist call venerating the surgical operation as a traditional ritual which needs to be preserved and advocating the role of women as guardians of tradition. Through reconstituting the story of clitoridectomy, the novel raises crucial questions about the tension between culture and women's rights. Through indictment of FGM, Walker favors the transcultural category of the female body, which needs to be protected against cultural practices that might undermine its integrity.

To reconstitute the history of clitoridectomy, Walker uses a set of devices. She uses a complex plot designed through interrupting the main story with subplots, and framed stories moving back and forth in time, and merging fact with fiction. She also uses shifting points of view; the story unfolds in fragments of memory in a first-person serial narrative that incorporates the voice of the protagonist as well as the voices of her family members and the voice of the woman who performs the ritual, tsunga M'Lissa. Most importantly, she uses a shocking, sensual and pornographic style which is characterized by merging metonymy, metaphor, irony, and symbolism aimed to reveal and disclose the harmful effects of the ritual on women's wellbeing, to challenge and fight against the "mutilation" of women by culture. Additionally, she relies on western anthropology to illuminate the ritual practice, as she relies on western psychoanalysis to help heal the effects of FGM on women. Through describing Walker's dynamics of rewriting history, we also show how far the polemical intention and the political purpose of the book—fight against FGM—have affected its artistic value.

Our reading of rewriting history in the three novels is mainly grounded in a double perspective, feminism and postcolonial criticism. While feminist theory helped to read the novels' focus on the depiction of stories of women, postcolonial criticism constitutes the background to read the relations of the colonized woman to her space and time and to identify the changes that have affected women's wellbeing in colonial and postcolonial environments.

Feminist Criticism is exceptionally necessary to read the gender issues developed in the novels under scrutiny. Indeed different tendencies in feminist thought informed this study. First, our interest in the literature written by female writers depicting female experiences stems from what is common in feminist criticism as the challenge to the exclusion of women writers from the canon. Such tendency in feminist criticism started with American critic Elaine Showalter who emphasized the need to construct a new canon of women's writings by rewriting the history of literature in order to uncover the history of a western female literary tradition.<sup>8</sup> As defined by Showalter, this approach combines between the close reading of individual texts and the use of historical data and non-literary material to understand the literary text.<sup>9</sup> Such an approach is at the basis of our interest in the three novels, which we shall closely read in the light of the historical data and non-literary material described in the historical part.

In addition to this classical feminist approach, the questioning of clitoridectomy, veiling and the myth of motherhood in the novels under scrutiny will be examined in the light of another rather radical orientation in feminist criticism, which emphasizes the need to challenge the patriarchal roots of gender inequality through focus on culture change defended by such feminists as Mary Daly and Kate Millett.<sup>10</sup> Such tendency in

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<sup>8</sup> Despite its exclusionary bias, such tendency in feminist criticism has inspired debates about the importance to uncover other female literary traditions. For instance, in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, Florence Stratton outlines the features of an emerging female tradition in African fiction.

<sup>9</sup> Elaine Showalter, "A Literature of their Own," in *Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. Mary Eagleton (London: Longman, 1991), pp. 24-37.

<sup>10</sup> See Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978);

feminist criticism initiated feminist activism in support of the transcultural category of the female body, which resulted in the universal right put forward by the UNESCO to protect the integrity of the body against all kinds of cultural practices seen as perpetuating patriarchal violence.<sup>11</sup>

Actually, we shall show that Walker's questioning of ritual clitoridectomy supports such feminist activism through her indictment of FGM, which she represents as a metonymy of the oppression of women in culture. We shall also see that though Emecheta has challenged the overvalue of motherhood in Igbo culture, and Djébar has challenged the idealization of the maternal role and the mystification of veiling supported by traditional patriarchy, strengthened by colonialism, both authors emphasize the need for the reevaluation of the cultural and historical structures underscoring the empowerment of women rooted in indigenous cultures. Such celebrated cultural roots include the Igbo heritage of the river goddess, and the custom of "women's war" that Emecheta has tried to restore through an intertextual relation with Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*. Additionally, the celebration of the ancestral heritage of Algeria, which reminds of the historical strength of Algerian womanhood exemplified in the legendary queen Kahina and the early Berber fighters is an example of the reevaluation of indigenous cultures in *La Femme sans sépulture*.

We shall also examine the novels in the light of other feminist tendencies as French feminism represented by Simone de Beauvoir. Indeed, de Beauvoir's emphasis on the universal victimization of women in her *The Second Sex* has inspired the naturalistic overtones of the doomed victimization and the denial of agency for women of African descent that Walker's text repeats echoing colonial discourses, reiterated by western feminists. We shall see that the feminist ideas of Simone de Beauvoir have been

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Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois press, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Valentine Moghadam and Manile Bagheritari, 'Cultures, Conventions and the Human Rights of Women,' UNESCO website:  
<http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/files/8091/11313735861Article.pdf/Article.pdf>

directly celebrated in Walker's text yet indirectly challenged in DeJbar's text. The latter rewrites the story of gendered violence projecting images of the tortured body of the decolonization combatant, which mockingly reverses and displaces both the images of repressed sexuality as signifier of women's oppression suggested through the metonymic representation of clitoridectomy and the images of "free sex" as signifier of resistance against female oppression suggested through *The Second Sex*. Eventually, we shall see that while Walker's challenge to clitoridectomy links her with western feminism, Emecheta's and DeJbar's challenge to cultural values undermining women's wellbeing distances them from western feminism and links them with postcolonial feminism as represented by Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Mohanty, and Marnia Lazreg.

In addition to feminism, postcolonial criticism constitutes the background to read the relation of the colonized woman to her space and time and to identify the changes that affected women's wellbeing in colonial and postcolonial environments depicted in the novels under scrutiny. We largely relied on two influential figures in postcolonial theory, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Said and Bhabha studies in the history of colonialism produced what has been called 'colonial discourse analysis.

Said's model of colonial discourse is based on what he calls Orientalism, which is a theory of how the west has made use of a system of representation, based on a supposedly superior Western self in relation to a supposedly inferior non-Western other, which allows the west to know, control and dominate the non-west. Such a discourse, Said argued, underlies the need to justify imperialist purposes. In his introduction to *Orientalism*, which is one of the most influential works in postcolonial theory, Said provides many definitions of Orientalism, which he explains are interdependent. He first defines it as "a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" then "a style of thought" and finally "a corporate institution"<sup>12</sup> active throughout several centuries stretching from the late 18th century to the more recent American imperialist interests in

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12 *Orientalism*, 2-3.

different parts of the world. The orient, which referred to the Middle East and India with 19th century colonialism, has incorporated different other regions which endured imperialist expansions. Orientalism is then this institutionalized discourse dealing with 'the other of the west' in those 'uncivilized' regions, which presumably needed Europe's enlightenment to save them from their 'primitivism.' Said writes,

My point is that Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient, which until the early nineteenth century had really meant only India and the Bible lands. From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II France and Britain dominated the Orient and Orientalism; since World War II America has dominated the Orient, and approaches it as France and Britain once did. Out of that closeness, whose dynamic is enormously productive even if it always demonstrates the comparatively greater strength of the Occident (British, French, or American), comes the large body of texts I call Orientalist.<sup>13</sup>

Said's orientalism describes and analyzes this institutionalized discourse. He analyzes the way the Orient is represented in a large variety of texts written by "a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, [who] have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny, and so on."<sup>14</sup> Analyzing these texts, Said argues that the representation of the Orient has been motivated not by imaginative thrust, but by a need to know underlying a need to control and dominate. The large amount of texts representing the Orient became as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century "the Corporate institution for dealing with the Orient-dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it." Said acknowledges his use of Michel Foucault's notion of discourse to deal with texts depicting the Orient as

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13 Ibid, 4.

14 Ibid, 2-3.

discourse motivated by the will to know and understand as well as the will to power and to rule over the Orient.<sup>15</sup>

Bhabha's questioning of colonial discourse confirms what Said demonstrated. However, his analysis focuses on the agency of the colonized. In his attempts to disclose the contradictions of the colonial discourse, Bhabha sees that this discourse is marked by a basic contradiction inherent in western thought, which divides the world into such binaries as self vs. other, superior vs. inferior, and colonizer vs. colonized. Inspired by Derrida's emphasis on the need to deconstruct these binaries, which are the cause of much illusion, Bhabha has worked to deconstruct the binary of colonizer vs. colonized. Bhabha's work develops a set of concepts to challenge colonial discourse including ambivalence, mimicry, hybridity, difference, and third space.

According to Bhabha, the colonial situation is shaped by the consequences of the colonizer's resistance to the oppression of the colonized. The colonized resisted the colonizer's power, which is always marked by anxiety, due to his belief that the supposed inferiority of the colonized is just a myth, which leaves him unable to justify neither his imperialist impulses nor the racial stereotypes he circulated. Therefore, all his actions are marked by ambivalence, which opens a space for the colonized to fight back using mimicry; or as explained by David Huddart, "the exaggerated copying" of the colonizer in a way that mocks the stereotypes. "This exaggeration means that mimicry is repetition with difference, and so it is not evidence of the colonized's servitude. In fact, this mimicry is also a form of mockery. Mimicry in general is one response to the circulation of stereotypes," adds Huddart.<sup>16</sup>

Bhabha names the colonized that use mimicry "mimic men" redefining, consequently, V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), a work known for the elevation western culture at the expense of other cultures. Bhabha appropriates the idiom but reverses Naipaul's meaning. Mimicry, mockery, or repetition with difference turns into

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>16</sup> David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 39.

a form of resistance to colonial discourse, which is itself replete with irony, repetition and mimicry. Bhabha writes,

Mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. [...] Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.<sup>17</sup>

To illustrate Bhabha's meaning through colonial mimicry, Huddart writes,

Essentially, colonial discourse wants the colonized to be extremely like the colonizer, but by no means identical. If there were an absolute equivalence between the two, then the ideologies justifying colonial rule would be unable to operate. This is because these ideologies assume that there is structural non-equivalence, a split between superior and inferior which explains why any one group of people can dominate another at all. However, having introduced this slight difference, colonial discourse is unable to control the consequences brought about by that difference—particularly the colonized's agency that is implied by the slippages of meaning.<sup>18</sup>

According to Bhabha, the contact between the colonizer and colonized leads to cultural mixed-ness, which is at the basis of the concept of hybridity. This mixed-ness does not rely on what is celebrated in western thought as cultural diversity depending on the binary opposition between two pure different cultures whose interaction results in a harmonious whole or multiculturalism. For Bhabha, cultures are not discrete phenomena; there are no pre-existing pure different cultures. Cultural hybridity is the effect of historical transformations as the colonial and postcolonial situations.<sup>19</sup> In an interview with Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha explains his meaning from cultural difference, which is different from cultural diversity; he says,

My purpose in talking about cultural difference rather than cultural diversity is to acknowledge that this kind of liberal relativist perspective is inadequate in itself and doesn't generally recognize

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<sup>17</sup> *The Location of Culture*, 85-86.

<sup>18</sup> Huddart, 40.

<sup>19</sup> *The Location of Culture*, 2.

the universalist and normative stance from which it constructs its cultural and political judgements. [...] With the notion of cultural difference, I try to place myself in that position of liminality, in that productive space of the construction of culture as difference, in the spirit of alterity or otherness.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, when trying to interpret colonial and postcolonial history, instead of stressing the binary oppositions, we should concentrate on the border situations or the liminal positions that Bhabha calls 'third space.' The 'third space' is a new productive site for the construction of culture as difference, a site "where identities are performed and contested," as explained by Richard Gray interpreting Bhabha's 'third space.'<sup>21</sup> Bhabha puts this clearly in the following, "hybridity to me is the 'third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom."<sup>22</sup>

Bhabha urges that these new meanings need to be used creatively to read historical changes. He explains, "because the notion of hybridity [...] is about the fact that in any particular political struggle, new sites are always being opened up, and if you keep referring those new sites to old principles, then you are not actually able to participate in them fully and productively and creatively. [...] hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them."<sup>23</sup> In other words, 'the third space' displaces, erases the histories that constitute it and enables other positions to emerge, and hybridity occurs when people adapt to the new emerging situations.

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<sup>20</sup> Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 209.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2011), 65.

<sup>22</sup> "The Third Space," 211.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

In addition to his attempts to disclose the contradiction of the colonial discourse, Bhabha also theorized about the responsibility of the critic of the postcolonial history to rewrite colonial history in a way that allows confrontation and reconciliation with the past, with the haunting repressed memories of the traumatic past. Such confrontation achieved through the repetition of repressed memories should aim to liberate the past from its traumatic effect in order to “turn the present into a ‘post’” and “to engrave this past in the deepest resources of our amnesia, of our unconsciousness” as Bhabha puts it.<sup>24</sup>

Bhabha considers that the act of rewriting colonial history should be achieved through an act of writing that turns the narrative enunciation into a space characterized by the emergence of repressed memories that return “uncannily” or involuntarily to the present and allow confrontation with the past. The “uncanny” or *unheimlich* is a key concept that Bhabha borrows from Freud and which is as Huddart puts it “close to what Freud calls *repetition compulsion*, which refers to the way the mind repeats traumatic experiences in order to deal with them. The feeling of uncanniness is, therefore, the feeling you get when you have a guilt-laden past which you should really confront, even though you would prefer to avoid it.”<sup>25</sup> Eventually, postcolonial haunting is a discourse about the need to confront haunting memories with the objective of dealing with them and dispelling their traumatic effect through the act of historical revision or what Bhabha also calls, repeating Toni Morrison, “The act of ‘rememoration’ (her [Morrison’s] concept of the recreation, of popular memory) [which] turns the present of narrative enunciation into’ the haunting memorial of what has been excluded, excised, evicted, and for that very reason becomes the *unheimlich* space for the negotiation of identity and history.”<sup>26</sup>

Actually, while using Said’s *Orientalism* has informed the reading of Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, using Bhabha’s rewriting of colonial history has informed

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<sup>24</sup> *The Location of Culture*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> Huddart, 55.

<sup>26</sup> *The Location of Culture*, 198.

the reading of both *The Joys of Motherhood* and *La femme sans sépulture* which represent colonial and postcolonial history in a way which repeats and reverses Bhabha's theorizing. We shall show that Walker's attempts to uncover the harmful effects of clitoridectomy underlies much prejudice against the African cultures, which she depicts as oppressive, repeating orientalist colonial discourses representing Africa and the Africans as the other of the west. We shall also show that Emecheta's depiction of the dilemma of a colonized poor woman living in a what corresponds to Bhabha's "third space" does not justify the hybridity, the ambivalence, and mimicry celebrated in Bhabha's reading of colonial history. Additionally, we shall show that Djébar's representation of a postcolonial Algeria that is still haunted by the specters of a colonial past despite the different attempts to rewrite this past reverses Bhabha's postcolonial haunting.

Reading the novels in the light of postcolonial theory, basically, as defined by Bhabha will show that the neglect of gender and class differences as well as the reticence to examine the failures of anti-colonial nationalism when interpreting colonial and postcolonial history constitute major pitfalls in postcolonial theory. These failures, which are indirectly criticized in *La femme* and *The Joys*, have alsoq been decried by postcolonial feminists and cultural theorists as Arif Dirlik.

In addition to feminist and postcolonial criticism, Derrida's deconstruction has been central to read some key passages in the novels under scrutiny. Actually, in novels that aim to disclose the forgotten, we found Derrida's deconstruction relying on the belief that meaning is perpetually differed very useful to uncover repressed meanings, underlying such hierarchies or binaries as those opposing men to women depicted in the novels under scrutiny.

Our interest in deconstruction also stems from the way it has been employed in postcolonial or feminist contexts by such theorists as Bhabha and Spivak who find in Derrida's deconstruction of western thought, which has provided the justification of colonialism, a basis to deconstruct colonialist discourses. Indeed, according to Derrida,

western thought has always been structured in binary oppositions, which “privilege unity, identity, immediacy, and temporal and spatial *presentness* over distance, difference, dissimulation, and deferment.”<sup>27</sup> Derrida claims that such binary oppositions and such privileging created much illusion and contradictions, and he proposes to undo western thought in order to disclose what he calls “différance” or what has been repressed, excluded, and silenced. Derrida proposes deconstruction as a method of critical analysis that he applies to reread canonical western texts in an attempt to uncover repressed meanings. He uses a set of deconstructive strategies, which allowed him to trace “the ‘Other’ experiences, histories, cultures and people that western philosophy has at various points tried to exclude, silence and destroy” as Stephen Morton puts it.<sup>28</sup>

In “Translator’s Preface,” to *Of Grammatology*, Spivak has explained how to deconstruct a text:

If in the process of deciphering a text in the traditional way we come across a word that seems to harbor an unresolvable contradiction, and by virtue of being one word is made sometimes to work in one way and sometimes in another and thus is made to point away from the absence of a unified meaning, we shall catch at that word. If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor. We shall follow its adventures through the text and see the text coming undone as a structure of concealment, revealing its self-transgression, its undecidability. It must be emphasized that I am not speaking simply of locating a moment of ambiguity or irony ultimately incorporated into the text’s system of unified meaning but rather a moment that genuinely threatens to collapse that system.<sup>29</sup>

Deconstruction requires from the reader to identify the binary oppositions and then to dismantle them in order to build new meanings, which can be deconstructed. Indeed deconstructive strategies form a process of different steps including the

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27 Barbara Johnson, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *Dissemination*, Jacques Derrida, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone press, 1981), viii.

28 Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London and N.Y: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group e-Library, 2004), 38.

29 Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” lxxv.

recognition of the hierarchical opposition within a text, their reversal and then displacement. Spivak has described these steps,

We must recognize that, within the familiar philosophical oppositions, there is always 'a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms controls the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), holds the superior position. To deconstruct the opposition is first . . . to overthrow [renverser] the hierarchy. [...] But in the next phase of deconstruction, this reversal must be displaced, the winning term put under erasure. The critic must make room for 'the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept,' a concept which no longer allows itself to be understood in terms of the previous regime [system of oppositions].'<sup>30</sup>

After identifying the 'violent hierarchy' in a text, it should be broken down, dismantled through denoting the contradictions in order to undermine the hierarchy, and then to reconstruct through suggesting the search for fixed meanings is pointless. While rejecting the idea of a single fixed truth, Derrida insists that to deconstruct underlies to construct, so once a hierarchy is reversed, a movement of reconstruction is launched and a new meaning is formed, "However negative it may sound, deconstruction implies the possibility of rebuilding," writes Paul de Man describing Derrida's deconstruction.<sup>31</sup>

We therefore have used deconstructive strategies to deconstruct the binary oppositions underlying key texts in the novels under scrutiny, whether those that oppose men to women in a hierarchy where men control women or those that oppose colonizer and colonized with the colonizer as a controlling force. We have used the principles of deconstruction in the way they have been reworked by Spivak who has reworked Derrida's deconstruction "to trace the founding exclusions inherent in radical political programmes such as [...], decolonisation or feminism [which claim] to speak for all the oppressed" while perpetuating colonialist structures of class and gender oppression they claim to oppose.<sup>32</sup>

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30 Derrida, quoted in Spivak, "Translator's Preface," lxxvii.

31 Paul De Man, quoted in "Translator's Preface," xlix.

32 Stephen Morton, 39.

We are also interested in deconstruction in as much as it allows intertextual readings. As Barbara Johnson puts it, using Derrida's deconstruction,

The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal, in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself. [...] The critique does not ask "what does this statement mean?" but "where is it being made from? What does it presuppose? Are its presuppositions compatible with, independent of, and anterior to the statement that seems to follow from them, or do they already follow from it, contradict it, or stand in a relation of mutual dependence such that neither can exist without positing that the other is prior to it?"<sup>33</sup>

After this brief review of the theoretical background, which underlies our reading of the rewriting of history in the three novels under scrutiny, we move to the examination of how each author has projected the changes affecting women's lives in different times and places in the African continent and what dynamics each author has used to rewrite history.

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<sup>33</sup> Barbara Johnson, "Translator's Introduction," xv.

## **4 Rewriting History in *La femme sans sépulture***

## 4.1 A History of 'Appropriation and Effacement'

*La femme sans sépulture* is one of Assia Djebar's recent publications; it was first published in 2002. Structurally, the novel opens with a prelude and ends with an epilogue. It is about Zoulikha Oudai, the woman without sepulture and forgotten heroine of the Algerian war of liberation. It is a novel which through the quest of the past and a return to the period of colonialism, more precisely the war of liberation as experienced by women, underscored by the return of the narrator-author to her hometown, attempts to rewrite history, which is the author's means to understand the present. In other words, *La femme sans sépulture* is a novel which repeats the theme of the return to the past to write the same story of past struggles but with a difference. Indeed Djebar repeats that same concern for history, which characterizes her earlier novels, yet *La Femme* illustrates an interest in the past in as much as it relates to the contemporary problems of Algeria.

The setting of the story is a complex interplay between past and present, and a movement from a modern city to an antique space populated nearly exclusively by women but also haunted by specters from the past.<sup>1</sup> Three historical periods are retrospectively represented through what, on its surface structure, depicts the recovery of the story of Zoulikha. These periods are the colonial period, early post-independence

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1 Haunting is a recurrent trope in the novel. The author's attempt to rewrite history, as a means to write what has been occulted or misrepresented relies much on the notion that colonial history is still haunting postcolonial place and time testifying upon a state of "disturbance." Djebar's use of haunting stems from popular culture where the return of the dead is believed to be "the sign of a disturbance in the symbolic rite, in the process of symbolization; the dead return as collectors of some unpaid symbolic debt," as explained by Slavoj Žižek who also relates this popular belief with the Lacanian psychoanalysis. See *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge (MA) and London: The MIT Press, 1991), 23, quoted in Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and the return of the dead* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2. In addition, as we can see below, Djebar's use of the haunting trope can also be interpreted in relation to postcolonial haunting.

years, the 1990's and the beginning of the 2000's. The place where the action occurs is the author's hometown, the antique town Césarée de Maurétanie (present day Cherchell) which, as a consequence of having experienced a long period of colonial oppression, remains haunted by that colonial experience. Women there are the only reliable witnesses of the author-narrator who curiously chooses to listen to both the living and the dead to revise history.

The colonial period with focus on the Algerian war of liberation as experienced by women in Césarée is the dominant time in the novel. It is described through interaction with the year 1976, the time when the author returns, fourteen years after the independence, to her hometown to collect the story of Zoulikha. Her informants are Zoulikha's two daughters Hania and Mina, her friend Lala Lbia known also as Dame Lionne living in the city of Césarée, and her sister-in-law Tante Zohra Oudai who lives on the hills of the Dahra Mountains above Césarée. The past, more precisely Zoulikha's story of resistance and torture within the colonial context constitutes those unforgettable memories haunting those women who have been close to Zoulikha, and which indeed haunted the author for about twenty years before she could find an adequate mode of representation for this story or history. Curiously, the past also returns accounted for by the woman without sepulture whose specter is still haunting the antique town.

The colonial period is first described in the prelude through the presentation of some facts about the life of Zoulikha. Here, Djebbar creates nothing. Just like a historian, sociologist, journalist, or broadly speaking a historiographer who endeavors to write history with focus on "the critical examination of sources."<sup>2</sup> Djebbar's sources are mostly oral, the testimonies telling the lived experiences of the war heroine, Zoulikha, intermingled by stories of other women. She gives factual information about the war

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<sup>2</sup> Our understanding of the term 'historiography' stems from the definition provided in Encyclopedia Britannica by Richard T. Vann who defines historiography as "the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination." See "Historiography," in <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/267436/historiography>, accessed to May 5, 2015.

heroine in a specific area and period. Other facts and details from that period have been reported in the testimonies of the different narrators in the novel. In an introductory note to the novel, to stress the historiographer task that she undertakes, Djébar writes: “tous les faits et détails de la vie et de la mort de Zoulikha, héroïne de ma ville d’enfance, pendant la guerre d’indépendance de l’Algérie, sont rapportés avec un souci de fidélité historique, ou, dirai-je, selon une approche documentaire.”<sup>3</sup>

The second period corresponds to early postcolonial years. This period is not abundantly depicted. It is referred to in the different narratives through some facts reflecting the experiences of other women in the novel but with little accuracy. This middle period in the novel seems then a transition between the colonial past and the present. Actually, through the depiction of this period, we feel that the transition to Independence is going very much wrong in this antique town which remains haunted by the specters of colonialism that appear in the form of widespread corruption showing that colonialism is progressively re-embodied in a different guise, as noticed by the peasant Zohra addressing Allal, an official administrator of the newly independent nation when he denies her decent accommodation: “...je suis remontée dans cette cabane. Celle-là, elle est de l’armée Française! L’ennemi avait jugé que cela suffisait à moi et aux trois orphelins. Et bien, moi, je te dis aujourd’hui, o Allal : L’ennemi a raison!” (150).

Space during these early postcolonial years is described as haunted. Césarée, the antique town is dethroned, abandoned, as even the Greco-roman vestiges, that were not robbed by the French and which still, however, testify to its glorious past, seem ghostly; Césarée seems crushed by the specters of an unsettled past. This haunting atmosphere transforms the antique town into a haunted city, which suffocates and mesmerizes its inhabitants and terrifies the rare tourists who venture a visit to the local museum. In a very suggestive passage told in a first person omniscient narration with internal

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3 Assia Djébar, *La femme sans sépulture* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), 9. All subsequent quotations from *La femme sans sépulture* will be taken from this edition, and page references will appear in the text in parentheses.

focalization representing Mina's thoughts, Césarée is a "capitale déchue... [où] l'espace entier, avec ses statues gréco-romaines, celles qui dérobées, sont au Louvre et les autres au musée local où personne, sauf de rares touristes, n'entre, tout cet espace au-dessus de nous, en chacune de nous [...] cet air, translucide, léger, est ! Plein à exploser! D'un passé qui ne s'est ni asséché ni tari. Hélas, ce plein est invisible à la plupart des regards. C'est pourquoi il écrase la ville" (95). In this haunted space reigns corruption characteristic of early postcolonial Algeria.

Some instances of this widespread corruption may be indicated. The novel reveals the disappointment of the peasant through the significant retreat of Zohra Oudai and her incurable pessimism when she recalls the citizens of Césarée, who are in her narrative "les chacals" "the jackals" (pp. 149-150). It reveals the disappointment of the common people, who like Hania, the oldest daughter of Zoulikha, are hurt by the betrayal of the memories of the martyrs of the Revolution, and the exploitation of their sacrifices to support official historiography,<sup>4</sup> represented in the novel by television and journalists, distrusted in Hania's narratives (53-54). It also reveals the deception and deceptiveness of the intellectual, who like Rachid promises love and care to Mina, the youngest daughter of the heroine Zoulikha, but he betrays this love when he decides to leave for France seeking a less orthodox relation with a French male friend.

The third period corresponds to the 1990's, which is a special period in the history of Algeria, marked by violence and terrorism. This period is not directly depicted; it is implied in the different narratives throughout the novel, but it is directly referred to in the epilogue in the author's reflections about the past and the present as "ses derniers dix ans [...] cette nouvelle saignée," (240). In the epilogue the narrator-author says that she returns for the third time late to her childhood space "l'espace d'enfance" to find out that the space is still haunted, as the specters of the past persist there, "Ils persistent là, ombres à peine mouvantes; ils hantent cette cité dont la majesté est trop ample pour eux,

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<sup>4</sup> By official historiography we mean the writing of history adapted by the state in official history texts or in school textbooks, or even through the media in Algeria.

faite par et pour des princes savants—oui, je les vois flotter en ombres qui n’entendent aucun chant perdu. . . ." (239).

In *La Femme*, the text is essentially focused on the link between colonial and contemporary violence. Violence experienced in the past is described in a way that invokes the violent years of the 1990s in Algeria. The reader is reminded of the curfews, of the searches and nocturnal assassinations and massacres in Algerian cities, of the invasion of intimacy by unknown men in the small rural villages even in day time, of the interrogations of suspect individuals in the commissariats, of tortures in unknown places of citizens who have never been judged and sentenced, and of the millions of innocent people missing.

Indeed the 1990s witnessed the most important political, social and economic unrest that brought about widespread blistering violence represented in the novel within fragmented texts sometimes through direct reference to the 1990s others through indirect allusion. During the 1990s, a democratic multi-party political policy was adopted, but the democratic process was soon repressed after the annulment of the first democratic elections won by a popular opposition party, Front Islamic du Salut (FIS). Repression of the democratic process and ongoing social, economic problems blew up the country into violence.<sup>5</sup>

Many historians have compared the violence of the 1990's with colonial violence. In *Guerre Invisible*, Benjamin Stora explains that the tragedy of the 1990s has often been interpreted through comparison with the colonial war, and he confirms Pierre Bourdieu's interpretation considering the new violence as more dramatic, "On a l'impression que la guerre d'Algérie se rejoue de manière d'autant plus dramatique qu'il

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5 For more information about the violence of the 1990s, see Youcef Bedjaoui, Abbas Arroua and Meziane Ait-Larbi, eds., *An Inquiry into the Algerian Massacres* (Genève: Hoggar, 1999); Benjamin Stora, *La Guerre Invisible, Algérie, Années 90* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po., 2001).

s'agit, [...] d'une répétition avec les mêmes phobies, les mêmes automatismes barbares, les mêmes réflexes primitifs de la barbarie militaire.”<sup>6</sup>

When colonial violence has been repeated in its brutality, the more recent crisis remains as described by Stora “*invisible*” and difficult to represent.<sup>7</sup> The novel, which indirectly represents the new violence through its relation with the earlier one, could only establish the direct link between the two sequences in the epilogue to stress the difficulty of its representation. While historians recall the past, the reader of *La Femme* is summoned to read through the past the projection of violence in the present. Different instances in the text seem to invoke the present violence. Djébar’s text represents violence through the process of recapitulation of memories from the colonial period by women who also express their bitterness and disappointment about the unchanging situation with independence.

The first chapter after the prelude is a long account of a violent incident—the assassination of three young brothers “les fils Saadoun,” in 1956 in Césarée narrated by Lalla Lbia, Zoulikha’s friend, “cette nuit où l’on a fusillé les fils Saadoun [...] ce fut pour moi dans cette époque de tourmente, la nuit la plus longue ! Noir son souvenir encore devant mes yeux, que Dieu nous assiste, que Mohammed et son ami, le doux Abou Bekr, nous soient intercesseurs pour nous, les orphelines !” (30-31) Lalla Lbia, who feels orphaned, finds release from the traumatic experiences of that long night, which still haunt and trouble her present only in prayers. While Lalla Lbia escapes in prayers, Tante Zohra Oudai could find no release from an incurable pessimism imposed not only by memories of how the French killed her husband and her sons and burnt her house, but also by the memories of the day of deliverance “Le jour de la délivrance” when she was refused decent accommodation (146-150). Fourteen years after the independence day, Zohra, who still lives in the same cabin left for her by the French who burnt her house, seems even more melancholic and further pessimistic when she

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6 Pierre Bourdieu qtd. in *La Guerre Invisible*, 9-10.

7 Stora, *La Guerre Invisible*, 87.

recalls the past which continues to structure the present. Even after repeating this violent past, the women who experienced violence do not seem to be relieved; this traumatic past is still haunting their present.

In “Voices of the Voiceless,”<sup>8</sup> we find testimonies about the recent violence, which show similar or more violent scenes. Mrs. Bachiri, a survivor of the Raïs massacre (29 August 1997), interviewed by the Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l’Homme (LADDH), describes the night where sixteen members of her family were killed,

Q : Mrs Bachiri, what can you tell us about the Raïs massacre ?

A: During the Raïs massacre, sixteen of my brothers, my milk brothers, were killed. [...] People who stayed at home were slaughtered, and those who went out were shot dead.

Q: So did they kill both of your brothers and their families?

A : Yes, they slaughtered both my brothers and their children. My brothers had seven each. A total of sixteen...

Q : What about the house ?

A : They burnt it...

We are puzzled... Why would anyone want to kill this family? They are not involved in anything.

[...]

Who is doing this? The cows, sheep were killed. Even a donkey was not spared.<sup>9</sup>

Mrs. Bachiri’s testimony shows that the brutality civilians endured past and present is the same. However, while Lla Lbia and Zohra know their enemy, his reasons and

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8 In “Voices of the Voiceless,” M. Farouk, T.S. Senhadji, M. Ait-Larbi write, “testimonies of the kind presented here are still scare because terror silences the victims, the survivors and the witnesses” 197. See “Voices of the Voiceless,” in *An Inquiry*, 196-265.

9 Ibid., 212-213.

motivations, Mrs. Bachiri seems ‘puzzled’ about the reasons that make her family subject to such violence, about the identity of the perpetrators and about their motives.

Djebar’s text repeats the dilemma of the common Algerian who endures violence while unable to understand its causes. Thus we read in the epilogue what seems to repeat Mrs Bachiri’s “Who is doing this?” in “que représentent-ils ces violents qui surgissent, menaçants? Eux qui tuent, qui violent et détruisent, nouveaux Firmin ou Vandales furieux, ressuscités du plus lointain passé!” (240). The text, however, offers cues about the causes of violence as it suggests that the barbarism of the new perpetrators can be traced in a more distant past staged by historical Vandals.

Djebar’s way of writing the history of violence, not through a linear progression from colonial past to postcolonial present allowed her to denote the causes of the reiteration of violence as it allowed her to deal with issues of responsibility relevant to the inscription of the history of violence. The fragmented images of violence inviting the reader to move backward and forward in time expose the reasons and motivations of those who kill, rape and destroy past and present. The text suggests that violence whether practiced by historical vandals, by French colonial powers, by the different armed groups in contemporary Algeria perpetuate imperial purposes.

In other words, the novel suggests that the failure of the State to assume responsibility for justice while perpetuating the colonialist policies of social and cultural division as well as political repression has resulted in the contemporary crisis of civil warfare and will not prevent its recurrence. It also expounds that the State’s manipulation of Algerian history underscored by the idealization of the war of decolonization motivated by evasion of responsibility for past failures would perpetuate violence. As already demonstrated by Michael O’Riley, the novel shows “how the violence of French colonialism has become interiorized within the Algerian nation as another form of imperialism exercised by Algerian nationals.”<sup>10</sup> O’Riley explains that

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10 Michael F. O’Riley, *Postcolonial Haunting and Victimization: Assia Djebar's New Novels* (NY: Peter Lang, 2007), 45.

Algerian nationals relied on the idealization of the war of decolonization through focus on “victimization and heroism,” and he shows that Djébar’s criticism of such a perspective “foregrounds the dangers of representing colonial history within a postcolonial context that cannot transcend its memories of victimization,” and warns that such a position towards a violent past perpetuates “the conditions of civil warfare in Algeria.”<sup>11</sup>

Against an official historiography focused on “victimization and heroism,” Djébar proposes a different act of writing colonial history, which motivates her belated return to the site of past struggles, which is still haunted by memories of a violent past, and where specters of corruption predict the new violence. Actually, this haunted space described within the narrative of the belated return of the narrator-author to her own hometown reminds us of Homi Bhabha’s metaphor of the haunted house found in works by authors such as Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer.<sup>12</sup> Bhabha explains that both Morrison and Gordimer used this metaphor to convey how place might testify to the “haunted site” of the postcolonial appearance of once-hidden colonial histories.<sup>13</sup> Like postcolonial theorists, Djébar realizes the importance of space as the most important evidence about the belated emergence of the once-hidden colonial history. She thus returns three times to her native town, and each time, though late, she collects necessary material to write her story about Zoulikha. This story is much about the history of place, of Césaré, as it is about Zoulikha according to the narrator-author vigilant to collect every minute detail because as she explains “cela concerne autant l’histoire de ma ville que la vie de Zoulikha” (123).

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11 *Postcolonial Haunting and Victimization*, 22.

12 In *Postcolonial Haunting and Victimization*, Michael F. O’Riley discusses how Djébar appropriates the metaphor of postcolonial haunting found in the works of postcolonial theorists as Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak and Ian Chambers, and he shows how she distances herself from postcolonial criticism by examining how postcolonial Algeria is responsible for the failures which led to the civil warfare of the 1990’s. We are indebted to O’Riley for the reading of the novel as a revision of postcolonial theory.

13 Homi Bhabha, “The World and the Home,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, & Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1997), 450.

The image of the haunted city that Djébar represents in her novel repeats, but with a difference, Bhabha's metaphor when it repeats the importance of the return of the history writer to the haunted site where spectral figures of colonialism return to haunt the present and solicit recognition. While taking "responsibility for the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" as Bhabha urges, the haunting memories about the colonial history Djébar recovers could not be washed away from their traumatic effect, and their repetition does not allow the present to turn into a 'post.' Djébar's repetition of colonial history, which allows haunting memories to return does not dispel the traumatic effect of those memories but permits this painful history to live on as troubling and distressing within the present which seems to be as troublesome as the past. Through such a position, Djébar seems to support cultural theorists like Arif Dirlik who criticizes the reticence of postcolonial criticism to examine the failures of the post-colonial state, which he explains has reincarnated the colonial past and becomes "colonialist in its assumptions of economic and political organization and its aspirations to the purity and homogeneity of national identity."<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Bhabha, Djébar chooses to return to this haunted site from a different position. She returns to the haunted city from a position which allows her a "critical examination" of the past she endeavors to revive and of the present she wants to illuminate. Actually, the most important concern of the belated narrative of Djébar in this novel, which lingered 20 years before the author finds the adequate way to write it, is how she can recover the occulted story of colonial history without participating in the imperialist dynamics of "appropriation and effacement" to use O'Riley's phrase suggesting to appropriate through an act of writing what would soon be effaced.

In other words, "appropriation and effacement" suggests that the act of writing would result in the evasion of issues of responsibility for failures whether it repeats colonial prejudice and denigration or reacts against them or whether it is focused on the

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<sup>14</sup> Arif Dirlik, "'Historical Colonialism in Contemporary Perspective,'" *Public Culture*, 14 (3) (2002): 613.

celebration of heroism or on lamenting one's victimization. Such an act of writing would efface rather than revive history disabling the illumination of the present. In *White Mythologies*, Robert Young warns against such acts of writing history, which would perpetuate colonial assumptions and prejudice; he writes, "the hidden ways in which nominally radical, or oppositional, historians and often unknowingly, or even knowingly, perpetuate the structures and presuppositions of the very systems which they oppose."<sup>15</sup>

In *Francophone Writing in Transition*, Peter Dunwoodie provides an excellent reading of how the writing of Algerian history has perpetuated colonial assumptions and prejudice through the repetition of colonial dynamics of appropriation and erasure. Dunwoodie calls these dynamics "the appropriative process of legitimation/exclusion grounded in a learned mix of forgetting and rewriting"<sup>16</sup> adopted first by metropolitan then by Ecole d'Alger historians (active from around 1900). Equally, those same dynamics, Dunwoodie explains, were adopted by the Muslim reformers led by the Ulema Association (active from around 1930), in a counter reactionary position which underscores the repudiation of all that is European while adopting Arabic and Islam as a unifying force of resistance.<sup>17</sup>

Peter Dunwoodie claims that the position adopted by the Ulema has swept away Algerian diversity. He explains that influenced by the teachings of Muslim scholars in the Middle East, the Ulema Association leaders claimed Islamic purity, attacked local maraboutism and the French secularism favored by many French educated Algerians. With this position, the Ulema "swept diversity away in the name of a fantasized and artificial homogeneity" writes Dunwoodie<sup>18</sup> who links this position to what Edward Said condemned as the "metaphysics of essence."<sup>19</sup> It is clear that the problem with

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15 Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (Routledge, 1990), 161–62.

16 Peter Dunwoodie, *Francophone Writing in Transition, Algeria 1900-1945* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, 2005), 250.

17 See *Francophone Writing in Transition*, 247-259.

18 Ibid, 116.

19 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 276.

such a position is the repetition of the dynamic of appropriation and exclusion; while the Ulema sought to appropriate what was denigrated by the French, they excluded that part of the past marked by French influence on Algerians. This position, which denies the diversity of Algeria past and present, was adopted in the discourses of official historiography after independence.

Focus on Arabic and Islam as the only factors for a homogeneous Algerian nation is questioned in the text of Djébar indirectly. The *madersa*,<sup>20</sup> referred to in many passages in the novel, may be a metonymic association between the *madersa* in the novel and those schools founded by the Ulema Association to teach Arabic and Islamic teachings from around 1930 onward. In a very significant text, which seems critical of the teachings of the *madersa*, Djébar underscores the problematics of the reactionary position adopted by the Ulama Association. Djébar's text reverses the *medersa* teachings focused on the homogeneity of the Algerian identity, which the text suggests has swept away Algerian diversity. In a conversation between the narrator-author and the youngest daughter of Zoulikha, Mina, the two women of postcolonial Algeria celebrate the diversity of the Algerian identity by offering a revision to a celebrate hymn taught at the *madersa*, saying,

Nous avons une seule langue, l'arabe  
Nous avons une seule foi, l'Islam  
Nous avons une seule terre, l'Algérie ! (77)

To reverse this hymn, the two women sing:

Nous avons trois langues, et le berbère d'abord [...]  
Nous avons trois amours :  
Abraham, Jésus...et Mohammed ! [...]  
Nous pourrions aussi évoquer nos ancêtres illustres :  
Jugurtha, trahi, est mort à Rome, loin de sa terre ;  
La Kahina, notre reine des Aurès, vaincue, s'est

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20 *Madersa* is an Algerian Arabic word which means school.

tué auprès d'un puits ;  
Abdelkader, expatrié, s'est éteint à Damas, auprès  
[d'Ibn Arbi ! (78)

Of course, in this symbolically and politically loaded passage, the two women of postcolonial Algeria seem to agree not only on the problematic teachings of the *madersa*, but on the earlier origins of the problem. The hymn seems to repeat colonial dynamics as implied in Mina's comment, "'trois fois un.' L'Islam étant le troisième des monothéismes, veut-on absolument tripler la sacro-sainte unicité ?" (77). Mina's comment may be referencing to the early position adopted by the French, who were indeed the initiators of the dynamics repeated in the rhythm of the discourse adopted in the teachings of the *madersa* however different they might seem. Actually, the *madersa* teachings are revised in this conversation, which celebrates the richness within Algerian diversity as suggested in this final comment made by the narrator author, "Le jeu des trois, sur une même terre : trois langues, trois religions, trois héros de résistance, n'est-ce pas mieux?" (78). It is maybe not necessary to expand further the implications of Djébar's text, and suffice it to say that sweeping away Algerian diversity, the discourse of unicity and the imperialist dynamics of "appropriation and effacement" represent unfortunately the only discourse and the only dynamics that have ever been used to define Algerian identity and Algerian history in past and present discourses.

This position, which denies the diversity of Algeria past and present, has been adopted in the discourses of official historiography after the independence. Official historiography reincarnated the most fatal of colonialist crimes, namely social and cultural division for the sake of a so-called pure and homogeneous cultural and national identity. In official history books as school textbooks for instance, Algerian identity has been defined as homogeneous and colonialism has been held responsible for all the problems of the recently independent nation, as official historiography has avoided examining how the new nation is responsible for existing predicaments. As O'Riley has

explained, the Algerian nation adopted a policy focused on “victimization and heroism” which “inhibit a critical confrontation with urgent questions of responsibility.”<sup>21</sup>

Assia Djebar reflects through different instances in the novel on how in the official historiographical project, colonial history is used as a justification of “victimization and heroism.” In the novel, Hania refuses participation in the making of a film projecting the heroism of her mother, which she thinks would kill her twice. Projecting the heroism of the martyrs of the revolution in films as part of the official historiographical project would relieve the conscience of those who betrayed them as Hania has put it. So focused on victimization, official historiography has evaded issues that would threaten the stability and shake the guilty consciousness of those that the peasant Zohra calls “the jackals,”<sup>22</sup> who substitute for colonial oppressors in postcolonial Algeria. Eventually, focused on “heroism and victimization,” the real story of the Algerian experience past and present remains missing in official historiographic projects.

The novel suggests that the failure of the Algerian new nation to assume responsibility for the past by repeating the colonialist policies of social and cultural division as well as political repression has resulted in the contemporary crisis of civil warfare. The crisis of contemporary Algeria, referred to in the novel as “nouvelle saignée,” was foreseen by Frantz Fanon in his famous work *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he explained that the specters of colonialism had already inhabited the soon-to-be

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21 *Postcolonial Haunting and victimization*, 4.

22 In *Chacal ou La Ruse des Dominées*, Tassadit Yacine-Titouh explains that the jackal in Kabyle folktales is one of the animals that the lion—the strongest and noblest animal in the jungle—uses to strengthen his authority; so he is used as a covering to the lion; yet despite his proximity to the lion—to authority, he is classified in the hierarchy of jungle animals, based specifically on physical characteristics, as dominated because he is at the same time the enemy and protector—covering of the lion. Actually, the metonymic association between jackals and the citizens of Césaire in the novel is significant if read in the light of the position of jackals—as instruments of the authority—in folk tales. See *Chacal ou Ruse des Dominées* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte & Syros, 2001).

liberated minds of the colonized subjects and could lead them to a harmful repetition of Europe's divisive violence.<sup>23</sup>

Eventually, in the light of all the historical references we have found in the novel, Djébar's text seems to point to the violence underlying the historiographical discourses past and present. These discourses, whether focused on "victimization and heroism" or on the purity and homogeneity of the Algerian identity, fail to represent the diversity of the Algerian identity as they fail to represent adequately the past (History), since they are but the reincarnation of colonial divisive violent discourses, underscored by the imperialist dynamics of appropriation and erasure.

Aware of all this, Djébar needed twenty years to find out how to represent adequately the history of Algeria metonymically associated with the story of Zoulikha, whose body disappears after it has been subject to all kinds of torture. But her voice continues, in a vivacious breeze, "L'image de Zoulikha, certes, disparaît à demi de la mosaïque. Mais sa voix subsiste, en soufflé vivace" (242). Even if a large part of Algeria's culture and history has been effaced under the effect of imperialist appropriation and erasure, the voice of Algeria is perpetuated in the story/history of Zoulikha that the narrator/author, who in the text plays the role of an ideal female listener "l'écouteuse," is vigilant to transmit without repeating the imperialist dynamics.

To recapitulate, Djébar's questioning of the ways of recovering the occulted colonial history shows that not any act of rewriting colonial history would free the past from its traumatic effects. In the postcolonial Algeria, depicted in *La femme sans sépulture*, all acts of rewriting history have allowed its effacement causing a state of amnesia which resulted in the reiteration of colonial violence in the 1990's.

Djébar's attempt to rewrite colonial history shows that traumatic experiences cannot be represented. They can only be reconstituted from the broken fragmented

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23 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

voices of the women who lived colonial struggles. In *La femme sans sépulture*, the reconstitution process needed a special and complex narrative mode relying on shifting points of view underscored by the use of FID. Djébar's alternative dynamics of re-inscription and transmission will be the focus of the next sub-chapter.

## **4.2 *La Femme Sans Sépulture*: the Dynamics of Rewriting History**

To represent the past and the present without repeating the imperialist dynamics, Djébar uses a number of artistic techniques. Some of these techniques are subversion of the conventional plot, recourse to oral tradition as the use of the framing device, shifting points of view, and the use of the rhetoric of free indirect discourse reflected in fragmentation of narrative, mosaic structure, broken syntax, shifting tenses, transliterations of popular dialect. In this sub-chapter, we will discuss how these artistic strategies are used by Djébar and show how the rewriting of history is undertaken artistically.

On the broadest level, *La femme sans sépulture* depicts a quest of the past to save from forgetfulness and to set the illuminated truth around the life of one of the heroines of the Algerian war of independence, within a larger feminine experience. This quest, which the text thematizes through the interaction of the past and present, directs attention to itself as a central theme of the novel by a number of narrative strategies, namely the use of the narrative frame and of a special form of plot subversion.

To narrate this story, Djébar draws upon the framing device. This device serves on the level of plot to interrupt the received narrative flow of linear narration of the realistic novel, thus offering at the same time a revision of the conventional plot and adopting a new design characteristic of what Bakhtin describes as a polyphonic novel, in which "the position from which a story is told, a portrayal built, or information provided must be oriented in a new way to [...] a world of autonomous subjects, not

objects.”<sup>24</sup> On the level of theme, framing also enables the different voices, which narrate the separate elements of the plot, to recapitulate, control and narrate their own stories through the interaction of the past and present, and through an interaction between narrator and listener, who both grow in self-consciousness.

Djebar matches the use of frame with the use of subversion as a mode of narrating the separate elements of the plot. The text opens with a prelude and ends with an epilogue rendered in the first-person voice of the author. It opens and ends with reproach and remorse. It opens with the same reproach repeated three times “Je vous attendais!” (13) “Je vous ai attendue des années, et vous ne venez que maintenant” (14) “je t’ai attendu toutes ces années!” (15) addressed by Mina to the next-door neighbour, historian, filmmaker and author, coming late to register the story of her mother. It ends with the author’s own remorse for returning thrice late “Il me faut l’avouer: je reviens dans ma ville vingt ans plus tard” (238), “je reviens si tard et je me décide à dérouler enfin le récit! Ce retard me perturbe, me culpabilise” (239), “...j’ai désiré revenir vingt ans plus tard, vingt ans trop tard, pour faire revivre le récit d’hier scandé par les mots, la voix, la présence dans l’air de Zoulikha” (240). By introducing and ending her text with this evidence of her late return, Debar subverts or negates her text’s themes of discovery, deliverance and revival, only to devote the remainder of her text to realizing these same themes.

Djebar works through subversion to reconstitute what is denied and forgotten. She uses subversion to reject all the other forms irrelevant to write “Histoire de Zoulikha” (13) which is “une histoire dans l’histoire” (142), the truth of which can only be wholly revealed if told as part of all the other stories related to it past and present. Therefore, this story cannot be told as a flow of events following a linear itinerary commonly used in realistic writings, as it cannot be told within the restrictions of the ordinary conventional plot built through heightening of tension and a final resolution where

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24 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 7.

characters, to use Bakhtin's words, are "objects, fixed elements in the author's design."<sup>25</sup> Characters in this story within the story are actively conversing with the narrator-author "[pour] inscrire enfin, ou plutôt [...] réinscrire..." "Histoire de Zoulikha" where the deliberate omission of the definite article indicates the generic reference of the noun phrase transposed from an Algerian Arabic, which requires no article use in such a context. Djébar therefore draws upon the framing device to "reinscrire" or to "rewrite down"<sup>26</sup> history, which is still engraved in the memory of some women to save it from erasure.

Djébar converses with characters as she conversed with women who gave her not only the story and history, but also a device. Actually, framing is an unconscious technique that the ingenious focalizer Tante Zohra Oudai adopts to tell the non-erased memories of a past that, though harmful and full of bitterness, turns through her framed tales into a tale within the tale with healing effects. Djébar draws upon the framing device inspired by the oral tradition, which she rediscovers while collecting history among women to rewrite down herself "Une histoire dans l'histoire, et ainsi de suite [...]. N'est-ce pas une stratégie inconsciente pour, au bout de la chaîne, nous retrouver, nous qui écoutons, qui voyons précisément le fil de la narration se nouer puis se dénouer, se tourner et se retourner...n'est-ce pas pour, à la fin, nous découvrir...libérées?" (142).

Djébar engages shifting points of view for the task of writing her "histoire dans l'histoire" in order to save from forgetfulness the history and the device. Djébar uses the first person voice of the prelude and epilogue, which assumes an autonomous presence in the middle of the narrative conversing directly with the other voices of narration, revealing the author's own thoughts, previously expressed through the third person

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<sup>25</sup> *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> "Reinscrire" means according to the definition of Larousse Dictionary "graver sur la pierre, le marbre," and it is the English equivalent of "rewrite down" which means according to the definition of Oxford dictionary "put down (on paper) in words" to save something from forgetfulness.

voice of the narrative commentary. In addition to the first person voice, *La Femme* develops through a complex but accomplished mode of narration. It consists of a third person omniscient voice with sometimes internal others, external focalization, direct speech rendered in the characters' speech, voices of variable focalizers, monologues representing the voice of Zoulikha rendered in a first person narrative, and even instances of the second person point of view representing the readers' conversation with the first person voice of the narrator-author in the epilogue, and in the middle of the novel.

Actually, after fixing the setting, and introducing the protagonists in the prelude using the first person I "je," the narrator-author eclipses from the scene to return in the epilogue. Meanwhile she becomes one of the characters, an unnamed character referred to with different pseudo names; the female guest "l'invitée," visitor "la visiteuse," foreigner "l'étrangère," foreigner not really foreigner "l'étrangère pas tellement étrangère," and the listener "l'écouteuse" who sometimes mixes her memories with the reminiscences of the narrators of Zoulikha's story and participates therefore in the restoration task. Yet most of the time, she prefers to listen to the confidences of the other narrators with vigilance.

The novel is thus an especially rich and complex instance of a multiply vocal story nearly entirely animated and told by women focalizers or, to use Wayne C. Booth's term, "disguised narrators" who range from peasant to city dweller, experienced skilled to inexperienced almost innocent, and hesitating but wholly reliable, dramatized, and unconscious narrators. Actually, to rewrite down her "histoire dans l'histoire" Djébar relies on the old peasant woman Tante Zohra Oudai, mother of three martyrs and wife and sister of two, who reassures her apologetic interlocutor, "Même si tu nous viens quelques années plus tard, nous, ...nos paroles restent les mêmes. Nos souvenirs, comme cette pierre ... sont ineffaçables" (80). She equally relies on the aged city-dweller, the skilled ex-foreseer of the future, Dame Lionne who proves equally skilled at restoring the past. Dame Lionne, who claims "Il n'y a que le passé qui reste cabré en moi" (28), is incomparably able to "désormais faire revivre le passé! Le menu

et concret passé de ces femmes, la plupart invisible aux autres, au monde" (166), as admiringly commented on, by the voice of the narrative commentary rendered in the third person voice restricted to the interior responses of Mina, the new frequent visitor of the ex-foreseer, to hear the past which foresees the future. Additionally, Djébar relies on less self-reliant, and less experienced younger narrators, the daughters of Zoulikha, who however grow into more sophisticated, self-reliant narrators as they gain deliverance and self-consciousness, while gradually delivered of the silent past, which burdens their hearts and minds.

Djébar uses this special mode of narration to allow the voices of narration to convey their ineffaceable memories about the past, which foresees the future. It consists of a gradual shift from an external focalization to an internal focalization narrative representing the thoughts then the voice of character focalizers. So narratives start mediated by the voice of an external focalizer, approximate to a third person narrator, that gradually relinquishes her voice to allow the reader to have direct access to character focalizers' thoughts at a first stage, then to their oral speech rendered in a mix of direct, indirect and free indirect discourse.

The movement from the representation of thought to the assumption of voice by the character focalizer, marked sometimes in the text as "Voix de..." "Voice of ..." followed by the name of the focalizer, is generally achieved when the focalizer reaches a level of immersion in the past to relive it. At this level, the narrative is more oral than written discourse free from the comments of the third-person narrator, except for very limited observations describing physical features about the intonation and the rhythm of voice or about the movements and gestures of the character focalizer. This immersion allows according to Anne Donadey "to speak the unspeakable" against "historical amnesia." The "unspeakable" are experiences "beyond words altogether" that "may be evoked but not depicted in detail."<sup>27</sup> The outcome is a narrative different from what has

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<sup>27</sup> Anne Donadey, "African American and Francophone Postcolonial Memory: Octavia Butler's 'Kindred' and Assia Djébar's 'La femme sans sépulture,'" in *Research in African Literatures* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 67.

has been recorded in official historiography represented in the novel by nationalist schools or *medersa* (76-8), television and journalists (53-54) and post-independence leaders (147-150) untrusted to tell the past.

In addition to the first person voice of the prelude and epilogue and the third person narration, Djébar needed for this restoration task the voice of dead Zoulikha, who tells in a first person voice the missing part of the story throughout four monologues intermittently interrupting the narration. The monologues in the voice of Zoulikha are free from comments. These monologues are dramatic interior monologues, which represent the thought of Zoulikha addressed to her younger daughter Mina, rendered in direct and free direct discourses. These monologues are overheard by the narrator-author who claims in the prelude, "je l'entends, moi, j'entends Zoulikha constante, présente. Vivante au-dessus des rues étroites, des fontaines, des patios, des hautes terrasses de Césarée" (17). She repeats in the epilogue, "Je suis revenue seulement pour le dire. J'entends, dans ma ville natale, ses mots et son silence...je l'entends" (236). The narrator-author overhears the monologues as she makes a voyage back in time and space, and therefore she has been able to hear that missing part of the story told by the unburied dead whose ghostly presence allows her to speak about what happened in the past and what will happen in the future.

The voice of the narrative commentary shifts between internal and external focalization. The author's voice is represented both indirectly and directly. It is indirectly represented through closeness between the implied author's views and the voice of narrative commentary. In the position of a listener, this voice intervenes to comment and enrich the testimonies, permitting the meeting of voices from the past and voices from the present, and attempting the exploration of feminine experiences ranging from their involvement in the liberation struggles to the ritualistic everyday toil. It is also represented directly through the first person voice in the prelude, the epilogue, and through a very subtle authorial intrusion in the chapter six entitled "*Les oiseaux de la mosaïque.*"

In this chapter, the narrator-author, who previously conceals herself in the clothes of "l'étrangère," blends her voice with the other voices of narration. This chapter starts

with the second person voice of self-address of a narrator approximate to the author who then intervenes in the first person, through the use of collective focalization<sup>28</sup>. After a self-questioning underscored by the use of the second person voice, the narrator-author disapproves of her concealment, so she resumes the narration through a collective focalization narrative which allows her to blend her voice with her interlocutors—Dame Lionne and Mina. Indeed, the narrator-author consequently decides to join the other voices of narration symbolically referred to as “les oiseaux de la mosaïque.” Our narrator-author drops her mask and blends her voice with the voice of her interlocutor Mina, whom she addresses using the plural personal pronoun “nous,” suggesting the bonding of the voices of the women of colonial and postcolonial Algeria.

These postcolonial women have heard the testimonies, indeed the songs, of the women who lived the colonial trials, and they may repeat those songs from the past just as they have heard them. Repeating the stories or the songs seems one of the objectives of our intrusive writer, who afterwards in this same chapter, alone in her hotel room, repeats through verbal echo the voice of Dame Lionne—the most objective narrator in the novel—about whom the omniscient third person voice with internal focalization says “Dame Lionne, elle, ne reproche rien à personne: elle enjambe les temps, elle est mémoire pure” (167). Then, in another chapter, she repeats that same voice together with Mina throughout their voyage back to Algiers from Césarée. This repetition of the voice of Dame Lionne by the two young voyagers is aimed to preserve the song through extending the echo “à deux, ... elle vont en prolonger l’écho” (165-166).

Our narrator-author proves throughout the text of the novel to be an ideal listener, and a perfect echoer. She is an ideal listener who is trusted by all her disguised characters/narrators—Hania who claims addressing the author “avec toi, [the author]

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<sup>28</sup> Collective focalization is focalization through a group of characters, it occurs when “a given set of elements can be perceived simultaneously—and identically or differently—by any number of characters” as explained by Gerald Prince, “A point of View on point of view or Refocusing Focalization,” in Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman, eds., *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2001), 44.

[...] si je parle d'elle [Zoulikha], je me soulage, je me débarrasse des dents de l'amertume" (p.51); Mina who confesses her tragic love story before her; Lala Lbia who praises her perspicacity; Zohra who, though distrustful of city-dwellers, shows hospitality and readiness to tell ineffaceable memories before her. The narrator-author is also a perfect echoer of the stories or the songs of other women. However, she lacks the perfect objectivity of Lala Lbia in reporting the past since she chooses the voice of an intrusive author who judges and accuses.

We end the reading of narrative structure in this novel with this final comment about the position of the reader. The reader follows the testimonies through different ways. We sometimes listen in the same position of the narrator-author, "listener," to the testimonies as they unfold in fragments in a situation that the text has often compared to listening to a fairy tale (122). We at times listen to the expansion of their echo repeated by the "listener," or watch their dramatic representation staged as in a theatrical play (71, 120) or movie (169). Actually, the readers should then piece together the different tales to get the overall meaning of the novel which, through its different fragments, constitutes that part of the story or history that official historiography has failed to inscribe and that was neglected in the records of the forgetful male witnesses and writers.

Through this complex narrative mode, strengthened by plot subversion and the framing device, Djébar extends the possibilities of the representation of history in art, criticizing ostensibly restrictive modes of representation—at the level of narration and plot building—adopted in male fiction committed to interpreting history during colonial and post-colonial periods. In other words, Djébar, who recognizes the inadequacy of the conventional plot as well as the revised structures of linear narration to write her story, seems less comfortable with traditional history written by males within stories with fixed or revised structures. In this novel, the author openly criticizes males for their short memory; males are "[des] témoins oublieux" (167) and have "(des) yeux et mémoires crevés" (95).

These claims may constitute an important feminist critique of the complex fiction of male domination. They also may reveal the author's indirect criticism of male fiction in which not only the female experience is forgotten or not sufficiently explored, but history was written without awareness of the danger of repeating the dynamics of appropriation and erasure. The author's criticism might be directed at the literature of the largely autobiographical pattern written in the decades that followed the Second World War known for the frequent use of the first person narrative and episodic plots. Criticism might also be directed at male committed literature of the dawn of Revolution written by writers who adopted realism as a method of socio-political analysis and criticism, known for its linear narration rendered through the omniscient narrative point of view. More precisely, Djébar's criticism implicitly undermines the omniscient narrative point of view of Mohamed Dib's trilogy as well as the first person narration of such autobiographical novels of writers like Mouloud Feraoun and Malek Haddad to represent adequately the experience of colonialism in Algeria.

In addition to shifting points of view and reversal of the conventional plot, Djébar undertakes the task of rewriting history and thereby writing the unwritten stories of women by relying on a specific style adequate to repeat that same story of the return to the past to write down what was occulted while avoiding the dynamics of appropriation and erasure. She adopts a style capable of expressing a specifically Algerian women's experience with all its complexity through French. This style permits the author to travel in space and time to register occulted histories, to achieve a great deal of cultural negotiation, as it permits her to establish Algerian uniqueness within a standard language (French) and a common human endeavor (literature). This style is significant mostly through its rhetorical strategies. These strategies are used to achieve an effective passage of the oral voices into a written narrative. Djébar uses free indirect speech as an ideal rhetorical device to translate Algerian women's experiences and culture, which are traditionally oral into a written literary French text. Yet, this text is informed by the Arabic oral dialect translated into what might be read as a colloquial form of standard French.

Actually, Djebbar craves to transliterate the oral stories of women relying sometimes on memory, at other times on the fictionalization of history. She overlays personal discourse (that of the author) over the discourse of the women invoked, which reveals the will to transform history by fiction. In a note to the reader entitled “Avertissement,” Djebbar asserts:

Dans ce roman, tous les faits et détails de la vie et de la mort de Zoulikha, héroïne de ma ville d'enfance, pendant la guerre d'indépendance de l'Algérie, sont rapportés avec un souci de fidélité historique, ou, dirais-je, selon une approche documentaire.

Toutefois, certains personnages, aux côtés de l'héroïne, en particulier ceux présentés comme sa famille, sont traités ici avec l'imagination et les variations que permet la fiction. J'ai usé à volonté de ma liberté romanesque, justement pour que la vérité de Zoulikha soit éclairée davantage, au sein même d'une large fresque féminine (9).

Relying on multiple oral voices, Djebbar tries to revive the past through her writing in French, a language reworked and transformed to allow her to convey all that she could have said in her mother language. When she makes use of French to write the Algerian oral tradition, she creates a new rhythm, marked by syntactic and semantic peculiarities. In an interview with Mildred Mortimer, Djebbar says, “Vous trouverez dans ces récits de femmes des sortes de tournures populaires que j'insère par une traduction voulue au premier degré. Ces paysannes disent, 'La France est montée au village,' au lieu de dire, 'L'armée française est montée au village.' Par moments la traduction essaie d'épouser ces tics qui apparaissent parce qu'il y a la guerre.”<sup>29</sup>

To insert the oral in *La Femme*, Djebbar finds in Free Indirect Discourse (FID) an ideal technique that she rediscovers within the oral accounts of the women telling the story of Zoulikha and used in all the narrative situations adopted in this polyphonic novel. FID is used to represent both thought and voice in the novel. We find instances of FID in narratives rendered in the third person voice representing thought or speech

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29 Assia Djebbar & Mildred Mortimer, "Entretien avec Assia Djebbar, Ecrivain Algérien," *Research in African Literatures* 19 (2) (Summer, 1988), 201-202.

with internal and external focalization. We also find instances of FID in narratives rendered as oral voices, approximate to a first person voice, representing voices haunting the minds of reflector characters and voices liberated by immersion in the past to assume the narration instead of the third person voice, which gradually fades from the narrative, but remains as an attentive “listener.”

One of the most common uses of FID occurs with narratives rendered in the third person omniscient voice. It occurs when a character's speech or thoughts are presented in the third person by the narrator without any indication of source. Not only does the narrator provide information through omniscient narration, but the characters speak for themselves in FID. The narrator enters the mind of the character and represents his or her thoughts verbatim, but the first- and second- person pronouns of direct interior monologue are absent. However, Djébar's use of FID with the third person parts from the usual when the represented voice of the character sometimes intrudes in an omniscient narration to articulate, usually, one sentence without any indication to the reader that such a change is taking place.

A sample from the novel will show Djébar's use of FID with the third person omniscient voice; the narrative is reflected through the consciousness of the character Hania:

La nuit où Mina se blottit dans l'une des pièces minuscules et sombre de Dame Lionne, Hania—dont le prénom signifie « l'apaisée » ne s'apaise pas. L'insomnie habituelle, se dit-elle, et maintenant, me voici droite sur mes jambes jusqu'à l'aurore ! Comme d'autres fois, Mina reviendra avant la première chaleur éclatée du jour—à l'heure où, dans chaque patio, les ménagères lavent à grands bidons d'eau ruisselante les dalles usées, couleur orange et vert passés, du sol.

Elle rentra avec l'une des fillettes de la maison d'en face, celle qui la suit comme son ombre : Yasmina s'installera dans un coin pour jouer aux osselets (ceux qu'avait dans l'enfance Mina et que Hania lui a conservés). Yasmina demandera à « l'Algéroise » - elle appelle ainsi Mina, ce qui ne plait pas tellement à Hania - une musique ni traditionnelle, ni chansonnettes à la mode, « la musique », dit-elle, après qu'elle a entendu une sonate de Mozart, et elles s'enfermeront dans la pièce d'en haut.

Ainsi, songe Hania, ma sœur, fille de Zoulikha, l'héroïne de Césarée, est presque en train de devenir une femme d'Alger. Ce n'est pas juste ! L'insomnie, dans le cœur blanc de la nuit, fournit prétexte à ratiocinations, Hania le sait. Négligeant sa couche, elle va d'un coin à l'autre de cette maison qu'elle a embellie ; ses mains de ménagère tentent de ranger encore : un bibelot, une couverture pas à sa place.

S'impatiente-t-elle de l'absence de sa sœur qu'elle a attendue tout le long de la semaine ? Non, Mina, chaque début de vacances, a besoin d'être dehors : retrouver ses lieux familiers, des coins de rue, deux ou trois maisons de ses camarades de lycée, restées dans la ville ; elle ira ensuite au sanctuaire de Sidi Brahim, à l'entrée est de la ville. Elle aime tant écouter les paysannes, et leur parler. C'est bien mieux que d'aller à la plage, pour moi ! s'excusera-t-elle.

Hania, de nuit, de jour, ainsi se tourmente. Quand le frère, dans un an, sera marié, que fera-t-elle ? Il partira de la maison ; peut-être même de la ville. Elle espère parfois : Et si Mina prenait enfin époux ? Avec un époux, pourquoi ne reprendrait-elle pas sa place, ici, dans la maison de sa mère ? (54-56)

Narration in the text under scrutiny corresponds to what Gérard Genette terms internal focalization and Franz Karl Stanzel calls reflector mode narratives, where the narrative is reflected through the consciousness of a reflector character; in reflector mode narratives, a character's deictic center prevails as the major narrative orientation point.<sup>30</sup> The "deictic centre" is a term used by Ann Banfield to describe those aspects of an utterance that refer to and depend upon the situation in which an utterance is made. She defines the deictic system as follows: "The deictic system is thus internally divided between those terms which represent the (personal) subject—I in speech, he, she, or a human they in the writing of the novel—and those which represent only a subjective centre—the deictic adverbials of time and place."<sup>31</sup>

If we stop to analyze the passage above, the most obvious sign that alerts to a FID reading of some sentences consists of the shift of pronominal reference and shift in tense, which are recognized by Fludernik as markers of FID.<sup>32</sup> Both first and third

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30 Franz K. Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, trans., Charlotte Goedsche (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 169-170.

31 Ann Banfield, quoted in Fludernik (1993), 381.

32 Fludernik (1993), 107.

person reference to the reflector character alternate to represent the reflecting mind of Hania. Equally, tense is just no less exchangeable than pronominal reference in this text.<sup>33</sup> In addition to pronominal and tense shifts, a set of syntactic expressive features underscore the shift from the narrator's perspective towards the deictic center of the reflector character.

Shift in pronominal reference is an important mark of FID in this text. Thus, we can see the narrative interrupted by the voice of the character Hania in a first person reference without any indication to the reader that such a change is about to take place. In "l'insomnie...l'aurore!" the author introduces Hania's thoughts without the use of the usual marker of direct speech since these thoughts are neither preceded by dashes nor enclosed in quotation marks. The author introduces us directly into Hania's mind and thoughts represented in her own voice using the "I" (je). The same exchange of pronouns is noticed later on in "ainsi...Alger" as well as in "c'est bien mieux...elle." And also without indication, the third person voice each time resumes the narration yet with a syntactical structure of direct discourse, and the rhythms of spoken language rendered through some expressive features such as exclamations and rhetorical questions.

In addition to pronominal shift, the narrative develops through what Fludernik calls "syntactic deviations" with "claims to expressivity"<sup>34</sup> that relate to the deictic centre of the reported consciousness (ie Hania's consciousness). In chapter four of *The Languages of Fiction* (1993), Fludernik has provided an extensive list of Ann Banfield's list of syntactic devices with expressive features, which relate to the deictic centre of the character, and which are responsible for the dual voice interpretation in FID. The text under scrutiny manifests many of these expressive features; we will focus on a few. For instance, we notice the alignment of some time and place adverbials to the deictic center

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33 Stanzel suggested that in reflector mode first and third person reference to the reflector character can alternate, and Monika Fludernik extends this argument to the exchangeability of tense in reflector mode narratives. See Fludernik (1993), 193.

34 Ibid., 223.

of the reflector character as in “comme d’autres fois” “la piece d’en haut” “ici, dans la maison de sa mère;” these temporal and spatial adverbs indicate a time and a place from Hania’s perspective. In some sentences, the representation of Hania’s consciousness is rendered through the use of exclamatory constructions, questions which retain their syntactically direct inverted form, or even through the use of clause-initial adjuncts “Non, Mina, chaque... ,” or a speaker-related sentence-modifier “pour moi.” For instance, in “ce n’est pas juste!” “et si Mina prenait enfin epoux?” obviously these are Hania’s words and thoughts, but she is not speaking or thinking them at this moment; it is the narrator who is “listening to them,” so to speak, using them to translate Hania’s thoughts.

Besides these syntactic features of expressivity, some pragmatic categories make the shift, from the reported consciousness to the narrative proper, more explicit. Actually, many typographical features help to separate those sentences which relate to the deictic centre of the character from the narrative proper. These include in the text under scrutiny the dashes, the semi colons, the parentheses as well as the quotation marks. For instance the dashes in “-à l’heure ...” and “-elle ...Hania-une ...” mark the shift from the perspective of the reportee (Hania’s) to that of the narrator. The parentheses in “(ceux...)” have a similar function. The use of quotation marks with the words “l’Algéroise” and “la musique” mark what Fludernik calls “loanings from the character’s lexis.”<sup>35</sup> Loaning here is made explicit by the use of the quotation marks. Worth noticing is that the loan is made by the reportee (Hania) and not by the narrator. Actually, the words inside the quotes relate to the deictic centre of a third party character—Yasmina—who in the direct speech act occupied the position of the speaker. The reported lexemes enclosed in quotation marks underscore Hania’s ironic intent in repeating them.

Hania’s “l’Algéroise” and “la musique” reflect an ironic intent derived from the tone of Hania’s voice, which implies her disagreement, deception and mockery. Hania,

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35 Fludernik (1993), 227.

who throughout the novel seems conservative of the bourgeois tradition of Césarée, seems to disagree with the cultural transformation affecting the younger generation who seem influenced by western styles—Mozart’s music. She also feels deceived that her sister is transformed into “l’Algéroise” where the direct translation from a common Algerian Arabic referring to the female citizens of Algiers—a hybrid capital city—underlies Hania’s mockery of those female citizens, then her deception to see her sister’s transformation into such a less indeterminate category. Hania, proud of being a citizen of the antique city Césarée “plutôt sévère dans ses mœurs” (186), seems deceived by and sarcastic of the cultural transformations coming from the less conservative capital city Algiers, much more open to external influence.

Additionally, FID is marked in this text by the shift in tense. Actually, this reflector mode narrative unproblematically alternates between the past, the present and the future. “The tense shift can, in appropriate contexts, come to function as a signal of speech or thought representation, particularly in passages where idioms otherwise reserved for direct discourse are incorporated into free indirect discourse and shift their tense,” writes Fludernik.<sup>36</sup> Djébar uses a marked present as the time of enunciation, as she uses an unmarked present to represent the first person reference to Hania’s thoughts. The third person reference to Hania’s thoughts is represented using an unmarked future referring to the speculative aspect of the thoughts. In the first two paragraphs, the shift from the unmarked future to the marked present underscores the shift in perspective. While the sentences in the unmarked future refer to the represented consciousness of the character rendered in FID, a referential linking to the current situation occurs by means of a marked shift into the present current enunciation in the sentences rendered in the present.

In the second paragraph, shift in tense aligns with shift in pronominal reference to underscore a shift in the thoughts of the reflector character. Worth noticing here is the shift from the future to the present and the “passé composé” within what we may read

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<sup>36</sup> Fludernik (1993), 177.

as a FID rendering, representing the reportee's thoughts. Though rendered in FID representing the thoughts of Hania, the clause "la musique", dit-elle, après qu'elle a entendu une sonate de Mozart," marks a shift in the thoughts of the character which move from speculation to recollection; this shift is marked by a shift in tense. Here, we are also struck by an ambiguous use of the personal pronoun "elle" which may be interpreted as a deictic word relating to the deictic centre of the character Yasmina who "demandera à l'Algéroise'...--une musique..." since semantically, the sentence would not have meaning if we attribute "elle" to either the character Mina or Hania. Equally, the phrase "-une musique ni traditionnelle, ni des chansonnettes à la mode" may underlie a deictic shift which however remains subordinate to both the ruling represented consciousness and the ruling narrating instance. Though ambiguous, this phrase may be a representation of what the "elle," referring to Yasmina, has said, yet rendered in FID. Actually, the example is not, simply, free indirect discourse but a free indirect discourse rendering of Hania's thoughts within which she echoes Yasmina's language. This is what Fludernik has named "free indirect discourse at double remove, the duality of double-layeredness a direct consequence of double filtering."<sup>37</sup> One therefore has free indirect discourse within free indirect discourse marked by an alignment of referential shift and shift in tense.

In the fourth and fifth paragraphs, the present and the future unproblematically alternate as a consequence of the unsettled mood of the narrative representing Hania's thoughts, influenced by her growing weariness. Therefore, the present is used with the two opening sentences of the fourth paragraph, which indeed represent the inner thoughts of the reflector character as opposed to the speculative thoughts representing outer deeds rendered in the future. The last sentence underscores another shift in tense to the *imparfait* and then the *conditional* within a "hypothetical" conditional sentence, where the reflector character seems to speculate about something that she perceives to be a wish hardly realizable.

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37 Fludernik (1993), 348.

Eventually, through its use of FID, the text can weave in and out of Hania's mind, can glide from narrator to character and back again without perceptible transitions. Two linguistic levels, inner speech with its idiosyncrasy and author's report with its quasi-objectivity, fused into one so that the same current situation seems to pass through narrating (narrator) and figural (character) consciousness. The fusion however can never be complete because there is distance between the position of speaker or thinker and that of hearer. With FID, Djebbar shows the necessity of letting Hania speak for herself in her own language, thereby incorporating Algerian Arabic dialect into the omniscient narration.

Indeed, with FID, Djebbar explores the problematics of incorporating the marginalized voice of the Algerian woman and, therefore, of incorporating dialect material into omniscient narration. The voices of women telling the different narratives are represented by the author who has merged Algerian Arabic dialect and standard French in the idiom of FID in third person omniscient narratives. The incorporation of dialect material into FID is particularly seen in the adoption of Algerian Arabic vocabulary or even the incorporation of some syntactical, morphological deviations suggestive of Algerian dialect, deviations that the author calls "des sortes de tournures populaires" witnessed in women's testimonies. "Free indirect discourse can easily incorporate dialectal morphology and syntax as well as lexical peculiarities of the dialect in question," writes Fludernik.<sup>38</sup> In the vast majority of instances, the narrative uses of Algerian Arabic are introduced by stretches of FID. The use of dialect material in FID is noticed at two levels in third person omniscient narratives. It is noticed in texts representing the speech or thought of a character rendered in FID third person narratives, as it is noticed in narratives representing the perspective of the narrator.

Djebbar uses the narrator to transmit characters' unspoken speech or thoughts rendered in FID, which incorporates Algerian Arabic dialectal morphology, syntax, and lexical peculiarities. By allowing Algerian Arabic into the narration, she endorses it.

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38 Fludernik (1993), 254.

The following passage provides a description of Hania's speech and thoughts, rendered in FID that incorporates some lexical peculiarities from Algerian Arabic.

Un jour, c'est sûr, tenace comme une sourde-muette, la mère en elle, entêtée, soudain murmurante, la guidera jusqu'à la forêt et à la sépulture cachée.

Mais non ! la guerre finie, rien, de cette issue qu'elle a attendue, n'arrive: où trouver le corps de Zoulikha ?

Après cette déception, une sorte d'hémorragie sonore persiste. Elle n'eut plus jamais de menstrues, précisément depuis ce jour de sa recherche en forêt. Elle n'y prend garde. Les voisines, les parentes par alliance, interrogent: "quand nous annonceras-tu une grossesse? Une naissance?" Hania ne répond pas. Elle sait. Etre habitée: d'autres femmes, autrefois, disait-on, étaient "peuplées", "habitées" – en arabe, on les surnommait les *meskounates* -, mais il s'agissait à l'époque d'un djinn, bon ou mauvais esprit avec lequel ces malheureuses devaient composer, ou se soumettre en silence, quelquefois tout au long de leur vie. Une sorte d'amant invisible, maléfique, les dominant, les harcelant de l'intérieur. Les autres femmes alors savaient ; se taisaient, en complices effrayées, malgré elles.

Or, depuis la guerre contre la France, toutes ces étranges créatures – auxquelles Zoulikha n'a jamais cru, elle qui avait appris à Hania à se méfier de 'ses sornettes' - ont fui probablement sous d'autres cieux (64- 65).

Here the narration is invaded by dialect. Djebbar represents Hania's thoughts in a manner that fits perfectly well with Fludernik's description of how through FID an author might provide "the precise flavor of the original utterance or consciousness that is 'true' to a character's mind. One prominent and pervasive manner of doing so is to incorporate lexical items from the character's or reported speaker's idiolect, sociolect, dialect or (foreign) language," explains Fludernik.<sup>39</sup> To read how dialect is incorporated through FID to represent Hania's thoughts, we will make use of some of the categories of the lexical items incorporated from the character's or speaker's idiolect, sociolect, dialect or (foreign) language defined by Fludernik.<sup>40</sup>

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39 Fludernik (1993), 255.

40 Ibid., 255-261.

In the narrative above, Djébar represents what is true to Hania's mind by incorporating lexical items from her idiolect and dialect or (Algerian Arabic). The text incorporates lexical items from a foreign language as the word "meskounates" transposed from Algerian Arabic meaning "haunted." In addition, we also notice the use of an evaluative adjective that lexicalizes Hania's attitude towards the haunted women in "ces malheureuses" which seems the literal translation of the Algerian Arabic "meskinates." We need to note here that this evaluative adjective has a non-subjective literal reading and needs therefore to be distinguished from the evaluative modifier "éffrayées" which is equally appropriate to Hania's perspective.

Indeed we need to note that, as Fludernik has explained, there are no clear indications for the alignment of these lexical items and idioms to the 'original' speaker or to his or her consciousness "except in the reader's stylistic perspicacity. Such cases are usually discussed in terms of 'stylistic deviation from the norm.' When free indirect discourse evokes a character's 'voice', the idiomaticity of the phrasing, the more colloquial (or more learned) tone (as the case may be), the too enthusiastic or too skeptical evaluation of the matter in hand—all these may hint at the other-directedness of the linguistic representation."<sup>41</sup>

Many lexical peculiarities are clearly part of Hania's private language as "peuplées" "habitées" which are literal translations from Algerian Arabic to French of the lexical item "meskounates" meaning haunted. Of course in standard French, neither "peuplées" nor "habitées" means haunted; they are, however, used here to reflect upon the complex relationships that result from acts of translation. The untranslated "meskounates" and the literal translations "peuplées" and "habitées" seem to repeat Bhabha's position to cultural translation. Through the untranslated "meskounates" turned into "peuplées" and "habitées", Djébar seems to repeat Bhabha who insists that "in the act of translation the content or subject matter is made disjunct, overwhelmed and alienated by the form of signification" and who therefore insists that what matters

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41 Fludernik (1993), 260.

in cultural translation is “the ‘untranslatable’—the foreign element in the midst of the performance of cultural translation [...] that reveals the interstitial [...] and becomes the ‘unstable element of linkage’, the indeterminate temporality of the in-between, that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which ‘newness comes into the world’”<sup>42</sup> and in destroying the fixed forms of cultural imperialism.

While “meskounates,” “peuplées” and “habitées” seem to refer to the untranslatable in the act of translation, they however seem to reveal no hybridity or newness celebrated by Bhabha. From “meskounates,” to “peuplées” and “habitées,” the same dynamics seem to be repeated through an act of translation that overlooks and alienates content and celebrates the ‘foreign element’ ‘meskounates’ as a means to achieve cultural negotiation. Women “populated” and “inhabited” underscores imperialist impulses reflected in the metonymic meaning suggested within “peuplées” and “habitées.” Imperialist impulses still hold on women’s bodies metonymic of the imperial impulses which still hold on the land which seems haunted, “meskouna,” “inhabited” and “populated” “peuplée” and “habitée” by specters from the past which render it sterile just as Hania who, haunted by the specter of the mother in her, has become sterile.

From women “meskounates” to “peuplées” and “habitées,” Djébar underscores the failure of literal translation to achieve the cultural alliance celebrated by Bhabha. From “meskounates” to “peuplées” and “habitées,” Djébar’s text underscores the failure of translation and the failure of transition to independence of postcolonial Algeria whose women are still “peuplées” and “habitées” sic dominated and eventually sterile. The repetition of these euphemisms might therefore be “understood to represent the complex relationship to language and culture faced by postcolonial authors choosing to write in the metropolitan language” as O’Riley puts it.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *The Location of Culture*, 227.

<sup>43</sup> Michael O’Riley, “Translation and Imperialism in Assia Djébar’s *Les Nuits de Strasbourg*” *The French Review* 76.6 (May 2002): 1236.

In addition to the use of dialect in narratives representing the consciousness of characters, the incorporation of dialect material into free indirect discourse is a feature noticed in narratives representing the perspective of the narrator who has a particularly colloquial and even dialectal style. The narratorial voice, even in apparently ‘omniscient’ passages, is charged with figural colloquial idiom. It is the case of passages focalized by the narrator, but employing the character’s language, as the following:

Tandis que Mina, à mi-parcours du retour à Alger, conduit en silence, son amie qu’on peut supposer somnolente, mais en réalité *habitée* entièrement par les derniers récits de la veille, qu’elle a elle-même sollicités, chez Dame Lionne –cette « voix de Dame Lionne » s’est arrêtée en elle, comme si, en vérité, l’éloignement, après une demi-heure de route loin de Césarée agissait pour diluer peu à peu, la vitesse de la voiture y ayant sa part, ces voix persistantes et mouvantes de la mémoire...(Italics mine) (164-165).

This passage renders the thoughts of an important character in the story, the female friend listener "l'amie" "l'écouteuse" collecting the story of Zoulikha, mixed with some delayed information about the setting provided at the end of the passage written in one fragmentary sentence. There is no evidence to the extent of the character’s involvement in the narrative. Is she literally thinking about the account of Dame Lionne? The main clause with the deictic impersonal “on” allows a free indirect reading. Such reading is supported by the inconsistent syntax of this one sentence paragraph where the syntactical structure seems to imitate oral language. It is also supported by the use of such idiomatic expression as “mais en réalité *habitée* entièrement par les derniers récits de la veille,” and “cette voix...s’est arrêtée en elle.” “*Habitée*” and “arrêtée en elle” are expressions which serve as indicators of ‘voice’, yet it is unclear as to whom this voice needs to be attributed, whether to the narrator-author or to the centre of consciousness “l’amie de Mina.”

The word “*habitée*” used here as elsewhere in this novel with Algerian Arabic connotations can be narratorial as well as figural language as one can infer from the comparison of its use in other passages both narratorial or figural, within free indirect or

direct discourses. This word has been used in the passage discussed earlier reflecting figural consciousness (Hania's), who in another passage in the novel claims with some anxiety in direct speech "j'en suis *habitée*" (92). It has also been used in another direct speech passage by the unnamed character "la visiteuse," yet with comfort: "je raconte ma nuit, *habitée* encore par ces récits de Zoulikha" (123). It is also again used in free indirect discourse representing the consciousness of the character Mina in "puisque cette femme reste ainsi *habitée* par l'histoire de Zoulikha, pourquoi, dès lors, sa hâte soudaine à partir?" (165) (Italics mine). The use of the word "habitée" with Algerian Arabic connotations in the passage above focalized by the authorial narrator suggests what Fludernik identifies as "a pattern of two cognitive levels, one aligned to a narrator persona, indexed by narrative 'knowledge,' the other to the ruling figural consciousness,"<sup>44</sup> submerged by the voices of other women.

The inclusion of figural idiom in the narrative is aimed at intensifying the figural perspective. Taking cues from Stanzel who "uses the term *Ansteckung* ('infection', 'contagion'—as in 'infectious or contagious laughter') to describe the incorporation of figural language into the narrative," Fludernik explains that "this is meant to signify a merging, in empathetic contexts, of the voice of the narrator and those of the characters, resulting in an intensification and expansion of figural viewpoint."<sup>45</sup> Actually, the incorporation of figural idiom in the narrative above is not merely phraseological, but also ideological; the authorial narrator here narrates using the idiom as well as the perspective of the characters. The narrative merges the voice of the narrator with the voice of the character "l'intervieweuse," whose voice is merged with the voices of the women she has interviewed throughout the novel. Through this double merging, it is the women's idiom and perspective that are intensified and made conventional.

The oral speech conveyed by the use of the word "habitée" is introduced precisely for the sake of intensifying the Algerian woman's voice, a voice socially distinct,

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44 Fludernik (1993), 324.

45 Fludernik (1993), 327.

carrying with it precisely those points of view and evaluations necessary to the author. Djébar's double merging of the voice of the author both with the voice of the authorial narrator and the voices of other women has indeed a double aim. It is, on one hand, a dramatic gesture to intensify the Algerian woman's voice against silence strengthened by historical forgetfulness, symbolized in this passage by "l'éloignement" and "la vitesse." It is, on the other hand, a stylistic parody of a tradition, which imposes silence on women and marginalizes them by association with irrational ideas as that of the *Djinn* or being haunted sic "habitée" by a *djinn*.

Through this act of ironical reversal, Djébar reasserts the legitimacy of being haunted or indeed "habitée" by voices, and she reverses and rejects all the negative connotations that tradition has associated with it. To be "habitée" the equivalent of "meskounat(es)" in tradition does not seem to frighten "l'interviewuse" and her friend Mina (the two women representing postcolonial Algeria), and even less Hania, who at the end of the novel, seems less anxious about being "habitée" as a consequence of liberating the voice which haunts her. Liberating the lexical item from negative connotations through a different act of translation focused on content, on subject matter has also liberated our author from the dilemma of writing in a metropolitan language.

The orientation of the narrative toward the oral speech of the women storytellers results in a double-voiced discourse. This narrative strategy approximates the Russian 'skaz' that Bakhtin defines as "an orientation toward someone else's speech, and only then, as a consequence, toward oral speech."<sup>46</sup> Bakhtin explained that this narrative strategy results in a double-voiced discourse. The syntactic and lexical peculiarities noticed in the passage above mark the intersection of two voices and accents, which can be explained precisely by double-voicedness. The authorial narrator's voice, merged with the voice of "l'interviewuse," is oriented toward the oral speech of the women storytellers.

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46 Bakhtin (1984), 191.

Merging the voice of the authorial narrator with the voices of the other women, the narrative realizes an orientation toward someone else's (women's) speech, manner of seeing and conveying what is seen, producing an orientation towards oral speech. In other words, figural idiom and perspective, toned with Algerian Arabic dialect, become the background of the novel where the standard French which gives form to the novel is subordinated to this oral voice. Djébar writes in French but "she foregrounds [...] the vocal" as Nada Elia has put it.<sup>47</sup>

Here one may add that this orientation toward oral speech within the passage not only serves to endorse the oral but, at the same time, neutralizes the French language. Rhetorically, and through orientation of a narrative focalized by the narrator towards the speech of the women storytellers, Djébar privileges the oral, while maintaining the French in a subordinate position to provide for her novel its material form. Indeed to revise the Algerian past and to revive the oral, "Djébar's use of French [...] disarms that language, reducing it to the role of medium rather than agent of oppression"<sup>48</sup> writes Nada Elia. In the interview with Mortimer, Djébar has explained her technique, "Je pense que le plus important pour moi est de ramener le passé malgré ou à travers l'écriture, 'mon' écriture de langue française. Je tente d'ancrer cette langue française dans l'oralité des femmes traditionnelles. Je l'enracine ainsi."<sup>49</sup> Additionally, through her reworking of French to write women's voices, Djébar rhetorically 'steps out' of her dilemma concerning her use of French to articulate the past as experienced by Algerian women<sup>50</sup> as she 'steps down' to the level of her interviewees and identifies with them.

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47 Nada Elia, *Trances Dances and Vociferations: Agency and Resistance in African Women's Narratives* (London: Garland Pub., Inc., 2001), 22.

48 Nada Elia, 37.

49 Djébar & Mortimer (1988), 201.

50 After the independence of the country, Djébar lived a dilemma related to her use of French to write her novels. She says about this dilemma "Il est sûr que, à ce moment-là, [after Independence] je me suis vraiment posée la question: 'Est-ce que je ne dois pas vraiment me tourner vers la langue arabe?' Ce qui fait que je suis restée longtemps, je ne dirai pas sans écrire, mais sans rechercher vraiment un public," *ibid*, 199.

Consequently, the narration is a mixture of a range of written, literary, oral, and colloquial styles. Yet far from merging harmoniously, the narrational styles of the novel are contending forms as if the struggle between the French ethic of order and the Algerian ethos of perseverance and defiance were being played out at the discursive level. The FID is thus naturalized in the text by polyvocality. The double-voiced utterances serve to reinforce the clash between Algerian dialect and French language that unfolds in the time of the telling of the story, as they serve to reinforce the division of the author. Djébar, however, maintains that the French language that she uses is finally unable to communicate the richness, the intonation, the idiom of the original Arabic structures, as we can infer from the following conversation, between dame Lionne, Mina and the narrator:

J'espère obtenir bientôt, dit-elle, si Dieu le veut, sept à huit kilos au moins de ce raisin recherché ; on l'appelle le *cherchali*. [...] Toi qui es de la ville, tu te souviens, n'est-ce pas, de son nom : le raisin *ahmar bou 'Ammar* !

Je me souviens je réponds, presque mélancolique et me tournant vers Mina, traduisant de l'arabe dialectal en français : *Ahmar bou 'Ammar*, ce si fameux raisin de table, comment transposer ces mots, Mina ? (Je cherche, je souris puis, incertaine :)

*Rouge écarlate, le raisin de 'Ammar'*

Un peu trop long, remarque Mina. La concision, en arabe, est belle car il y a rime ! (115)

Eventually, to close with Djébar's use of FID in omniscient narration, it is clear that FID has allowed her flexibility and multiplicity. It allows her the flexibility to move smoothly and rapidly from one character to another. She gives a voice to many since the narrator is continually surrendering the story to the various characters. The narrator, omniscient because she can enter the characters' minds and describe their thoughts, relinquishes her authority, often making pure narration secondary to the FID. By letting the characters speak for themselves from within the narration, she gradually refrains from that omniscient objective narration. With the omniscient narrator's retreat, characters recover both autonomy and dignity. Additionally, Djébar's choice of FID stems from the ability it gives her to represent difference; the narrator can move the focus swiftly and smoothly from voice to voice, consequently shifting the perspective,

thus undercutting the dominance of the narrator, without simply replacing it by first-person monologue.

However, this autonomy and dignity can only be effective if they are accompanied by the will and the ability to listen. To this end, Djébar's use of FID with omniscient narration preserves the sense of listening as the characters' voices are presented as being heard. In this context, Djébar's use of FID corresponds to the definition of Gilbert D. Chaitin, who describes FID as a matter of listening and retransmitting; "style indirect libre paved the way for the invasion of narrative [...] by dialogue, the progressive effacement of narrative voice, by making narration a matter of listening rather than speaking, of echoing, receiving and retransmitting."<sup>51</sup> Taking a cue from Volosinov and Bakhtin, Chaitin emphasizes that FID "marks the transformation of the narrator from the traditional authoritative role of the one who knows (the past, the truth, etc.), to the receptive function of the one who listens." The narrator's role in FID is thus not restricted to "simple recording and transmitting; [...] 'it is marked by an active reception of the other speaker's speech.'"<sup>52</sup> The omniscient narrator in *La Femme* listens, repeats the echo and espouses the perspectives that she wants to transmit.

Djébar exploits FID with omniscient narration in order to render the effect of the voices of the women who tell their stories as they echo through the mind of the listener. It thus serves to portray the unvoiced impression of the one who receives the narration—be it the narrator or the reader. The reader shares the characters' thoughts in their own words, and although they are presented by the voice of the narrator, the reader is not told about but shown them.

Alongside this use with omniscient narration, FID is a technique used even in texts essentially presented in the novel as oral discourse, texts that Djébar separates from written discourse by the heading: "voix de..." or "voice of ..." followed by the

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51 Gilbert D. Chaitin, "Listening Power: Flaubert, Zola, and the Politics of Style Indirect Libre" *The French Review* 72. 6 (May 1999), 1023-1024.

52 Ibid, 1029-30.

name of the storyteller. Rediscovered in oral discourse, FID is also a technique that Djébar uses with first person narratives with internal focalization. Actually, FID in oral and first person narratives are uncommon and less frequent in novels. Equally, in this novel, FID is used not only with accounts using the past, which is the most appropriate tense used with FID. *La Femme* extends this by using FID in texts written in the present, a usage rarely noticed in research about FID.

Indeed, according to Fludernik, research has neglected if not denied the existence of FID in oral and or in first and second person narration, as it has neglected its use with the present tense. Fludernik notes that many scholars, including Ann Banfield (1982), Frans Plank (1986), Manfred Von Roncador (1988) deny the existence of FID within oral discourse. On the contrary, in response to such research, Fludernik asserts “In fact, free indirect discourse occurs pervasively in the oral language [...] On similar lines, most examples of free indirect discourse that have been discussed have concentrated on third person narrative, but the device equally exists in first person texts. Besides [...] free indirect discourse can now be discovered in more experimental kinds of writing, [...] in second person narrative.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, Fludernik opposes the neglect of research to the occurrence of FID in texts written in the present. She writes, “free indirect discourse occurs not only in narratives using the narrative past tense or preterite—the ‘standard’ case, so to speak, which is assumed to be the only one in most studies of free indirect discourse—but also in texts written entirely in the present tense, a fact that has been little noted in work on free indirect discourse.”<sup>54</sup>

In *La Femme*, Djébar finds in FID with the first person narrative as well as with oral discourse a happy ground first to empower the marginalized Algerian women with voice, and second to incorporate Algerian Arabic in a French text, which is her means to revive and revise the past rhetorically. To illustrate, we take as example an extract chosen from the beginning of the prelude:

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53 Fludernik (1993), 80-81.

54 Ibid, 85.

*Histoire de Zoulikha: l'inscrire enfin, ou plutôt la réinscrire...*

La première fois, c'était au printemps de 1976, me semble-t-il. *Je me trouve chez la fille de l'héroïne de la ville. De ma ville, « Césarée », c'est son nom du passé, Césarée pour moi et à jamais...*

*La seconde des filles de l'héroïne, qui vient d'arriver d'Alger, me dévisage d'un regard ardent – un des assistants m'a hélée, en me tendant une bobine son pour le Nagra. Elle a répété mon prénom, elle a sursauté. Elle m'interpelle, et sa voix lente soudain s'emporte:*

Je vous attendais ! Ce mur qui limite notre patio, c'est bien celui de la maison de votre père, n'est ce pas ?

*Je fais oui de la tête ; en arrivant ici, une heure auparavant, je m'étais fait silencieusement la remarque : «Tout contre la vieille maison de mon père, vraiment !.... »*

Je vous ai attendue des années, et vous ne venez que maintenant !

*Voix haute et cabrée, cette fois, de la jeune femme. Je souris, un peu lasse.*

je suis là ; en retard peut-être, mais là ! Travaillons !...

Elle et moi, nous avons enfin commencé : *histoire de Zoulikha* (13-14)

The italicized parts of this quotation can be interpreted as FID. Fludernik's persuasive explanation of how to distinguish FID in first person narratives is very helpful in this context. She writes "In first person narrative the character through whose consciousness one perceives things in free indirect discourse is the 'experiencing self', the narrator's self as character in the tale, to be distinguished from the 'narrating self.'"<sup>55</sup> In the passage above, FID is essentially marked by the fusion of the voice of the narrator with the power to organize, order the events and to comment the narration, 'the narrating self,' with the voice of the narrator character participating in action, 'the experiencing self'. Equally, the shift in the tense of the narration as well as the unusual lexis and the syntactic deviations such as the use of fragmentary sentences are other markers of FID.

Through its FID elements, this passage seems to indicate that there is a story, indeed a history, that needs to be put down on paper in emergency and that, though late "en retard mais là," the nomadic author returns to her native town to pull together its fragments among the fragmented speech of women, that Djébar identifies in a later text

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55 Ibid., 81.

as “paroles, par bribes éparses” (80). Through its FID features, the passage seems to emphasize the fact that there is a story and a history within “Histoire de Zoulikha,” twice mentioned without the definite article, that the author records from her nomadic position and with an intermittent voice. This voice is modified under the effect of listening and echoing the voices of women. Liberated by the force of memories, these broken voices acquire the power of reorienting history.

In this extract, contrary to what is common about FID, we distinguish the use of the present with sentences which can be free indirect, within a first person narrative recounting a past event which happened in 1976. The FID changes the tense of the narrative from the past to the present. Djébar, who starts her novel with a bivocal phrase where the voice of ‘the experiencing self’ mixes with the voice of ‘the narrating self,’ prepares through this the lines which follow. What follows curiously intermingles the past and the present; the tense shifts from the past « c’était » to present « je me trouve ». This present summoned by the past requires from the nomadic author returning late to her native town Césarée to unify her efforts with those of a woman from her postcolonial generation to work together “travailler”. The past calls for the present to change it, it is a past freed to be written or rewritten in the present just as this discourse is indirect and free.

Coming after the “imparfait” in “c’était au printemps,” the present in “je me trouve” strikes the reader by an element of topicality and immediacy that arises in the narrative. The statement refers clearly to a ‘now’ and even to a future, and tends to provoke in the reader a feeling of expectation: what will happen in urgency? Through this shift in tense, the point of view shifts, attended by the journey of the narrating self in time and place, and introduces a subjective element in a narrative that swings between internal and external focalization. The narrator speaks sometimes from an internal position, at others from an external position, seeking to convince the reader of the importance to write down or rewrite down “histoire de Zoulikha,” just as the narrating self seeks to convince her accusing interlocutor about the necessity to start work even though late. Actually, the reader is also summoned to participate in the

process of rewriting down “histoire de Zoulikha,” which is not a story of the heroism of an individual woman, but “histoire de Zoulikha” may refer to the “History” of a nation which needs to be rewritten out of the fragmented speech of women. This process of historical inscription is necessary to constitute an ample gaze on the future (of Algeria) and to enable accurate questioning of the present.

The second example that we propose to illustrate how FID is used to reinsert the oral in *La Femme*, and thereby to rewrite history, is a polyphonic passage merging many voices in the same narrative. In this passage, we discover with the author FID as a “stratégie inconsciente” (142) rediscovered among “les paroles, par bribes éparses, de Zohra Oudai” (80) echoing in the mind of the female listener, “écoutouse”:

Si cette table basse pouvait parler...*Elle est le seul souvenir qu'il me reste de ma demeure incendiée.* (Après un silence :) Quand Zoulikha venait au douar, elle apportait les médicaments, elle apportait la poudre, elle apportait l'argent !... Déguisée en vieille —elle, alors encore si belle—, elle enlevait son dentier, elle tirait ses cheveux et les dissimulait sous une coiffe de paysanne, *comme on les aime ici, d'une serge d'un noir luisant et orange* ; elle ajoutait un vieux pan de drap usé sur sa tête et ses épaules, comme si elle était pauvre. *(Elle qui aurait pu vivre dans la ville richement, mais tout leur argent, à elle et à El Hadj, était versé, en grande partie, d'abord à la medersa, puis à « l'organisation », puisque le temps de la lutte ouverte avait sonné !)*

Zohra Oudai a hoché la tête, replongée dans ce passé pour le revivre — l'amertume ayant disparu de sa voix, en tout cas impétueuse, comme si le « temps de la lutte ouverte » subsistait ; une incandescence invisible.

Ainsi, « notre » Zoulikha, si elle était née homme, aurait été général chez nous, comme chez bien d'autres peuples, car elle n'a jamais craint quiconque et elle aimait l'action, plus encore que mon frère, El Hadj — *que dieu l'assiste au paradis des héros !* — lui qui était si doux, brave mais trop doux !

Elle a soupiré derechef.

Elle allait et venait, notre dame, des mois durant : extérieurement, elle semblait une errante, presque une mendiante, *comme tu les vois au marché, ces vendeuses d'œufs et de poules, et d'herbes médicinales !* Zoulikha portait son couffin *comme ces anonymes de notre pauvre peuple : sans foyer ni protection, telles celles qui vont sur les routes, intrépidement !... Que craindre, pour*

*une vieille femme, dis-moi ? Même pas les voleurs ! Oui* (elle s'est perdu dans un silence, puis, en se secouant, elle a repris son récit) : Zoulikha descendait et remontait, de votre ville à nos collines, et jusqu'à la montagne, car elle savait où s'orienter pour chaque refuge... Surtout pour la poudre qu'elle a transportée, ainsi, couffin après couffin, *comme une bête de somme !*

[...] Quand le commissaire politique (encore deux mots en français !) survenait, il notait par écrit tout ce que Zoulikha apportait. Ils écrivaient [...] *ici même, sur ma meida : cette table, si elle avait une âme, comme elle aurait parlé !...*

(Sur ce, fuse son rire presque d'enfant) (80-83).

Many voices merge in this passage where we have used italics to mark FID. The voice of the storyteller swings between the past and the present, between 'a narrating self,' commenting the narration and 'an experiencing self.' This voice is doubled sometimes by other voices including the voice of the omniscient narrator and even the voice of Zoulikha, the heroine of the story told by Zohra. While the voice of the narrator is clearly marked (a third person omniscient voice commenting the narration with an external focalization), the voice of Zoulikha is incorporated in the speech of Zohra in "Que craindre, pour une vieille femme, dis-moi ? Même pas les voleurs!" This exclamatory sentence preceded by a tag question is integrated within the speech of Zohra without overt markers.

Within this narrative, the marks of FID are also the marks of an Algerian Arabic dialect, of an oral discourse that is noticed at the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels. On the syntactic level, in addition to the shift in the tense of the narration and the broken syntax, a set of expressive elements proper to oral discourse inform Zohra's account. Essentially, clear intonational markers: modulation of pitch, speed and volume, mimicry and tone of voice express bitterness, irony, or joy. In the passage quoted, the storyteller begins with a voice of bitterness caused by her reflection about the present, which is as harmful as the past for this peasant that Independence has made more miserable. Her brief reflection on the present within "cette table basse... Elle est le seul souvenir qu'il me reste de ma demeure incendiée. (Après un silence :)" has reduced her voice to silence. However, the storyteller escapes the bitterness of the present through

immersion in the past thereby her voice regains the joy of the meeting with specters from the past. Orality in this passage is equally marked by other expressive elements such as exclamations, repetitions, questions, or incomplete sentences. With these features, there are also the lexical peculiarities of Algerian Arabic words transposed in French such as the words “*medersa*” and “*meida*” which signal the will to write down this other language as a linguistic as well as a cultural peculiarity.

These multiple voices or this fragmented spare speech follow the narrator-author and her friend, “les pousse sur le chemin en trace mouvante et infatigable, en un flux imperceptible, murmurant contre leurs oreilles, elles qui, de concert, gardent le silence” (82). This moving trace, this oral whispering narrative demands to be promptly written down. This urgency is marked by the shift in tense from the past to the present, just as it is marked by the bitterness of the voice of Zohra evoking the present. Through fragmented speech and intermittent voices, the nomadic author echoes by writing down this moving trace, that whispering narrative in a French language sufficiently modified to allow orality, to destabilize, as a historically reliable source, official historiography.

To recapitulate, we can argue that Djébar uses FID sparingly, moving rapidly from omniscient narration, to direct speech, to reported speech, to FID, thus creating the continually shifting focus, the refusal to settle, which pervades the work. She includes what characters say publicly as well as what they think privately, and FID allows her layers of perspective, a technique whereby she can create a sense of rapid oscillation. Furthermore, we find heterogeneity of perspective and resistance to both summation and linearity. Djébar’s choice of FID as a central narrative technique is motivated largely by the way in which it allows her to re-present literal voices of many characters. It is through FID that these voices can be heard, can interrupt one another, and break down any semblance of totalization. It is thus through FID that the narrative of the return to the past to inscribe occulted histories has evaded the dangers of “appropriation and effacement.”

To conclude this reading, Djébar's alternative dynamics in the the recuperation task allowed her to restore even those harmful experiences which could not be represented but only evoked. They also allowed her to revise and challenge the different representations of Algerian history focused on repeating discourses of "victimization and heroism," and gendering and erotization, which allow the "appropriation and effacement" of this history.

## **5 Rewriting History in *The Joys of Motherhood***

## 5.1 A History of Burials

*The Joys of Motherhood* was first published in 1979; it is Emecheta's best-known and most widely discussed novel. It is about Nnu Ego, the daughter of the village, Ibuza, respectful chief, Nwaokocha Agbadi and his beautiful defiant mistress, Ona. Through the story of Nnu Ego, the novel makes a number of points about the plight of women in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria as affected by traditional patriarchy and colonialism. *The Joys of Motherhood* chronicles the personal dilemma of Nnu Ego, whose life is torn as a consequence of her desperate adherence to dying traditional customs in an urban space characterized by drastic changes, brought by the change of time. Nnu Ego was born and grew-up up in the rural village Ibuza, where traditional values and lifestyles are still maintained, and she therefore has been brought up to respect Igbo custom. Yet she moves to live all her adult life in an urban space, Lagos, where traditional values are giving way under the pressures of Western capitalism, education, and the mixture of various cultures (Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, and European).

The description of the setting focuses on how Emecheta plays with the notion of time in the novel where we notice interplay between “Western diachronicity and traditional African synchronicity,”<sup>1</sup> or between Western time and traditional African time. In the novel, the interplay between “Western diachronicity and traditional African synchronicity” is determined by the movement of the protagonist between two different spaces, the rural Igbo village Ibuza and urban Lagos, marking the most important events in the cycle of her life, namely birth, marriage, and death which are the components of

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1 We have made use of Anthony Barthelemy's distinction between “Western diachronicity and traditional African synchronicity” in the novels of Buchi Emecheta to read Emecheta's rewriting of history in *The Joys of Motherhood*. See Anthony Barthelemy, “Western Time, African lives: Time in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta,” in *Callaloo* 40 (Summer, 1989), 559-574.

traditional African “synchronic or cyclical time.”<sup>2</sup> The setting contrasts two spaces. On the one hand, we see the rural Ibuza where time is cyclical, and on the other hand, there is urban Lagos where time is rather diachronic.

The novel reflects upon the changes in time and space as they affect the characters. The largest part depicts the effect of these changes on women, mainly on the protagonist Nnu Ego whose life seems to be much more affected by the vicissitudes of cyclical time. This projection of a protagonist immersed in cyclical time but who has to confront the requirements of diachronicity seems to repeat Julia Kristeva’s “Women’s Time.” Kristeva argues that women’s biological nature and their procreative role links them to the modalities of two temporalities, cyclical or natural time defined by ‘repetition’ common in nature, and monumental time defined by its ‘eternity.’ She writes, “these two types of temporality (cyclical and monumental) are traditionally linked to female subjectivity”<sup>3</sup> which

would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations. On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable jouissance. On the other hand, and perhaps as a consequence, there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality [...] All-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space this temporality re-minds one of [...] the various myths of resurrection which, in all religious beliefs, perpetuate the vestige of an anterior or concomitant maternal cult.<sup>4</sup>

These two temporalities are confronted with the modalities of linear time, or a diachronic time “which is readily labeled masculine.”<sup>5</sup> Being immersed in cyclical and monumental temporalities, women have developed a problematic relation to time, “female subjectivity as it gives itself up to intuition becomes a problem with respect to a

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2 Barthelemy, 560.

3 Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blade, *Signs* 7.1 (1981): 18.

4 Ibid., 16-17.

5 Ibid., 18

certain conception of time: time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival-in other words, the time of history.”<sup>6</sup> Kristeva traces the relation of feminist movements in Europe and America to time and shows the dilemma of feminists about where to recognize themselves vis-a vis the two forms of time, cyclical, monumental vs linear, diachronic.

Following a feminist perspective, our novel depicts the effect of immersion into cyclical time on women living in a world torn between the requirements of two times. The projection of the conflict of the protagonist under the effect of the changes in time seems to respond to a feminist requirement. However, seen from a different perspective, the novel represents the conflicts of women and men living in a space torn between the requirements of a cyclical and diachronic time. It also projects the effect of diachronicity, which is a manifestation of western hegemonic influence, as harmful towards traditional culture, favorable of a cyclical time. “For Emecheta,” writes Barthelemy, “diachronicity ultimately represents an alien and aggressive force that not only disputes old values but that also corrupts and debases traditional ways and the community that extends backward and forward in time. Diachronicity ultimately seeks to deny Africans dignity and pride by validating racist and imperialist misconceptions of African culture.”<sup>7</sup> Projecting the conflicts of life in between and showing the Orientalizing effect of colonization on individuals and their living habits seems to repeat a postcolonial perspective.

The novel depicts the life of the protagonist as largely affected by cyclical time. Nnu Ego's birth embodies the recurrence of a significant past moment, from the realm of synchronicity. Her birth embodies the vengeful return of a slave woman who has been buried alive with her mistress during a funeral ceremony. The history of the slave woman communicates the complex dynamics of an unfair caste system. The slave girl is actually a woman who has been “promised to a river goddess.”<sup>8</sup> Nwokocha Agbadi,

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6 Ibid., 17

7 Barthelemy, 561.

8 Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 31. All subsequent

Nnu Ego's father, has kidnapped her during his raids on surrounding villages testifying upon his profitable involvement in the slave trade. Agbadi has offered the slave woman as a servant to Agunwa, his senior wife. When Agunwa dies because of her distress for being neglected by her husband who favors the company of his mistress, the slave woman has been required as local custom dictates to be buried with her mistress. But the slave woman resists custom and refuses to be buried. Outraged by her resistance, Agunwa's eldest son beats the slave woman to death. Yet before her death, she promises to return to the family as a vengeful *chi*—"the guiding spirit from the realm of the living-dead."<sup>9</sup> She returns through Nnu Ego and wreak havoc into her life.

This ritual time seems to have the strongest hold on Nnu Ego's life. As a baby, she has suffered from unbearable headaches, which continue throughout her childhood and girlhood. The headaches have been caused by the vengeful *chi*. With her first marriage, the vengeful *chi* manifests itself by denying Nnu Ego children, which results in her divorce. With the failure of her first marriage, her father arranges another marriage for her; he sends her away from the village to marry Nnaife Owulum, an Ibo man living in Lagos. This marriage involves Nnu Ego into new trials.

With her second and long-lasting marriage, Nnu Ego moves to urban Lagos where she has to confront a new time, a diachronic Western time characterized through Nnu Ego's eyes with ugliness. Nnu Ego's movement in place is paralleled with a change in time. Nnu Ego's first confrontation with this new time and new place is that of estrangement. The narrative representing the thoughts of Nnu Ego describes this first confrontation, "Nnu Ego arrived in Lagos and was led [...] to a queer-looking house" (40) where a man with "crude ways and ugly appearance," who smells unhealthy "all soapy as if he was over-washed," "raped" her as he "demanded his marital right"(44). Nnaife, Nnu Ego's husband is not only ugly, but he also lacks romance, as he obliges

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quotations from *The Joys* will be taken from this edition, and page references will appear in the text in parentheses.

9 Stephane Robolin, "Gendered Hauntings, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Interpretive Acts and Postcolonial Theory" in *Research in African Literatures* 35. 3 (Fall 2004), 76.

her to consume the marriage without the least celebrations the very first night she arrives to his house exhausted after a four-day trip. Early, the encounter with the new time and place frustrates Nnu Ego who hates her new environment and could never adapt to it.

In "Western Time African Lives," Barthelemy reflects about the characteristics of this time and its effects on characters. He explains that the symbolic marker of this new time is a "clock," which allows the English colonizer to control and enter into the intimate life of the Igbo family. Barthelemy writes,

A clock serves as the overdetermined symbol of Western time and Western encroachment in *The Joys of Motherhood*, and the mechanical device ticks off every second of estrangement from family and pre-colonial culture for Nnu Ego, [...]. Moreover, this clock allows the English to intrude themselves into the intimate life of Nnu-Ego and Nnaife, [...]. Indeed, he seems to be robbed of his manhood by the clock, and he becomes the focus of Nnu Ego's hatred of English culture and its dominance over Africans and African ways.<sup>10</sup>

While living with Nnaife, Nnu Ego has noticed that the time of her husband is regulated by a clock. This clock has been given to Nnaife by his master as a means to control him, "Her husband Nnaife would get up at six in the morning by the clock the master and his wife had given him" (47). Different instances in the novel show how Nnaife's life has been entirely regulated by this clock: "So regularly timed was his daily progression that one could tell the hour of the day by what he was doing. They gave him the grand title 'Nnaife, the washerman.' So good was he at his job that, for a small consideration the master's friends often borrowed him" (47).

Through regulating their time, the colonizer has enslaved husbands. Nnaife's time so regulated belongs to the white masters. He has nearly no time left for his family; the narrative explains, "He only had half a day off in the week and that was on Sundays, when he worked till two o'clock in the afternoon. So he had little time to take notice of Nnu Ego, and she did not look or ask for any attention from him. She had come to

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<sup>10</sup> Barthelemy, 566.

accept him as one of the inevitabilities of fate" (47). The "virtual enslavement"<sup>11</sup> of husbands to the Western demands is the general rule. When Nnu Ego complains to her friend Cordelia about the enslavement of her husband to his white masters, Cordelia sympathizes: "You want a husband who has *time* to ask you if you wish to eat rice, or drink corn pap with honey? Forget it. Men here are too busy being white men's servants to be men. We women mind the home. Not our husbands. Their manhood has been taken away from them. The shame of it is that they don't know it. All they see is the money, shining white man's money" (emphasis mine) (51).

While in Cordelia's assessment, the grievances of Nnu Ego are caused by the problem of time, Emecheta wants to denote two evils of "Western industrialization and capitalism," namely emasculation and mechanization.<sup>12</sup> One significant effect of the virtual enslavement of men as noticed by women is emasculation. Nnaife, who has been stripped of his time for a low salary, is also stripped of his manhood since the job he fulfills for the whites is "unmanly" and according to Nnu Ego "irrespectful." Nnu Ego has always resented her husband's job, "She had at first rejected his way of earning a living and had asked him why he could not find a more respectful job" (47). Later, Nnu Ego grows very resentful of the job and hateful of the husband who seems satisfied with a job that emasculates him "But every time she saw her husband hanging out the white woman's smalls, Nnu Ego would wince as someone in pain. The feeling would cut deeper when, with sickening heart, she heard Nnaife talking effusively about his treatment of dainty clothes and silks. The man was actually proud of his work, she realised" (47). Her inner pain caused by her despise to her husband grows so bad that she once "stood up angrily and declared: [...] I wouldn't have left the house of Amatokwu to come and live with a man who washes women's underwear. A man indeed!" (48).

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11 Ibid., 567.

12 Barthelemy, 567.

The second important effect of “virtual enslavement” to the white man is mechanization. The way Nnaife fulfills his unmanly and inhuman job with clock regularity reduces him to a machine. In “Western Time African Lives,” Barthelemy notes, “Nnaife, the washerman, moves with the regularity of a clock, and he is in fact reduced to a kind of machine, a machine that performs unmanly work for racist whites.”<sup>13</sup> Machine-like, Nnaife “had little time to take notice of Nnu Ego;” he is unable to offer his wife either love or romance. When he notices Nnu Ego's first pregnancy during a dispute, Nnu Ego complains about his unfeeling reaction, and their conversation unfolds to show his lack of romance:

“you are not only ugly but you are a shatterer of dreams. I imagined that when I told my husband of my coming child I should tell it nicely...”

“Yes, maybe by the moonlight, or on your goatskin by the fireside” (49).

Machine-like, Nnaife shows no feeling towards the pregnancy of his wife. His only reaction is to recommend his wife to keep her pregnancy secret, “if you are pregnant [...] there is still one problem. What will they say in the church? We have not been married there. If I do not marry you in church they will remove our names from the church register and Madam here will not like it. I may even lose my job. So keep it quiet, will you?” (50). Nnu Ego grows very hateful of the place and time that have gradually enslaved even the women. She feels outraged that “Madam” would interfere with her intimate family life, and would even strip her of expressing her joy of motherhood. Later, a friend to whom Nnu Ego complains that “these our husbands are like slaves, don't you think?” points out that the situation is even worse for women: “They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them badly, they take it out on us. The only difference is that they are given some pay for their work, instead of having been bought” (51).

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13 Barthelemy, 567.

Though hateful of this time, Nnu Ego has tried to appropriate the best of its features to escape enslavement. After suffering through a particularly difficult time, Nnu Ego realizes that "[s]he and her husband were ill-prepared for a life like this, where only pen and not mouth could really talk. Her children must learn" (179). She apprehends the importance of education; she therefore invests in the education of her sons to save them from enslavement. However, while investing in the education of her sons, she understands but very late that the freedom that Western culture seems to offer in guise of education for her sons is inseparable from Western industrial time, which has enslaved, emasculated, and mechanized her husband. Nnu Ego ignores that with education, a fundamental manifestation of diachronic time, her sons would learn other principles than those of the Igbo custom. Deeply involved in the achievement of her single purpose—collecting the joys of motherhood at old age as a consequence of the success of her educated sons—she could not see that her sons would grow selfish and unfeeling like their father or maybe worse.

Nnu Ego's future hopes about collecting the joys of motherhood in old age belong to another time, to the cyclical time, and they therefore cannot be fulfilled through her children who grow up in a capitalistic environment and who have been educated to show little or no respect to old custom regardless. What starts with selfishness, ends in a rejection of local culture manifested in the conduct of Nnu Ego's educated sons who have unthinkingly preferred to leave their economically ruined parents during old age and follow the white man westward. Their later marriage with Western white women is significant to show that under the effect of diachronicity, Nnu Ego is stripped even of hoping that her children would support her in old age. As Cynthia Ward puts it "Her educated sons, immersed in seeking self-fulfillment in the New World, perceive her as having no significance and refuse to break for her sake the ivory ornaments of the literate values that they have acquired and that invest them with prestige. Instead, Nnu Ego is crushed."<sup>14</sup> Nnu Ego's deception caused by the neglect of her children has led to

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14 Cynthia Ward, "What They Told Buchi Emecheta: Oral Subjectivity and the Joys of "Otherhood," *Modern Language Association* 105 (Jan. 1990), 95.

her final disintegration; the narrative tells that "what actually broke her was, month after month, expecting to hear from her son[s]" (224).

With this failure, we reach the last stage in Nnu Ego's cyclical life, namely her death, which is underscored by a return to the rural village Ibuza and to synchronic time. The narrative describing her death is very significant, "Nnu Ego dies alone by the roadside. After such wandering on one night, Nnu Ego lay down by the roadside, thinking that she had arrived home. She died quietly there, with no child to hold her hand and no friend to talk to her. She had never made many friends, so busy had she been building up her joys as a mother" (224). Dying alone is a curse according to Igbo custom. With this new curse, the reader is reminded of the old curse, which has marked Nnu Ego's birth. Ironically, while Nnu Ego is cursed at birth to pay for her father's transgressions, she is also cursed at her death to pay for the transgressions of her children, basically her sons, in whom she has invested a lot, and who fail to fulfill the filial duties prescribed by tradition. The children, whose failure is displaced to be projected on the mother, return to Ibuza after the death of their mother to offer her "a second burial,"

When her children heard of her sudden death they all, even Oshia, came home. They were all sorry she had died before they were in a position to give their mother a good life. She had the noisiest and most costly second burial Ibuza had ever seen, and a shrine was made in her name, so that her grandchildren could appeal to her should they be barren.

Stories afterwards, however, said that Nnu Ego was a wicked woman even in death because, however many people appealed to her to make women fertile, she never did. Poor Nnu Ego, even in death she had no peace! Still, many agreed that she had given all to her children. The joy of being a mother was the joy of giving all to your children, they said.

And her reward? Did she not have the greatest funeral Ibuza had ever seen? It took Oshia [her son] three years to pay off the money he borrowed to show the world what a good son he was. That was why people failed to understand why she did not answer their prayer, for what else could a woman want but to have sons who would give her a decent burial?

Nnu Ego had it all, yet still did not answer prayers for children. (224)

Two warring interpretations underlie Emecheta's ending passage. Within the children who "came home" to give their mother a "decent second burial" and to make "a shrine...in her name" and "The joy of being a mother was the joy of giving all to your children," we distinguish a postcolonial perspective relying on the celebration of women as sacrificial mothers and on the importance of the return to the past with the objective of celebrating its rituals and structures against imperialist denigration. On the other hand, within "Nnu Ego was a wicked woman even in death," the eternal curse against women by tradition is pronounced. Then within "Poor Nnu Ego, even in death she had no peace!" a feminist defense is structured against this curse. Indeed, through projecting the curse and its condemnation, Emecheta's text is reminiscent of a feminist perspective calling for the depiction and the condemnation of structures allowing the victimization of women.

In other words, read according to a postcolonial perspective, the belated return of the children coming from diachronicity for a second burial underscores the celebration of what belongs to cyclical time as second burials in Igbo custom are times for celebrations and not mourning. During second burials, "there is feasting and merry-making rather than mourning and wailing," writes Austin Echema who also explains some of the significances of the rituals "it is a time to give the departed a hearty send-off on his/her journey into the spirit world, [...] Placate the spirit of the dead person," as it is time to "driving away any vindictive spirits that may be loitering in the vicinity of the house of the deceased."<sup>15</sup> It is also time to celebrating his achievements: "the family uses this occasion to show off what the deceased left behind in terms of material wealth and human resources. With this ceremony, it is believed that the deceased has now reached the land of the spirits and the living is guaranteed protection."<sup>16</sup>

The belated return of the children coming from modernity to placate and to reconcile with the spirit of the dead mother, to celebrate her heroic achievements

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15 Austin Echema, *Igbo Funeral Rites Today: Anthropological and Theological Perspectives* (Berlin: LIT VERLAG, 2010), 41.

16 Ibid., 43.

suggests reconciliation with the past and its dead symbols underscored by ritual celebrations. The time of the celebrations is neither cyclical nor diachronic, it projects what Bhabha describes as a time lag, “[w]here these temporalities touch contingently, their spatial boundaries metonymically overlapping, at that moment their margins are lagged, sutured, by the indeterminate articulation of the 'disjunctive' present. Time-lag keeps alive the making of the past.”<sup>17</sup>

The time lag or liminality is marked by the dialectical discourses about the value of motherhood that emerged during the celebrations and after. The event of the second burial offered by the children to reconcile with the mother and the past opens up a third or supplementary space discernable in the dialogue that emerges among the people of the community with opposing points of view about the value of motherhood and that of womanhood, and which was not a subject of dispute before contact with modernity. The value of motherhood takes new meanings, disputed among those who valorize womanhood by motherhood and those who lament the fate of womanhood.

However, read according to a feminist perspective, this ending passage projects the failures of the past and present suggested through curses and burials prescribed by tradition and a cyclical time operating through a caste-gendered system and reinforced by diachronicity and western influence. Actually, with the children offering a “second decent burial” to the mother, burial becomes a significant metaphor. It is worth mentioning here that burial is a common feminist metaphor as noted by Diana Wallace,

In the twentieth century, metaphors of burial, imprisonment and spectrality proliferate in feminist theory, used by, among others, Virginia Woolf, Hannah Gavron, Adrienne Rich, Luce Irigaray, Sarah Kofman, Diana Fuss and Judith Butler, in ways which suggest that they have a particular potency as theoretical ‘tools’. There is, however, a shift as they are no longer used to theorise women’s ‘subject’ position specifically within marriage but to analyse the repression of women’s ‘subjectivity’ in a wider sense.<sup>18</sup>

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17 The Location of Culture, 254.

18 Diana Wallace, “‘The Haunting Idea’: Female Gothic Metaphors and Feminist Theory.” *The*

Emecheta repeats and expands the meanings of significant feminist metaphors. Burial becomes Emecheta's metaphor suggesting concealment of failures and imprisonment in ritual time. Nnu Ego's children coming from different urban centers in the country and abroad return to offer "a second burial" to the mother. While the "second burial" conceals the mother's body as well as voice, it also suggests the imprisonment of children in ritual time. The second burial conceals the mother's story, her long struggle, which has been burdened by a curse from ritual time from synchronicity, and overburdened by a curse from diachronicity. The mother dies alone, and her story has been buried once and twice during the children's absence. Ignorant of the mother's story, the children find in ritual time an excellent means to bury the mother and her story with style, "a shrine was made in her name." Imprisoned in ritual time, the returning children, especially those coming from the west, make a "shrine" to remind the grandchildren about the fertility of the mother and the mythic importance of "motherhood."

The "second burial" reminds the reader of the "first burial" of the slave woman who promises to return through the vengeful *chi* or the haunting ghost or specter which stands for what is common in feminist theory as, "the idea of woman as 'dead' or 'buried (alive)' within male power structures which render her 'ghostly'."<sup>19</sup> From the first burial to the second burial, the curse proclaimed by tradition is projected backward and forward. While the truth about the curse of the first burial and the truth about the curse of the second burial remain concealed through entombment, the failures projected backward and forward are deeply buried.

Between the first burial and the second burial lie the failures of all generations, those of the father—Nnu Ego's father—and those of the children. Between the first burial and the second burial, the mother's story is therefore still hidden from the grandchildren since the chain of narration is broken with the absence of the children.

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*Female Gothic: New Directions*, ed. Diana Wallace & Andrew Smith (Hampshire & NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 34.

<sup>19</sup> Diana Wallace, 26.

The children like the father find in ritual a double means to appease guilt and to evade responsibility for personal failures. Like the father who has offered ritual sacrifices to appease Nnu Ego's vengeful *chi*, or to appease his own guilt, the children offer a "second burial" and a "shrine" as an ideal means prescribed by tradition to appease guilt, and all offerings past and present are motivated by a need to evade responsibility for failures.

Beyond the interplay of times which has certainly affected Nnu Ego's choices, with the pessimism suggested through the mother's lonely death by the roadside in Ibuza, and through the return of the children not to dig up the mother's story but to bury it again with a 'shrine', the novel suggests that there is only one time, ritual time which seems to have the strongest role in determining Nnu Ego's as well as her children's and her grandchildren's fate. This time is the ritual time of the burials, the first and the second.

While the first burial is suggestive of the imprisonment of the father's generation—in precolonial or early colonial time—within the confines of a caste gendered system, the second burial is suggestive of the imprisonment of the generation of children—in postcolonial time—within the confines of a mythologized motherhood and an idealized past or its denigration underlying a need to evade responsibility for the failures of the past and those of the present, which will project the curse further forward in the future.

However, though Emecheta's vision of the past and present seems pessimistic through this feminist reading, her masterful use of the art of irony allows her to achieve a reversal of the failures of the past and present. These failures are progressively mocked, exposed in their nakedness through Emecheta's commitment to dig up what has been buried during the first and the second burials. Emecheta offers irony as an excellent way of rewriting history. She offers laughter at imperfections, as a means of atonement and reconciliation with history. In the following sub-chapter, we offer a

reading of Emecheta's dynamics of rewriting history focusing on her most effective means, namely irony.

## **5.2 *The Joys of Motherhood*: the Dynamics of Rewriting History**

Unlike the children of Nnu Ego who return to Ibuza for a "second burial," Emecheta returns to Ibuza and to the past to dig up vigilantly and carefully in order to expose and condemn failures, but also to dig out the treasures or "the booty" of the past. The outcome of this return is the real story of the mother and that of motherhood that has been buried twice. Emecheta makes use of a set of narrative techniques and representational strategies to achieve this purpose. We will focus on her use of irony, which in Emecheta's text is a very rich device drawn from different famous stylicians' arguments about the different uses of irony. Her use of irony stems from Vaheed K. Ramazani's association between irony and free indirect discourse (FID), Bakhtin's concept of parodic stylization, Monika Fludernik's definition of irony and Walter Nash's definition of humor.

Actually Emecheta's use of mockery and humor throughout the novel seems to line with Walter Nash's definition of humor as being "a mode of attack and a line of defense, a method of raising questions and criticizing arguments, a protest against the inequality of the struggle to live, a way of atonement and reconciliation, a treaty with all that is willful, impaired beyond our power to control."<sup>20</sup> Additionally, irony through the different uses of Emecheta corresponds to the definition of Monica Fludernik,

Irony is always a pragmatic phenomenon of an implicational nature; textual contradictions and inconsistencies along-side semantic infelicities, or discrepancies between utterance and action (in

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20 Walter Nash, *The Language of Humor, Style and Technique in Comic Discourse* (NY: Longman, 1985), 1.

the case of hypocrisy), merely signal the interpretational incompatibility, the break in the argument, the crack in the mirror which then requires a recuperatory move on the reader's part—aligning the discrepancy with an intended higher-level significance: irony.<sup>21</sup>

Emecheta's use of irony also links with Ramazani's association between irony and FID. Ramazani writes,

The free indirect mode therefore inscribes its reversible pretense of empathy within an overarching metairony [sic] of narration and reading. The hierarchy of reflector and narrator, subjective and objective, necessarily subsists at the level of corrective irony. But in foregrounding both a uniformity of registers and a disparity of ideologies, the disembodied voice of the free indirect mode also gives rise to textual self-consciousness, or romantic irony. [...] Thus, it is in the free indirect mode that romantic irony best objectifies the dissonance between meaning and experience.<sup>22</sup>

Additionally, Emecheta's association between irony and FID permits her to re-process the current discourses oral and written about the privileges of motherhood in a way that Bakhtin would describe as a parodic stylization. To describe parodic stylization, Bakhtin writes,

In the English comic novel we find a comic-parodic re-processing of almost all the levels of literary language, both conversational and written, that were current at the time. [...] This usually parodic stylization of generic, professional and other strata of language is sometimes interrupted by the direct authorial word (usually as an expression of pathos, of Sentimental or idyllic sensibility), which directly embodies (without any retracting) semantic and axiological intentions of the author. But the primary source of language usage in the comic novel is a highly specific treatment of "common language." This "common language"—usually the average norm of spoken and written language for a given social group—is taken by the author precisely as the *common view*, as the verbal approach to people and things normal for a given sphere of society, as the *going point of view and the going value*. To one degree or another, the author distances himself from this common language, he steps back and objectifies it, forcing his own intentions to refract and

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21 Monika Fludernik (1993), 344.

22 Vaheed K Ramazani, *The Free Indirect Mode. Flaubert and the Poetics of Irony* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1988), 115.

diffuse themselves through the medium of this common view that has become embodied in language (a view that is always superficial and frequently hypocritical).<sup>23</sup>

Essentially, Emecheta's return to the past to rewrite the story of Nnu Ego, or to rewrite history challenges all the discourses past and present, spoken and written which follow the death of Nnu Ego. We start at the end to re-read the story of Nnu Ego with the awareness and vigilance necessary to disclose the underlying meanings within Emecheta's ironies. We therefore offer a rereading of the closing text of the novel starting from the protagonist's death and the repetition of the first curse.

Actually, the irony of the double curse, one at birth and another at death, is “a mode of attack and a line of defense.” Emecheta's projection of Nnu Ego's curse backward and forward affords her the opportunity to criticize gendered practices embedded in a stratified social system. It also allows disclosing the displacement, which has led to the evasion of responsibilities past and present prescribed by tradition. As explained by Stephane Robolin, while tradition imposes punishment as a disciplinary action against wrongs and transgressions,<sup>24</sup> the novel shows that punishment is generally displaced. Women seem to receive the punishing affliction in all times. The favorite daughter has to pay for the transgressions of the father, the senior wife neglected and insulted dies of grief so that the injured husband could be healed through the care of the mistress, and the best slave princess, who has been a river goddess, is ritually murdered to offer the mother a decent burial.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the mother is blamed for the failures of her children, who would curse her has she failed to answer their appeals for fertility and prosperity.

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23 Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist. tran. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin and London: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 301-2.

24 Traditionally, according to Mbiti, “when punishment comes, it comes in the present life. For this reason, misfortunes may be interpreted as indicating that the sufferer has broken some moral or ritual conduct against God, the spirits, the elders or other members of his society” *African Religions and Philosophy*, 205.

25 Stephane Robolin, “Gendered Hauntings, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Interpretive Acts and Postcolonial Theory” in *Research in African Literatures* 35. 3 (Fall 2004), 78.

The irony of the double curse is also repeated to allow reconciliation with tradition. When failures are repeated, exposed and mocked, the underlying dynamics of the caste and gendered system which are deeply embedded in tradition are weakened. With the break in gendered discourses, the reader is required to achieve "a recuperatory move" aligning the discrepancy with an intended higher-level significance. The reader is therefore required to reject and condemn the transgressions that a caste gendered system has imposed on tradition. He is also required to reconcile with this tradition through preserving the treasure; namely the instant punishment "in the present life," to disable the ghosts of the past from returning to haunt the present and future. The grandchildren of Nnu Ego should destroy the shrine and dig up the story to dig out the treasure.

Irony in *The Joys of Motherhood* is as Nash has suggested "a method of raising questions and criticizing arguments." When the transgression underlying the caste and gendered system are disclosed, the text raises questions about the validity of the discourses of male domination as well as the discourses that identify women with tradition. It then draws attention to the underlying aims of these discourses repeated to maintain the subordination of women. Rereading backward, the reader may find out that such discourses subscribing the duties of a good daughter, a good wife, and the good mother repeated among women and men in Iboza and in Lagos in the past and the present are all structured within a "violent hierarchy" aimed to rule women and to maintain their subordination to men. The hierarchy where men hold the superior position to control women must be overthrown and dismantled; in other words, discourses subscribing the duties of women should be challenged in order to overthrow the hierarchy.

Through the rereading of the two closing paragraphs of the novel, we endeavor to show how Emecheta has challenged the oral discourses repeated by men and women to assign the duties of motherhood through the use of irony underscored by FID. The FID used by Emecheta corresponds to what is known in most research as standard FID "found with great pervasiveness in the nineteenth-century 'omniscient' novel, although,

especially with Dickens, it is used prominently for the rendering of speech events and very commonly for ironic purposes."<sup>26</sup> FID is a technique that Emecheta uses in a narrative rendered through external focalization to represent the current discourses about the privileges of motherhood for ironic purposes.

FID allows the author to achieve the "parodic stylization" of the discourse of male domination. The narrative in those closing paragraphs re-produces the current language representing the privileges of motherhood at both conversational and written levels. When Emecheta represents the discourses, she, like all the comic authors using "parodic stylization" described by Bakhtin, "distances [herself] from this common language; [she] steps back and objectifies it, forcing [her] own intentions to refract and diffuse themselves through the medium of this common view that has become embodied in language."

In the closing paragraphs of the novel, many discourses are fused. Against the common language of the impersonal, going on opinion represented through indirect speech, we find "the parodic stylization" of the discourse of male domination represented through FID in addition to the direct speech of the author, who is sometimes unable to hide her voice. Shifts from common language to parodying of generic and other languages and shifts to the direct authorial word are quite abrupt in this passage.

To reread those closing paragraphs we have already quoted requires a deconstruction of our earlier reading through which we have shown that the text justifies claims by feminist and postcolonial critics. We start our rereading with a 'rewriting' of the text where we will use italics to show the FID portion:

Stories afterwards, however, said that Nnu Ego was a wicked woman even in death because, *however many people appealed to her to make women fertile, she never did. Poor Nnu Ego, even in death she had no peace!* Still, many agreed that she had given all to her children. *The joy of being a mother was the joy of giving all to your children,* they said.

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26 Fludernik 1993, 83.

*And her reward? Did she not have the greatest funeral Ibuza had ever seen? It took Oshia [her son] three years to pay off the money he borrowed to show the world what a good son he was. That was why people failed to understand why she did not answer their prayers, for what else could a woman want but to have sons who would give her a decent burial?*

Nnu Ego had it all, yet still did not answer prayers for children.

In this passage, the portions in italics are the FID representing a "parodic stylization" of the language referring to the gossip, following the death of the protagonist Nnu Ego. In the first paragraph, the shift into FID is designed by the construction of the first sentence that reflects an ironic tone accelerated by the repetition of the word "however" that expresses contrast and that underscores tension in the discourse repeated. The second "however" seems to conceal an unresolvable contradiction, and if it is put under erasure, "sous rapture" to use Derrida's terms, and replaced with "though," the sentence will have a different meaning. While in the first part of the sentence, the main clause with the reporting verb "said" introduces an instance of indirect speech, in the second part of the sentence, the discourse of the other is introduced into the discourse of the author in a hidden form, that is to say, there is no linguistic marker announcing the discourse of the other. The word "however" in this second part of the sentence prepares for the introduction of a form that can easily be perceived as the discourse of the other. The second sentence is clearly a FID that is marked by the absence of the main clause and of the reporting verb and the use of the exclamation mark. The third sentence is an informative text with external focalization representing the voice of the implied author. In the fourth sentence, FID is marked by the absence of the quotation marks to signal the direct speech, which precedes the phrase with the subject and reporting verb.

In the second paragraph, the beginning is a FID representing a parodic stylization of language referring to the current gossip. What follows is the speech of the author who intrudes abruptly in the current gossip to end it with a double ironic note within "that was why....prayers." Yet despite the abrupt intrusion, gossip resumes to stop the voice trying to give reasons about the silence of Nnu Ego. In the last sentence, the

authorial voice resumes sarcastic that within this cacophony of voices speaking about and for Nnu Ego, her voice is erased, repressed, and buried.

The voice of Nnu Ego is silenced. Her voice is lost between the claims of those who define her as “poor Nnu Ego,” and those who define her as “mother.” Her voice is lost between the claims of those who speak about her poverty, about her disadvantaged class position and define her as “poor Nnu Ego” sic “poor woman,” and those who celebrate her virtues as a mother whose aspirations should be limited to the success of her children. Her voice is lost between claims lamenting her victimization and claims trying her idealization. Her voice is twice deeply buried in traditional codes of moral conduct perpetuated in modern claims about the need to save traditional codes against opposing claims denigrating tradition and its codes. Her voice is lost between tradition and modernity so that even the narrative voice in its privileged omniscient, all-knowing position feels so disempowered by the limits of this position which however has no power over the dead. The intrusive author realizes that her privilege is her loss<sup>27</sup> just as her privileged position as a postcolonial intellectual interested in the history of Nigerian womanhood does not allow her a direct access to the voice of Nnu Ego who is unfortunately twice buried.

Emecheta’s sarcastic conclusion seems to join Spivak’s skepticism about the possibility to empower the female subaltern<sup>28</sup> with voice. In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak argues that while it has already been proved that the history of the subaltern has been effaced, the history of the female as subaltern is doubly effaced; Spivak writes,

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27 In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak describes the dilemma of the postcolonial intellectual trying to recover the history of the subaltern, “The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss,” 82.

28 Morton has provided the meanings of ‘subaltern;’ he explains that the word subaltern, which means a junior officer of the British army according to OED, has been used by Antonio Gramsci to denote the “[n]on hegemonic groups or classes” (Gramsci qtd. in Morton, 48); Gramsci’s meaning has later been extended by the Indian-based historians known as Subaltern Studies Collective, who used subaltern to refer to the continued subordination and oppression in post-independence “South Asian society, [...] expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way” (Guha qtd. in Morton, 48). Spivak uses the term to account for the double subordination of the female in post-independence societies or what became known as “Third World.” See Morton, 48.

“Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. [ ...] If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.”<sup>29</sup> Spivak continues her argument to prove that the history of the female is lost since represented in official male-centered historical records written by early traditional patriarchy, by the colonizer or later by male decolonization nationalists. The outcome of these male-centered historical records distorted the figure of the female who now exists under the shadow of the metonymic representation as the “third world woman;” Spivak writes, “Between patriarchy and imperialism, [...] the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization.”<sup>30</sup>

The history of the female subaltern is doubly effaced as it is represented in discourses where she has no speaking voice. Spivak finds in the representation of *sati* or widow sacrifice<sup>31</sup> in official historiography a good example to show how the voice of the widow and the female has been misappropriated and lost between the assertions of those who define the practice as sanctioned suicide underlying female oppression and those who define it as an act of free will underlying ‘courage’ and ‘strength of character.’ Spivak argues that the widow’s voice, agency, and will are so deeply embedded in Hindu patriarchal tradition and its admiration of the virtues of Hindu womanhood for the choice of *sati* and in colonial discourses of self-praise for the salvation of Indian womanhood from barbaric Hindu culture. Between these two definitions of widow admiration and widow victimization, “there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak,”<sup>32</sup> argues Spivak, who eventually

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29 “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 82-83.

30 Ibid, 102.

31 In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak defines widow sacrifice as follows, “The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice. (the conventional transcription of the Sanskrit word for the widow would be *sati*,” 93.

32 “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 103.

concludes that “the subaltern cannot speak,”<sup>33</sup> a conclusion that Emecheta’s “Nnu Ego did not answer prayers” seems to confirm.

Spivak however finds in Derrida’s deconstruction quite an illuminating strategy, which allowed the recovery of the voice and the re-inscription of the history of the female subaltern despite the conclusive assertions of her text. While the re-reading of the history of the subaltern traced within the archives of official historiography has ended with the loss of voice, reading history through the careful investigation of “the ‘arguments’ and ‘assertions’ made by the everyday culture of the subaltern”<sup>34</sup> allowed the recovery of the voice of the female subaltern past and present. Deconstruction has allowed Spivak and her readers to recover the voice of silenced womanhood through tracing the history of *sati* in the story of the young freedom fighter who disguises her activism in an act of widow sacrifice.

Actually, while tracing the history of *sati*, Spivak has learnt about a case of a modern self-emolition from family connections,<sup>35</sup> that she accounts for in the following:

A young woman of sixteen or seventeen, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, hanged herself in her father’s modest apartment in North Calcutta in 1926. The suicide was a puzzle since, as Bhuvaneswari was menstruating at the time, it was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy. Nearly a decade later, it was discovered that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian Independence. She had finally been entrusted with a political assassination. Unable to confront the task and yet aware of the practical need for trust, she killed herself.

Through the re-inscription of the story of modern self-emolition in its relation with the pre-texts defining *sati* in official historiography, Spivak’s text allows the recovery of the voice of the modern and old female subaltern. The subaltern past and

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33 Ibid, 104.

34 J. Maggio, “Can the Subaltern be Heard?” 438-439.

35 Making use of J. Maggio’s contentions, we suggest that Spivak’s own investigations among her relatives to solve the puzzle surrounding the Bhaduri suicide, is one instance of Spivak’s use of “the everyday culture of the subaltern” to re-read history.

present seems to say that as she *chooses* to inscribe her body and her existence within the signifier of good conduct, she also mocks the society that prescribes death for good conduct. Likewise, when the modern freedom fighter *chooses* to prescribe her body and her existence within the signifier of victimization, she mocks the salvation that the abolishment of *sati* has brought to Hindu womanhood. The female subaltern mocks both patriarchy and imperialism as she *chooses* to live the life she wanted—as a fighter—when she wanted, and to die the way she wanted—as a *sati*—when she wanted. She on one hand refuses to prescribe her activism against British imperialism within a nationalism prescribed by male elite, which assigned her tasks. She on the other hand defies the British either to punish her activism or to save her from barbarism. She prescribes her activism within the tradition of *sati*, a female tradition indeed, in which Spivak chooses to inscribe herself as a postcolonial female intellectual interested in the re-inscription of the history of the female subaltern.

Equally, though the voice of the subaltern is lost in Emecheta's story as the closing paragraphs of the novel suggest, we guess that a further deconstruction of Emecheta's text might allow us to recover the voice of the female imbedded in patriarchy and imperialism. Actually, through a doubly ironic discourse underscored by authorial intrusion, Emecheta undertakes a process of unveiling and re-inscription. She undertakes the task of overthrowing the violent hierarchy, which defines the virtues of motherhood and dictates how a good mother should behave. She thus repeats to ridicule and reverse the current discourse about the privileges of motherhood, confined to "decent burials" that the society offers to mothers. She discloses the failure of the Igbo society to understand the value of motherhood and its rewards ironically buried with the "decent burials." Likewise, she mocks the claims of victimization repeated within the ironically charged text of the closing paragraphs.

As a result, and through the doubling of the voice of the omniscient narrator, the author requires that the society should perform a digging up, through the return in time and space to find "the joys of motherhood." It is indeed, the return that the author has done artistically, through her story that begins with "the mother" in the first chapter,

which is suddenly interrupted to return to the story of the "The mother's mother" in the second chapter of the novel suggesting that the lost voice of Nnu Ego, the modern subaltern who "did not answer prayers," can be retraced in "the deathbed plea" of the mother's mother. History must be revised to dig out the real value of motherhood and many other values in the Igbo society. Indeed, *The Joys of Motherhood* is a quest in the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial times to find the values lost between tradition and modernity. *The Joys of Motherhood* is a quest that the author has made through a very subtle use of irony which allows her to repeat, revise then reverse the discourses of the "burial," but also to repeat, revise in order to dig out the buried values and to recover the voice of the female subaltern.<sup>36</sup>

Broadly speaking, these closing paragraphs seem to parody not only current conversations but also written "stories" and novels debating the privileges of motherhood in the traditional African family as well as the value of tradition in the present societies. While in some "stories" this tradition is denigrated, is declared "wicked," in other "stories," it is idealized and mythologized through the agreements of many. The FID passages may represent the debate among writers representing these two poles, and the last conclusive sentence we designate as an authorial discourse represents the position of Emecheta, who through the double irony of the passage creates for herself a third position, or a 'third space,' a space 'in between.'

Emecheta parodies the denigration as well as the idealization of the African tradition. She parodies those male writers, who have preferred to idealize the African past, cultures and traditions in order to defend African culture and traditions against Western denigration. Emecheta's implicit criticism might be directed at the writers, who have undertaken the task of the valorization of African history, traditions, and beliefs and the rehabilitation of the African past.<sup>37</sup> Among them we may name Elechi Amadi

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36 We will see in the chapter, "*The Joys of Motherhood: Women between Tradition and Modernity*" that some of the values of motherhood could be explored through establishing the relation between *The Joys of Motherhood* and a predecessor text, *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa.

37 Valorization of African past, traditions, and cultures has been undertaken by the founders of the

who, in *The Concubine*, presents the protagonist of his novel as a goddess figure suggesting the idealization of African womanhood. Additionally, Emecheta's implicit criticism might be directed at those male writers who have idealized motherhood as Leopold Senghor who identifies the African or "black" woman with the nurturing figure of Mother Africa, idealized for her beauty, fertility and nurturing potential. Emecheta's implicit criticism might also be directed at the early denigration of the African past displayed in early Western ethnographic literature, or the more recent denigration of African womanhood witnessed in some "stories" by some male writers, as Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* where the writer offers a limited and sexually defined depiction of women.

Emecheta's implicit criticism might also be directed against reading the recent African history marked by colonialism within the confines of the "third space" as defined by some postcolonial theorists, mainly as represented by Homi Bhabha. In the conclusive lines of the concluding paragraphs as well as throughout the novel, Emecheta places herself in a third space, which allows her to read this tradition and culture through their contact with modernity introduced by colonialism. She therefore places the predicament of her protagonist between two conflicting times, two places and indeed between African tradition and Western modernity. When she places her protagonist on the borderline of two cultural systems, she joins the argument of Bhabha about the need of the postcolonial artist to place himself in a position of liminality or a 'third space' to explore what happens 'in-between' cultures or on the border or the threshold. However, the third space Emecheta creates for herself and for her characters is different from Bhabha's. Emecheta repeats Bhabha with a difference.

In "Gendered Hauntings, *The Joys of Motherhood*, Interpretive Acts and Postcolonial Theory," Stephane Robolin makes an excellent reading about how Bhabha's "liminality" illuminates *The Joys* which however repeats to revise the theorist's celebration of the "third space." Robolin explains that through focus on the

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Negritude movement. See Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*.

trauma of Nnu Ego and her feeling of loss and distress, Emecheta however holds a pessimistic view towards the cultural interstices that Bhabha celebrates. Therefore, Emecheta's representation of the colonial condition which underscores an interstitial anxiety clashes with Bhabha's liminality at many levels, namely at the level of tone, focus and interpretation. Robolin has insightfully explained those levels of the clash between Emecheta's text and Bhabha's theorization of the in-between:

Bhabha's theoretical work underwrites a celebratory tone that Emecheta's project simply does not share and would even appear to negate. For all the distress that discursive (mis)translation, splitting, or ambivalence may cause imperial authority, Emecheta's novel underscores a very different colonial phenomenon than does Bhabha. Rather than explore the effects of liminality on the colonizer, this text renders visible the unambiguous pain intrinsic to life in the colonial interstices by dramatizing the conglomeration of hardships experienced by one woman and her community as a result of foreign British domination (in tandem with interconnected patriarchal customs). Instead of a discursively (or politically) menaced colonizer, we witness the traumatization and emotional fragmentation of the colonized female subject.<sup>38</sup>

Robolin, who seems supportive of Emecheta's views against Bhabha's celebration of the "third space," adds "The ruptures and fissures in the colonial discourse that render hegemonic power less than total are well worth celebrating, but to overlook the hardships that emanate from the various types of interstices, as instantiated in the case of Nnu Ego, is to miss a fundamental element of social contestation."<sup>39</sup>

Actually, Emecheta's project of rewriting history, which is focused on the representation of the trauma of the female colonized subject, and her struggle in a colonized society and later in postcolonial society, draws attention to the neglect of the hardships of the poor women. Emecheta's attempt to write the history of the most oppressed among the subaltern sides with many opponents of postcolonial theory especially as outlined by Bhabha. In his *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Arif Dirlik opposes the claims of postcolonial theory

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38 Robolin, 83.

39 Ibid., 88.

about the necessity to rewrite “the history of oppression and the resistance to it in accordance with the needs of the successful among the oppressed, while erasing an earlier radical history that focused on the group and its liberation as a whole.”<sup>40</sup> Equally, Anne McClintock objects to Bhabha’s elision of gender dynamics and difference, as she writes that Bhabha’s theory “effectively reinscribes mimicry as a male strategy without acknowledging its gendered specificity [...] so that masculinity becomes the invisible norm of postcolonial discourse.”<sup>41</sup>

Emecheta's choice to represent the story of those who have failed to live in hybridized spaces, offers a revision of postcolonial critics evident at many levels. The inattention to gender and class dynamics and difference constitutes a significant pitfall in Bhabha’s representation of colonial life that Emecheta’s text rewrites. Emecheta depicts a hybrid space, Lagos of the 1930’s, largely populated by women who could not be hybridized due to the absence of all forms of contact with the foreign culture. Indeed such contact as Robolin puts it “requires proximity to the foreign ruler [which] determined by privilege (in part sex-based, in part class-based),” so that “even the diligent female merchants in the local marketplace of Emecheta's novel are refused direct colonial interactions, such that the male servants perform even conventionally female chores in colonial households: we witness how Nnaife, as the male primary care-taker, administers the domestic tasks for his colonial employers.”<sup>42</sup>

An important example that shows Emecheta's revision of postcolonial theory is her repetition of the issue of education, which is used by Bhabha to support his theorizing about the ambivalence and anxiety of the colonizer as a result of the institutionalization of education in the colonies. Referring to the history of India, Bhabha argues that the decision of the British parliament to educate a class of Indians to

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40 Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Westview Press, 1997), 12.

41 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 64.

42 Robolin, 85.

help rule the country involved the British in a state of anxiety because this class of educated Indians “became a reminder of the shaky foundations of racial stereotypes, and therefore the unjustifiable nature of colonialism.”<sup>43</sup>

Referring to the history of Nigeria, Emecheta shows that Western education has made the colonized anxious and not the colonizer. Part of the hardships of Nnu Ego emanate from her constant struggles to secure the necessary funds to educate her sons within a costly educational system. Her anxiety culminates when her life investment proves fruitless as her educated sons grow to be "the mimic men" as described in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967)<sup>44</sup> who should have made the colonizer feel more confident about his superiority. Nnu Ego's educated sons have ignored their mother's expectation increasing her anxiety towards depression.

The behavior of Nnu Ego's educated sons projects them as a reversed version of Bhabha's "mimic men." Nnu Ego's educated sons have been depicted as selfish and irresponsible. They have married white women and preferred to live in the west in unknown conditions, or maybe miserable conditions since the narrative refers to the fact that Oshia, Nnu Ego's eldest son, coming back home from America after his mother's death has "borrowed" money to pay for the costly second burial of his mother, "it took Oshia three years to pay off the money he had borrowed to show the world what a good son he was" (224). The colonizer who is completely ignored by Emecheta would only feel more comfortable about his superiority, would feel proud of his educational system, which enslaved the colonized further, at the opposite of Bhabha's expectations. Through the hybridized educated Nnu Ego's sons, Emecheta offers a double reversal of Bhabha's idiom of the "mimic men" when she depicts the educated men in colonial Nigeria un-empowered by their mimicry.

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43 Huddart, 41.

44 The protagonist of *The Mimic Men*, who is himself a mimic man, has been un-empowered by his mimicry. See David Huddart's reading of the novel, 48.

Additionally, Emecheta's text also reverses Bhabha's idiom of the "mimic men" through the depiction of a hybridized native, metonymically represented in the character Nnaife. In opposition to Bhabha's "mimic men," Nnaife, who has always been derided by his own wife, Nnu Ego, is the object of scorn among the white colonizers. Nnaife is ironically called a "baboon" (41) by Dr. Meers, his colonial employer, and he is despised for his servility and copying of the white by Nnu Ego who complains "he copies the white people he works for" (75) as she always compares him with despise to her father, her ex-husband or his own brother who all live in Iboza and who have never come close to the colonizer. The position of Emecheta is shared by other culture theorists who also criticize Bhabha's theory of hybridity, like Arif Dirlik who says "Hybridized' natives were in the nineteenth century objects of scorn and suspicion among both the colonialists, and the native population, for being a poor copy of one and a degenerate version of the other."<sup>45</sup>

Contrary to Bhabha's "mimic men," Nnaife's mimicry of his white masters underlies no repetition with difference or any form of mockery. Emecheta's text underscores not only Nnaife's exaggerated servitude and servility to the colonizer at different instances, but also his naïve stupidity, which becomes a feature of his personality. In the voice of the narrative commentary, we are told that Nnaife "was one of the Africans who were so used to being told they were stupid in those days that they started to believe in their own imperfections" (p.83). He has internalized the colonizer's stereotype. He behaves in faint stupidity; we see for instance how he ironically keeps waiting for the new master after the departure of the Meers, confident that the "generous reference" his colonial employer has left for him "would get him a new job" (85). The narrative representing the thoughts of Nnu Ego shows how this stupidity becomes a characteristic feature rather than a mask as a postcolonial theorist would suggest. Commenting about the conduct of Nnaife, the narrative reads

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45 Arif Dirlik (1997), 171.

sometimes he was clever enough, but often he adopted such a stupid attitude, especially when she [Nnu Ego] brought up some important topic, that it seemed his only way of facing up to a difficult situation; she knew that if she did not do something about their present condition, Nnaife would be content to wait hopefully for a new master forever, even though there was absolutely no sign of one ever arriving (86).

Significantly enough, Emecheta's text reverses the idiom of the "mimic men" further when it describes the reaction of Nnaife to his master's scorn. Actually when called "a baboon," a stereotype to use Bhabha's language, Nnaife shows a complete indifference. Nnaife does not know the meaning of "baboon", and the narrative suggests that "he was not the type of man who would have done anything had he known the meaning. He would simply shrug his shoulders and say, 'We work for them and they pay us. His calling me a baboon does not make me one'" (42). As a hybridized native, Nnaife does not behave like Bhabha's "mimic men" who would repeat and reverse stereotypical jokes about themselves; Bhabha suggests that this repetition always transforms those jokes that become a form of resistance to colonial discourse. Nnaife seems indifferent to resist colonialism as Bhabha's "mimic men" would do.

Additionally, *The Joys of Motherhood* repeats to revise the postcolonial theory's reticence to examine the struggle of the whole group in favor of the struggle of few among them and the horrors of colonialism in favor of "victimization and heroism." Emecheta seems to raise the question of historical forgetfulness characteristic of postcolonial criticism, which in its attempts at rewriting the past seems reticent to examine some features of that past as the devastating effects of colonialism on both the poor and women, which resulted in the neglect of class and gender issues to focus on the "victimization and heroism" of hybridized natives. Therefore, *The Joys'* restraint to examine the struggle of the successful to focus on the hardships of a female who has failed to live "in between" offers a revision of postcolonial historical forgetfulness.

In the same vein, *The Joys'* reticence to examine the horrors of colonialism in favor of female victimization shifts the focus from postcolonial theory's mystified "victimization and heroism" to a feminist condemnation of patriarchy tradition. Though

adopting the discourse of victimization of women in culture has involved Emecheta in another controversy, as we will show below, Emecheta raises the question of the consequences of the forgetfulness of the horrors of history, which is generally motivated by the evasion of responsibilities.

Actually, while drawing attention to female victimization in culture, the novel's ironies projected backward and forward complicate Emecheta's perspective of history. Her ironies backward denoting the failures of the past characterized by female oppression and forwards denoting evasion of responsibilities shift the focus from victimization to responsibility. It is therefore worth noting that while on its surface structure the novel is focused on female victimization, the underlying structure of the novel is focused on the importance of the individuals' assumption of responsibility to change their fate, a responsibility that the postcolonial theorists' focus on victimization and heroism seems to disregard.

All in all, rewriting history for Emecheta offers a reversal of the denigration of the African past and the consequent limited and sexually defined presentation of women, as well as a reversal of the idealization of the African past and tradition and the consequent idealization of women. When she creates a third space, this reverses many of the key considerations of Bhabha. Emecheta's perspective of history as projected through *The Joys of Motherhood* suggests a necessary return to the past with the objective of a cautious re-evaluating and re-examining of what happens to the individual, what happens to his institutions through their contact with modernity. And while observing and depicting what happens, the nomadic writer who travels backward and forward has been vigilant to preserve what is positive, appropriate the best through contact with modernity, and reject what is repressive for the wellbeing of women.

## **6 Rewriting History in *Possessing The Secret of Joy***

## 6.1 A History of Mutilation

*Possessing the Secret of Joy* is a novel which protests against the discrimination of women on account of what the author terms as patriarchal ideologies in Africa. The novel raises crucial questions about the tension between culture and women's rights. Walker locates women in oppressive structures produced by what she calls dominated cultures, which she holds fully responsible for the victimization of women. She thus embraces an exclusive focus on the oppression of women by monolithic patriarchy. Then, she urges a fight against local practices seen as perpetuating patriarchal violence. She therefore chooses to expose a traditional ritual, namely clitoridectomy, and she strongly condemns the practice that she chooses to name as female genital mutilation(s) or FGM, which becomes, through her scenic narration, metonymic of oppressive patriarchal culture in Africa.

To rewrite history, Walker launches the debate about clitoridectomy, which indeed has its origins in early colonialist discourses associating women with culture. She rewrites the controversial debates among colonial and missionary then later feminist detractors and colonial educated African defenders. She dramatizes the debate through the story of Tashi who, though saved as a child from "mutilation" thanks to the missionary sanction of the ritual, willingly requests to endure the "mutilating" operation in an attempt to honor her culture as advised by nationalist liberationists. Just after the surgical operation, Tashi marries the son of a missionary and leaves to America. A large part of the novel projects how Tashi's life has been particularly destroyed after she submits to the "mutilating" ritual, as it projects her struggle, helped by her family and friends to recognize the causes of her pains. In the end, thanks to Western therapy, she could come to terms with what she has done, and then starts another stage in her life, when she decides to return to Africa to fight against FGM.

Set against such a background, the novel has two opposing reactions. According to some readers and scholars, Walker's endeavor to represent from without an "alien" cultural practice as misogynistic and oppressive beyond the way the culture itself characterizes it is another means of oversimplifying 'the Other' in a way which prolongs Orientalizing attitudes.<sup>1</sup> Others defend the novel as a creditable necessary effort to come to terms with whatever may undermine women's wellbeing, and that such an effort is motivated by humanistic intentions, which are praiseworthy even if they come from without.<sup>2</sup>

In *Possessing*, Walker attempts through accusation and indictment to unveil what she considers the evils of a cultural practice and to disclose its effects on women's wellbeing. Through her indictment of FGM, Walker favors the transcultural category of the female body and thus supports the universal right put forward by the UNESCO to protect the integrity of the body against all kinds of cultural practices, which might undermine women's wellbeing or perpetuate patriarchal violence. She thus sides with women's rights activists/feminists within the UNESCO, who "have long argued that in order to end discrimination against women, there must be agreement that 'culture' is not a valid justification for gender inequality. When drafting international conventions and

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1 See Annemarie Bean, "Disclosures, Silences, Agency: African Female Genital Circumcision," *Women and Performance* 7.2-8.1 (1995): 324-38. Seble Dawit and Salem Mekuria, "The West Just Doesn't Get It," *New York Times* 7 Dec. 1993. A27. Ikenna Dieke, "From Fractured Ego to Transcendent Self: A Reading of Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*," *The Literary Griot*, 11.1 (1999): 48-68. Ikenna Dieke, ed., "Introduction: Alice Walker, A Woman Walking into Peril," *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*, Ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999, 1-12. Oyeronke Oyewumi, "Alice in Motherland: Reading Alice Walker on Africa and Screening the Color Black," in *JENdA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies* 1. 2 (2001). <http://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/jenda/article/view/54/84>. Gay Wilentz, "Review: Healing the Wounds of Time" Reviewed work(s): *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker, *Bailey's Cafe* by Gloria Naylor," in *The Women's Review of Books*, Vol. 10, No. 5 (Feb., 1993), 15-16

2 Mahala Yates *Stripling, Bioethics and Medical Issues in Literature* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005). Geneva Cobb Moore, "Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Fall, 2000), 111-121; Lynn Pifer and Tricia Slusser, "Looking at the Back of Your Head": Mirroring Scenes in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*," *Theory, Culture and Criticism*, Vol. 23, No. 4, (Winter, 1998), 47-57.

declarations, attention must be directed not only to existing human rights instruments but also to those pertaining to women,” as Valentine Moghadam and Manilee Bagheritari put it.<sup>3</sup>

In "Alice Walker's Africa: Globalization and the Province of Fiction," George Olakunle explains the position of Walker; he writes,

the novel stakes out a universalist position that valorizes a basic, transcultural category of the female body, especially as and when that body is subjected to disfigurement on account of patriarchal ideologies. For her [Walker], the practice of genital mutilation serves to contain women sexually and socially; above all, it is a violation of each woman's right to the integrity of her body. Consequently, the practice should, in its various forms and cultural contexts, be held as a human rights violation, one that can be repudiated on the grounds of a universal ethical standard.<sup>4</sup>

Though the novel is intended to be polemical, it remains a work of art that needs also to be evaluated with focus on its artistic value and deserves to be treated as a work of literature with strengths and weaknesses of composition. Such an approach is necessary to set some balance between responding to the novel artistically and responding to it politically—as part of the debate between the "West" and the "rest." Through describing Walker's dynamics of rewriting history, we therefore try to show how far the polemical intention and the political purpose of the book—fight against FGM—have affected its artistic purpose.

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3 Valentine Moghadam and Manilee Bagheritari, 'Cultures, Conventions and the Human Rights of Women,' UNESCO website:

<http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/files/8091/11313735861Article.pdf/Article.pdf>

4 George Olakunle, "Alice Walker's Africa: Globalization and the Province of Fiction," in *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Autumn, 2001), 354.

## 6.2 *Possessing the Secret of Joy*: the Dynamics of Rewriting History

Indeed beyond this controversial background, *Possessing* is a novel that displays many strengths of composition. Essentially, the novel represents those controversial intentions through the use of a large set of characters generally well-drawn, a varied and diversified setting shifting place and time between two continents Africa and America, and between past and present, and a complex plot designed through interrupting the main story with subplots, moving back and forth in time, and merging fact with fiction. The author experiments with shifting points of view; this makes the story unfold in fragments of memory in a first-person serial narrative that incorporates the voice of the protagonist as well as the voices of her family and the tsunga<sup>5</sup> M'Lissa. The stylistic choices are also very diverse; the novel merges the direct and simple style, the indirect and metaphorical, yet essentially a sensual and pornographic style aimed to shock the reader.<sup>6</sup> Metonymy, metaphor and irony merge though much symbolism underlies this stylistic mix. However, beyond what could have been a strong artistic achievement, the novel's controversial intentions have hindered and weakened its artistic purposes basically due to the authorial intrusions which are frequent in the novel where on many occasions the characters speak with the words of the author teaching and lecturing.

Rewriting the history of FGM, Walker focuses on how the ritual has been jerking between missionary sanctions and the subsequent interruption of the ban. Sanctioned by the early wave of white missionaries to Africa, the practice has never been eradicated despite the congratulating claims of those missionaries about the success of their efforts. A second wave of missionaries who claim their common heritage with the people of the

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5 "Tsunga" is a word Walker invented to describe the woman who performs the ritual.

6 Walker's intentions in using sensual pornographic style can be traced within her response to the controversy created after the publication of *The Color Purple*, particularly about her use of pornographic style; in "Finding Celie's Voice," Walker argues that rape and other forms of sexual exploitation should be placed within a discourse that is shocking to reveal and disclose their true nature. See Alice Walker, "Finding Celie's Voice," *Ms. Magazine*, V14 (Dec. 1986), 71-72.

continent have felt the need to return to save the continent, and therefore they also preached against clitoridectomy. Their short lived success has been crushed by colonial-educated Africans emerging as cultural nationalists who preach the compulsory return to ritual practice as an expression of cultural belonging in their power motivated struggle. Walker dramatizes this history through the story of Tashi and the embedded story of Dura. While the story of Dura can be linked with the failure of the early white missionary sanction against the ritual, half of Tashi's story suggests the failure of the second wave of missionary preaching against the ritual. With this failure, while the Christian church seems highly satisfied with its achievements in the continent to care about the fate of African womanhood, Alice Walker engages herself to fight fictionally through *Possessing*<sup>7</sup> against FGM and write the missing part of the story of Tashi which has been suspended by nationalists.

Walker rewrites the history of FGM in Africa through the reconstruction of the story of Tashi and Dura from the different set of the fragmented nonlinear narratives told by shifting points of view within a narrative frame suggesting many embedded stories developed through plot subversion. To begin with, the reconstruction of the framed embedded story of Dura suggests that thanks to the efforts of the first white missionaries among the Olinka, Christianized Catherine has renounced the practice for a certain time. Through plot subversion, suggesting the reversal of white missionary achievements, Catherine resumes the practice when she hears that Black missionaries are coming to the village. Fearful that being black, the new missionaries would preach the return to the old custom and would therefore punish the mothers of "uncircumcised" daughters, Catherine calls the tsunga M'lisa to perform the ritual to her daughter who subsequently dies. Likewise, the reconstruction of the story of Tashi suggests that thanks to the efforts of the second wave of black missionaries who have gone to the continent at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tashi has been saved from ritual "mutilation"

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7 In addition to the novel, Walker has also engaged to fight FGM through more than one weapon; she co-produced a documentary movie entitled *Warrior Marks*, as well as *Warrior Marks. Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women*, a memoir/travelogue of the experience of making the documentary.

during her childhood. Through plot subversion suggesting the reversal of the efforts of the Black missionary achievement, Tashi, grown to become a young maiden, decides to return to the "banned" practice and undergoes the ritual "mutilation" as a consequence of the influence of nationalist liberationist appeals.

Within these two framed stories, written in a complex structure of shifting points of view and plot subversion, Walker underscores the failure of the Christian church to save African womanhood. Walker makes Tashi voice this failure in her closing statement in the narrative representing the climax of the story, "Poor Adam! He couldn't hold a candle to Our Leader, the real to us—Jesus Christ" (114). Walker's criticism of the failure of the Black Christian church is more evident in another instance where Tashi tells that Adam has refused to make a sermon about FGM to his congregation. In Tashi's narration, the incident reads:

One sermon, I begged him. One discussion with your followers about what was done to me. He said the congregation would be embarrassed to discuss something so private and that, in any case, he would be ashamed to do that (259-260).

The two ironical statements underlie Walker's criticism of the failure of the Black Christian church, led by males to articulate and promote the wellbeing of African womanhood. Tashi's understatement underscored by metaphor suggests that Adam standing for the preachers of the Black Christian church has been too busy with the promotion of his church to be able to save sic "hold a candle to" "Our Leader, the real to us—Jesus Christ" standing for the leaders of the African continent. In other words, Walker's understatement suggests that the second wave of missionary effort has also failed to save Africa from the shackles of ignorance suggested through the connotation of the word "candle." The Black Christian church has been busy with its own promotion repeating the same sermons about "Brotherly Love" and focused "on the suffering of Jesus alone" which according to Tashi "excludes the suffering of others from one's view" (259). The Black Christian church has been too busy repeating the same discourses of pretense and deception about "Brotherly Love" in a world full of hatred to be able to rise against patriarchy.

The missing part of the story of Tashi, which constitutes the bulk of the novel, is actually about Walker's project to substitute for the Christian church to "fight" not simply preach against FGM. This part is partly focused on the display of the ritual and of its "terrible" effects on women using a metonymic shocking style. The ritual becomes 'the wound,' "the hidden scar, between Tashi's legs" (63), her sexual parts are described as 'the mutilated vagina,' 'the traumatized flesh' and a long list of shocking words which describe in minute detail the sexual parts of Tashi after the operation as in the following passage where Adam describes the early effects of the surgery on Tashi,

It now took a quarter of an hour for her to pee. Her menstrual periods lasted ten days. She was incapacitated by cramps nearly half the month. There were premenstrual cramps: cramps caused by the near impossibility of flow passing through so tiny an aperture as M'Lissa had left, after fastening together the raw side of Tashi's vagina with a couple of thorns and inserting a straw so that in healing, the traumatized flesh might not grow together, shutting the opening completely; [...]. There was the odor, too, of soured blood, which no amount of scrubbing, until we got to America, ever washed off (62).

Using the same style aimed to shock, Walker makes other characters repeat similar accounts. Olivia describes the changes in Tashi after the surgery. After referring to the loss of cheerfulness, of liveliness, and of vitality, which used to characterize Tashi, Walker makes Olivia repeat what Adam has already described, "No one spoke of the other, the hidden scar, between Tashi's thin legs. [...] No one mentioned the eternity it took her to use the w.c. No one mentioned the smell" (63).

With this shocking style, much prejudice about the oppression of women in culture unfolds. A long list of reproving words is used to describe "African culture and tradition" which are denounced, decried, and described as "mutilating cultures." We read for instance "among people in *mutilating cultures*, [...] a woman's vagina be tight. By force if necessary" [emphasis added] (169); "a culture in which it is mandatory that every single female be systematically desexed" (217). Within this culture, women are kept ignorant of their bodies. Tashi confesses before her psychoanalyst "It was only after I came to America, [...] that I even knew what was supposed to be down there.

[...] yes. My own body was a mystery to me, as was the female body, beyond the function of the breasts, to almost everyone I knew" (112).

To rewrite history, Walker also relies on the repetition of old myths about the inferiority of Africa and lesser humanity of Africans. Walker repeats such old myths as the myth about the homogeneity of Africa and Africans. Actually, Walker repeats what African philosopher Paulin Hountondji named, the myth of Unanimism<sup>8</sup> or what Oyeronke Oyewumi terms as the "villagization of Africa." The primary assumption of this myth consists of considering Africa despite its diversity as "a homogeneous, unitary state of primitivism in words and deeds," as Oyewumi puts it.<sup>9</sup> Walker miniaturizes Africa into her invented Olinka village, which stands for the continent. She even miniaturizes Africa further by stereotyping: "The Mbele camp was a replica of *an African village*" [emphasis added] (43).

Walker also considers clitoridectomy as a defining feature of African womanhood when she describes Tashi after the operation as "*Completely African*." She writes, "The operation she'd had done to herself joined her, she felt, to these women, whom she envisioned as strong, invincible. Completely woman. Completely African" (61). Commenting on Walker's "villagization" of Africa and her link between clitoridectomy and Africanness, Oyewumi writes, "What is a typical African village, and indeed who or what is this typical African that embodies Africanness, given a varied and various continent of peoples, cultures, and countries? It is this unanimist perception that enables this wholesale homogenizing and miniaturizing of such a vast and diverse continent. How and why does female circumcision, which is not practiced by many African cultures, become the defining characteristic of Africanness?"<sup>10</sup>

To reinforce these myths, Walker even creates words or an African language, which underscores the fictional nature of her Africa. Walker has created a fictional

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8 Paulin Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1983).

9 Oyeronke Oyewumi, "Alice in Motherland."

10 Idem.

language in which she blends the vocabulary of one African language with that of another, and she has even invented many words, that she says come from her "unconscious." Walker says that she named the "traditional circumcisers [...] *tsunga*," and she explains that, "*Tsunga*, like many of my 'African' words, is made up. Perhaps it, and the other words I use, are from an African language I used to know, now tossed up by my unconscious. I do not know from what part of Africa my ancestors came, and so I claim the continent" (267-8). Here it is worth noting that while the insertion of words from the first language by both Djébar and Emecheta is motivated by a need to prescribe the oral heritage which informed their writings into the written literary text making of these insertions as Bill Ashcroft puts it "synecdochic of the writer's culture—the part that stands for the whole [...]. Thus the inserted language 'stands for' the colonized culture in a metonymic way,"<sup>11</sup> Walker's invented language underlies her aim to reinforce the old myths, which inform her rewriting of history.

In addition to myth, Walker makes use of psychoanalysis to rewrite the history of African womanhood. An important part of the novel is focused on the ways to fight effectively FGM. For this sake, Walker engages Western psychoanalysis, which she proposes as an effective cure to heal the psychic wounds of African womanhood. Two psychiatrists, an old white man and a young African American woman, have been engaged by Walker to heal the psychic troubles of Tashi. The white psychoanalyst, Carl, "a figure of enlightenment" as Olakunle George describes him,<sup>12</sup> is the fictional projection of Carl Gustav Jung. Walker acknowledges her indebtedness to Carl Jung in the "Thanks" section she included at the end of her novel; she writes, "I thank Carl Jung for becoming so real in my own self-therapy (by reading) that I could imagine him as alive and active in Tashi's treatment" (269).

Many scholars show the importance of psychoanalysis in *Possessing*. In "Archetypal Symbolism in Alice Walker's '*Possessing the Secret of Joy*,'" Geneva Cobb

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11 Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation*, 75.

12 Olakunle George, 361.

Moore pertinently explores Walker's use of psychoanalysis, basically as defined by Carl Jung, to bring the psychically traumatized or wounded Tashi to a state of spiritual maturity and peace. Moore writes that "Alice Walker's fifth novel, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), marks a new beginning for an author/activist who explicitly appropriates Carl Jung's archetypal patterns of the ego, the shadow, the anima/animus, and the Self in a psychological process that promises individual harmony and wholeness for those earnestly seeking self-knowledge and well-being."<sup>13</sup> Equally, in "Looking at the Back of Your Head": Mirroring Scenes in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*," Lynn Pifer and Tricia Slusser explain that Walker makes use of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage theory to allow her protagonist "to move from an experience of fragmentation to a vision of a more unified state of self-possession."<sup>14</sup>

Alongside with psychoanalysis, Walker employs anthropology to rewrite the history of African womanhood. So in addition to Carl, the psychoanalyst, Pierre, an anthropologist, is the second enlightenment figure in the novel used by Walker to help heal the wounds of Tashi. Pierre is presented as someone who "has said he wants to be the first anthropologist to empower and not further endanger his subjects" (214). Tashi seems very impressed by his education and insight, and she celebrates Western education for allowing him to have an omniscient knowledge that could help her out of her dilemma. Tashi says, "I look at Pierre and think: Yes, it is a good thing that we train our children to help us. We who need so much help. I send a flesh of gratitude to those schools I've never set foot in, Berkeley and Harvard. If I should live, I think, I would visit them as shrines" (215). Tashi is impressed by his omniscience as he could interpret her recurring dream, so she claims that, "it was those knowing eyes, with their appraising look, that, from as far away as an undergraduate dormitory at Harvard, saw into me. Even into my dreams" (153). Recognizing both Carl and Pierre as enlightenment figures participating in the mission of saving Africans from themselves, Olakunle George writes,

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<sup>13</sup> See Geneva Cobb Moore, 111.

<sup>14</sup> Lynn Pifer and Tricia Slusser, 47.

Two important figures in the process of Tashi's cure are the European father-figure Carl, and Pierre, the product of her husband's adulterous relation-ship with Lisette, a French woman. On the strength of this aspect of the novel, the issue of the enlightened foreigner saving benighted Africans from themselves clearly rears its head. Carl and Pierre are the pre-eminent cerebral figures in the novel. Tashi fondly refers to Carl as Mzee, "teacher." For his part, Pierre decodes Tashi's recurring dream that she is trapped in a gigantic tower, locating in the dream a cross-cultural symbolization of women's entrapment by patriarchal structures.<sup>15</sup>

Though Walker's criticism of FGM discloses much of the harmful effects of a cultural practice on women's wellbeing, her return to the continent with the aim to complete the work started by the missionaries, namely to end the ritual "mutilation" of women underlies a neo-colonialist attitude toward Africa. When Walker, claiming the African heritage, returns to Africa with a set of characters to disclose and to "fight" against what still undermines women's wellbeing in that heritage, she has consciously or unconsciously involved herself in the difficult task where as "a returning exiled" she could only approach that heritage from without. Indeed, in the novel, Walker returns to Africa to "fight" the battle that "Tashi" has been dreaming to accomplish, and which has been instantly *cut* by cultural nationalists undermining all Christian missionaries' achievements for Tashi. The construction of the story through plot sbversion, her use of a shocking style, her repetition of old myths about Africa and Africans, her use of Western psychoanalysis and anthropology disclose Walker's "missionary" sic "neo-colonialist" attitude to the heritage she wants to appropriate or misappropriate and to the battle she wants to "fight" or to smash.

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15 Olakunle George, 258.

**PART3 : 'A Literature of their Own': From  
*The Joys of Motherhood*, Through  
*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, to *La femme  
sans sépulture***

This part explores the relation among three novels, two already show affinities, which allow their classification within an emergent literary canon, African women's literature written in the language of the colonizer, and the third is written by a woman writer who claims ancestral heritage in Africa and who therefore returns to the continent to write about the plight of women in Africa. The three authors are creatively engaged in the historiographic projects of the recovery of occulted histories with an attempt to give voice to what they perceive as silence. The voice is set against the silence of historical discourses. The voice becomes a double voice, a double voiced discourse underscored by dialogue among artists. This claim for voice against silence invites an intertextual reading of *La Femme Sans Sépulture*, *The Joys of Motherhood* by our two African writers in dialogue with *Possessing the Secret of Joy* by the African American Alice Walker.

This notion of dialogue derives from Mikhail Bakhtin's theories about “dialogic speech” or “dialogic relationships” which were later on termed dialogism.<sup>1</sup> In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), Bakhtin explains that dialogic relationships cannot be measured by purely linguistic criteria because, although belonging to the realm of the word, these relationships allow readings of history and culture rather than purely linguistic studies. He thus writes:

Dialogic relationships, therefore, are extralinguistic. But at the same time they must not be separated from the realm of discourse, that is, from language as a concrete integral phenomenon. Language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it. Dialogic interaction is indeed the authentic sphere where language lives. The entire life of language, in any area of its use (in everyday life, in business, scholarship, art, and so forth), is permeated with dialogic relationships.<sup>2</sup>

Bakhtin's dialogism involves the dialogue of languages existing in a given era reflected in novels (heteroglossia), and emphasizes that novels of a given era are criticisms of each other (intertextuality) allowing tension within an individual text rather

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1 Indeed, though the concept “dialogism” is often linked with Bakhtin, he never used it as such.

2 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 183.

than suppressing it. The novel reproduces what Bakhtin terms in *The Dialogic Imagination* as “heteroglossia” which he describes in the following,

The novel must represent all the social and ideological voices of its era, that is, all the era’s languages that have any claim to being significant; the novel must be a microcosm of heteroglossia. [...] Languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a piece, a tiny corner of the world, force us to guess at and grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more multi-leveled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or a single mirror<sup>3</sup>.

As such, Bakhtin’s ideas are particularly useful to the examination of Africana women’s writing as they allow us to evaluate the relations between texts, which take their style directly, parodically, or ironically from the languages of others. Additionally, Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, which encourages readings of history and culture as well as language, offers a critical lens to read how each of our three writers has inscribed herself in history while representing in her novel “all the social and ideological voices of its era.”

Our approach to Africana women’s writing concentrates on an intertextual reading of the three novels using Bakhtin’s categories of the double voiced discourse, namely stylization, parodistic narration and hidden polemic. To define these categories,<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin wrote:

The situation is different with parody. Here as in stylization, the author again speaks in someone else’s discourse, but in contrast to stylization, parody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one. The second voice, once having made its home in the other’s discourse, clashes hostilely with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims. Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices. [...]

In a hidden polemic the author’s discourse is directed toward its own referential object, as is any other discourse, but at the same time every statement about the object is constructed in such a way

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3 *The Dialogic Imagination*, 411-415.

4 We provided the definition of ‘stylization’ in an earlier section, so we provide here Bakhtin’s definition of ‘parodistic narration’ and ‘hidden polemic.’

that, apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object. A word, directed toward its referential object, clashes with another's word within the very object itself. The other's discourse is not itself reproduced, it is merely implied, but the entire structure of speech would be completely different if there were not this reaction to another person's implied words.<sup>5</sup>

Our three writers undertake the task of rewriting history. Our objective is to show how each writer has attempted to confront the ways in which African women have been written out of history while underscoring the emergent dialogue among the respective texts of the three novels, which reveal instances of stylization, parodistic narration and hidden polemic.

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<sup>5</sup> *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 193-194.

**7 *The Joys of Motherhood* : Woman  
Between Tradition and Modernity**

## **7.1 Woman Between Indigenous Patriarchy and Colonialism**

In her attempt to rewrite history, Emecheta focuses on women's trauma in colonial and postcolonial times and denounces the neglect of the dilemma of women caught between tradition and modernity in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. In other words, Emecheta places woman between tradition and modernity in order to find out the effect of each on the wellbeing of women. Emecheta points to the combination of some failed traditional values as well as modernity represented in colonialism to bring about the tragic alienation of women among the Igbo in the Nigerian society. Emecheta's portrayal of Nnu Ego serves to unveil the truth about how some traditional values strengthened by colonialism have established standards for female valorization. Throughout the story of Nnu Ego's hardships, Emecheta represents an Igbo society that enslaves women to men stressing the role of tradition and colonial legacies to maintain women in a subordinate position. In an ironic style, she implicitly, not explicitly, urges that in order to end their alienation, women should rebel against all that might restrict and discriminate them.

Ironically, instead of portraying a rebellious woman, Emecheta chooses to portray a protagonist who fails to rebel, metonymically representing the failure of some women to end their subordination in the Nigerian society. Actually, in the characterization of Nnu Ego, Emecheta attempts to represent the weaknesses of her protagonist, which have led to her complete social alienation underscored by her lonely death by the roadside. The weaknesses of Nnu Ego can be summed first in her adherence to failed traditional values as the overvalue of motherhood and of the superiority of male offspring as well as to modern values brought by colonialism and the Christian culture

which confine women to the home where they could better serve their families and bring up their children.<sup>1</sup>

Many African writers and philosophers stressed the importance of motherhood in Africa. Yet some recognized that in general, motherhood has been mythologized and mothers stereotyped in most African cultures. John S. Mbiti explains that the concept of mother is central to African philosophy and spirituality, and that motherhood is a joyful and privileged state for the woman who receives special treatment from neighbors and relatives, which continues after child-birth. In some societies, marriage is not fully consummated until the wife has given birth.<sup>2</sup> According to Remi Akujobi "Motherhood as experienced and practiced in Africa is influenced by religious mythologies, and local lore and it is colored with examples of self-sacrifice/giving and much more in the name of motherhood. While mothers are revered as creators, as providers, cradle rockers, nurturers, and goddesses, they also inspire awe because they are known to wedge huge powers in their children's lives."<sup>3</sup> Barbara Christian however asserts that such idealized images have served as content for some other major problems the society cannot solve.<sup>4</sup> Motherhood is so critical in most traditional societies in Africa that "there is no worse misfortune for a woman than being childless. A barren woman is seen as incomplete;" she is what Mbiti called the "dead end of human life, not only for genealogical level but also for herself. [...] the childless wife bears a scar which nothing can erase."<sup>5</sup>

In the novel, we can see clearly the effect of tradition on the life of Nnu Ego who defines the validity of her womanhood only with motherhood. The importance of children is stressed early in the novel. As Nnu Ego remains childless after her first

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1 See part 1, chapter 2 "Colonial Intervention and Women" where we showed how colonialism restricted women's role in society encouraging ideas such as the confinement of women to the home to bring up their children and to fulfil domestic chores as exclusive female responsibilities.

2 Mbiti, 107.

3 Remi Akujobi, Motherhood in African Literature," in *Comparative Literature and Culture* 3. 1 (2011): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1/2>>

4 Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1980).

5 Mbiti, 107.

marriage, Amatokwu, her first husband, reminds her of the basic objective of marriage in their traditional society, namely the continuation of the patrilineal kinship line; he thus expresses his desire for children through the emphasis on his worth as a “busy man with precious seeds” and the worthlessness of the “infertile” Nnu Ego; “what do you want me to do?” Amatokwu asked. ‘I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line’ (32). Then as she loses her first son from Nnaife her second husband, desperately she says: “but I am not a woman anymore! I am not a mother any more. The child is there, dead on the mat” (62).

The reaction of Amatokwu and the despair of Nnu Ego are justified by tradition. Amatokwu who has been very proud of marrying the daughter of the chief feels no guilt when he announces his need to remarry, and Nnu Ego expresses no surprise about such a decision. In the narrative commentary we read, “she was not surprised when Amatokwu told her casually one evening that she would have to move to a nearby hut kept for older wives, because his people had found him a new wife” (32). Nnu Ego could not be surprised raised up as she has been in a tradition where “it is a duty, religious and ontological, for everyone to get married; and if a man has no children or only daughters, he finds another wife, so that through her children (or sons) may be born who would survive him and keep him [...] in personal immortality,”<sup>6</sup> as Mbiti has explained about traditional African cultures.

Additionally, respectful of the tradition of son preference, Nnu Ego sacrifices the education of her daughters to save that of her sons within a costly educational system. Indeed the impact of tradition on Nnu Ego's choices is so strong that though aware of the importance of learning for girls, she however prefers to finance her sons' education. To stress the impact of tradition on the choices of Nnu Ego, Emecheta makes her protagonist pronounce one of the most emancipating statements of the novel stressing the salvation role of education for women, which Nnu Ego, however, contradicts: “I am

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<sup>6</sup> Mbiti, 25.

beginning to think that there may be a future for educated women. I saw many young women teaching in schools. It would really be something for a woman to be able to earn some money monthly like a man” (189).

Nnu Ego's choices have been further restricted as she adheres to new modern social values which lead to her complete social alienation. In colonial urban Lagos, the novel points to how colonialism has affected Nnu Ego's total absorption into non-awarding motherhood. We see this early in the novel when after the death of her first child, Nnu Ego realizes that the reason for his death is her absence, as she has left the baby alone without any one to care for him while she has been outside trying to contribute economically to supplement her husband's income. Actually, women in Iboza would leave their babies and go to the fields to help husbands in farming, and the members of the extended family would care for children. In colonial Lagos, community life has disappeared, and Nnu Ego loses the support that makes it easy for a woman to have children while accomplishing other more rewarding activities outside the home. In her new circumstances, she decides to live according to the norms of the "white man's world" which rule Lagos, and therefore she becomes more absorbed into the maternal role, which increases her confusion in Lagos. This confusion is described through the voice of the narrative commentary representing Nnu Ego's thoughts,

She might not have any money to supplement her husband's income, but were they not in a white man's world where it was the duty of the father to provide for his family? In Iboza, women made a contribution, but in urban Lagos, men had to be the sole providers; this new setting robbed the woman of her useful role. Nnu Ego told herself that the life she had indulged in with the baby Ngozi had been very risky: she had been trying to be traditional in a town like Lagos, and she lost her child. This time she was going to play it according to the new rules (81).

Modernity has more than ever accentuated the marginalization of women by denying their “useful” participation within this new setting or the “white man's world.” After the birth of Oshia, Nnu Ego has decided to play it according to the new rules, the rules of the white man. Yet once again she fails, and finds herself trapped “between two” worlds, as she could not cope with the demanding conditions of life in urban

Lagos when her family grows larger with more children and little income. Though desperate and confused, Nnu Ego could see that the duties traditionally prescribed on her as a mother and as a senior wife do not fit with life in Lagos, "at home in Ibuza she would have her own hut and would at least have been treated as befitting her position [as a senior wife], but here in Lagos, where she was faced with the harsh reality of making ends meet on a pittance, was it right for her husband to refer to her responsibilities? It seemed that all she had inherited from her agrarian background was the responsibility and none of the booty" (137). Her hardships have increased gradually, the narrative informs us that "[t]his was a life Nnu Ego did not know how to cope with. She felt adrift, as if it were on an open sea" (161). Then near the end of her life, Nnu Ego realizes that "she had to give way. The force pulling her was stronger than her will" (195).

The novel develops to suggest the double subjugation of women to an indigenous patriarchal order strengthened by modernity. Throughout the story of Nnu Ego's hardships, Emecheta shows how traditional as well as modern values converge to restrict the choices of women and to enslave them to men. In *When the Colonized Mother Speaks*, Kyeong-Hee Choi suggests, "Emecheta's inclusion of the precolonial curse in Nnu Ego's maternal suffering clearly suggests that African women have always been subject to the oppressions of gender, class, and tribes, prior to, and even after, British colonization."<sup>7</sup> Actually, the novel seems to suggest that women have been subordinated to men's interests throughout history—pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial.

Emecheta goes on to unfold her metaphor of enslaved womanhood when she claims that her protagonist feels imprisoned by a set of values that have been cleverly maintained through the ages by males who wittingly make use of women's sense of responsibility to enslave them. In a narrative representing the thoughts of desperate Nnu

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7 Kyeong-Hee Choi, *When the Colonized Mother Speaks: Post-Colonial and Maternal Narratives of Toni Morrison, Pak Wansö, and Buchi Emecheta* (Indiana: Indiana Univ. 1996), 267-8.

Ego, who finds herself trapped by a set of rules prescribing her duties that life in Lagos has made an unbearable burden, Emecheta makes a feminist claim, "it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned by her role as a senior wife. It was not fair she felt the way men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her" (137).

Along with this feminist condemnation of the patriarchal traditional values, Emecheta admits the complicity of women in perpetuating values that men have created to perpetuate women's subordination. This might be read as the strongest feminist statement of the novel expressed within Nnu Ego's confession:

The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die. That's why when I lost my first son I wanted to die, because I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband—and now I have to include my sons. But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man's world, which women will always help to build (187).

Even if these thoughts have never been loudly expressed, we feel that this discourse is too ideologically loaded to be uttered or even thought of by a traditionally dedicated woman as Nnu Ego. We just feel that the voice of the narrator representing the thoughts of the protagonist has shifted focus to represent the thoughts of the implied author deeply influenced by Western Feminist thought. Emecheta's identification of the overvalue of motherhood and son preference as instances of sexual differentiation and as standards prescribed by males to keep women in a subordinate position seem to respond to Western feminists' instruction to feminist writers to detect any instances of sexual differentiation rooted in male dominance and to challenge gender inequality through focus on culture change.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*; Sandra Harting, ed., *Feminism and Methodology* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

Actually, though the novel shows that the plight of Nnu Ego is worsened by colonialism, Emecheta's depiction of the effect of colonialism on her protagonist is negligible compared with the literal and metaphorical condemnation of the Igbo indigenous patriarchy which the novel insists is culturally imposed. Emecheta suggests that though colonialism had actually strengthened what already was problematic in the history of Africa, its effect on women's wellbeing is less harmful than indigenous patriarchy. The metaphors of the burials and of the double curse of Nnu Ego can actually be read as Emecheta's condemnation of an indigenous patriarchal order which is not recent, but it is deeply culturally embedded.

The curse that Nnu Ego has inherited at birth has determined her fate even if her father has sent her to the farthest place he could think about, Lagos. Frequent references to the effect of this curse on Nnu Ego's life while in Lagos are paralleled with the references to the indirect effect of colonialism. Indeed, colonialism has affected negatively Nnu Ego's life not directly but indirectly. The novel shows that Nnu Ego's hardships have increased due to the emasculation and mechanization of her husband and to the intellectual dependency of her educated sons. It also shows that her other problems in Lagos are more related to urbanization which is brought by modernity and colonialism. Never has Nnu Ego been exposed to a direct contact with the colonizer. The novel seems to suggest that colonialism has therefore contributed only indirectly to reinforce the enslavement of women.

Emecheta's reluctance to condemn colonialism directly is clearly stated in an interview, where she claims that:

You can't say that the white man meant to be bad, because during that time his women were at this stage too. You'll remember that this was during the late Victorian times, while the colonization was at its highest. He brought his own values on top of what we already had in Africa, so that the

position of the African woman got worse without changing the oppressive traditional situation in which she was before, he brought a second oppression so it is like a double yoke.<sup>9</sup>

What seems clear for Emecheta here is that "the position of the African woman" was already bad due to "an oppressive traditional situation," and it "got worse" with colonialism which "brought a second oppression." What remains ambiguous for us is that the white man brought a second oppression without really meaning to be oppressive and "bad". Does it mean that the white man who did not mean to be bad could not be blamed for being oppressive, which therefore may explain the novel's reluctance to condemn clearly and directly colonialism for worsening "what we already had" and which is condemnable? Indeed though reluctant to condemn colonialism, the novel seems to develop beyond its author's intention to show that Nnu Ego's life is overwhelmed by both indigenous patriarchy and colonialism.

It should be noted, however, that although the author shows a strong reservation regarding the patriarchal character of traditional Igbo culture, she does not indiscriminately reject this culture. Despite the feminist condemnation of some indigenous patriarchal values and despite the clear denunciation of the "oppressive traditional situation" that we "already had in Africa," the novel refers to the little explored treasure or the "booty" of traditional life. The narrative representing Nnu Ego's inner complaints states that the treasures of traditional life have been lost in Lagos, "It seemed that all she had inherited from her agrarian background was the responsibility and none of the booty." Though this statement seems to confirm that traditional life has its treasures, setting the largest part of the novel in colonial Lagos allows us to see very little of these treasures, which seem to be deeply concealed within the strictures of the caste and gendered system that colonialism has strengthened.

What the novel values clearly is the communal Igbo life and the solidarity among women in Ibuza. The novel has stressed in many instances that Nnu Ego has always

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9 Buchi Emecheta, quoted in Rolf Solberg, "The Women of Black Africa," *English Studies* (1983), fn. 59, 259.

been treated warmly and humanly by women in her in-law family through her first marriage, while being neglected then harshly beaten by her husband. When she returns to her father's compound after the failure of her first marriage, most of her father's wives "were sympathetic and nursed her mentally back to normal," (35). In an interview, Emecheta declares that some values like community life have been tried and approved and need to be preserved, "the traditional values [which] have been tried and approved. There are certain parts of you that are so tied to them that if you don't adhere to traditions, you just die. What I am, really saying is that what is good in the old values—let us keep it. I wish not to look down on everything we have as bad or backward just because it is not modern. And community life for example I think we should keep that—you know, just like that."<sup>10</sup>

Indeed Emecheta's reluctance to overtly condemn colonialism while condemning some traditional values that she finds oppressive to women because prescribed by indigenous patriarchy raises an important issue that complicates the novel's overall profile. Through this position, the novel enters the debate associating women with culture while underscoring the victimization of women in culture. It therefore becomes a battlefield for debate opposing Western feminists and "consciously 'African' critics" to use Cynthia Ward's words. While feminists interpret the novel as a feminist parable, which is praised or blamed in as far as it justifies the concepts articulated by Western feminists, 'consciously African critics' evaluate the novel in relation to its position to traditional culture.

Emecheta's projection of the weaknesses of the Igbo traditional culture with reservation generates divergent reactions among Western Feminist critics who most of the time misread the novel. "Existing scholarship on *The Joys of Motherhood*, rather than serving as an avenue through which to assess the conditions of African women and to interrogate the validity of its claims, has become, for the most part, a framework for reiterating old stereotypes about Africa and its women and for oversimplifying an

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10 Buchi Emecheta, quoted in Rolf Solberg, "The Women of Black Africa," 260.

otherwise complex relationship," writes Salome C. Nnoromelle in "Representing the African Woman: Subjectivity and Self in *The Joys of Motherhood*."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Florence Stratton criticizes Western feminist interest in Emecheta. She explains that applying Western feminist perspective to read Emecheta has resulted in what Chandra Mohanty identifies as "a coherence of effects." These effects she writes include "the privileging of the concerns of Western feminism, the denial of social and historical agency to women of other cultures, and the obliteration of cultural and historical difference." Stratton explains that applying Western feminist perspective to read Emecheta in Katherine Frank's and Marie Umeh's essays for example has resulted in "the suppression of the anti-colonial discourse of Emecheta's texts."<sup>12</sup>

Most Western feminists have found in the novel a means to repeat old Orientalizing attitudes towards the others' cultures. Many Western feminist critics as Patricia Lee Yongue and Katherine Frank acclaimed the novel as an excellent expression of feminism. In Frank's estimation, Emecheta's growth as a writer is linked to an increasing awareness that African traditions are the source of oppression for African women: "As Emecheta's gifts as a novelist developed from the awkward, diffuse autobiography of her first two books to the lyricism of *The Bride Price* and finally to the tragic dignity of *The Joys of Motherhood*, her vision of African womanhood steadily darkened."<sup>13</sup> In "'My Mother is Here': Buchi Emecheta's Love Child," Yongue links theories about women's bodies by Nancy Chodorow, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray to read *The Joys* as well as *The Bride Price* and *The Family*; she thus claims that Emecheta's three novels indict patriarchy for the systematic oppression of woman. Yongue writes that "Emecheta is fiercely feminist [...]. Although she is an outspoken critic of imperialism, Emecheta refuses to sentimentalize tribal culture, to depict pre-colonial Africa, simplistically as an Eden ransacked by western

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11 Salome C. Nnoromelle, "Representing the African Woman: Subjectivity and Self in *The Joys of Motherhood*," in *Critique*, 43 (2) (Winter 2002), 178.

12 Florence Stratton, 109.

13 Katherine Frank, "The Death of the Slave Girl: African Womanhood in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta." *World Literature Written in English* 21 (1982): 495.

imperialism; for the significant part of the told and untold history and the story of tribal Africa is the oppression of women."<sup>14</sup> Other feminists as Tuzlyline Jita Allen disclaim the novel's feminism complaining that Nnu Ego's passivity is unbelievable and that Emecheta "seems more interested in her heroine's suitability to an idea of African womanhood than in breaking the chains which the culture has forged."<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, Emecheta's reluctance to condemn colonialism as well as her condemnation of some cultural practices as oppressive, refusing therefore to commit her work to neither the defense of culture against Western denigration nor to the celebration of this culture has resulted in the condemnation of her work for repeating the imperialist prejudice towards African culture. Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu claims that Emecheta's work like that of Achebe repeat early European ethnographic representation of Igbo society as gendered. Nzegwu blames Emecheta for representing Igbo life as oppressive to women to make it fit with the concepts articulated by Western feminists about the universal oppression of women.<sup>16</sup> In "Buchi Emecheta: The Shaping of a Self," Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi<sup>17</sup> refuses to include Emecheta's work prior to *The Joys* with an African literary canon objecting to what she sees as neocolonialist attitudes in her work; with such a charge, she excludes Emecheta as "no longer 'one of us'." She however sees in *The Joys* a marker of Emecheta's gradual development of "a more acceptable African world view"<sup>18</sup> and concludes that with *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta seems at last "to come to terms with her Africanness."<sup>19</sup>

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14 Patricia Lee Yongue, "'My Mother is Here': Buchi Emecheta's Love Child," in *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th Century Literature*, ed. Elisabeth Brown-Guillory (Austin: Univ. Texas, 1996), 74.

15 Jita Allan Tuzlyline, *Womanist and Feminist Aesthetics: A Comparative Review* (Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1995), 108.

16 Nzegwu, 12

17 Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Buchi Emecheta: The Shaping of a Self," *Komparatistische Hefte* 8 (1983): 65-78.

18 Ibid, 73.

19 Ibid, 66.

In "What They Told Buchi Emecheta: Oral Subjectivity and the Joys of 'Otherhood'," Cynthia Ward defends Emecheta's work against both feminist readings as well as what she terms as "consciously" African criticism, she writes,

In a significant sense, this kind of normative criticism which rejects as literarily immature all that does not fit its paradigm of subjectivity has not escaped the colonialist enterprise of "othering": the erasure of individual distinction and historicity within and between groups of people and the subsequent construction of an ahistorical, unified representation to facilitate subjugation and control. The practitioners of such criticism, much like their colonial predecessors, demand an unproblematic self-representation of the authentic African woman that will erase deviation and contradiction; [...]. Failure to delineate the essential features of what such critics feel an African woman is--or should be—leads to an accusation that she is unable to represent herself adequately.<sup>20</sup>

## 7.2 *The Joys of Motherhood* in Dialogue with *Efuru*

Beyond these controversial debates, we propose to read the effect of tradition and colonialism on the wellbeing of women in *The Joys* in the light of its intertextual conversation with a precursor text, *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa. The importance of *Efuru* for our concern lies in its depiction of women's life in a traditional Igbo society, which has already been affected by modernity. Through these concerns, *Efuru* offers an opportunity for discourse with *The Joys* which seems critical of some cultural practices overvalued in *Efuru*. Depicting an Igbo society in a colonial context, *Efuru* is the first woman-authored novel written in the language and narrative form of the colonizer. It represents the story of a distinguished gracious female character<sup>21</sup> whose virtues are inspired by her adherence to Igbo custom. *Efuru's* insistence on the virtues of its

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20 Cynthia Ward, "What They Told Buchi Emecheta: Oral Subjectivity and the Joys of 'Otherhood,'" *Modern Language Association* 105 (Jan. 1990), 85-86.

21 As a first woman-authored novel in Nigeria written in English, *Efuru's* representation of a distinguished female character offers a reversal of the prejudiced representations of female characters by male authors as Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*. See Ernest Emenyonu, "Rev. of *Efuru*," *Ba Shiru* 1.1 (1970): 58-61.

protagonist and on the importance of Igbo custom for her agency and empowerment indicates Nwapa's "privileging of the discourse of tradition over that of modernity" as witnessed by Susan Z. Andrade. Published thirteen years after *Efuru*, *The Joys* emerges "into an already existing female literary tradition."<sup>22</sup>

The two novels show many similarities basically between the personal and family histories of their respective female protagonists.<sup>23</sup> With regard to the historical periods depicted in the two novels, while *Efuru* is set in the colonial period, *The Joys* is set in colonial and postcolonial periods. While *Efuru* depicts an Igbo village life during the early colonial period where life is little affected by Western modernity, *The Joys* depicts two important settings, the rural Ibuza and urban Lagos heavily affected by Western ways during the late colonial and early postcolonial periods. Therefore Nnu Ego could have been the daughter of *Efuru*. Emecheta acknowledges her indebtedness to her predecessor by building her novel through the relation of a developing personal history from mother to daughter as well as through similarities between the protagonists' personal histories. *The Joys* nevertheless revises *Efuru* through the critique of indigenous patriarchy and colonialism.

The dialogism between the two novels is significant in the choice of women protagonists who are both respectful of the appropriate rules of Igbo femininity, but whose fate is different. Nwapa's narrative develops through the representation of the virtues of an economically independent character who determines her own life while adhering to Igbo custom. The narrative celebrates *Efuru*'s modesty and adherence to appropriate models of Igbo femininity. She adheres to the role of the dutiful daughter and wife, as prescribed by Igbo custom. The rules for appropriate behavior for women as defined by Ife Amadiume include: hard work, cooking well, respect for elders,

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22 Susan Z. Andrade, "Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion: Naming an African Women's Literary Tradition," *Research in African Literatures*, 21(1990), 97. Many scholars wrote about the relation between *Efuru* and *The Joys* as two important novels of a female literary tradition; see Florence Stratton, "Their New Sister, Buchi Emecheta and the Contemporary African Literary Tradition" in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994).

23 Susan Z. Andrade has summed these similarities in "Rewriting History," 97.

behaving without condescension to the other inhabitants of the village, helping those in need, and the valorization of traditional Igbo custom.<sup>24</sup> Efuru respects all these rules and she eventually becomes a devout follower of the female/feminist deity, Uhamiri. Conversely, while Nnu Ego seems to have inherited most of the virtues of the "mother" she fails to determine her own fate. Nnu Ego adheres to the same role of the dutiful daughter and wife, she respects all the rules of appropriate behavior, but she could not determine her own fate, which seems to be determined by the slave "chi" or deity, and not by the "beautiful" and "wealthy" Uhamiri.

The dialogism underlying the choice of different deities for the two protagonists is significant. While both authors claim to rewrite history from within a cultural heritage, their interpretations of this cultural heritage converge. When Nwapa has chosen for her protagonist a deity that supports self-satisfaction, self-determination, self-fulfillment and independence, she chooses to celebrate the positive aspects of this heritage. Rewriting and revising Nwapa's text, Emecheta reminds her predecessor that some women's fate could also be determined by a slave deity, who has ironically been a river goddess devotee but who has been enslaved nevertheless. Emecheta reminds her predecessor that this heritage could have been harmful to women's wellbeing, that this heritage which allows slavery could enslave the individual from within. Emecheta uses irony to remind her predecessor that a slave woman ritually murdered could return as a *chi* to determine the fate of the free woman, the chief's daughter. Rewriting Nwapa's text, Emecheta reminds her predecessor about the need to stress these failures in history. Rewriting Nwapa's text, Emecheta warns her predecessor that ignoring or minimizing the failures of the past would enslave women forever as it is suggested through the symbolism of the slave woman who returns to enslave the daughter to ironically punish the father. Emecheta warns her predecessor that in this heritage women generally pay for the transgressions of males. She warns her about the gendered caste dynamics characteristic of this heritage.

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<sup>24</sup> *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*.

The dialogue between the two texts continues to discuss the effect of motherhood, an important value of this heritage, on the wellbeing of women. Indeed, *The Joys of Motherhood* as a successor text starts where *Efuru* ends; working through verbal echo, Emecheta derives her title from the last paragraph in *Efuru*, "She [Uhamiri] had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her?"<sup>25</sup> She then undertakes the task to rewrite and revise the precursor text's assumptions about the meaning of motherhood and womanhood in the Igbo custom. Rewriting Nwapa whose novel depicts the virtues of womanhood in the Igbo custom, *The Joys* in its surface structure depicts the miseries of motherhood which constrain womanhood in this same custom.

Before we discuss the conversation between the two texts, we first offer a reading of the closing text of *Efuru*, which sums up Nwapa's ideology of motherhood, and which inspired Emecheta's novel. The closing lines of the text have been read by several critics as a key to understand the novel as well as Nwapa's ideology of motherhood; Susan Z. Andrade for instance considers that "Nwapa's tribute to women's independence notwithstanding, the narrative manifests a blindspot about the ideology of motherhood."<sup>26</sup> Our reading of the closing lines of *Efuru* and of the whole novel as a celebration of womanhood regardless of motherhood and as a consequence of Emecheta's response stands in contrast with Susan Z. Andrade's reading, as she interprets the ending of *Efuru* in the following, "Nwapa negotiates the closure by so elevating the discourse of motherhood that the success of Uhamiri, and by extension, that of *Efuru* is undermined. In response, Emecheta blatantly criticizes her precursor's privileging of motherhood through her last lines."<sup>27</sup>

Actually, Nwapa's valorization of the Igbo custom stands on the celebration of what Ahmad Ghashmari calls the "elasticity of the rules" in the Igbo custom,<sup>28</sup> which

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25 Flora Nwapa, *Efuru* (Heinemann, 1966), 221.

26 Andrade, 100.

27 Andrade, 104.

28 Ahmad Ghashmari, in "A Book Review," in *africaResource* :

allows individuals to introduce reform while keeping in line with this custom. Therefore, Efuru's feeling of incompleteness for being childless prescribed by Igbo custom could be compensated by the cultivation of the virtues of womanhood also prescribed by this same custom. Through its closing lines, the novel settles the constant undercurrent of doubt about the ability of a woman without children to be happy, a doubt that has often troubled Efuru. The closing lines of the novel structure the key question that has often preoccupied Efuru, if Uhamiri "had never experienced the joys of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her?" Though the rest of the narrative has been devoted to resolve this pertinent question, the answer seems to come to Efuru in the form of a dream epiphany through the closing lines which precede the question:

Efuru slept soundly that night. She dreamt of the woman of the lake, her beauty, her long hair and her riches. She had lived for ages at the bottom of the lake. She was as old as the lake itself. She was happy, she was wealthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her? (221)

Efuru has slept soundly that night because she has realized as did all the worshipers of Uhamiri that womanhood in the absence of motherhood is worthy of worship since the Uhamiri faith is based on women's worship of a deity who looks beautiful with "her long hair and her riches" and who is "happy" even if "she had no child," and who could give her devout worshipers "beauty and wealth." Efuru has slept soundly that night because she has realized that as a devout worshiper of Uhamiri she should be "happy" with her "womanhood"; she should be self-satisfied with her other achievements regardless of "the joy of motherhood." "Womanhood" seems to entail "beauty" revealed through physical beauty and moral strength and "wealth" suggesting economic independence. These qualities are worthy of being celebrated and of being sought after by women regardless of "the joy of motherhood" which seem undermined in this text celebrating "beauty, wealth, and happiness outside motherhood." "The joy of

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[http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=894:flora-nwapas-efuru-a-book-review&Itemid=349](http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=894:flora-nwapas-efuru-a-book-review&Itemid=349)

motherhood" is actually understated and mocked in this text celebrating womanhood. "The joy of motherhood" is repeated to be mocked in this text focused on the empowerment of women through a celebration of economic independence and "beauty".

Essentially, through this style of indirection and understatement, Nwapa indirectly criticizes the privileges of motherhood prescribed by Igbo custom. Efuru yearning for children has always been motivated by more than self-satisfaction through motherhood, but also the satisfaction of society's need which is manifested first in her mother-in law's worries which soon turned into suggesting that her son should remarry for the sake of children. Additionally, when Efuru's wish in motherhood has been fulfilled, as she gives birth to a daughter, Efuru has expressed her joy saying, "Is it really true that I had a baby, that I am a woman after all."<sup>29</sup> While Efuru's self-confidence and strength have never been shaken by the fact that she could not bear children before she bears this daughter, it is strange to hear her valorizing her womanhood by motherhood. Actually, Efuru repeats the current belief in her village about overvalue of motherhood without really allowing this belief to rule her life. Thus when Nwapa kills the daughter who ironically makes Efuru "a woman after all" while allowing Efuru to live and enjoy many achievements, she actually subtly defies and challenges the Igbo custom which values women just as instruments of procreation.

Throughout the novel, the qualities and the achievements of Efuru are celebrated; she is depicted as a dignified woman, who overcomes her life's problems and eventually determines her own destiny. The novel opens with Efuru marrying a man against the will of her father, and then soon gaining this consent through helping her husband to earn the necessary money to pay for the bride price and therefore forcing the father to bless the marriage according to custom. This is the first marker of not only Efuru's strong determination, but also of her ability as a woman to be a reformer while respectful of tradition. Actually, with this marriage, Efuru could use the "elasticity of

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<sup>29</sup> *Efuru*, 31.

the rules" in the Igbo custom<sup>30</sup> to introduce reform while keeping in line with this custom. Efuru, who offends her father's will and the custom of bride price through her romantic marriage, finds a way to amend her offence within the Igbo custom, which allows a man to pay back the bride price even after marriage. The novel develops to celebrate her other virtues as growing into a skillful trader who could ensure her economic independence and help the needy in her community.

She could overcome "the misfortune" of being childless which has not made her bear the "scar which nothing can erase" described by M'biti. She nevertheless turns this misfortune, of not being able to preserve "personal immortality" and of not being useful to her own children, into the fortune of being able to preserve life against mortality and of being useful to all the community. Actually, Efuru marries twice, but both her marriages fail. She gives birth to one daughter who dies. However, Efuru remains firm and strong, maintaining a very successful and prosperous business and standing as a perfect example of generosity, intelligence and care among her peers. After each hardship, Efuru has been able to pull through and resume her life and success; Efuru's mother in law from her first marriage admits Efuru's capacity to endure hardships, "Efuru's patience couldn't be tried....Life for her meant living it fully. She did not want merely to exist. She wanted to live and use the world to her advantage."<sup>31</sup> Actually it is her ability to live fully which is the essence of her success. Living fully entails committing herself to be useful for others through helping them live right and/or live long. Fully useful, she keeps helping and lending money even to people whose misfortunes prevent them from paying back. Through her friendship with the village doctor, she arranges to help sick people who cannot afford to pay for health care allowing the preservation of life against mortality.

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30 Ahmad Ghashmari, in "A Book Review," in *africaResource*

[http://www.africasource.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=894:flora-nwapas-efuru-a-book-review&Itemid=349](http://www.africasource.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=894:flora-nwapas-efuru-a-book-review&Itemid=349)

31 *Efuru*, 78.

Being useful for others helps Efuru maintain the respect of the community even against the spiteful comments on her childlessness spread by the village gossip, who appears to be the only character who envies Efuru in her village. Actually, the female community has been motivated to rescue Efuru's reputation against the rumors about her adultery, and a "woman's war" has been declared to punish the husband who believes the unfair accusations against his wife. In a very significant incident suggesting the celebration of female strength and solidarity in Igbo community, Ajanapu, Efuru's aunt-in-law, breaks a mortar pestle on Gilbert's head—Efuru's second husband. The significance of this incident lies in Ajanapu's use of the mortar pestle which is "not only an important domestic tool, but the same instrument brandished by angry Igbo women during "sitting on" a man."<sup>32</sup> The narrative celebrates the strength and solidarity of women through this comment "She got up quickly for she was *a strong woman*, got hold of a mortar pestle and broke it on Gilbert's head. Blood filled Gilbert's eyes"<sup>33</sup> (italics mine). Additionally, this incident underscores Efuru's move toward a woman's community, which culminates in the eventual worship of the benevolent female deity, Uhamiri. In response to call for a woman's war launched by Ajanapu against Efuru's husband who believes the rumors about her adultery, Efuru finds in Uhamiri, the water goddess, an indomitable supporter.

Worship of the benevolent deity Uhamiri is common in the Igbo custom as worship of the Mammy Water deities within the myth of the water goddesses.<sup>34</sup> Nwapa appropriates this myth which inspires her to outline the female "feminist" theology in *Efuru* and in all her oeuvre; in "Myth, History, Culture, and Igbo Womanhood in Flora Nwapa's Novels," Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo writes that "Uhamiri is the central and controlling image and represents the feminine principle in *Efuru* and *Idu*. In the war

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<sup>32</sup> Susan Z. Andrade, 100.

<sup>33</sup> *Efuru*, 217.

<sup>34</sup> See Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, *The Water Goddess in Igbo Cosmology: Ogbuide of Oguta Lake* (Africa World Press, 2008). See also Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo, "Myth, History, Culture, and Igbo Womanhood in Flora Nwapa's Novels," in *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Marie Umeh (Africa World Press, 1998).

novel, *Never Again*, the Woman of the Lake becomes the influential, powerful figure and deity to which the people run for refuge."<sup>35</sup>

In *Efuru*, her first novel, Nwapa has started outlining the attributes of this female "feminist" theology inspired from the myth of the water goddesses. This theology is "as old as the lake." Uhamiri chooses her followers among the females who already possess some qualities which resemble hers, namely beauty and generosity in addition to the necessary intelligence to succeed in trade and in life. She calls her chosen followers through dream, and she inspires them with her teachings through dream epiphany. She then fosters the virtues of her followers providing for more "beauty and wealth" more goodness and generosity, and more economic independence. Uhamiri denies her followers "the joy of motherhood" nevertheless. Self-satisfied and wholly empowered by her personal attributes and achievements, Uhamiri disregards "the joy of motherhood."

Efuru's personal traits resemble the goddess of the lake, Uhamiri, and therefore Efuru starts to have dreams or religious calling from the woman of the lake right after she loses her first and only child. Though called at this early stage in the novel, Efuru has decided to answer the call just at the closing of the novel when offended by her second husband who accuses her of adultery. The decision to answer the call entails a determination to give up all yearning for children, to mock "the joy of motherhood" that custom has prescribed to undermine women's other achievements, and the devotion to the benevolent work of sisterhood serving the community. The satisfaction of Efuru with her decision is summed up in the closing text "Efuru slept soundly that night" and in dream epiphany through which the woman of the lake strengthens Efuru's decision.

Eventually, we may say that *Efuru* is about the virtues of womanhood regardless of motherhood. According to the female "feminist" perspective followed by the

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35 Theodora Akachi Ezeigbo, "Myth, History, Culture, and igbo Wamanhood in Flora Nwapa's Novels," in *Emerging Perspectives on Flora Nwapa: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Marie Umeh (Africa World Press, 1998), 54.

worshippers of Uhamiri, womanhood is an autonomous value that needs no other value to be complete. Motherhood however needs the virtues of womanhood to be successful. Through solidarity among women preached by the Uhamiri "feminist" theology, a mother always finds support among the female relatives; Ajanupu's advice and support to Efuru when she has her first and only daughter is a significant marker about how motherhood links to womanhood in the Igbo custom.

The novel ends by Efuru's decision to answer the call for the "women's war" launched by Ajanupu. This significant ending may suggest the call for a 'women's war' launched by Nwapa and answered by Emecheta against the representations denigrating Igbo womanhood by male writers. Through *Efuru* 'the war' is launched against Ekenzi's *Juagwa*, where the female protagonist is a prostitute. Emecheta responds to Nwapa's call through exploring "the joy of motherhood," not sufficiently depicted in the predecessor's text deliberately focused on the virtues of womanhood through the childless Efuru. Emecheta gives her protagonist Nnu Ego, Efuru's primary unfulfilled wish many times over, while denying her the forebear's promise of joy. Emecheta warns that motherhood has become the source of much misery, which may constrain all the virtues of womanhood Nwapa has celebrated in *Efuru*. With Nnu Ego, womanhood and motherhood are buried once and twice, and they require us to read and reread beyond what on the surface structure justifies the claims of those who praise the novel as a feminist parable and those who blame it for the repetition of imperialist prejudice against African culture.

Our previous reading of the closing text of *The Joys* has allowed us to find that the ironies of the novel are motivated by the double need to challenge the current language representing the privileges of motherhood at both conversational and written levels, and the need to travel in time and space to find out "the joys of motherhood." We have also suggested that Emecheta has undergone this return through the unusual structure of her plot where the chronology of the story of the mother has been interrupted so that while the novel starts in a first chapter with "The mother" it continues in a second chapter with "The Mother's Mother." We thus suggest that this return to the story of the mother's

mother is motivated by the author's need to return to a precursor text about motherhood,<sup>36</sup> to help write the missing part in the story of the mother, which has been buried twice.

We also suggest that to understand Emecheta's ideology of motherhood, it should be read in the light of its conversation with *Efuru*. A re-reading of the closing text of Emecheta through its conversation with the closing text of *Efuru* will we hope reveal the underlying meaning of the value of motherhood in *The Joys*. We will make use of Bakhtin's category "stylization" to show that Emecheta's repetition of Nwapa's text in the closing lines of her novel as well as in the title allows a "stylization" of Nwapa's thought.

The definition of Bakhtin's "stylization" is here necessary. Stylization which is one of the categories of the double voiced discourse as defined by Bakhtin is based on:

an intention on the part of the author to make use of someone else's discourse in the direction of its own particular aspirations. Stylization stylizes another's style in the direction of that style's own particular tasks. It merely renders those tasks conventional. Likewise a narrator's narration, refracting in itself the author's intention, does not swerve from its own straight path and is sustained in tones and intonations truly characteristic of it. The author's thought, once having penetrated someone else's discourse and made its home in it, does not collide with the other's thought, but rather follows after it in the same direction, merely making that direction conventional.<sup>37</sup>

When Emecheta repeats Nwapa's famous statement "the joy of motherhood," she makes use of Nwapa's discourse to render it conventional. Indeed Emecheta stylizes Nwapa's style of indirection and understatement to render her celebration of womanhood regardless of motherhood and indeed her ideology of motherhood conventional. Emecheta's stylization is aimed to celebrate the female feminist theology that Nwapa has outlined in *Efuru*. Emecheta's text is penetrated by Nwapa's thought without colliding with it. For instance, in response to "the woman's war" launched by

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<sup>36</sup> *Efuru* is an ideal precursor text for the links we listed before between the two novels.

<sup>37</sup> *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 193.

Nwapa against the representation of women as immoral in male writings—reference to Ekenzi's *Jagua*—Emecheta joins in the war through her mockery of the discourses presenting the privileges of motherhood maintained in the masculinist oral tradition, sic Igbo custom and written tradition, sic male writings and a deference of Nwapa's mythical inspired theology based on the celebration of womanhood regardless of motherhood.

Thus, Emecheta enters the war through mocking the current language about the joys and the virtues of motherhood. She mocks this "current language" about the "virtues of motherhood" which disregards the virtues of womanhood, and shows that this "language" is created to enslave women and that motherhood and its joys turn to be just a myth in the absence of the strength of womanhood. Through nearly all the novel narrating the story of the mother, Nnu Ego, mocks the "current language" about the "virtues of motherhood," one important chapter about the story of the mother's mother, narrated through flashback, celebrates the virtues of womanhood already largely defined in *Efuru*. This chapter defines through the character of Ona, the mother's mother, the virtues of womanhood. These virtues are summed in Ona's deathbed plea to Agbadi, Nnu Ego's father, "please don't morn me long, and see that however much you love our daughter Nnu Ego, you must allow her to have a life of her own, a husband if she wants one. Allow her to be a woman," (28). Interpreting this plea, Salome C. Nnoromele writes,

Ona's idea of motherhood runs counter to the general notion that African women equate womanhood or selfhood with motherhood. Ona's desire and hope for her daughter is that she be given the opportunity "to have a life of her own." In other words, Ona wants Nnu Ego to be the master of her own fate, the subject of her actions rather than an object of other people's actions and decisions. This, to Ona, is what it means to be a woman, to be one's own self.<sup>38</sup>

Still the significance of what it means to be a woman, and what it means to have a life of her own can be explored further. A basic requirement of this deathbed plea is

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38 Salome C. Nnoromele, 185.

woman's agency and empowerment, which would allow her to have a life of her own, be the master of her choices in life including to have a husband or not, to have children or not. As a master of her own actions in life, her identity as a woman should not be defined within the confines of the violent hierarchy of a gendered system that opposes woman to man, and which consequently defines woman as a wife or a mother, and which eventually imposes patriarchal codes of moral conduct. The presence of a man is not a necessary requirement for her existence, as his absence would not mean absence, as she can have a life of her own even if she is neither wife nor mother. Therefore, to be a woman can be defined from within through her own self-determination and self-achievement as a woman who is not necessarily "a good wife" and a "good mother."

Nnu Ego, who is taught to respect Igbo patriarchal custom, has been obscured from her mother's desires and thoughts about womanhood. She has never been allowed to have a life of her own; her whole life has been a struggle to be "a good daughter" "a good wife" "a good mother." Nnu Ego, or the woman of the late colonial and early postcolonial periods has been stripped of the heritage that strengthens her womanhood regardless; she has been stripped of the heritage of the water goddess, which strengthens womanhood regardless of motherhood. This heritage of the water goddess is lost as the devotee of the water goddess has been enslaved then ritually murdered or "buried alive."

A "women's war" launched by Nwapa is therefore needed to restore this heritage, to bring back the joys of motherhood and those of womanhood. Emecheta answers the call by mocking the male prescribed maternal discourses, which overvalue motherhood and those discourses, which undervalue womanhood. Additionally, Emecheta's bonding with Nwapa and her embracing of the female feminist theology, which celebrates womanhood regardless, underlies a distancing from the pessimistic overtones of victimization of women repeated by western feminists, and which our first reading of the closing passage has confirmed. Indeed these women's voices eloquently speak against the silencing of women through stories, which can rhetorically recover the lost voice of the subaltern. Speaking about the voice of the subaltern, it is worth mentioning

that Spivak recognizes, as Morton puts it, “that literary texts can provide an alternative rhetorical site for articulating the histories of subaltern women.”<sup>39</sup>

In the novel, there is a symbolic reference to “women’s war,” in the incident depicting the food strike that Nnu Ego and her co-wife Adaku have planned against their husband, Nnaife. In respect of the Igbo custom, which prescribes the duties of the wife, Nnu Ego interrupts the fight. This is suggestive of the obstacles that women may face in their fight against patriarchy. The male law would always be used to discourage women from fighting their ‘women’s war.’ Adaku, the foil character in the novel, defies the customs which, respected by Nnu Ego, have led to her tragic demise. So while through Nnu Ego, Emecheta projects the life of a woman who respects Igbo masculinist custom, through Adaku, Emecheta hints to the possibility of the revival of the heritage of the water goddesses structured in Ona’s deathbed plea, requiring a woman “to have a life of her own.”

Actually, a female feminist theology celebrating the virtues of womanhood against masculinist denigration or mystification, and against western feminist victimization seems to respond to feminist postcolonial theory as defined by Mohanty and Spivak among others. A basic requirement of postcolonial feminism is woman’s agency and empowerment that can be achieved through the re-inscription of effaced history. These feminists warn against discourses of victimization of womanhood which have roots in colonial discourses aimed to justify imperialism, repeated by western feminists and by some non-western feminists in post-colonial societies. They also warn against the mystification of womanhood repeated by decolonization nationalists. Postcolonial feminists argue that though speaking for women’s empowerment, both feminists and decolonization nationalists perpetuate structures they claim to oppose.<sup>40</sup>

When the conversation between the two novels about the effect of tradition on women’s wellbeing in the turn of the century has involved many aspects where the

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<sup>39</sup> Morton, 55.

<sup>40</sup> See part 1, chapter 3, women and culture

voices of two authors merge to render the discourse celebrating womanhood conventional, the dialogue underlying their position to colonialism is so brief and fleeting. *Efuru* gives a marginal account of the historical events that preceded colonialism and aided greatly in its acceleration focusing on the complicity of some Igbo men, as Efuru's father, with the European colonialist enterprise through slave trade. It shows yet briefly the gradual protraction of European colonialism to conquer the continent, as it displays the ways in which colonial violence and corruption infuse the Igbo culture. *The Joys* seems to continue the story of colonial violence, while being also brief but uncritical; it depicts the miseries of colonialism and its insidious effect on native Nigerians without either questioning the complicity with or resistance against the process, or reproving the European for those miseries. *The Joys* as Andrade puts it, "represents the phenomenon [colonialism] itself as an act committed on Africans."<sup>41</sup> Emecheta wants the "African" woman to assume responsibility for her fate through adapting to change; the miseries of Nnu Ego emanate from her attempt to be traditional in a colonial urban setting.

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<sup>41</sup>Andrade, 102.

**8 *Possessing the Secret of Joy: Woman*  
Between Tradition and the Invention of  
Tradition**

## 8.1 *Possessing the Secret of Joy* in Dialogue with *The Joys of Motherhood*

*Possessing the Secret of Joy* converses dialogically with other texts as it "represent[s] all the social and ideological voices of its era" allowing the free play of contradictions within its text to use Bakhtin's argument. So our reading of the novel is aimed to describe the free play of contradictions within its text as they relate with a predecessor text, Emecheta's *The Joy of Motherhood*, then as they relate to a successor text Djébar's *La femme sans sépulture*, which *Possessing* has allowed to emanate.

The dialogism between Emecheta's text and Walker's text can be traced through different examples. One of these instances is noticed at the level of tone. Through parodistic narration, Emecheta's implicit condemnation of the evils of patriarchal institutions has been turned into a verdict imposing death sentence against monolithic patriarchy in Walker's text. Walker challenges explicitly ritual clitoridectomy, documenting the story of one African woman, Tashi, whose life has been almost destroyed after submitting to the "mutilating" operation. Most of the novel depicts the harmful ensuing effects of this operation. Tashi endures different troubles physical and psychic as a dysfunctional sex life, intensely painful childbirth, deformed child, troubled marriage, and tortured soul, which are all attributed to "FGM". Physically, the subsequent consequences of the operation result in her failure to enjoy her husband sexually, in giving birth to a brain damaged son. Psychically, the repressed memories of the death of her sister following genital mutilation and her subsequent physical suffering from her genital scars have led Tashi to madness. The rest of the novel represents therapeutic attempts to get Tashi out of her troubles, helped by her Western friends, and her activism to fight FGM in her homeland, by killing the tsunga M'Lissa, the woman who performs genital operations in her village. Symbolically, this murder or death sentence is Walker's verdict against those cultural practices that may affect

women's wellbeing. Ironical of Emecheta who implicitly condemns, Walker's text is a call for arms.

Dialogism can also be traced through characterization. The characterization of Tashi, like that of Nnu Ego underscores the oppression of women in culture yet with a difference. Walker represents her protagonist as a victim of FGM, which thus becomes metonymic of the victimization of women in culture. To underscore this victimization, Walker builds her story around a character who has been saved from FGM when a child as a consequence of her mother's response to the preaching of the Christian missionaries who have denounced the practice as "barbaric." Tashi, however, decides to undertake the operation when grown up in response to the nationalist call venerating "mutilation" as a traditional ritual which needs to be preserved and advocating the role of women as holders of tradition. Tashi's early uncritical veneration of nationalist appeals is due to her early reverence for her culture, which becomes the marker of identity in postcolonial Africa.

Additionally, the dialogue between the texts of the two novels is also underscored by another instance of parodistic narration. Like Emecheta, but through accusation and scorn, Walker denounces and rebels against women's or more precisely mothers' complicity in perpetuating the torture of their daughters. In one of her last testimonies about her role as a bearer of tradition, M'Lissa (the woman who accomplishes the operation) finally admits the contradiction of women who are complicit in their own repression, of "mothers" who allow their daughters to undergo an operation that has so distorted their own lives. Repeating and revising Nnu Ego's confession "But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone," Walker through M'Lissa says, "In service to tradition, to what makes us a people. In service to the country and what makes us who we are. *But who are we but torturers of children?*" (210) (emphasis added).

Walker's repetition and revision of Emecheta's discourse is here a clear instance of the dialogism between the two texts. Dialogue is underscored by a polemical

parodistic narration where Nnu Ego's softened confession in "But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters?" claiming the complicity of women in perpetuating patriarchal values has been turned into a political-cultural discourse of resistance against traditional as well as new nationalist values in postcolonial Africa. M'Lissa who repeats Nnu Ego's rhetorical structure through the use of the question form for her utterance, in "But who....?" denotes accusingly those institutions which dictate women's behavior, namely tradition venerated by nationalism.

In the same context, and through a hidden polemic to Emecheta's text, the postcolonial daughter of Africa, Tashi, who could be one of the daughters of colonial Nnu Ego, illuminated by the teachings of her Western friends, challenges polemically the mother's complicity in perpetuating the oppressive tradition. Tashi recalls her mother accusingly:

And there was my mother, trudging along the path in front of me, her load of groundnuts forcing her nearly double. I have never seen anyone work as hard as my mother, or pull her share of work with a more resigned dignity. I studied the white rinds of my mother's heels, and felt in my own heart the weight of Dura's death settling upon her spirit, like the groundnuts that bent her back. As she staggered under her load, I half expected her footprints, into which I was careful to step, to stain my own feet with tears and blood (16).

The overworked mother, who recalls Nnu Ego's hard work to fit the requirements of mythical motherhood, cannot have peace even after her death (just as expected by Nnu Ego in her prediction about the future). In another harsher accusation, Tashi says, "In truth my mother was not equipped, there was not enough of herself left to her, to think about me. Or about my sister Dura, who bled to death after a botched circumcision, or about any of her other children. She had just sunk into her role of 'She Who Prepares the Lambs for Slaughter'" (258-259). It seems that the *little equipped overworked* mothers of Africa are *unaware*—since there was not enough of them left to them to think about their *sadomasochistic* behavior while serving through their sacrificial actions patriarchal monolithic myths.

Another instance of dialogue between Emecheta's and Walker's texts as underscored by parodistic narration is the repetition with difference of Emecheta's metaphor of enslaved womanhood. Indeed, in Walker's text, Emecheta's metaphor is an institutionalized enslavement prescribed by tradition defended by the "elders" and reinvented by the nationalists. Nnu Ego's unuttered feelings of unfairness in "It was not fair she felt the way *men cleverly* used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually *enslave* her" (italics mine) are given a political dimension in Walker's description of the plight of Tashi. Walker denotes those "clever men" as being "the elders" or "the chief and his counselors" of the pre-colonial era and early colonial periods and "Our leader" of the decolonization and postcolonial periods. While "the elders" and "the council of elders," seem to have an institutional influence in most traditional African societies as they "represent tradition and the wisdom of the past," as witnessed by historian Mani Ampin,<sup>1</sup> "Our Leader" or the nationalist leader in the revolutionary struggle of the Olinka bears considerable likeness to the Kenyan cultural nationalist Jomo Kenyatta, who encouraged Africans to return to tribal rituals, such as "female circumcision", as part of anti-colonial activism.<sup>2</sup>

According to Walker's text, nationalist leaders have reinvented tradition, which has been protected by the "elders" to maintain the enslavement of women and their ritual "mutilation" that the missionaries and the colonial governments have tried to abolish. In the novel, while the "elders" have sanctioned the "mutilation" which has led to the death of Dura, Tashi's sister, "Our leader" has sanctioned the "mutilation" of Tashi, at an advanced age despite being saved during her childhood from "mutilation" thanks to missionary effort. Walker's text focuses on the fact that the ritual "mutilation" of women which was sanctioned by tradition, vigilantly protected by "the elders," has been prescribed by cultural nationalists who substitute for the elders in the decolonization and postcolonial periods. Therefore, the enslavement of women which is maintained by

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1 Manu Ampin, "The Five Major African Initiation Rites" in *Africana Studies*,  
<http://www.manuampin.com/AfricanInitiationRites.htm>.

2 See part one the chapter: Women and culture.

ritual "mutilation" not simply by relying on women's sense of responsibility has therefore moved from enslavement to the indefinite category of Emecheta's "clever men" to Walker's definite categories the "elders" then the "leaders". With Walker, women's enslavement has moved from the patriarchal paternalism of "eldership" to that of "leadership". Emecheta's story of the enslavement of women in tradition becomes in Walker's text the story of the enslavement of women through the reinvention of tradition by the nationalists during the decolonization and postcolonial periods.

Walker tries to argue that the nationalists have used religious emotionalism as well as nationalist anthropology to instruct the return to tradition and to maintain the patriarchal order, which the missionaries have tried to abolish. In a significant confessional narrative told by Evelyn—Tashi's American name—during a therapeutic encounter with her African American psychiatrist doctor, we learn much about the strategies of the nationalists to maintain the old patriarchal order, we will therefore rely heavily on this text to show these strategies as debated by Walker.

To begin with, the authority of the unnamed leader and his influence on people seem to be maintained by religious emotionalism. This "Leader" who has been jailed for a while then "assassinated on the eve of Independence as he left the high security prison" (107) becomes a god-like figure to the masses. Tashi parallels her earlier reverence to the "Leader" with the reverence Christians have for Jesus, "He was a Jesus Christ to us" (108). She parallels the suffering of this leader in prison to Jesus Christ's suffering, "we thought him a god, really [...] to have suffered so much" (109). Walker argues that turned into a divinity, his teachings are also venerated, "Even from prison we received our instructions. [...] Good instructions. Sensible; correct. From our Leader," (109) witnesses Tashi. The instruction could easily stand between Africans and Christian missionaries who have preached against old customs and against ritual "mutilation." Reinforced by the counter faith in nationalism, Africans could mock the missionaries, "it was difficult to hear the missionaries' objections, [to customs] or to care about missionaries themselves. Though we gave them our mumbled prayers and

conversions, with which they seemed so easily, like mothers of docile children, satisfied" (110).

In addition to religious emotionalism, Walker argues that nationalists rely on a masculinist anthropology that enlists the woman's body in the service of a cause that's male defined to reestablish the old patriarchal order that the preachers have been fighting. Walker parodies the nationalist teachings, repeated within the protagonist's confessions to the psychiatrist doctor,

From prison Our Leader said we must keep ourselves clean and pure as we had been since time immemorial—by cutting out unclean parts of our bodies. Everyone knew that if a woman was not circumcised her unclean parts would grow so long they'd soon touch her thighs; she'd become masculine and arouse herself. No man could enter her because her erection would be in his way.

*You believed this?* [Psychiatrist doctor's question]

*Everyone believed it. [...] the elders, particularly, acted as if everyone had witnessed this evil, and not nearly a long enough time ago* (112-3).

Walker mocks the nationalist leader, who collects the argument to defend "circumcision" against missionary "objection" from nonsensical myths repeated by the masses and defended by the elders whose wisdom is also ridiculed here. The repetition of this myth by the nationalist leader offers an ironical reversal of Tashi's early-unquestioned reverence of what she used to see as "Good," "Sensible," "correct" instructions. Additionally, the repetition of this myth offers a double reversal of Tashi's mockery of the missionaries she has compared to "mothers of docile children." The African's mockery of the missionaries is turned against them.

Essentially, Walker's criticism is directed against cultural nationalists and nationalist anthropology. She therefore has not been satisfied by creating a fictional unnamed leader, who bears likeness to the Kenyan leader Jomo Kenyatta,<sup>3</sup> but merges fact with fiction and calls Kenyatta to her fictional world identifying him as the spiritual

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3 Parallels between Walker's unnamed leader and Jomo Kenyatta have been outlined by Olakunle George in "Alice Walker's Africa."

teacher of all nationalist leaders. Thus the narrative describing the fictional unnamed "Leader" starts with a comparison based on a display of similarities and differences between the personal histories of national leaders, "Our Leader, like Nelson Mandela and Jomo Kenyatta and others before them, had been forced into exile and eventually captured and jailed by the white regime. [...] Unlike Nelson Mandela and Jomo Kenyatta, Our Leader never made it to freedom himself; he was assassinated on the eve of Independence as he left the high security prison" (107). The narrative ends by claiming that the unnamed "Leader" receives the "Good, sensible and correct" instruction from Kenyatta himself, "Our Leader, our Jesus Christ, said we must keep all our old ways and that no Olinka man—in this he echoed the great liberator Kenyatta—would even think of marrying a woman who was not circumcised" (114). Here, repeating the echoed text from Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, Walker discloses the bargaining that the nationalist leaders have used with the women who have been enlisted with the decolonization struggles to serve a male defined, power motivated cause.

Walker's argument against cultural nationalism continues to denounce the nationalists' cheap bargaining with women. The bargaining statement from *Facing Mount Kenya*, has been reversed in Walker's text through chiasmus. After her "circumcision," Tashi marries the uncircumcised non-Olinka missionary, Adam. The chiasmic reversal is underscored by Tashi's conduct after the operation, Walker's text seems to suggest that no "circumcised" sic "mutilated" woman would marry an Olinka man when she returns to the old ways. After discovering the conspiracy in which her body has been used as the sacrificial offering to celebrate the triumph of the God-like nationalist leader, Tashi realizes that she can only marry a non-Olinka man. Tashi confesses to the psychiatrist doctor that despite her fornication with Adam, she has never thought of marrying him, because "Like every Olinka maiden. [...] I was in love with the perfect lover who already had three wives," but she has married the missionary Adam because as she admits "I found I could not fight with the wound tradition had given me. I could hardly walk" (114). Within Tashi's confessions, Walker seems to suggest that the African women who were enlisted with the decolonization movements

were betrayed by the male nationalists. Walker's text repeating claims of many feminists<sup>4</sup> seems to suggest that as soon as nationalists reversed the power to their side, they wanted to silence the women who like Tashi, inspired by the liberationist discourses of the decolonization struggles, wanted to "fight" for their own liberation.

Walker's criticism of nationalists hides much Orientalizing tendencies. To begin with, Walker's most important repetition of the Orientalizing discourses is her denial of agency to the protagonist in the text prior to the last phase in the novel—Tashi's revitalization and her return to Africa. Walker's Orientalizing makes her read the African woman's faith in the nationalist liberationist cause as a sign of "innocence and ignorance" within her protagonist confession to the psychiatrist about her earlier reverence to the "Leader"; Tashi says, "I smiled at the young innocent, ignorant girl I'd been" (114). Women's innocence is justified in this text through Tashi's as well as all other women's uncritical reception of the teachings of the nationalist "Leader," which though irrational, the text claims that "Everyone believed."

Back to the dialogue between Walker and Emecheta, Walker undergoes a neocolonial mission in Africa to prove that the white man did not mean to be bad in the continent. While Emecheta's metaphor about the enslavement of women in tradition has been expanded through the metonymic representation of the ritual "mutilation" of women as a consequence of the reinvention of tradition, Emecheta's reluctance to condemn colonialism has encouraged Walker to undergo a neo-colonialist mission to "civilize" the "uncivilized" who still "mutilate" their women. Indeed Walker seems to support the view that though colonialism has robbed the riches of Africa, and devoured the flesh of its peoples, one should not deny its positive contributions in the continent. Yet even if the contribution of colonialism is worth praising, to oversimplify the

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4 In "A literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World," Spivak shows how women were used to help achieve the national independence of India and how their rights have been ignored by the gendered nationalist discourses which confined women's roles to motherhood and domesticity away from politics. See Spivak, *In Other Words: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 241-268.

hardships that emanate from colonial rule and to overlook the scars left by the colonial machine on the bodies of colonized women and their children is to miss a fundamental element in social contestation and therefore in history.

In Walker's text, the hardships that emanated from colonialism are limited to an oversimplified critical statement responding to what Mirella Ricciardi's, an Italian colonialist woman, has written about Africans being natural and "possessing the secret of joy." Walker rewrites the colonialist construction recollected from Mirella Ricciardi's *African Saga* (1982). She repeats Ricciardi's text, which has inspired her novel's title, within a conversation between Tashi and her African friend Mbatia. In Tashi's voice, the novel tells us:

In the evenings she [that is, Mbatia] reads aloud passages from books for us to puzzle over or enjoy. Tonight she reads from the book of a white colonialist author who has lived all her life off the labor of Africans but failed to perceive them as human beings. 'Black people are natural;' she writes, 'they possess the secret of Joy, which is why they can survive the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them'" (269).

The novel's ending rewrites a disabling colonialist construction, encountered through Ricciardi's text and replaces that construction with a dynamic and politicized one. Walker refutes Ricciardi's praise of the African's possession of the secret of joy, "These settler cannibals," says Tashi, "why don't they just steal our land, mine our gold, chop down our forests... devour our flesh and leave us alone. Why must they also write about how much joy we possess" (270). By the end of the novel, she reverses the colonialist text in the slogan "RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY" (264). This slogan is held against the male gun machine aimed at the execution of Tashi for murdering the Tsunga M'Lissa. Whereas Ricciardi's book mystifies "the Africans" to a point where complacency and resignation in the face of hardship become their unique gifts, Tashi comes to the realization that resistance, not accommodation, is the ultimate condition of joy.

Actually, the secret of joy, which Nnu Ego has missed by her adherence to traditional patriarchal values, has been discovered by the protagonist of Walker, Tashi,

throughout her long struggle for the discovery of the source of her pains. In *Possessing*, the secret of joy is resistance instead of acceptance. It is resistance to whatever can undermine women's freedom and wellbeing that Walker offers as a secret of joy against patriarchal values may they be those that mystify motherhood, or those that overvalue clitoridectomy. Therefore, through parodistic narration strengthened by verbal echo, Emecheta's indirect criticism, underscored by irony against some failed cultural values, is turned into a harsh attack, a battle against a patriarchal culture motivated by restraining the joys of womanhood.

Yet despite the recognition of Ricciardi's colonialist position, Walker also succumbs to the same colonialist discourse, in that her representation of Africans, like that of Ricciardi and other colonialist writers, reveals her own misconceptions about Africans and prejudice towards their cultures. What she tells us about Africa and Africans relates to her own experiences as a western subject representing Africa with orientalist eyes. Her reading of African women and their bodies evinces the same kind of ethnocentrism she decried in white feminist scholars.<sup>5</sup> With her representation of the African woman's body, she does not account for the different meanings that different cultures attach to the body. Her reading of African women's bodies is informed by her Western culture and its privileging of the body.<sup>6</sup>

To conclude, we may say that however noble her concern for the wellbeing of African womanhood might be, Walker's paternalism over the "ignorant, innocent" woman can hardly be dissociated from the concern of the Christian missionaries or the colonial institutions, which have sanctioned the "barbarism" of African cultures. However noble her concern about protecting the integrity of the African woman's body might be, the way she displays the nakedness of this body could hardly protect the integrity of any human body regardless. The way Walker displays the African woman's

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5 In *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, Walker criticizes white feminism for being centered around the concerns of middle class white women.

6 Susan Bordo & Leslie Heywood, *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley, London, Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2003).

body could hardly be dissociated from the colonialist display of the Hottentots or the violent unveiling of Algerian women by the French nor even from contemporary pornographic images of women's bodies in advertisement brochures. It likewise cannot be dissociated from the extremist demand to veil this body to transform it into a depersonalized unidentifiable moving piece of cloth.

In the next sub-chapter, we offer a reading of one of the framed stories constituting *Possessing the Secret of Joy* reflecting about Algerian culture and history. Our focused reading of this framed story is aimed to anticipate key elements in the dialogue between Walker and Djébar, which we will describe later.

## **8.2 *Possessing the Secret of Joy*: Orientalizing the Algerian Culture and Denigrating History**

This sub-chapter offers a reading of one of the framed stories constituting the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* within the narratives told by the character Lisette, a French Algerian reflecting about Algerian culture and history. We read Lisette's narratives in the light of early colonial texts written by French Algerians or French educated Algerians, who have an orientalist attitude to Algerian culture and/or a denigrating position to the Algerian history. The underlying aim of this reading is first to anticipate the dialogue between Walker and Djébar and second to show the Orientalizing attitude of Walker towards African cultures, which she considers as homogeneous as many western orientalist writers for whom 'Africa' was "wonderfully synonymous with the exotic, the mysterious, the profound, the seminal" to use Edward Said's words describing orientalists' view about the Orient.<sup>7</sup> Through a close reading of Lisette's narratives, we try to show that Walker repeats the same prejudice towards Algerian culture and history adopted in colonial literature.

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<sup>7</sup> *Orientalism*, 51.

In the framed story called "episode with Ayisha," Walker uses a French colonialist woman, Lisette, who looks at Algeria from the perspective of the ghost of colonialism, to witness that the Algerian woman lived under the threat of body mutilation inflicted by Algerian culture. When it is historically known that no ritual "mutilation" or FGM had ever been practiced in Algeria, to fit with the requirements of the universal suffering of women, Walker or Lisette invents the cliché within the "episode with Ayisha," which is the story of a servant called Ayisha, who runs away fearful from the sight of sharp instruments beside her bridal bed, symbolically referring to the threat of body mutilation during the wedding night.

The "episode with Ayisha," as repeated by Pierre who collects it from his mother, the French Lisette, reads:

It was, said my mother, about a young woman in Algeria who worked for us, and who nearly suffered the same fate as Torabe's wife.<sup>8</sup> [...] Her name was Ayisha, and she ran to us one night screaming from the sight of the variety of small, sharp instruments her anxious mother had arranged underneath a napkin on a low seating cushion that rested beside the bridal bed. [...] This episode with Ayisha, who was returned to her family, who beat her for running away—and actually we never knew what became of her—is at the root of my refusal to marry even though in France there are no instruments of torture beside the bed.

And the Maquis de Sade? I asked.

Thankfully only one man, she said, and thankfully not in this century. She laughed. And thankfully not beside my bed (131-2).

Read in the light of other texts, the 'sharp instruments' associated with the wedding night/deflowering may be interpreted as a reference to male sexual violence during that night. Actually the wedding night was an obsessive motif in colonial Algerian texts as Saad Ben Ali / René Potier's *Aichouch La Djellabya, Princesse Saharienne* (1933), Rabah Zenati / Akli Zenati's *Bou-el-Nouar, Le Jeune Algérien* and

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<sup>8</sup> The story of Torabe's wife has been told earlier by Lisette. Torabe's wife has drowned herself, after the refusal of her parents to protect her against the torture of her husband who "had cut her open with a hunting knife on their wedding night, and gave her no opportunity to heal" (130). Walker here makes reference to the consequences of the practice of infibulation which makes the act of deflowering a harmful experience because during wedding nights, a woman's hymen is cut.

Etienne Dinet / Slimane Ben Ibrahim's *Khadra, Danseuse Ouled Nail* (1910)<sup>9</sup>. In these texts, as Peter Dunwoodie puts it, "the deflowering [is] often described in crude detail to reinforce the cliché of Arab brutality and blur the distinction between arranged and forced marriage."<sup>10</sup> In *Khadra* for instance, the young heroine Khadra has been forced by her mother to marry a repulsive man whose brutal conduct during the wedding night leads to her elopement and eventual madness. The narrative devotes an extensive description of the deflowering of Khadra. Even if Lisette ignores what becomes of Ayisha after she has been returned to her family, a leap into those earlier texts would inform us that Ayisha's fate would not be different from Khadra's fate, which is inscribed in earlier colonial Algerian texts.

Actually, *Khadra* and many other colonial texts repeat the cliché of the Arab's brutality in expressing his desires, depicted in earlier texts as Ferdinand Duchêne's *France Nouvelle, Mœurs Algeriennes* (1903) and Raymond Marival's *Chair d'Ambre* (1901).<sup>11</sup> In these two novels, male brutality is "associated with the treatment of women in contexts which denigrate Islamic religion and Berber culture," wrote P. Dunwoodie.<sup>12</sup> In *France Nouvelle* for instance, the scene of the deflowering of Baya is very significant to our context; Duchêne writes, "Mansour is satisfied: his wife was indeed a virgin. Praise be our clement and merciful God! Standing there, the man looks down at his victim, the poor, motionless, bleeding, sacrificed thing at his feet."<sup>13</sup> Thus, even if Lisette ignores what has become of Ayisha, her fate has been inscribed in earlier texts, and the reader of the Ayisha episode needs just to establish the connection with other texts to know that a woman's fate has been inscribed by "our clement and merciful

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9 See Ben Ali, Saad, René Potier. *Aichouch La Djellabya, Princesse Saharienne*. Paris: Les Œuvres Représentatives, 1933. Zenati, Rabah, Zenati Akli. *Bou-El-Nouar, Le Jeune Algérien*. Alger: La Maison des Livres, 1945. Dinet, Etienne & Slimane Ben Ibrahim. *Khadra, Danseuse Ouled Nail*. Paris: Piazza, 1926.

10 *Francophone Writing in Transition*, 232.

11 See Duchêne, Ferdinand. *France Nouvelle, Mœurs Algériennes*. Paris: Calmann Levy, 1903.

Marival, Raymond. *Chair d'Ambre*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1901.

12 Peter Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 146.

13 F. Duchêne, *France Nouvelle*, quoted in *Writing French Algeria*, 146.

God” and re-inscribed by tradition since blood has always been needed to glorify “God” or to deify a custom.

Additionally, Lisette’s story repeats the myth of the elopement of victimized Algerian women. Lisette’s story about Ayisha recalls those early colonial writers for whom Algerian women were the victims of oppressive patriarchal culture, and who repeat in their stories that “the only way for native women to escape their fate was to elope”<sup>14</sup> as noticed by Algerian scholar Marnia Lazreg. In Walker’s text Ayisha, like Khadra, has tried but in vain to escape a determined fate which is imposed by patriarchal monolithic oppressive culture, indeed just like Torabe’s wife and her own mother, who in another part of the African continent have endured victimization in culture.

The sharp instruments which frightened Ayisha—and bled Baya and Khadra—are not different from the instruments used to cut Torabe’s wife in her early childhood (during the infibulation operation) and during her wedding night through the anxious arrangement of her parents. When Walker links the fate of Ayisha to that of Torabe’s wife, she alludes to the torture inflicted on women who have been victims of infibulation during wedding nights (deflowering). The brutal conduct of Algerian males during wedding nights may have the same consequences endured by women who have undergone infibulations so that even in those parts of Africa where no FGM is practiced, women are not saved from sexual torture as Walker and her informant Lisette seem to suggest through the Ayisha episode.

Actually, it occurs that wedding nights in Algeria may be experienced as “an institutionalized rape,” as some feminists prefer to refer to arranged and / or forced marriages.<sup>15</sup> Arranged marriages at a very early age were the custom in Algeria and are still the custom among some families especially in some rural areas. Young people with

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14 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 41.

15 Jacqueline des Forts, *Violence et Corps des Femmes du Tiers-Monde : Le Droit de Vivre pour Celles qui Donnent la Vie* (Alger: Editions ANEP, 2003), 144.

little knowledge of their bodies are confronted with each other for the first time during the wedding night, which is generally surrounded with much tension since young inexperienced couples were required to pass the test of virginity and virility.<sup>16</sup> In "La Nuit de nocces ou la virilité piégée," Algerian socio-anthropologist Faouzi Adel explained,

Mais la nuit de nocces ne se réduit pas à l'accomplissement d'un rite, elle est aussi l'occasion d'une transgression d'un sexe, celui de la femme [...] et pour laquelle il faut aménager les moyens et le moment légitimes afin d'en rendre acceptable la profanation. Il ne s'agit pas [...] d'un simple épisode de violence sexuelle d'où l'homme sort toujours vainqueur mais d'un véritable examen de passage où tout le monde est mis à l'épreuve: les époux parce qu'ils sont tenus à faire la démonstration de leur confrontation à la norme (virilité, virginité), les proches parce que du point de vue d'honneur, ils sont directement et dangereusement concernés.<sup>17</sup>

Though both bride and bridegroom experience tension, success in the test of virginity needs to be proved through woman's blood, and failure in this test is not tolerated for women who sometimes pay with their lives when they fail "the test of blood" to use Jacqueline des Forts's expression.<sup>18</sup> Describing the effect of the failure of what he names the test of virginity on women, Faouzi Adel explained, "si l'époux peut prétexter la magie des femmes face à l'impuissance, l'épouse par contre, n'a aucun argument à opposer à l'accusation de non virginité (ou femme trouée) et doit souvent payer de sa vie, la honte et le déshonneur qu'elle inflige à ses proches."<sup>19</sup>

Even if Ayisha has been a victim of institutionalized rape, in this episode, Lisette's story remains pregnant with prejudice. Walker reworks the same old oriental discourse based on opposition and difference. Her depiction of Arab male brutality, along with the trope of sexuality and elopement recalls those early colonial writers who "were unable to rise above the production of myths of difference," as Marnia Lazreg has

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16 Faouzi Adel, "La Nuit de Nocces ou la Virilité Piégée," *Insaniyat Revue Algérienne d'Anthropologie et de Science Sociales*, 4(1998), 7-8.

17 Faouzi Adel, 3-4.

18 My translation of Jackeline des Forts's "le test du sang," 145.

19 Faouzi Adel, 5.

assessed.<sup>20</sup> The myth of victimized womanhood in Africa is set against the graceful salvation of French womanhood from the fatalism of sexual violence, which is culturally determined in Africa. When Ayisha's fate is not different from that of Torabe's wife—and by extension from Khadra and Baya's—it is different from the fate of the French woman, at least in "this century."

Through the "episode with Ayisha," the reader may notice that while women in Africa seem to endure victimization in culture, women in France have "thankfully" been saved from a culturally determined male brutality. However, the ghost of the frustrated Ayisha, who flees from her parents and husband to find refuge among the civilized French colonizers who have not cared to know "what became of her" after returning her to her family, has haunted the colonialist friend of the Algerian servants' children forever. Lisette has consequently refused marriage despite the fact that "in France there are no instruments of torture beside the bed." Then, reminded that the French history registered an instance of male violence towards women, "the Marquis de Sade" whose cruelty "to women is lodged in the collective consciousness of the French" (132), Lisette is thrice thankful "Thankfully only one man... and thankfully not in this century. ... And thankfully not beside my bed" (131-2). In France according to Lisette, the "sharp instruments" used by "only one man" "not in this century" cannot be as harmful as those "anxiously arranged" beside Ayisha's bed.

The discourse of opposition and difference between the fate of the African woman and that of the French woman "in this century" underlies the aim of celebrating the French woman's success against patriarchy. Underlying Lisette's grateful claims is the celebration of French Feminism as the text of Walker from another narrative by Lisette suggests. In this narrative, Lisette clearly celebrates "the winds of change that were blowing over women's lives in France, thanks to women like my suffragist grandmother and writers like Simone de Beauvoir, whose book *The Second Sex*, [Lisette acknowledges] put the world I knew into a perspective I could more easily comprehend,

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20 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 38.

if not control. Prior to reading this book I felt doomed to incomprehension regarding the universal subjugation of women” (119-120).

Underlying Lisette’s cheers is the celebration of the grandmother’s activism and the glorification of the insight of French Feminism, which saved the French woman from the doom of incomprehension and therefore from the doom of subjugation that still are the fate of the African woman. And following this glorification, Walker finds it necessary to preach for those who still suffer—as the African woman—that it is necessary to follow the steps of the successful as the following quote suggests “there seems to be no remedy except enlightenment regarding their plight, followed by an active exercise of the insights of their awareness” (120). The French woman’s experience seems to be an appropriate model for the African women whose mothers and grandmothers stand still “in the shadow of ...man” (130) and have therefore turned into torturers of their daughters—as all African mothers in this novel seem to be.

Underlying Lisette’s thankful claims lies the ideological bias inherent in the belief in the superiority of the French culture purported in the colonial novel. French culture does not allow brutality against women—when it ever existed—to turn into an institutionalized custom as opposed to African cultures which are male dominated and therefore less liberating for women. According to Lisette, “thankfully” cruelty towards French women is an exception and not a rule nor a ritual approved by tradition as it is the case in Algeria or other parts of Africa where torture against women’s bodies is culturally institutionalized. Lisette is like early colonial writers who though showing sympathy towards the miseries suffered by Algerian women, yet as Lazreg puts it “they generally perceived their culture as superior to that of the natives. They could feel sorry for Algerian women, but seldom questioned the role played by colonial order in their suffering. They never bothered to find out whether polygamy or the chronic

immiseration of native women wrought upon them by harsh colonial economic policies hurt them to the most.”<sup>21</sup>

Had they only tried to find out, Walker like Lisette would have discovered other material to help them justify the claim to the universal doom of women. Lisette, who feels so concerned and so sympathetic with the plight of the Algerian woman, would have perhaps told us the other story about the savage violence inflicted on women's bodies not by "brutal Arab males" but by "civilized" French males. Similarly, Walker, who feels so concerned with the universal doom of women, would have found out that the French woman not unlike Ayisha and Torabe's wife has suffered violence and torture against her body in many ways. Contrary to Lisette's gratifying claims, many French historians, sociologists, doctors and writers have reflected about the violence endured by French women in France.

Contrary to Lisette's amnesic claims, French historian and sociologist Laure Adler reports that wedding nights in France were violent; they were as violent as wedding nights in rural areas in Algeria. Laure Adler confirms the claim about the universal subjugation of women. In her book *Les Secrets d'Alcove, Histoire du couple de 1830 à 1930*, Laure Adler has studied the wedding nights in the French families of the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> She describes what she calls the first legal rape of conjugality relying on novels by French writers of this period, and she cites Honoré de Balzac who recommended men to never start marriage with rape, as she relies on medical recommendations calling men to avoid brutality in this first contact. She describes the pain endured by women as a consequence of the loss of virginity as well as the tension and anxiety that characterized wedding nights, especially among middle class families. Reading *Les Secrets d'Alcove*, one may find out that wedding nights in France were neither less painful nor less brutal than wedding nights in some regions in Algeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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21 Ibid., 50.

22 Laure Adler, *Les Secrets d'Alcove, Histoire du Couple de 1830 à 1930* (Paris: Hachette Littérature: 1983).

Equally, through a historical and sociological interrogation, in her *Le Droit de Cuissage*, the French sociologist Marie-Victoire Louis explores the relation between custom and sexual violence in France.<sup>23</sup> Louis establishes the link between an ancient historical legendary phenomenon known as "le droit de cuissage," or the "droit du seigneur" also translated as "the Lord's First Night"<sup>24</sup> and the different forms of sexual appropriation exercised on working women in nineteenth century France. Relying on a large set of diversified references, Louis builds her argument on the fact that the sexual violence exercised against working women in the 19th century had roots in the feudal system and in "le droit de cuissage" which institutionalized the right of the lord to deflower local maidens. Louis writes, "Le droit de cuissage exercé sur les femmes salariées au XIXe siècle peut s'expliquer par la permanence, dans les lieux de travail, de comportement masculins hérités du système féodal qui font du devoir sexuel des femmes l'expression du pouvoir des hommes."<sup>25</sup>

Louis argues that 19<sup>th</sup> century working women suffered corporal servitude, under what she calls "le nouveau droit de cuissage."<sup>26</sup> She argues that with the new "droit du seigneur," working women were required to be the maidens that the capitalist employer, who replaced the medieval "seigneur e.i. Lord," would need to satisfy his sexual desires. Louis argues that the situation might seem different as the working woman could reject the seductive advances of her employer though not without the risk of provoking his wrath that might manifest in the loss of her job. Louis also warns that even if the effects of such a custom have largely disappeared, in France in this century, injury to the female body is not completely abolished. As a cry against silence, she dedicates her book *Le Droit de Cuissage* to the memory of the French young woman who in 1982

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23 Marie-Victoire Louis, *Le droit de Cuissage. France, 1860-1930* (Paris : Les éditions de l'Atelier, 1994).

24 See Boureau, Alain. *The Lord's First Night: The Myth of the Droit de Cuissage*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

25 *Le Droit de Cuissage*, 19.

26 Idem.

was raped by her boss, then burnt alive by her husband when in the evening she confessed her plight.

In addition to Adler and Louis, we may find other instances to counter Lisette's and Walker's claims about the superiority of the French culture in *Violences et Corps des Femmes du Tiers-Monde*, *Le Droit de Vivre pour Celles qui Donnent la Vie*, by the French doctor Jacqueline des Forts. Des Forts finds no difference between violence practiced against women's bodies in third world countries like Algeria and first world countries like France. In France, in this century, Jacqueline des Forts refers her readers to the story of "Sarah whose name is also Véronique"<sup>27</sup> that she characterizes as "scandale actuel des viols domestiques au sein de sociétés dont certaines se prétendent civilisées."<sup>28</sup>

Jacqueline des Forts shows that despite the similarity between the stories of Sarah and Véronique, the former was largely mediatized while the latter was stifled. While the case of Sarah<sup>29</sup> caused a good deal of controversy, and her story was made into a controversial film, Véronique endured eight years imprisonment before any public interest in her plight. Véronique Akobé was a clandestine Ivoirian immigrant who was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by a French court on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1990 (and was incarcerated in 1987) for killing the son of her rich industrial employer whom she harshly wounded in self-defense; the father and the son both alternately raped her. Thanks to the wide advertising of the case of Sarah in 1995, the Association Européenne Contre Les Violences Faites Aux Femmes Au Travail (AVFT) heard about

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27 My translation of the author's "Sarah s'appelle aussi Véronique" in Jacqueline des Forts, *Violences et Corps des Femmes du Tiers-Monde*, 161. For more information about the case of Véronique, see: 1997-01-01 Campagne pour la Grace de Véronique Akobé, 1995-1997 AVFT Association Européenne contre les Violences faites aux Femmes au Travail.mht

28 Jacqueline des Forts, 156.

29 A Filipina immigrant domestic servant in the United Arab Emirates, who killed her employer who raped her and as a consequence she was sentenced to imprisonment by one court and to death by a second Islamic court. Sarah was saved thanks to an international outcry and a defense campaign in several countries, as her case was seen as symbolizing the ill-treatment of domestic servants in the Persian Gulf countries.

Véronique who was liberated as Jacqueline Des Forts notices, “‘en catimini’ par peur du scandale qu’aurait pu provoquer la réouverture de son procès [qui] s’est déroulé dans des conditions éffarantes.” As a final comment, des Forts writes, "Mais pourquoi cette absence de médiatisation quand les violeurs appartiennent à la bonne société française?"<sup>30</sup>

We therefore wonder whether there is any difference between violence against women in France and in Algeria. Is the violence endured by Torabe’s wife and Ayisha more harmful than the pains of French Middle Ages maidens, 19th century working women, the contemporary French woman raped then burnt alive? Is there a large difference between wedding nights in 19<sup>th</sup> century Algeria and in 19<sup>th</sup> century France? Is there any difference between forced marriages, or *droit de cuissage* and rape whether the woman is Algerian or French living in this century or in the past? We wonder too what psychological effects, what trauma Lisette would have endured had she heard about the young woman who was raped then burnt alive not in an ex-French colony in Africa, not in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in France, in this century. Would she laugh, be grateful and say “thankfully not beside my bed”? If we admire Walker’s courage to dare interfere with the silence about FGM, and violence of wedding nights in Algeria, we aspire, as African readers, from a writer of her talent a further accuracy if she wants to compare the effects of custom in Africa and civilized countries. And we aspire as Algerian readers to find a firsthand knowledge about Algerian culture from any writer willing to depict what has been harmful to women's wellbeing in Algeria past or present.

The absence of media coverage and the little interest of scholarly research in the violence committed by the "civilized" French against women in Algeria left Walker very little informed about who used "sharp instruments" to cut Algerian women's bodies during one century and thirty years of colonialism. Not only metaphorically, sharp instruments were used to cut women’s bodies, but in a different story from that told by

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30 Des Forts, 162.

Lisette. As early as the French invaded Algeria, French troops used sharp instruments to “cut” Algerian women’s ears and hands to get their jewelries. Sometimes women's bodies were "cut" in barbarous ways to satisfy pathological violent desires of some French officers. Sharp instruments remained the most ingenious means used by the colonial powers to punish women prisoners during the Algerian War of Liberation.<sup>31</sup> Djébar's *La femme sans sépulture* depicts a story of gendered violence endured by a revolutionary heroine of the Algerian War of Liberation. This story, as we will see later, constitutes a key element in the dialogue between Djébar and Walker.

In addition to the myth of victimized womanhood in Algeria sic Africa and the specter of Ayisha which has haunted the delicate memory of Lisette, the French colonialist woman, the colonial history of Algeria is an oversimplified text in Walker’s narrative told by Lisette. Walker has also been informed by her French informant in an oversimplified historical discourse, mixed with her memories of loss that:

It was hard enough to have been forced to leave Algeria, our house and gardens and servants and friendships (with the servants) there. But the French were killing the Algerians, body and soul, and the Algerians grew sick of being treated worse than dogs. They fought back. There seemed to be a rising tide of blood across the land, and even clergymen like my father were not exempt. We left in tears, for we considered ourselves Algerians. French Algerians, of course. Members of the ruling class and race, *bien sur*. The elite. And yet I, especially, felt native to the land, because I was. I was born there (120).

In the above narrative, the history of French colonialism in Algeria, of the violence practiced against the Algerian natives is erased for concern with the French Algerians who have been removed from their "native land" in which they had not only house and gardens but servants with whom they established friendships. Lisette nostalgically recalls, "The people were so beautiful, hospitable as Africans are always, especially our servants and playmates the children taught me games, and they and their

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31 See part 1, chapter 1 where we referred to some instances of gendered violence endured by Algerian women at the hands of French colonial troops. We also provided in a footnote a list of references adequate to the subject.

parents taught me Arabic" (120). Lisette's narrative is a nostalgic evocation of a more innocent, less violent past; it reiterates many of the myths about the relationships between the French Algerians and the natives repeated in the colonial novel leading to the erasure of the history of colonial violence.

Like colonial texts, in Lisette's narrative, outside being servants, the Algerians are absent. The native Algerians that Lisette could remember are in addition to the servant Ayisha whose story is full of prejudice, unidentifiable servants who are nice and hospitable and who have taught her Arabic and games. Lisette's narrative about her childhood in Algeria is similar to the early colonial text which as described by Peter Dunwoodie, "focuses single-mindedly on the European settlers and reiterates the stereotypical depiction of Muslim Algerians as servants"<sup>32</sup> who welcome the European settlers and who earnestly serve them as Lisette's "hospitable" seems to suggest.

The settler experience Lisette represents reiterates the myth of racial harmony. Lisette's appraisal of the beauty and hospitality of the Algerian repeats colonial texts, basically by the Algerianists, as the following text by Robert Randeau suggests, "in Algeria, despite religious differences, mutual sympathy developed, and in the present the touching loyalty of our natives constitutes formal proof thereof."<sup>33</sup> With proclaimed fraternity, the settler is held innocent of the crimes committed by the "French security forces" against the natives in Lisette's story as in the stories by Algerianists. Lisette's apologies for the French Algerians can be compared to the apologies we read in the colonial texts repeating the myth of racial harmony, which sought to find legitimacy for the appropriation of the land and labor of the natives.

Actually, Walker's reiteration of the myth of racial harmony dehistoricizes the violence of race relations in colonial Algeria. Despite the proclamations of fraternity of Lisette repeating the Algerianists, the racial divide was never bridged. "In reality" as Lazreg puts it "the two societies, the natives and the French, never opened up to each

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<sup>32</sup> *Writing French Algeria*, 161.

<sup>33</sup> Randeau, quoted in *Writing French Algeria*, 159-160.

other;”<sup>34</sup> the two groups united neither through love nor through politics witnessed Jacques Berque.<sup>35</sup> Lisette’s evocation of a more innocent, harmonious, less violent past within her appraisal of the hospitality of the natives erases the history of colonial violence and of Algeria’s resistance to colonialism.

Walker’s erasure of the history of colonial violence results in the denigration of the history of French colonialism in Algeria. In Lisette’s narrative, antagonistic race relations are interpreted within the limits of a conflict between “the French security forces” and the natives whose response to this violence is enclosed within “a tradition of Arab martyrdom.” Recalling the anxiety of the Christianized native “boys” of her father’s congregation, Lisette writes that these boys were “innocent, that is to say, apolitical, Algerian boys [of her father’s congregation] [...] caught as they were between the French security forces, to whom all Arabs looked alike, and the Maquis, the NLA and the more militant Moslem fanatics, to whom Christian Arabs looked not at all like themselves.” These young boys “who had appeared deeply moved by the non-violence preached by the Jesus Christ of my father’s church” (21-22) grew up however amid violence. Lisette describes this violence as follows “for a long time there was a tradition of Arab martyrdom in Algeria, of which they were well aware, as young ‘Arab terrorists’ after young ‘Arab terrorist,’ sometimes boys no older than themselves, went up, barehanded or with stones and rusty swords, against the machine guns and hand grenades of the French” (122).

When the French security forces are singled out as responsible for violence in the colony, oddly the narrative incorporates native Algerians’ response to colonialism within a tradition which is far from being Algerian. If Lisette’s nostalgia for the sun of her lost native land has resulted in an amnesia which repressed memories of fear and violence, this leaves Walker very poorly informed about Algerian colonial history, and about the Algerians’ means of resistance which were not “non-violent” but violent. “The

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34 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 41.

35 Jacques Berque, *Le Maghreb Entre Deux Guerres* (Paris : Seuil, 1962), 327.

French colonial venture in Algeria was as savage as it was protracted,” writes Lazreg<sup>36</sup>, and the Algerian resistance to colonialism was violent too.

Violent struggles had always characterized the relations between the French colonizer and the Algerians. As early as the French set foot in Algeria, Emir Abd-El-Kader’s resistance started and lasted over ten years, from 1830 to 1844. After the collapse of this armed resistance “it took another forty years of episodic rebellions before the country was finally subdued.”<sup>37</sup> “Algeria” as Dunwoodie puts it: “was always an arena of an all-too problematic presence” for the French colonizer.<sup>38</sup> Algerian “boys” “went up” “against the machine guns and hand grenades of the French” not “barehanded or with stones and rusty swords,” as recollected by Lisette’s amnesic memory. Actually, Algerian boys *and girls* went up with crafty bombs, which exploded stadiums, schools, cafés reserved to the “élite” who while “loving” the Algerian natives, chose passive sympathy to repress feelings of guilt. Unfortunately or fortunately, the Algerians did never adhere to that “tradition of Arab martyrdom.” Frantz Fanon describes the Algerian tradition of resistance, he writes, “the Algerian people had never disarmed. November 1, 1954, was not the awakening of the people, but the signal it was waiting for in order to get into motion, in order to put into practice in full daylight a tactic acquired, and solidly reinforced, in the heyday of the Franco-Moslem period.”<sup>39</sup> Describing the Algerian woman’s participation in the decolonization struggle, neglected in Walker’s text, Fanon wrote “in the first years she had to break by means of her own heroism the wall of silence and slander but with a *gun in hand*” (emphasis mine).<sup>40</sup>

Walker’s strategy of de-dramatization of colonial violence has led to the denigration of the historical process, which leads to the erasure of the real story of desire, resistance and violence. Walker and her French informant have chosen to ignore

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36 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 42.

37 *Ibid.*, 42.

38 *Writing French Algeria*, 274.

39 *A Dying Colonialism*, 65.

40 *Ibid.*, 12.

the desire of the European settler to “débarasser l’Algérie des Arabes,”<sup>41</sup> to ignore the permanent animosity separating the Europeans and indigenous peoples. Walker like colonial writers has chosen to ignore the violent resistance of the natives against the dispossession which had resulted from aggression.

In addition to the repetition of the myth of racial harmony and the consequent dramatization of colonial violence, Lisette’s memories reiterate the claim to indigenous status recurrent in colonial texts. Lisette’s “we considered ourselves Algerians. French Algerians, of course,” is a repetition of the famous statement “Algériens nous sommes!” proclaimed by numerous characters in the fiction produced in colonial Algeria.<sup>42</sup> And her “I, especially, felt native of the land, because I was. I was born there,” repeats the claim to belong for being born there proclaimed in colonial fiction too. In *Writing French Algeria*, Peter Dunwoodie has examined elaborately the ambiguities inherent in the claim to indigenous status reiterated in the colonial novel; he has shown that the reiterated claim to *belong* (to have been born there) underlies the dilemma of the French Algerian bedeviled by the lack of legitimacy and the absence of roots.<sup>43</sup>

Lisette’s memories underlie a double dilemma inherent in her inability to identify either with the natives despite her sympathy with them or with the French that she ironically yet timidly criticizes. Lisette’s dilemma is seen in the ambiguity of her narrative when she identifies with the natives since she shares the indigenous status because born like them there, and too she has learnt their language and their games, but she does not seem to be ready to seriously share their existence. And how could she live according to the requirement of a patriarchal culture? Is it worth denying the achievements of her suffragist grand-mother and the insight of a surrogate mother as Simone de Beauvoir? Her ambiguity is noticed too in seeing herself as being / not being French. While accepting the privileges of colonization, she declares her hatred of

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41A famous slogan repeated by the French Algerian during the period of colonialism. See *Writing French Algeria*, 275.

42 Ibid, 7.

43 See "A Question of Belonging" in *Writing French Algeria*, 245-283.

metropolitan France, seen as responsible for installing and perpetuating injustice. While feeling offended for being *forced* to leave house, gardens and servants, Lisette ironically criticizes the colonial system that alienates the indigenous population and installs the settler population as an “elite,” a position she seems to timidly reject. In her uncomfortable position, Lisette’s denunciation of injustice vacillates between irony and empathy.

Lisette’s dilemma is caused by the lack of legitimacy within her past experience, and eventually within her present nostalgic memories of loss (of a native land). Her declaration of hatred of metropolitan France as well as her denunciation and indignation of the injustice committed by the French security forces underlie a need to evade responsibility towards colonization. She structures an ironic uneven equation where she makes her love for the natives as the reason for her hatred for France and therefore of her resentment about being forced to leave the "native land" with the independence of Algeria. She claims, “loving my nurse, my playmates and servants, I naturally hated France. And then suddenly to have to 'return' there, as the newspapers said to us. I protested to my parents that France was a place I'd never been; how, therefore, could I 'return'? My parents, like most settler parents, had no answer. They were far from happy about the turn of events themselves" (121). Within this declaration of love, hatred, and resentment, Lisette seems to overlook the fact that the suffering of her playmates and nurse is partly due to her illegitimate presence among them and to her privileged position, which is the cause of their exclusion.

Lisette’s evasion of responsibility towards colonization, coupled with her indignation for being “forced to leave” and her ironic protest against the forced “return” underlie the need of the French Algerian subject to legitimize his past experience as well as his nostalgic claim to “belong” and to “return” to his "native land." Actually, Lisette’s protest underlies an ironical reversal suggested through the irony of the forced “return” through her “France was a place I'd never been; how, therefore, could I 'return'?” which underlies a political claim against historical injustice towards the

French Algerian minority. This denunciation of historical injustice has been claimed in the works of French Algerians as Albert Camus and many other writers.

From the denigration of the Algerian culture and history to the attempt to legitimize the claim of belonging and return of the French Algerian on the basis of the superiority of his culture, we therefore wonder what camp Walker purports to support, the African or the European. We wonder what history she purports to rewrite or to reiterate. Is it that of victimized womanhood or that of the imperial hegemony of the west?

With Walker's direct reference to the Algerian history of colonialism and her comparison between the plight of her protagonist and that of the Algerian woman during the colonial period, we move to Djébar's novel to see how it also converses with both Emecheta's as well as Walker's texts.

**9 *La Femme Sans Sépulture*: Woman  
Between Gendering and Victimization**

## **9.1 *La femme sans sépulture* in *Dialogue with The Joys of Motherhood***

Like *The Joys of Motherhood* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, *La femme sans sépulture* is equally rebellious. Djebbar rebels against the manipulation of tradition to define gender roles restricting thereby women's roles within the narrow limits of gendering and erotization, as she rebels against discourses stressing the victimization of women stripping them of agency. Through examining the relation of *La Femme* to *The Joys*, we show how Djebbar's text makes use of the tradition of veiling, read in a hidden polemical relation to Frantz Fanon's "Unveiling Algeria," to show the rebellious position of her protagonist against what restricts her freedom as opposed to the submissiveness of Emecheta's protagonist. We also show that despite choosing different models of womanhood, both authors rely on the style of indirection, namely metaphor and irony, to defy male defined traditions.

Djebbar's text revises Emecheta's in hidden polemic. Emecheta's discourse is implied in *La Femme* where the woman without sepulture who has pragmatically manipulated tradition, defied the colonizer but attained the joys of motherhood seems an ironical reversal of the victimized Nnu Ego, who fails to live in a hybridized space, and who is respectful of tradition, disappointed by her children, but who has received "a decent burial." Always in hidden polemic, through the representation of Zoulikha's relation to tradition, Djebbar's text reverses Nnu Ego's doomed stubborn loyalty to outmoded traditional values.

Zoulikha is the opposite figure of Nnu Ego. Djebbar represents a woman who lives in a hybridized colonial space, yet unlike Emecheta's Nnu Ego, she succeeds to live in this space. Like Bhabha's "mimic men" yet a female, Zoulikha could appropriate the

best from the hybridized colonial society in which she lives. She has appropriated Western education, which has allowed her to appropriate the language of the colonizer, to have contact with him, and even to secure a job in a colonial administration, and she therefore has enjoyed economic freedom. Unlike Nnu Ego, Zoulikha succeeds to live and accommodate to life in a hybrid space. Unlike Nnu Ego she rebels against all that might constrain her freedom, may they be traditional values or colonialism. If Emecheta represents through Nnu Ego the failure of the majority of African women to rebel, Djébar represents through Zoulikha, the success of a few to rebel.

Parallels between the two protagonist women may show how through choosing different models of womanhood, the two texts, *The Joys* and *La Femme*, converse in a hidden polemic. Zoulikha like Nnu Ego is the daughter of her father. While Nnu Ego's mother dies at childbirth, we know nothing about Zoulikha's mother. The fathers of both protagonists seem to have played significant roles in their daughters' lives. Nnu Ego's father has noticed that his daughter lacks the force of character of her mother, and he consequently has tried to protect her, and he even chooses her first and second husbands. Zoulikha's father has noticed the force of character of his daughter who seems to possess the qualities that fathers hope to see in their male offspring. He therefore brought her up in a manner that endorses her freedom and self-esteem. Unlike the majority of the fathers of his generation, he invests in the Western education of his smart daughter. He later on supports her choices in life when she has decided to leave her hometown and live alone in a city for the sake of a job at a colonial administration. He also respects her choices of her three husbands. Hania witnesses "Zoulikha [...] doit sa première force, dans sa jeunesse, à son père!" (150). In a hidden polemic, Djébar's text reverses the image of weakness and therefore failure of African womanhood that *The Joys* projects.

Significantly enough, though projecting different models of womanhood, the two novels relate to each other not polemically but through stylization. In fact, Djébar's text

repeats Emecheta's style of indirection to show that tradition has been manipulated to restrict women's roles from colonial to postcolonial Algeria. Djébar makes use of an outstanding marker of traditional womanhood in Algeria, namely veiling to show that as early as colonialism set foot in Algeria, the veil has been idealized as the most important marker of a woman's identity, and was required to serve as a shield against colonial penetration into the private life of Algerians. Women have therefore been summoned to be the guardians of this tradition. Against this idealization and mystification of veiling, Djébar's text celebrates the virtues of womanhood regardless. It indirectly and ironically defies through a rebellious protagonist attempts to restrict women's roles and to make of them guardians of a male defined tradition.

Through what in its surface structure seems a polemical relation, Djébar's text projects through Zoulikha a main character who is the opposite of Emecheta's protagonist. Actually, contrary to Nnu Ego's unquestioned respect of traditional values and her loss and disorientation in hybridized Lagos, Zoulikha holds a pragmatic relation to tradition. She ignores those traditional values that impose seclusion and veiling on women when she feels that the latter constrain her freedom and self-assertion in a rapidly changing Algerian society under the effect of colonialism. Armed with Western education, she secures a job at a colonial administration, and she wears European clothes just like the majority of urban native males. She however dons the veil, which has by no means limited her freedom of movement, with the change of circumstances; "elle a accepté, semble-t-il aisément, cette fois, de 'se voiler', mais certainement pas par attitude conservatrice" (22). The veil later on becomes Zoulikha's mask to hide her resistance against colonial rule. Through Zoulikha's veiling/unveiling, Djébar fictionalizes the history of veiling in Algeria, which has largely been affected by the changes brought by colonialism, struggle for liberation, and postcolonial upheavals.

The veil is a recurrent motif in the novel that, through scenic narration, represents the controversies about veiling in Algeria during the colonial and early post-colonial

periods. The novel represents the controversy in a hidden polemic to Fanon's "Unveiling Algeria."<sup>1</sup> Through everyday experiences of women living engagement, the novel represents their sympathy and solidarity with each other's plights, their apprehension and fear, and their strategies not only to achieve their role in the liberation struggle, but to realize self-assertion and self-determination. The novel shows women living under oppressive colonial rule but defying this rule and outwitting the oppressor, relying first and foremost on their own genius as women, acting within the limits of their own traditional society, and sometimes defying even tradition. The novel shows women's engagement in the decolonization movement as participants whose militancy was an expression of their will to rebel not only against brutal colonial rule but also against the restrictions of their traditional society.

Confirming Fanon's "Unveiling," the novel shows that women's strategies of struggle rely much on the woman's body between traditionalism and modernism, between veiling and unveiling. Yet, in a hidden polemical relation to Fanon's text, the novel dismisses the mystification of the veil and of the woman's body underlying Fanon's text which actually repeats much of the colonial orientaling attitudes to Algerian culture and women as it repeats "what was at the time a standard notion among Algerian men and colonists."<sup>2</sup> Through the repetition and revision of Fanon's text, Djébar refutes in a hidden polemic the mystification of women's instrumentalization of the veil and the mystification of their role in the revolutionary struggle, as she discloses the enclosure of women's experiences within the narrow limits of "heroism and victimization," and erotization and gendering.

Fanon stresses the role women played in the Algerian War focusing on the importance of the veil in the history of colonization through what he calls the "historic dynamism of the veil." He explains the latter as being the circumstances through which

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1 Frantz Fanon, "Unveiling Algeria" in *A Dying Colonialism*.

2 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 127

the veil was instrumentalized, foregrounding the ways in which women strategically donned or removed the veil to subvert French colonialism. Fanon distinguishes three phases for what he calls the “historic dynamism of the veil.” The first phase corresponds to the beginning of colonialism when the veil, which was required by tradition, became a means of resistance against the intrusion of the colonizer into the private life of the colonized. Fanon argues, “To the colonialist offensive against the veil, the colonized opposes the cult of the veil,” which represents the counter reaction of the colonized towards the criticism of this particular aspect of his culture—veiling.<sup>3</sup> He then explains, “The tenacity of the occupier in his endeavor to unveil the women, to make of them an ally in the work of cultural destruction, had the effect of strengthening the traditional patterns of behavior.”<sup>4</sup> The second phase corresponds to the War of Liberation, when, after the decision of the “political leaders” to involve women in the struggle, “The veil was abandoned in the course of revolutionary action.” Yet women were soon required to return to their veils, which were “transformed into a technique of camouflage,” which helped them to hide arms under the folds of their veils.<sup>5</sup>

The novel equally shows that much of the Algerian revolution was played on the Algerian woman’s body. Yet through the history of Zoulikha and her relation to the veil, we read a reversal of Fanon’s phases about “the historic dynamism of the veil.” Instead of the veiled woman who unveils then returns to the veil to meet the needs of the revolutionary struggle, Djébar portrays an unveiled woman who later dons the veil for some personal needs, but who transforms her veil into a camouflage to fit the needs of her engagement with the revolution. Djébar represents through the history of Zoulikha a woman who has ignored the traditions of seclusion and veiling. She has benefited from Western education, and she has even secured a job in a French

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3 *A Dying Colonialism*, 47.

4 *Ibid*, 49.

5 *Ibid*, 61.

administration, which permits her contact with the colonizer and free movement in his city. Though Zoulikha can be seen as an exception in her hometown, as Hania comments "faisant exception parmi les femmes de sa société, Zoulikha circulait alors au village comme une Européenne : sans voile ni le moindre fichu!" (19-2). This model of womanhood was not exceptional in the Algerian society of the period described by Fanon. "Unveilling" describes the period of the war of liberation, with focus on the urban guerrilla warfare. During that time in cities, many Algerian women could be compared to Zoulikha, as "[m]any had already received a *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires* [...] considered at that time an achievement for natives," and they "seldom wore the veil" as attested by Lazreg who adds that it was this generation of women who was attracted by the revolution and the guerrilla warfare.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the reversal of the "historic dynamism of the veil", the novel discerns different styles of veils which reverses Fanon's assertion about "the unchanging uniformity of the veil."<sup>7</sup> The novel distinguishes the different strategies used by women of different ages in veiling, as it differentiates between the veil used in urban and rural areas. Through the way the characters use the veil, Djébar represents the different types of veils in terms of the color and the material which constitutes the fabric, dismissing thus Fanon's assertion that the veil is "a uniform which tolerates no modification, no variant,"<sup>8</sup> and dismissing the orientalist overtones of Fanon's representation of the veil. She discerns between the silk and cotton veils which may have different colors. This variety in material is significant in determining the age of the women wearing the veil as it is explained in the narrative, "voile de soie (de soie moiré ou, pour les plus âgées, de soie mêlée de laine fine, pour en adoucir les plis), la pointe d'organza raidie et à demi transparente sur l'arête du nez, masquant ainsi le bas du

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6 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 122.

7 *A Dying Colonialism*, 36.

8 *Ibid*, 36.

visage pour rehausser les yeux fardés, agrandis au khol, ainsi que le front surmonté parfois d'un bijou d'or ou de perles" (22).

Djebar's text makes significant historical jumps to the ancestral history of Algeria when women were venerated through references to the history of Césarée the capital of Mauritania. These historical jumps offer a reversal of Fanon's text, which seems to repeat orientalist discourses about the limited existence of Algerian women before the war of liberation. In his zeal to demystify women's role in the war, Fanon repeats the prejudice shared among his French contemporaries about the victimization of women in traditional society. Through references to ancestral history, Djebar's text offers a reversal of Fanon's orientalist overtones. In Césarée, this history, which is unfortunately kept hidden in an amphitheater that is visited by foreign tourists but rarely by local citizens, informs through its edifices that women were the equal of men just as Cleopatra Selene who was made a queen by Juba II, the king of Mauritania, as soon as she became his wife (100). The queen reigned together with the king, and she is said to have exerted considerable influence on Juba II's policies. Other instances in the novel emphasize the historical strength of Algerian womanhood exemplified in Kahina (78) and the early Berber fighters, known for the French as 'amazons' (136).

In addition to refuting the limited existence of women before the war, the novel dismisses Fanon's claim about the little consciousness and "ignorance" of the Algerian woman about the revolutionary climate which characterized the early years of the war of decolonization. Fanon wrote "until 1955, the combat was waged exclusively by the men. The revolutionary characteristics of this combat, the necessity for absolute secrecy, obliged the militant to keep his woman in absolute ignorance."<sup>9</sup> In the novel, Hania tells about how El Hadj, Zoulikha's third husband, discusses political matters with his wife in the presence of the other members of the family including herself; she

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<sup>9</sup> *A Dying Colonialism*, 48.

says “Quand El Hadj revint de son pèlerinage, à cause de ce qu’il avait vu en Egypt, juste avant 54, il répétait: 'Les Français, nous avons à les mettre dehors!' Il parlait de la lutte de tant de peuples, “et nous alors, poursuivait-il (je l’entends encore), serions-nous les derniers à retrouver nos droits ?” (96) Within this text, we note the need of the narrator to stress the accuracy of her account by repeating the exact words of El Hadj, which actually shows that women and even children were involved in politically charged conversations and therefore with the struggle as early as it started.

Likewise, Djebbar refutes Fanon's assertions about the late engagement of women with the revolutionary struggle. Hania tells that as soon as El Hadj joined the maquis, Zoulikha also engaged with the revolutionary struggle as a contact agent; she left for this purpose her young children with her eldest daughter, Hania, who reports her mother’s words: “mon amie ma sœur, mes petits, si tu pouvais me les garder un peu, ils m'alourdisent!...J'aurais une liberté complète pour *travailler!*” (emphasis added) (96-97). Djebbar projects through the early engagement of Zoulikha with the liberation struggle a reversal of Fanon's portrayal of the “ignorant” Algerian woman who joined the struggle late, after a decision that was very difficult to take by male nationalist leaders. Djebbar's position can be strengthened by Lazreg who refutes Fanon’s claims about the late participation of women in the movement of decolonization as she writes, “Fanon claims that 'until 1955, the combat was waged exclusively by men,' the implication being that women came in late. Yet some women have asserted that they had been contacted by the F.L.N. in early 1955, barely a few months after the war started, in November 1954.”<sup>10</sup>

When Djebbar revises Fanon's Orientalizing and gendered discourse about the limited existence of women and their ignorance about politics, she confirms his assertions about the change of the veiling tradition under the effect of colonialism but

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10 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 126.

with a difference. Djebbar shows the negative effects of this change. Actually, the novel distinguishes between the ancestral veil and the conservative veil. The ancestral veil establishes woman as a “lalla”<sup>11</sup> loved and respected and treated as an equal; Zoulikha's experience with veiling after her third marriage is significant in this context. In one of the monologues of Zoulikha, the narrative shows that veiling according to the ancestral tradition objectifies respect, protection, and harmony of matrimonial life,

De connaitre quelqu'un qui se mit à m'admirer, à m'appeler Lalla, cela, ma fille, après tant de douleurs et de combats, ce fut comme une couverture de chaleur dont il m'enveloppa à tout jamais. Que dire, que te dire, que revivre pour toi d'El Hadj, je l'ai toujours appelé ainsi : dans ses yeux, grâce à son amour, à sa bonté si profonde, dans sa noblesse si pudique, je ne lui paraissais ni déguisée, ni enfermée, ni maquillée... [...] Mariée à El Hadj, je reprenais moi-même et tout naturellement le voile ancestral, sans même me dire une fois, une seule, qu'il était linceul. Non (190-1).

The ancestral veil followed a tradition that required veiling for a woman after marriage, so that a woman would hide her beauty from all other men to show it exclusively to the husband who would offer her protection, love and respect with marriage. With colonialism, the veil had assumed a different role, which was to hide the Algerian woman from the erotic gaze of the colonizer. The direct consequence of this change was that women kept their veils tight and lowered them further. To describe this change, Lazreg writes,

The veil became women's refuge from the French denuding gaze. However, its form changed, becoming longer, and it acquired a new significance as a signal of not only cultural difference but also protection from and resistance to colonial-Christian domination. The idea of veiling one's self early, before the onset of puberty, and *voluntarily* became a sign of virtue among many Algerian girls growing up during the colonial era.<sup>12</sup>

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11 An Algerian Arabic word attributed to a woman to honor her, meaning “my mistress.”

12 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 53-54

Algerian males, who were defied by the French colonizer who misappropriated the control of the public sphere, turned into what the text of Djébar identifies as “maître auguste” of the private space. The irony in “maître auguste” is quite significant through which Djébar satirizes the status of those males who when they became unable to offer the necessary protection to their women, hung on that piece of cloth to protect them. The indirect consequence of this change was that the Algerian “Lalla” became “dames” who needed “august masters” to see that the piece of cloth is properly protecting their women as the text of Djébar ironically suggests. In this context, Lazreg has written that the veil was “native *men*’s last bastion of resistance to the French, guaranteeing a safe haven of personal power in an otherwise dominated society.”<sup>13</sup>

The ancestral veil and the protection it symbolized had therefore been forever lost for the preserved piece of cloth meant to hide beauty as well as ugliness and to protect women from the erotic gaze of the colonizer. In *Questioning the Veil*, Lazreg reiterates the argument about veiling provided by her own grandmother “A woman should hide her ugliness or her beauty. That’s the way it should be. *You must protect yourself!* [Italics added]”<sup>14</sup> Ironically, in a society which had lost its values under the effect of colonialism, the veil, which was used to preserve a woman’s beauty to a loving respectful husband, turns into a means of protection for women whose men became unable to protect them. In this conservative tradition which had conserved the piece of cloth but lost the values, woman consequently lost reverence and respect, and the veil, that piece of cloth aimed to hide and protect from the erotic gaze, turned into what Zoulikha metaphorically describes as a “linceul” (192) which effaced the Algerian woman for a long time until the time of the revolution when the veil would become a “*camouflage*”.

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13 *Ibid.*, 136

14 *Questioning the Veil*, 15.

In the novel, the ancestral veil, donned by Zoulikha after her third marriage, is harmonious with the respect and reverence that she experiences throughout her matrimonial life. With the absence of those conditions, with the changing circumstances—the death of Zoulikha’s husband—the veil becomes for Zoulikha a “linceul” which would threaten her self-determination and freedom. So instead of wearing this tradition which effaces women, Zoulikha has to make a choice, return to disguising under European dress or disguising under a veil. Her new circumstances require the disguise under the veil of a rural old woman.

The text of Djébar shows the effects of the change of the veil from the ancestral to the conservative tradition on the ‘sophisticated bourgeois’<sup>15</sup> women of Césarée. In Césarée “*une ville aux mœurs sévères*,” what remains of the ancestral veil is that piece of cloth, which imprisons women, restricts their freedom, and denies their selfhood. The novel hints to this change through satirizing the meaning of “dame” in the conservative city Cesarée where being a “dame” imposes effacement and concealment of identity and selfhood that the males, called “masters” by their wives, seem vigilant to protect. The novel repeats a significant anecdote about how Zoulikha defies the tradition of concealment of selfhood. This anecdote collected by the narrator author, as recounted among the dames of Césarée --“*bourgeoises un peu sophistiquées*” who might have met in a “Hamman”<sup>16</sup> or a marriage feast, is significant and is therefore worth quoting in full:

Zoulikha, voilée et allant à une fête, a heurté dans la rue, derrière l'église, une dame européenne, et celle-ci a crié: "Eh bien, Fatma!" et Zoulikha, découvrant sa voilette, lui a répliqué: "Eh bien, Marie?" Elle a pris, paraît-il, un ton presque innocent. Tu sais aussi qu'elle parle si bien le français, L'Européenne, peut-être pas aussi bien, puisqu'elle vient de Malte...[...]

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15 My translation of the text’s “les bourgeoises un peu sophistiquées” 22.

16 The Algerian Arabic name for Turkish bath.

La Française, enfin pas de France, mais Française quand même, était, paraît-il, tout offusquée, surtout devant cette mauresque voilée. Elle s'est presque étouffée d'indignation: "Tu m'appelles Marie? Quel toupet!" Alors Zoulikha, très doucement, comme à l'école l'institutrice (et son voile découvrant tout son visage), de lui faire la leçon: "Vous ne me connaissez pas ! Vous me tutoyez... et, en outre, je ne m'appelle pas Fatma ! ... Vous auriez pu me dire " Madame", non?" [...]

Sur ce, la dame de Césarée, dans la salle froide du hammam, de soupirer:

Moi, je n'aurais probablement pas eu ce courage. Je comprends juste un peu de français. J'aurais pu répondre avec colère à la dame Mayo, mais en arabe! "D'ailleurs, même si j'avais parlé comme Zoulikha, c'est de *mon maître* que j'aurais eu peur surtout, en revenant à la maison. Me faire reconnaître ainsi dans la rue, moi, *une dame*! Et enlever ma voilette...Quelle audace elle a cette Zoulikha! [...] Les temps ont changé, oh oui!" (pp. 23-24) [emphasis added].

The ambivalence of the "dames de Césarée" is clear in this text where we sense their feelings of envy mixed with false pride of being '*dames*'. When they envy Zoulikha's courage and rebelliousness, they do not hesitate to deplore her audacity in defying local mores vigilantly guarded by their men or "masters". The woman listening to the anecdote finds it easier to defy the colonizer despite her inability to speak French than to defy the tradition of effacement. Ambivalent too is the dame's last remark about change. When we may sense her appreciation of such a change, we also note her fear to lose the status of a "dame" or indeed to lose the protection provided by effacement. In fact, this dame's weariness is caused by her fear to live in a time for which she is not prepared, a time which needs self-determination instead of effacement. The narrator author satirizes the contradictions of a tradition which imposes effacement and denial of identity as marks of womanhood or of being a "*dame*" in Césarée.

Through this significant anecdote, Djébar achieves a double ironical reversal of the tradition of effacement and concealment of selfhood through veiling. This tradition seems to be a repetition of the French orientalist discourses, which de-subjectify Algerian women by identifying them indistinguishably as "Fatma". The text plays on the ironies of identity in colonial Algeria. Ironically enough, when the French colonial

women who come from different parts of Europe could easily be identified as “Française[s], enfin pas de France,” the Algerian woman finds no identity in her native land outside the de-subjectified “Fatma”. When Djébar repeats Zoulikha’s defiance to the colonialist woman who calls her “Fatma” by returning the prejudice in calling her “Marie”, she expresses the refusal of the Algerian woman to be defined by others through images, which would deprive her of agency and subjectivity. And when she unveils in public to teach the colonialist woman a lesson about identity, she also expresses her defiance to the tradition of effacement and denial of identity that both the dames of Césarée and their masters seem vigilant to protect and preserve in colonial Algeria.

In addition to underscoring the link between veiling and orientalist discourses, which de-subjectify Algerian womanhood overlooked in Fanon’s text, Djébar repeats but reverses the instrumentalization of the veil as described by Fanon in different ways. She shows through Zoulikha’s use of the veil that women have always had their own strategies in veiling, and that the instrumentalization of the veil is not nascent of the revolutionary struggle. Early before the revolution, Zoulikha, who used to wear European clothes, accepted to don the veil. The novel provides some of the Algerian women’s “strategic uses of the veil” through the accounts about Zoulikha’s reasons for veiling. The novel explains that after her third marriage “elle a accepté, semble-t-il aisément, cette fois, de 'se voiler,' mais certainement pas par attitude conservatrice” (22).

The different narratives report different reasons about Zoulikha’s veiling. One of the reasons is to conceal a “weakness” “une faiblesse” in her body. In another narrative, her younger daughter explains that Zoulikha donned the veil in respect of the mores of the city where she has moved to live, “Elle qui, venant de Hadjout, s’installait à Césarée, à cause des mœurs plus conservatrices d’ici, elle accepta de vivre comme les autres citadines: voilée et confinée à la vie domestique” (p.76). Then through Zoulikha’s

monologue, the reason for veiling could have been the need to enjoy the harmony of matrimonial life and the protection it provides. As we have seen above, after her third marriage with El Hadj, a man who loves and respects her, and who could see her noble character, contrary to hostile women and men of her neighborhood who see her “*déguisée en Roumia*,” she removes the “pseudo-European” mask she used to wear in the guise of European dress, and she dons “the ancestral veil” which objectifies the respect, the protection, and the harmony of her matrimonial life. Women’s strategies of using the veil are ignored in Fanon’s text which therefore ignores the pragmatism of women in relation to their culture.

During the revolution, the veil was transformed further. Djebbar’s text repeats Fanon’s assertions about women’s use of veiling/unveiling as strategies of struggle and about the transformation of the veil into a camouflage; it however reverses the image of timidity and discomfort that Fanon described as being experienced by the women who unveiled to outwit the colonizer. Fanon wrote:

The unveiled body seems to escape, to dissolve. She has an impression of being improperly dressed, even of being naked. She experiences a sense of incompleteness with great intensity. She has the anxious feeling that something is unfinished, and along with this a frightful sensation of disintegrating. The absence of the veil distorts the Algerian woman's corporal pattern. She quickly has to invent new dimensions for her body, new means of muscular control. She has to create for herself an attitude of unveiled-woman-outside. She must overcome all timidity, all awkwardness.<sup>17</sup>

As Lazreg has pertinently observed, Fanon’s “emphasis on women’s 'conflict' with their body transforms their participation in the war into a struggle over the veil. Here again, the mystique of the veil and a lack of accurate knowledge of the various ways in which women could move in and out of identities resulted in silencing their unique contribution to the Algerian independence.”<sup>18</sup> Algerian women's

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<sup>17</sup> *A Dying Colonialism*, 59.

<sup>18</sup> *The Eloquence of Silence*, 127-8.

veiling/unveiling during the decolonization struggle has even been described as an act of women's agency by Meyda Yegonoglu who writes that "the veil had now become the embodiment of Algerian women's will to act, their agency. It was not surprising after all that women's agency emerged out of the texture of their own culture."<sup>19</sup>

Through many instances in the novel, we see that women could 'move in and out of identities' through veiling/unveiling without experiencing the discomfort described in Fanon's "Unveiling Algeria." We see for instance how Zoulikha manipulated the veil making use of the different styles of veiling to move from one identity to another, from an urban woman or 'dame' to a rural woman then to a rural old woman. So, to counter the hostility of the French soldiers she meets in the corridors of the police station where she has been subjected to daily questioning, Zoulikha changes her veiling style into what makes her invisible. She covers all her body except for one eye which permits her to peer through the world as if using a camera and to see without being seen. She has moved from an urban lady to a rural peasant. Zoulikha explains that this phantom-like method of veiling renders her unseen by all but her neighbors, "Je masquais alors mon visage presque entièrement: seul mon oeil libre, en triangle ouvert. Ainsi voilée à la façon paysanne, et non comme une citadine, moi, pourtant la veuve du maquignon El Hadj, que chacun, dans mon quartier reconnaîtrait" (130). Then we see her transforming her veil further to the style of an old rural woman, hiding arms under the folds of her veil "Elle semblait une errante, presque une mendiante, comme tu les vois au marché, ces vendeuses d'œufs et de poules, et d'herbes médicinales!" (81).

In another instance, we see Hania shifting from veiling to unveiling as she moves from a rural area to the city with a remarkable comfort. Accounting for her own adventure through veiling/unveiling, Hania says:

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19 Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 64.

Naturellement, depuis mon départ de Burdeau où je laissais mon mari, j'avais plié mon voile, je l'avais dissimulé dans mon sac. Ainsi, habillée comme une Européenne, on pourrait me prendre pour une Corse, une juive, bref une femme de chez eux. Mon voile caché, mon accent français impeccable, j'ai pu aisément circuler.

Dans ma ville, je remis lentement, dans le vestibule d'une maison, mon voile de citadine sur ma tête et, redevenue moi-même, je me suis hâtée jusqu'à la demeure de ma mère (58-9).

Just like an actress who 'passes' from one identity to the other in different costumes, Hania has experienced no sense of incompleteness, no feeling of anxiety or awkwardness or timidity that the women of Fanon's "Unveiling Algeria" might have experienced when they were requested by the Nationalist leaders to unveil in order to help the revolution move to the European quarters. Unlike the fidaia described by Fanon, Hania with her European looks and impeccable French accent could "aisément circuler" over a very long distance taking different means of transport, including hitchhiking. Djebbar's description of Hania reverses Fanon's assertions about the women's discomfort to install the facility of 'passing' and changing identities for the Algerian woman used to veiling. Lazreg confirms through a field study "the relative ease with which women moved in and out of the veil, as actresses playing roles in different costumes."<sup>20</sup>

Through another significant example, Djebbar repeats Fanon's third stage of the historic dynamism of the veil, consisting of a return to the veil after 1957<sup>21</sup> but with a difference. This return to the veil is dramatized in the novel through showing a reverse journey from the city Césarée to the mountains made by the second daughter of Zoulikha, donning the veil as a camouflage. To see her mother in the mountain, it was decided that Mina should don the veil to hide her identity. Contrary to Hania's ease in and out of the veil, we notice Mina's unease in the veil. Recounting this experience, Mina says "J'étais arrivée, avec mon voile blanc de jeune fille, le visage entièrement

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<sup>20</sup> *The Eloquence of Silence*, 127-8.

<sup>21</sup> Fanon wrote: "from 1957 on, the veil reappeared," *A Dying Colonialism*, 61.

masqué, sauf un œil libre. Comme ce me fut difficile!” The experience has not been easy for the young girl despite her excitement about her transformation into “Presque une femme, une véritable inconnue” (208). Mina explains the difficulty of the adventure, which resulted into the loss of the guide designated to lead her on her trip, “Soudain, à cause de l’émotion peut-être, voilée ainsi, mais regardant en ombre borgne, ce fut comme si je ne voyais plus rien... Je m’affolai. Tout voir, qui voir, à travers cette fente minuscule ?” (p, 209). Contrary to Fanon, Djebbar shows the difficulties, awkwardness and the uneasiness of a young girl unused to veiling to adapt to the requirements of body camouflage and therefore to assume the reverse identity of a veiled woman. These difficulties were ignored in Fanon’s text when he describes the return to the veil, which is readopted as camouflage.

Zoulikha’s history with veiling/unveiling as well as the instrumentalization of the veil during the revolutionary struggle underlie the position of the text of Djebbar to tradition and modernity. The individual’s relation to tradition should follow social change because if the individual does not adapt to change in respect of some traditional practices and values, his/her subjectivity might be distorted. When we require women to be the guardians of tradition in a changing society, this would simply strip them of self-determination and self-realization. In Césarée “plutôt sévère dans ses mœurs” (186), women have been assigned the role to guard the tradition of veiling against their own self-determination in their changing society. The subjectivity of these women has therefore been distorted as they become “dames” who need to be secluded in a harem or vigilantly veiled when they venture outside their well protected bourgeois villas. In a society like Césarée which denies women the right to adapt to change and indeed the right to agency and subjectivity, a woman may turn into a ‘dame’ stripped of her subjectivity or live disguised as Zoulikha either in the guise of European clothes or in guise of a phantom-like veiled woman who changes the world around her without being seen.

Many instances in the novel refer to women and disguising. Young Zoulikha in European clothes is described as disguised. The narrator-author returns to her native Césarée disguised into “l'étrangère,” representing the estrangement of women in postcolonial Algeria, where a woman's subjectivity was denied even when the country had won its independence. In postcolonial Algeria, women were required to assume the roles of the guardians of tradition; all the women who participated in the war of independence, who abandoned the veil during the war to hold arms and combat the colonizer were required to return to the roles they were assigned during the colonial period before the war of decolonization.

In postcolonial Algeria, woman was also required to guard tradition, and always through covering her body, and this time through recourse to the Islamic not traditional conservative veil. The novel refers to this return to veiling through the symbolic scene where in the last monologue of Zoulikha, Zoulikha describes how her tortured body which has been thrown in the village or 'douar' of her martyred husband has been later on buried according to the Islamic tradition by one of the young men who were under her leadership during the armed struggle. This young man uses to be a sleepwalker who during his somnambular crises used to walk towards Zoulikha sleeping, and every night in an “acte d'adoration,” he kissed while crying her hands and her feet (232). This act of adoration may suggest the erotic behavior that some males used to project on women fighters during the war of decolonization.

The burial scene may be interpreted as Djébar's metaphor for Islamic veiling in contemporary Algeria. The novel shows how the return to the veil in postcolonial Algeria goes hand in hand with the silencing of women and their exclusion from the building of the new nation. The burial scene reads:

ce fut un des garçons de la grotte qui vint en voleur héroïque, me chercher, [...] Lui seul, malgré lui et malgré les autres, il réussit à m'enfermer, à me plomber. Il m'enterra. C'était sa forme d'amour. Alors que, spontanément, l'ennemi avait trouvé ce qui convenait le mieux à mes fibres, à

mes muscles: pourrir en plein air, sous des youyous de femmes me transperçant... Non, il m'enterra ! Selon la tradition... il m'honora, selon l'islam! (228-231).

In the novel, the silencing of women in Algeria is depicted through the voice of Zoulikha projected in postcolonial Algeria. After the text describing colonial torture, the narrative moves to depict the early postcolonial times. In another symbolic scene, the text describes how before the symbolic burial, her slain body thrown in her husband's 'douar' has started to frighten the men of the village, who have the same erotic gaze of the colonizer towards her body, and who in turn have been afraid of the tortured body just as did her slayers in the past. Symbolically, the scene may suggest the ironic debates about the need to the return to the veil, a strong marker of tradition, which has been used to define gender roles in postcolonial Algeria. The scene reads:

[T]ous les hommes de ces mêmes lieux, ne se sont-ils pas mis à leur tour à avoir peur, de qui... de moi en particulier et de ce qu'ils ont appelé "mon héroïsme", ou plutôt de cette présence de mes bras, de ma poitrine, de ma tête toujours droite et de mes cheveux désormais en broussaille—car ma crinière de lionne rousse, exprès, ils l'ont trainée dans la poussière.[...] Comme si me trainer et m'exposer ainsi aux chacals errants, et auparavant aux yeux effrayés des paysans immobiles dans un cercle voyeur et impuissant, comme si ironiser sur ce corps femelle abattu[...] liait bizarrement bourreaux et hommes victimes ou même témoins (222-223).

The text describes how later on in the name of tradition these frightened males exclude women, whose tortured bodies, still remind the nation of the leadership role they played in the past struggles. To exclude women, the postcolonial male leadership warns the nation in the name of tradition as the narrative puts it,

Je l'imagine aisément, cette adresse masculine, au nom de la bienséance ou de la tradition islamiques, maraboutiques, Dieu sait quoi d'autre, mais tradition certes avec son plomb—une mise en garde entre complices, d'un air de dire, comme au café du commerce des colons du village, ou des fidèles de la mosquée, les fidèles aux parties de dominos des cafés maures: 'Où allons-nous si vos femmes, si vos filles se trompent de rôle!'(p. 223).

In the name of tradition, the young somnambular has been inspired to bury Zoulikha "dans une clairière que je ne *reconnus* pas, qu'il choisit de m'enterrer consciencieusement" (p.234). In the name of the Islamic tradition, the veil returns to ironically 'honorably' bury Algerian womanhood in postcolonial Algeria. To save himself and his companions from the troubles caused by their erotic dreams, the sleepwalker has been inspired to the redeeming solution, which is the burial according to tradition, which is once again summoned to define gender roles in postcolonial Algeria. By covering or hiding or veiling the woman's body, troubled frustrated males could find peace and remedy for their erotic troubles; "La tâche accomplie, le dos courbaturé, il se découvrit l'âme soulagée. Il se fondit dans la forêt, silhouette droite, toujours plus droite" (234). The forest may be Djébar's metaphor suggesting the postcolonial Algerian society where survival is determined by the sexual politics of gendering and erotization, where the colonial discourse about the victimization of women has been replaced by the discourse stressing the heroism of women, which silence women and deny them effective participation in society.

The metaphor of the burial reminds us of Emecheta's text where the same metaphor is used. Djébar repeats the metaphor of the burial of womanhood, which seems to be justified by tradition in both texts. The ritual burial of the mother's story has been motivated by the evasion of responsibility towards failures in the text of Emecheta where the ironic style of the author reverses the discourse of the burial and installs the call for a digging up. Djébar repeats the metaphor and the irony not polemically but in stylization. Djébar stylizes Emecheta's style, namely her metaphor of the burial of womanhood and ironies motivated by a need to defy male defined traditions. Through what seems on the surface structure polemical reflected on the use of opposite models of womanhood, Djébar stylizes Emecheta's metaphors and ironies to render them conventional.

To sum up, and to evaluate the dialogue Emecheta/Djebar, we may say that even if both authors have emphasized the fact that women's lives are structured by socio-economic, cultural, political, and economic conditions, the women in the respective novels have reacted differently to their conditions. Emecheta places women between tradition and modernism, between two conflicting political and cultural systems, Igbo tradition and Western modernity stressing the victimization of women and their lack of agency. Djebar shows that some women, as the 'dames' of Césarée, actually lack agency because before changing conditions they have not assumed any significant responsibility to change their lives. Many other women, as most of the women who populate *La Femme*, have changed the course of history, and the veil, commonly denoted by the colonizer as the symbol of oppression, has by no means oppressed them, but it has been adapted to change. These women have transformed their time and their environment, and the veil has been transformed as they themselves have been transformed. Unlike Nnu Ego who remains faithful to traditional customs in a changing society, the women of the revolutionary period in *La Femme* have adapted tradition to change. Both authors however seem to react against attempts to restrict women's roles in the respective postcolonial societies depicted.

## **9.2 *La femme sans sépulture* in Dialogue With *Possessing the Secret of Joy***

To move to the dialogue Djebar/Walker, we may discover other significant instances of hidden polemic. Reading *Possessing* dialogically through *La Femme*, we notice that *La Femme* challenges the naturalistic overtones of the doomed victimization of women's lives in Algeria, or in Nigeria among the Igbo, or in the Olinka village symbolically representing Africa. *La Femme* challenges the denial of agency for women of African descent that Walker's text repeats echoing colonial discourses, reiterated by

western feminists. Focused on the depiction of the theme of gendered violence, we therefore choose to show the hidden polemical relation of Djébar's text to Walker's through exploring the hidden polemic of *La Femme* to a western feminist text, written by a French feminist, namely Simone De Beauvoir, whose 'insights' are celebrated in Walker's text.

To start with, Djébar's response to Walker's handling of African women's history can be noticed in the difference between the approaches they adopted to represent history. This difference appears in Djébar's announcement in the "Avertissement," which heralds her narrative, and in Walker's proclamation in a "Note to the Reader" which ends her narrative. In her novel's opening, Djébar starts with a note addressed directly to the reader where she asserts her purposes; "rapportés avec un souci de fidélité historique, [...] selon une approche documentaire," but also using "ma liberté romanesque, justement pour que la vérité de Zoulikha soit éclairée d'avantage." So reporting with respect of the historical fidelity, but also making use of fictional liberty to clarify history is Djébar's way of rewriting history.

Conversely, when the story of Tashi is purely imaginative and wholly fictional, the reader is struck by the intrusion of the author who addresses him/her directly producing some real facts and statistics about "genital mutilation" in the final chapter entitled "Note to the Reader" which reads:

It is estimated that from ninety to one hundred million women and girls living today in African, Far Eastern and Middle Eastern countries have been genitally mutilated. Recent articles in the media have reported on the growing practice of 'female circumcision' in the United States and Europe, among immigrants from countries where it is part of the culture. [...] Tashi, who appears briefly in the *Color Purple* and again in *The Temple of my Familiar*, stayed with me, uncommonly tenacious, through the writing of both books, and led me finally to conclude she needed, and deserved, a book of her own. She also appeared to me in the flesh. During the filming of *The Color Purple*, [...] the young woman who played Tashi, [...] was an African from Kenya: very beautiful, graceful and poised. Seeing her brought the Tashi of my book vividly to mind, as I was reminded

that in Kenya, [...], little girls were being forced under the shards of unwashed glass, tin-can tops, rusty razors and dull knives of traditional circumcisers [...] A portion of the royalties from this book will be used to educate women and girls, men and boys about the hazardous effects of genital mutilation. (285).

Reading *Possessing* dialogically through *La Femme*, we may say that the representation of the “real” history of Zoulikha as illuminated by the fictional is an ironical reversal of the fictional story of Tashi, which is illuminated by the factual. Actually, when Djebbar relies on a real story and makes use of what she calls her “fictional liberty” in order to illuminate the factual, she fictionalizes history and thereby remains faithful to her double task as a novelist and a historian. Walker however finds it necessary to illuminate the fictional by the factual to “educate” and teach, to judge and condemn, which distances her from both the task of the fiction writer and that of the historiographer when dealing with African history.

Equally, in a hidden polemic, Djebbar criticizes the paradigm of victimization adopted by Walker in her representation of the African woman through a denial of female agency. Her representation of the “real” history of Zoulikha as reflective of rebellion and strength despite the torture of her body by the French military is a reversal of the imaginative story of the “universal” Tashi who has been denied a singular individuality to fit the generalizing categories that Walker needs for her project of resistance against Female Genital Mutilation.

Additionally, the text of *La Femme* repeats with a difference the history of colonial Algeria as well as the “episode with Ayisha” which is still haunting the memory of the French in Walker’s text. In fact, Djebbar repeats the theme and the figure used in Walker’s text as a means of examining issues of social injustice during colonial times. The theme of violence and the figure of the ghost of the colonial past haunting the present are recurrent in *La Femme*. The violence used by the French military—not oppressive patriarchal tradition— against Algerians and the figure of the ghost of the

colonial past haunting the postcolonial minds of Algerians not of the French are recurrent in the different narratives documenting the life and death of Zoulikha, and in the narratives which have been imaginatively created to illuminate further the history of colonial violence against men and women. The ghost of colonial violence haunts the minds of all the characters of the story, who become like Tashi and Lisette storytellers, and its effects have transformed their lives forever.

Djebar's novel repeats *Possessing* by repeating the theme of violence and torture inflicted on women's bodies but with a difference. Torture or violence as inflicted on women by the colonial then later on the neocolonial terrorist machine in Algeria is an ironical reversal of Walker's representation of the torture inflicted on women's bodies by tradition and the reinvention of tradition. Djebar repeats the theme of rape, yet while Walker finds it necessary to rebel against the "institutionalized rape" and the "universal" doom of African womanhood, Djebar focuses on gendered violence practiced during the war of independence and its effect on individuals in postcolonial Algeria. An important part of the novel constituting the monologues of Zoulikha emphasize the fact that the intimidation and physical mistreatment inflicted on Zoulikha affect her not only as a consequence of being a combatant but also because of her gender. Though not in a linear chronological account, but through fragmented narratives, the monologues reconstitute the story of coercion, detention, rape and tortures inflicted on Zoulikha's body by French soldiers.

Djebar's representation of gendered violence underlies parallels with Simone de Beauvoir's article "Pour Djamila Boupacha" "For Djamila Boupacha." Djamila Boupacha is an Algerian revolutionary, illegally imprisoned, raped and tortured by the French paratroopers. Actually, after having been informed about the horrors that young Djamila had endured, De Beauvoir responded to the appeals of Gisele Halimi, a lawyer and human rights activist, who needed support in her battle against the war methods used by the French army in Algeria. In June 1960, De Beauvoir wrote "Pour Djamila

Boupacha,” which was published in *Le Monde*.<sup>22</sup> Then she accepted, always at the request of Halimi, to head a committee demanding a fair trial for Djamila, who was thanks to the committee’s efforts transported to a prison in France, and therefore her case was transferred to a metropolitan court. In 1961, De Beauvoir and Halimi’s actions for Djamila were crowned by the publication of *Djamila Boupacha*, a book jointly compiled by Halimi and De Beauvoir.<sup>23</sup>

Though the two texts, De Beauvoir’s and Djébar’s, are addressed to two different audiences, they share many concerns. They tell the stories of war revolutionaries who were victims of gendered violence. They aim not only to call attention to one of the most horrible forms of gendered violence, sexual aggression, generally endured by women during wars but also to warn against many other issues. In fact, they also point to the imperialistic dispositions of the violence of the French colonialism. When De Beauvoir describes the violence practiced by the French army in Algeria as a reiteration of the violence of the Nazi occupation of France,<sup>24</sup> Djébar also points to the interiorization of this imperialistic violence in contemporary Algeria. However, while denoting the historical relation between imperialism and the forms of violence practiced in colonial Algeria and those practiced in contemporary Algeria, they also emphasize the importance of issues of responsibility. Each from her position points to the responsibility of those who allow the reiteration of violence. Then each acknowledges her own responsibility about this state.

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22 “Pour Djamila Boupacha” *Le Monde*, 2 Juin 1960.

[http://web.archive.org/web/20120324184623/http://s1.lemde.fr/webdocs\\_contenu/fichiers/2012/torture/pdf/09\\_Pourdjamila.pdf](http://web.archive.org/web/20120324184623/http://s1.lemde.fr/webdocs_contenu/fichiers/2012/torture/pdf/09_Pourdjamila.pdf)

23 See Ranjana Khanna, *Algeria Cuts: Women and Representation, 1830 to the present* (California: Stanford University Press, 2008), 79-91.

24 Actually, most of De Beauvoir’s positions towards the colonial war in Algeria are expressed in her autobiography *Force of Circumstance*, where she incriminates the French who turned into persecutors after having themselves been victims of Nazi oppression.

Starting her article by expressing weariness about the standardization of scandals in the French society, “Ce qu'il y a de plus scandaleux dans le scandale c'est qu'on s'y habitue,” De Beauvoir promptly moves to the presentation of one sample case about the atrocities of colonial war in Algeria. She represents violence metonymically providing a vivid description of the tortures perpetrated on the body of Djamila whose suffering stands for the miseries endured by all Algerians, as the text seems to suggest. De Beauvoir uses direct and indirect speech as she uses multiple voices to describe torture, her own voice, the voice of Djamila, the voices of witnesses, and the voices of the persecutors. She starts with a very brief representation of the incident, which led to the arrest of Djamila who was subject to physical violence as soon as arrested. Interested in conveying essential information about the violence endured by Djamila, De Beauvoir starts by reporting what she describes as “facts” retraced by Djamila and witnessed by many other people who could also confirm the accuracy of the victim’s accounts about her trauma. Therefore, after reassuring her reader about the accurateness of what she has previously described as scandalous, she starts reporting the facts aiming to shock and move her reader to action using minute descriptions of the victim’s naked body under torture.

De Beauvoir makes use of polyvocality to write the story of gendered violence. The author introduces her reader to facts as recounted by others, but she does not merge her voice with them. However, she merges Djamila’s voice with the voices of witnesses to describe facts representing torture as a common war method used against all Algerians. Djamila is then allowed to speak alone, in direct speech, about what seems to make her case highly outrageous, having to endure “le supplice de la bouteille” while “a virgin.” De Beauvoir individualizes Djamila and allows her to speak in an independent and unmerged voice to describe “la plus atroce des souffrances;” as if she wants to allow the traumatized young Algerian to externalize her pain, which seems both physical and psychic. Here the author finds it necessary to reinforce the voice of Djamila, who points out her loss of consciousness during that special level of torture. Thus, a witness’s voice

was called to confirm and to add other details about the violence practiced against Djamila's inert body. The author finds it also necessary to intervene herself in order to reinforce the traumatized fainted victim by adding a final parenthetical comment to close Djamila's direct speech "(Djamila était vierge)." In this polyphony of voices, the author also reports the aggressive rude words addressed to Djamila by her persecutors during the questionnaire, in a direct discourse aimed to dramatize, " 'On va pas te violer, ça risquerait de te faire plaisir', lui dirent, quelques jours plus tard, les hommes qui la questionnaient."

Here De Beauvoir simulates the fair trial that she and the lawyer Halimi were calling for while advertising for Djamila's case. De Beauvoir simulates a jury trial to substitute for the torture trial that made Djamila confess. In this jury trial, Djamila is represented as the plaintiff, and she is summoned with witnesses to expose facts before prospective jurors; the author stands for the attorney who offers evidence and arguments to help the judge and the jurors make a fair decision. De Beauvoir wants the French people to assume the function of the judge. In *Algeria Cuts*, Ranjana Khanna explains that De Beauvoir uses a legal discourse to describe torture; she makes Djamila describe the tortures she had endured by providing a precise description of the instruments of torture such as bottle, cigarettes, and electrodes. Instruments, as Ranjana Khanna explains, serve as "indexes of pain" in courtrooms.<sup>25</sup>

After the presentation of facts denouncing the war methods used by the French army in Algeria, De Beauvoir summons the French government and the French people to react. She first calls the French government to assume its responsibility for justice, which seems arrogantly sullied in Algeria by the French army, whose officers start to evade all forms of control. De Beauvoir then addresses the French people and confronts them with their responsibility for humanity and for justice calling attention to the

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<sup>25</sup> *Algeria Cuts*, 84.

alarming situation of indifference to scandals committed in the name of the French people. She finally warns that any abandonment of responsibility would be a form of betrayal, “Par cette abdication c'est la France entière qu'ils trahiraient, c'est chacun de nous, c'est moi, c'est vous.”

However, De Beauvoir's humanist feminist appeals were silenced by the Evian agreement and then the amnesty laws. In 1962, the Evian agreement came into effect to announce the retreat of the French army from Algeria and the end of armed struggle. The agreement adopted amnesty laws, which granted pardon to the torturers of Djamilia who was soon released from jail. These laws have created a state of amnesia, which has been harmful to both France and Algeria as noted by Benjamin Stora, who therefore warns that neither communities nor individuals can exist in a state of amnesia; he calls the repressed memories of the war a form of gangrene.<sup>26</sup>

Djebar repeats De Beauvoir's concerns and strategy but with a difference. Djebar's text repeating images of torture denounced by De Beauvoir underscores a hidden polemical relation to the predecessor text. Like De Beauvoir, Djebar represents violence and the tortures perpetrated on the body of Zoulikha using the voice of her protagonist. In a testimonial narrated by Zoulikha, we learn that Zoulikha, like Djamilia, has been illegally imprisoned in a place where she should not have been held; she has been raped by a group of soldiers. However, instead of the legal language used by De Beauvoir, Djebar uses a language that does not stand on pain, trauma or victimization. Djebar repeats the metonymic images of the tortured body, depicts the instruments of torture for other purposes.

In testimonials narrated by Zoulikha, the text of *La Femme* represents violence metaphorically. Images of the tortured body come in fragments throughout the monologues of Zoulikha. Thus, such images as the “pieds ensanglantés ... seins en

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26 Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et L'oubli* (Paris : La Découverte), 1998.

coupes plates qu'il s'apprêtent à torturer..." (69) "peau jetée en dépouille" (218), "vagin électrifié," (221) project torture metonymically. These metonymic images stand as metaphors for the reiteration of violence. The author makes use of free indirect discourse underscored by a shift in tense and parallels between colonial and postcolonial time to put emphasis on the reiteration of violence in Algeria. When Zoulikha refers to torture, she expresses her fears and anxiety about the new violence.

The text gives little importance to pain endured in the past. The last monologue describing torture shows that Zoulikha has been able to endure torture in the past. Her soul and heart have never been affected despite torture on her body, which has found a way to "metamorphose," which Michael F. O'Riley describes as "a symbolic birth" through which "the woman's body searches a new history—or renaissance—outside the violent and reproductive death drive that delimits it."<sup>27</sup> Being a woman's body, which has endured pain mixed with the pleasure of giving birth, it could actually endure the brutality of the enemy and could even endure torture with the same mixed feelings of pain and pleasure. The tortured woman could transcend her pains and thus feel the pleasure of a mother who offers her own life as a sacrifice to save her children. The tortured mother has been reinforced by her experiences of giving birth when pain has been mixed with the joy of seeing her offspring.

However, when the text repeats images associating "the pain of physical torture with the pain of childbirth" as Mildred Mortimer puts it in "Tortured Bodies,"<sup>28</sup> and when it repeats images associating the sacrifice of mothers and that of the "martyrs," it rejects "reducing" these experiences of mixed pain and joy into the idealized projections

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<sup>27</sup> *Postcolonial Haunting*, 75.

<sup>28</sup> Mildred Mortimer, "Tortured Bodies, Resilient Souls: Algeria's Women Combatants Depicted by Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, Louisette Ighilariz, and Assia Djebar," in *Research in African Literatures* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2012), 113.

of women as sacrificial mothers. Describing the period of torture, the text through the voice of Zoulikha reads:

Torture ou volupté, ainsi réduite soudain à rien, un corps—peau jetée en dépouille, à même le sol gras—[...] mon corps—peut-être parce que corps de femme et ayant enfanté tant de fois—se met à ouvrir ses plaies, ses issues, à déverser son flux, en somme il s'exhale, s'émiette, se vide pour autant s'épuiser ! Du moins pas encore ... peut-être qu'il cherche dans le noir, et hors du temps, quelque métamorphose?

Penser aux quatre enfants que j'ai eus, au feuillage de murmures, de gémissements, de râles déchirés et d'assauts furieux qui ont précédé leur venue à chacun—t'imaginer plus particulièrement toi, Mina [...] cela m'a permis de traverser cette durée de la torture si longue sans que le sang, le pus ou l'urine m'éclaboussent l'âme, me souillent le cœur (218-9).

When the text repeats images of sacrifice, it objects the restriction of women's roles to functions assumed suitable with their biology, notably mothering that is generally equated with sacrifice. This is evident in the ironic tone of the text above where Djébar mocks the way the experiences of the revolutionary are suddenly reduced to nothing, a body, "réduite soudain à rien, un corps." The irony is noticed in the way the text confirms the sacrificial images within "peut-être ... s'épuiser !" to reverse them through "Du moins pas encore." The revolutionary's body, strong enough by its experiences, searches and finds a way to overcome the long period of torture that the enemy started and that seems to continue until the present, in independent Algeria. Reference to the present is underscored by the use of the present tense to describe torture.

The irony seems to mock the way women in independent Algeria have been "suddenly" required assuming functions suitable with their biology by the nationalist leadership ruling the country. Actually, women were required to assume the idealized role of the mothers of the new nation, which was a canny way to restrict their roles in society. The monologue addressed to the daughter expresses Djébar's expectations of a

‘metamorphosis,’ or a rebirth of the spirit of defiance through the revolutionary’s offspring, ‘particularly’ females against the new silencing. Therefore, it seems that Mortimer has missed Djebbar’s irony when she argues that the association between torture and childbirth suggests, “the martyr, in the throes of pain, is transformed symbolically into a ‘founding mother of the new Algeria’ as she gives birth to the new nation.”<sup>29</sup>

The silencing of women through emphasizing their sacrifices is not seen as sudden by Algerian scholar, Marnia Lazreg, who explains that the position to women’s roles in the decolonization war as well as in the building of the new state has always been ambivalent despite the fact that women’s militancy has been reflective of a strong will to change the course of history. According to Lazreg, women have always been required to play sacrificial roles by the FLN—the National Liberation Front, which is the political party which led the armed struggle against colonialism and which ruled the country until the 1990’s. Lazreg explains that while the wartime FLN perceived women “as creatures of sacrifice,”<sup>30</sup> in postcolonial Algeria, “women, as a group, were seen as necessary to the building of the state, but as contributors, not participants. The sacrificial view of women expressed by wartime F.L.N. was thus given a clear content. Sacrifice not duty complemented by right, was the cornerstone of the new state’s view of women.”<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, Djebbar’s repetition of images of sacrifice and her association between torture and childbirth have other implications. The repetition of images of sacrifice, which are soon reversed, is also significant as it shifts emphasis away from pain caused by torture endured in the past. Djebbar’ repetition of fragmented images of

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29 Mortimer, “Tortured Bodies,” 113.

30 *The Eloquence of Silence*, 130.

31 Ibid, 146. In *The Eloquence of Silence*, chapters 7 and 8, Lazreg has analyzed in detail the role of women in the decolonization struggle as well as the complexities of the relationship between gender and the FLN leadership during the war and after the independence.

the tortured body offer an ironical reversal of De Beauvoir's erotic projection of a virgin's nakedness and pain. Djébar's depiction of torture endured by a woman who married three times, and who gave birth four times seem to mock the French reader who needed a virgin's body projected naked in order to move against gendered violence. The mockery is expanded further when Djébar projects a non-virgin's body, which finds a way "to metamorphose," to transcend pain against the image of the virgin that the French reader is summoned to save. Ironically, having no chance neither to be saved by a French public opinion nor to be defended by a French feminist who finds it necessary to emphasize that her protégée "was a virgin," the non-virgin finds a way to rise above limits and to 'fly' freely. Djébar projects a strong Algerian woman who is strengthened by her experiences to endure torture and to transcend pain against the frail fragile virgin with no experience that De Beauvoir's text offers as a model of Algerian womanhood.

Though the images of gendered violence in Djébar's text are repeated to express the ability of a woman's body to negate pain during past trials, pain seems nonetheless reinstalled as soon as negated as the images seem to underlie a different more recent source of pain. The fragmented images representing torture are focused on the pain of Zoulikha about the reiteration of violence. The text focuses on the disappointment of the tortured woman and her fears for her daughter, Mina, in this space, which is not secure and still filled with horror just as it was during the colonial period. The woman who has endured the tortures of the past is unable to find rest and feels haunted by the same fear of the colonial times.

The shift of emphasis toward the new causes of pain suggested by the repetition of images of gendered violence is underscored by a shift of the narration from colonial to postcolonial time and the use of the present tense. This shift is noticed in the following: "c'est à partir de cette aube que, dorénavant, je te parle, o Mina, ma petite" (222). Zoulika addresses her daughter from a new dawn, the dawn of independence, which seems worrisome too, and she probes, "est-ce que la peur me tenaille encore, me mord,

m'affaiblit [...] ou ne serait-ce pas désormais une peur tournée vers toi, vers ton corps si frêle, vers ton visage de jeunesse, vers ton avenir? Comment puis-je rejoindre le royaume des morts rassérénée si me hante encore mon angoisse pour toi” (224).

The present is as troublesome as the past for women. During the 1990s, the consequences of the civil unrest were particularly distressing for women, and some women suffered the worst penalties. In rural villages as well as in cities, women were kidnapped, tortured, and raped. In *Guerre Invisible*, Stora reports, “L’Algérie des années 1992-1999 présente la ‘particularité’ d’être ce pays où la violence à l’égard des femmes est des plus atroces. Ainsi, le gouvernement annonce, le 22 décembre 1994, que 211 femmes ont été assassinées depuis décembre 1993, avec viols, mutilations, décapitations.”<sup>32</sup>

In *Violence et Corps des Femmes du Tiers-Monde*, Jacqueline des Forts records accounts, collected from the quotidian *El Watan* of 24 January 1995, about what she calls “viols de guerre en Algérie.” The testimony of Warda is very significant to show the relation between gendered violence in the past and in the 1990s. Warda is a 17-year-old girl kidnapped and sequestered in an unknown old house with about 12 other adolescent girls, who were used to cook and do the washing up among other chores, and who all were tortured and raped. In the testimony of Warda, the same images of torture return, Warda tells about how her persecutor burnt her body with cigarettes before raping her, and just as Djamilia, the young Warda loses consciousness while being raped. Warda tells that though the girls who were in the house advised her not to resist “the terrorists” to lessen her pains, she resisted and angered the menacing “terrorist,” trying to remind him that the religion he seems to defend prohibits rape. Warda’s testimony gives account of scenes of torture entangled with her arguments with the angry “terrorist,”

Il m’a ordonné ‘enlever mon pantalon. J’ai refusé en lui disant que ce n’était pas bien, ce qu’il voulait faire, que Dieu condamnait cela, que nous n’étions pas mariés. Il menaçait de son poignard en me disant qu’il allait me balafre, [...] il a mis la lame de son couteau sur ma joue, [...] je l’ai

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32 Stora, *La Guerre Invisible*, 99.

supplié en disant que c'était "H'ram" (péché) devant dieu, mais il a pris une cigarette, l'a allumée et s'est mis à me brûler les cuisses. J'ai hurlé et j'ai fermé les yeux en d'adossant au mur. Il a recommencé avec sa cigarette et je me suis évanouie. Je n'ai plus rien senti. Quand j'ai repris connaissance, j'étais par terre avec plein de sang.<sup>33</sup>

Though this text reminds of the barbarity that Djamila endured, it shows Warda stronger than the Djamila described in the text of De Beauvoir. This Warda dares to argue even while having a knife threatening to cut her cheek, and dares to speak about what happened even if no promise of justice encouraged her, and no public opinion has been motivated to support her. Though Warda dared to speak, indifference and amnesia, which characterized the 1990s have been reinforced by an amnesty charter which saved Warda's oppressors from "the rigors of justice," just as the Evian had saved Djamila's torturers despite De Beauvoir's appeals. Amnesia has unfortunately been reinstalled with the September 29, 2005 national referendum, through which Algerians passed the "Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation that grants amnesty to nearly all terrorists and full amnesty to all agents of the state,"<sup>34</sup> despite Debar's warnings.

When Djebar expands the echo to say that the violence the French inherited from the Nazi has been transferred to Algeria, she also warns against the state of indifference towards this new violence. She describes this indifference as an "amnesia" saying that "les gens vivent, presque tous, la cire dans les oreilles: pour ne pas entendre la vibration qui persiste du feu d'hier. Pour couler plus aisément dans leur tranquille petite vie, ayant choisi l'amnésie" (236). Like De Beauvoir, Djebar warns against the indifference and the state of amnesia towards the violence persisting in Algeria. She points to the responsibility of all, including herself, in allowing this reiteration of violence through this choice of amnesia. She points to her own responsibility for being so late in denouncing violence.

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33 Jacqueline des Forts, 154.

34 James D. Le Sueur, *Algeria since 1989: Between Terror and Democracy* (London, New York: Zed Books, 2010), xix.

Here it is worth noting that while Walker's direct reference to Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* underlies the celebration of French feminism and its universal overtones, Djebbar's hidden polemic to De Beauvoir's text points to the limitations of French feminism. Djebbar's attempt to expand the feminist appeals of De Beauvoir, which in fact have been silenced by the laws of amnesty, shows that French feminism is too self-centered to see the trauma of the 'other,' and it consequently betrays the very values it fights to implement. Surprisingly enough, a liberal feminist like De Beauvoir makes of 'virginity' a key instrument in her rebellion against gendered violence. Surprisingly enough, a voice like De Beauvoir's was duped by the plans of politicians who adopted the amnesty laws. Surprisingly enough the humanist values of French feminism seem exclusive as they could not enclose the trauma of the other, the psychic trauma of Djamila, who was soon abandoned by De Beauvoir after the armistice.

In the novel, Djebbar's position to French feminism seems implied within the text's central image representing the author's reflections on the dynamics of "appropriation and effacement" in relation to the legacy of imperialist history. These reflections are embodied in the chapter "Les oiseaux de la mosaïque" "the birds of the mosaic" through which the author exploits and modifies the canonical Homeric episode of imperialist seduction, "Ulysses and the Sirens." Actually, the novel depicts a two-century old mosaic, which reproduces the Homeric episode, held in the museum of Césarée. This mosaic shows the sirens as beautiful women musicians on the point of flying off. The body of one of the sirens is half effaced in the mosaic. The sirens contemplate a boat where a central character, Ulysses, is tied to the mast of the boat while a crew of two men led the boat with wax in their ears. He seems charmed by the songs (118-9). Despite having been warned against the danger of listening, Ulysses has listened to the songs telling the story of imperialist violence, but he has chosen to recede. Like Ulysses, De Beauvoir years later had listened to the story of Djamila about gendered violence, and like Ulysses too, she chose to retreat leaving violence behind.

Indeed after appropriating the story of Djamila, De Beauvoir soon allowed its effacement. The story of Djamila has been inscribed through its repetition by the French feminist voices within a story that repeats those same imperialist dynamics of “appropriation and effacement.” Firstly, Djamila’s story has been effaced and her lived reality has been distorted in a text that projects the nakedness of her body without allowing this body “to metamorphose.” In De Beauvoir’s text, the only status that Djamila is allowed is that of a victim who even when given voice, the voice is weak and ultimately faints. Secondly, through the projection of Djamila as a victim of gendered violence who could never have access to justice, the story of Djamila has been doubly condemned to effacement.

De Beauvoir was satisfied and relieved to see the French army retreat unpunished from Algeria ignoring the pains of Djamila and all the victims of gendered violence, whose stories have been condemned to effacement under the laws of amnesty and amnesia. After her release from jail, Djamila was advised by De Beauvoir to return to her country and to participate in the building of the new nation with a complete ignorance of her pains. Djamila had once believed in the universalism of French humanist feminist values when she consented to the publication of her story. She however refused to make any reference to her torture years later when interviewed by the French television channel *France 3*. When Djamila voiced her pains, she used to believe in the humanist values of Halimi and De Beauvoir, yet years later, we could see and feel her disappointment when she refused to speak again about torture. The pains of Djamila were doubled as she became the eternal victim who could never rise beyond this status that French feminism tanned her with.

By denying agency to the Algerian revolutionary, the French feminist distorts the feminist values she elsewhere celebrates. By defining Djamila as “virgin,” she denies for her what she claims for the ‘woman’ of her *The Second Sex*, “It is not nature that

defines woman; it is she who defines herself.”<sup>35</sup> De Beauvoir’s plea for justice ignores Djamila’s revolutionary activism, which represents the way Djamila defined herself when she chose to fight against colonialism even when she knew that she was risking her life regardless of the virginity valued by the French feminist who elsewhere expresses her disregard to what she calls the “myth of virginity,” or “the cult of the virgin.”<sup>36</sup> By standing in the position of the savior of the virgin, the French feminist betrays her own values. Here, Lazreg’s warnings against distorting the lived reality of ‘different’ women proves relevant; Lazreg writes, “The misrepresentation of ‘different’ women is a form of self-misrepresentation. It bespeaks a repression of one’s femaleness and glosses over the fact that the representer is also engendered and remains far from having achieved the freedom and capacity to define herself.”<sup>37</sup> Missing the opportunity to achieve freedom and self-definition despite her contact with ‘different’ women, the French feminist ends like the epic traveler who indifferently resumes his imperialist voyage after listening to the songs of the sirens.

Like Ulysses and De Beauvoir, the narrator author of *La Femme* has listened to the songs of the sirens in guise of listening to the story of Zoulikha as told by different voices, but unlike them, she returns to expand their echo. Actually, the narrator author has identified herself with the epic traveler many times in the novel, yet she distances herself from him reproving the complicit refusal to confront the violence that the sirens echo. Like Ulysses and De Beauvoir, Djébar has listened saying “Je l’entends, et je me trouve presque dans la situation d’Ulysse, le voyageur qui ne s’est pas bouché les oreilles de cire, sans toutefois risquer de traverser la frontière de la mort pour cela” (236). However, unlike Ulysses who continued his imperialist voyage ignoring the violence of the place after having listened, and unlike De Beauvoir who was satisfied by

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35 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), 65.

36 See *The Second Sex*.

37 “Feminism and Difference,” 97.

the laws of amnesty and amnesia, our narrator-author refuses to resume her voyage saying “Je ne m'éloigne pas; je n'ai pas demandé à être immobilisée. Non!” (242). Actually, unlike Ulysses and De Beauvoir who both listened but sided with amnesia, the narrator author returns to expand echoes about gendered violence within a text which is too vigilant to repeat the dynamics of “appropriation and effacement” that De Beauvoir's text knowingly or unknowingly repeats.

Djebar's revision of French feminism seems to join Lazreg's reaction against western feminists' misappropriation of the reality of women from North Africa and the Middle East. In “Feminism and Difference,” Lazreg shows that the reality of these women has been “appropriated in one form or another by outsiders,”<sup>38</sup> whose interest in “different” women's lives underlies a “desire to understand their own institutions better”<sup>39</sup> which results in the distortion of these women's history. Actually, if we follow Lazreg's argument, De Beauvoir's appropriation of Djamila's story may underlie “the desire to understand [French] institutions better.” While calling for justice to Djamila, the French feminist needed to test the French legal system and its ability to achieve egalitarian universalism. She, consequently, needed to celebrate the superiority of French institutions, which could defy injustice and force politicians to respect justice. She dared for this cause to project the naked body of an ‘oriental’ virgin who desperately needed salvation by a superior legal system protected by a vigilant public opinion.

Actually, indifferent to the risks Djamila took when she accepted to defy the taboos around the female body and female sexuality in a traditional society which encourages silence about gendered violence even if the torturer is the common enemy,<sup>40</sup>

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38 Ibid., 81.

39 Ibid., 87.

40 Louisette Ighilariz, the Algerian combatant testifies that her mother made her promise never to speak about the violence she endured while in prison. See “Tortured Bodies,” 110.

De Beauvoir did not take the risk to defy the taboos surrounding the deviances of a French legal system that proved vulnerable before the plans of politicians. The French feminist chose to side with the less risky solution of amnesty and amnesia though she had previously courageously claimed "L'affaire de Djamilia Boupacha concerne tous les Français. Si le gouvernement atermoie c'est à l'opinion [...] d'exiger impérieusement le renvoi du procès de Djamilia, l'aboutissement de l'enquête qu'elle réclame, [...], et pour ses bourreaux les rigueurs de la loi," Her choice reinstalled silence despite the courage of Djamilia. Consequently, while early French feminist's egalitarian appeals have encouraged Djamilia to defy silence, her later retreat from her earlier humanistic egalitarian project has silenced Djamilia forever.

De Beauvoir's retreat from the humanistic egalitarian project is prompted by the end of the war in Algeria. Here it is worth mentioning Lazreg's questioning of the antihumanistic tendencies which emerged among French intellectuals including some feminists following "the collapse of the French colonial empire, more specifically the end of the Algerian war." Lazreg questions, "what does antihumanism offer 'different' peoples? On what grounds (moral or otherwise) can powerless people struggle against their relegation to the prison house of race, color, and nationality into which antihumanism locks them?"<sup>41</sup> And here we question, on what grounds could the eternal victim struggle after relegating her story to silence and amnesia despite the risks she took to break the silence.

Decades later when violence returns, Warda and a few others dared to speak about gendered violence. Warda's fiery challenges recall the strength of the Algerian woman past and present, which needs to be celebrated against the silence that French feminism in complicity with politicians has imposed. Inspired by Warda's daring defiance, and reminded of Djamilia's silenced courage, Djebbar finds the most adequate way to write

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41 "Feminism and Difference," 99.

the story appropriated and effaced by French feminists. Zoulikha's or Djamila's story needs to be written in its relation with Warda's against a French feminist orientalist projection, and against politicians' plans not on the grounds of universal humanism, neither on the grounds of antihumanism and the celebration of difference. It is written on the grounds of Algerian woman's courage and sense of defiance past and present.

Djebar ends her novel with an optimistic note suggesting that despite the half effacement of the story or history of Zoulika, her voice and her song, standing for the history and voice of the Algerian revolutionary, subsist. Thus we read, "L'image de Zoulikha, certes, disparaît à demi de la mosaïque. Mais sa voix subsiste, en soufflé vivace." Unlike the songs of the sirens in the Homeric poem, the story of Zoulika is not magical but naked truth, "elle n'est pas magie, mais vérité nue"(242). In an earlier passage, the novel provides the reasons that allow this voice to persist. Always through exploiting and modifying the Homeric episode reflected in the mosaic, the narrator author describing the scene says that it shows "Des musiciennes prêtes à ... s'envoler," then she recapitulates "Une seule femme s'est vraiment envolée: [...] c'est Zoulikha" (118-9). This text suggests that the only woman who could fly free from restrictions is the revolutionary woman whose voice subsists and whose story though half effaced, through its repetition within narratives that misappropriate its essence, could still be heard.

The voice of the Algerian woman who willfully engaged in the the war of liberation subsists. This voice, represented through the monologues of Zoulikha, is metonymically standing for the voices of the women revolutionaries, who said their words when they rebelled against whatever limits aimed to restrict their freedom. The novel shows that women rebelled against the restrictions of their society before they could engage into the rebellion against colonialism. The text shows Zoulikha's defiance to the severe mores of Césarée, which imposed strict rules for women's conduct including veiling and seclusion, as it imposed definite roles for women, namely the role

of sacrificial mothering. Hence, these women revolutionaries could rebel against an enemy willing to define them as victims who need to be saved by an imperial savior.

Unfortunately, the spirit of rebellion and the power that the Algerian woman has acquired through her experiences and her engagement in the war of decolonization were soon weakened. The text shows this through parallels with the image of the women of the mosaic, who unfortunately could not fly away even if they seem ready to do it. Unfortunately, the hopes of the Algerian woman to fly free from restrictions were cut down, just as the hopes of the narrator author contemplating the mosaic have soon been withdrawn as reflected through her pessimistic reflections; “Je me disais, [...]: Elles vont s'envoler; c'est sûr, ces femmes de la ville: avec leur chant et leur légèreté! Or (et je m'attriste, tout haut) la torpeur, depuis 1962, s'est réinstallée écrasante: on la sent dans les rues, dans les patios” (119). The hopes of the Algerian woman to fly free have been cut down by torpor, by the dreadful silencing of the spirit of rebellion and that of freedom in postcolonial Algeria. However, though the text suggests that the only Algerian woman who could fly is the revolutionary, the narrator author who decides to repeat the echo of her voice, of her rebellion against restrictions, not of her victimization nor of her heroism, allows hope for the Algerian woman in contemporary Algeria to rise against torpor and take cues from the history of rebellious women about how to rebel.

In this way, Djébar distances her text from French feminism as she has distanced her text from official historiography. She thus sets down a path for Algerian feminism, which is different from French feminism and its ‘humanist overtones’ underscored by the victimization of women. She sets down the foundation of a feminism which undertakes the task of rewriting history underlining the strength of women and not weaknesses and underscoring the capacity of a woman's body to overcome pain, “to metamorphose” while undermining the projections of these pains to provoke false empathy, or to appease the guilty consciousness of French feminists. This feminism

detaches itself from French and western feminist attempts to sell images of the Algerian or African woman's body, whether these are those metonymic images of the electrified body of young tortured Djamilia, or those of Ayisha or those of Tashi pretending to protect African womanhood against gendered violence.

Djebar sets the foundation of a feminism that underscores the strength of Algerian womanhood. This feminism strengthens woman with voice, a voice which rises "dans chaque lieu où se sont entremêlés peur et attente, audace et, hélas, crime sauvage dans l'ombre" (242). This feminism rises against silence, against amnesia and amnesty, against "appropriation and effacement," and against the manipulation of history or religion to serve the interests of a "male elite" to use the words of Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi.<sup>42</sup> This feminism allows no bargaining aimed to delay women's need to 'fly' free from restrictions for the sake of achieving a national 'freedom' or maintaining 'social peace.' This feminism calls for a metamorphosis to be accomplished through a new rebellion against restrictive sacrificial roles; it calls for a metamorphosis to be accomplished by allowing women to achieve 'duties complemented by rights.'

This feminism relies on the strength of the complicity between mother and daughter as opposed to any form of relief sought among Western womanhood. The text underscores the strong and trustful relation between mother and daughter, which is distorted in Walker's text representing African womanhood. Djebar's text reestablishes the relation of mother and daughter that have been so loosened in Walker's text where the mother becomes the oppressor of her own daughter whether in the case of Tashi or in the case of Aisha. Djebar's text shows that the strong relation between mother and daughter can strengthen both. When the monologues addressed to the daughter by the living dead mother witness to the author's focus on this complicity, many other instances in the novel also underscore the same bonding. These instances sometimes

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42 Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite . A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Perseus Books Publishing, LLC 1991).

emphasize the need of the postcolonial woman to strengthen their relation with the women who witnessed colonial turmoil, to get inspired from their experiences. Some instances in the novel remind of the historical strength of Algerian womanhood exemplified in Kahina and the early Berber fighters, named by the French as ‘amazons.’

This feminism calls for rebellion, and the novel finds in the heritage of Algeria, in its diverse sources, Arab or Berber or even Islamic traditions, different examples about rebellious women. Thus, some instances underscore the need to find inspiration in the experiences of women from the Berber tradition. Djébar’s text cites the Algerian legendary figure Kahina, “notre reine des Aurès” (78), and incites towards inspiration from her rebellion. It also makes reference to the early resistance movements against colonialism and reminds of the female Berber fighters, called by the French soldiers ‘Amazones,’ who indifferent to prejudiced projections underlying the French references to them, defied the enemy who wondered, “quel est donc ce peuple, pour avoir de telles femmes?” (136).

In other instances, the text even calls for inspiration from the rebelliousness of women in the tradition of Islam. The text reminds of the rebellion of Lalla Fatima, the cherished daughter of the Prophet Mohammed, and her female progeny. In a conversation between the narrator author and the daughters of Zoulikha, Hania, the eldest daughter, affirms that, “Zoulikha [...] doit sa première force, dans sa jeunesse, à son père! Après tout, c’est la tradition de l’islam : avec Lalla Fatima et son père, notre prophète qui a eu beaucoup de filles, ce sont les fils de Fatima qui furent suppliciés et les filles de Fatima qui déroulèrent une parole de reproche et de révolte, devant tous !” (150).

Against the victimization and powerlessness of Algerian womanhood projected in different narratives repeating the imperialist tradition, Djébar’s text finds in the ancestral history of Algeria as well as in the Islamic tradition a rich heritage stimulating criticism and rebellion. This heritage strengthened the women who like Zoulikha fought

the war of liberation and may inspire women in postcolonial Algeria with the power and strength necessary to defy silencing and torpor. Grounded in such a heritage, when Djébar's text distances itself from French feminism, it finds theoretical background in the work of Algerian scholar Marnia Lazreg who sets the rules for how to represent women without appropriating their individuality and their lived reality when she writes,

To take intersubjectivity into consideration when studying Algerian women or other Third World women means seeing their lives as meaningful, coherent, and understandable instead of being infused "by us" with doom and sorrow. It means that their lives like "ours" are structured by economic, political and structural factors. It means that these women, like us are engaged in the process of adjusting, often shaping, at times resisting and even transforming their environment. It means that they have their own individuality; they are "for themselves" instead of being "for us." An appropriation of their singular individuality to fit the generalizing categories of "our" analyses is an assault on their integrity and on their identity.<sup>43</sup>

The reader of Djébar can equally find in the work of Mernissi what gives evidence about the rebellious women in the tradition of Islam. Mernissi informs about how women such as Aisha and Umm Salama, the most eloquent and politically aware among the prophet's wives, rebelled against the silencing of women and argued even with the prophet asking for the protection of women's rights against a "male elite," composed of religious men as well as politicians, whose interests conflict with women's rights. Mernissi also informs about the rebelliousness of the most famous among the daughters of Fatima, Sukayna, "one of the great-granddaughters of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima," known for her "revolt against political, oppressive, despotic Islam and against everything that hinders the individual's freedom."<sup>44</sup>

To sum up, reading *La femme sans sépulture* dialogically has, we hope, allowed an understanding of Djébar's feminist tendencies, which find sources in the Algerian

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43 "Feminism and Difference," 84.

44 See *The Veil and Male Elite*, 192.

history as well as in the tradition of Islam even if the language used to write these preoccupations is the language of De Beauvoir whose text writing Algerian history is polemically echoed in *La Femme*. This reading has, we also hope, allowed refuting the prejudice that is perpetuated in Walker's text repeating such texts as De Beauvoir's, stressing the victimization of Algerian womanhood. In addition, reading the novel dialogically would maybe allow to describe *La Femme* as "a microcosm of heteroglossia" par excellence as it represents "all the social and ideological voices of the era" representing Algerian woman's history, including the voice of official historiography, the voice of western feminism repeating colonial discourse, and the voices of Algerian women, including the voice of the author, which "eloquently" defy attempts to define Algerian womanhood within the limits of gendering, "heroism and victimization."

As a final instance of artistic dialogue between the three novels under scrutiny, we want to stress an important and significant opposition between the texts of Djébar and Emecheta on one hand, and that of Walker on the other hand. As opposed to the documentary approach underscored by the use of specific time and specific place foregrounding the texts of Emecheta and Djébar, Walker's text highlights the absence of specific dates or historical events. In her zeal to confront African traditions she sees as antithetical to women's health, Walker to use Wilentz Gay's words, "lumps African countries and cultures together into a single entity."<sup>45</sup> In contrast, *The Joys* opens by giving dates and ages, encouraging the reader to locate the text in a specific time and place. Likewise, *La Femme* is a text where place and time are set with the vigilance needed to write books of history.

This historical specificity indicates Emecheta's as well as Djébar's awareness of historical fidelity and their consciousness of the complexities of historiography, which

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45 Wilentz Gay, "Review," 16.

seem ignored by an author of Walker's talent when dealing with the African past and traditions. This historical specificity also indicates that representing history and tradition allows no generalizations or simplification, that traditions are culture specific. Historical specificity requires the respect of diversity of history, of social locations and group interests. Conversely, the denial of historical specificity and the oversimplification of African history unfortunately constitute Walker's failure to adequately fulfill her attempt to confront the ways in which African women have been written out of history. This unfortunately casts her out of the history with which she claims identification while reaffirming old prejudice about Africa, which put her in the company of other orientalist Western writers before her.

To conclude, we may say that writing intertextually has allowed the three writers further opportunities in their attempts to rewrite history. While the two texts of Emecheta and Walker have tried through novels which allow tension within an individual text to confront the ways in which women have been written out of history, *La Femme* confronts in a double polemic both the ways in which women have been written out of history and the ways in which women have been written within history.

## **Conclusion**

The study of rewriting the history of Africana women by Africana women using western languages, focused on demonstrating the artistic dialogue that emerges among three representative works, namely *The Joys of Motherhood*, *La femme sans sépulture*, and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, has enabled us to explore both historical living experiences as well as artistic involvements reflecting Africana women struggling with language to reevaluate Africana woman's experience and literature against silence and prejudice. Some major findings having theoretical implications have emerged out of this study.

First, Algerian and Nigerian women's roles and statuses have been shaped by historical changes brought about by colonialism, which affected social, cultural, and economic life. Therefore, the status of women affected by socio-historical and cultural conditions differed not only from one country to the other, but from one region or one social group to the other in the same country. After colonial intervention, not only had colonialism strengthened the gender inequalities already existing in those societies, but also it violently intervened with women's lives. Colonialism created the condition of the ideologization and mystification of women's lives and reinforced their silencing while trying to justify the superiority of the colonial civilization.

Second, we have also found that neither in Algeria nor in Nigeria did women live as 'oppressed' categories or as 'brutal amazons' as most Western ethnographic literature tried to prove. Women have made a world of their own where they could overcome the limitations of the changing conditions of life under colonial rule. Women's lives in the two different sides of the continent explored, testify upon their constant struggle to be themselves against the different attempts to define them. However, despite their ability to overcome limitations, women's lives have been mystified in colonial, feminist and nationalist discourses. This mystification has affected continental African women as well as African women in the diaspora.

Third, the representation of Africana women's reality is a common concern in the novel written in western languages by postcolonial Africana female writers. Through

our comparative contrastive study woven into the textual analysis of three representative works, we hope that we been able to explore the motivations, the aspirations, and the challenges of this novel, which through the fictional rewriting of history has tried to reevaluate Africana female experiences against silence and prejudice writing simultaneously an emergent literary tradition.

The fictional rewriting of history in the three novels we choose to discuss involved the writers in reviving the debates about women in culture. Thus, when Djébar refers to the veiling tradition in Algeria, Emecheta refers to the myth of motherhood, and then Walker depicts the tradition of clitoridectomy, they rewrite the debates associating women with culture. While Walker repeats the common colonial prejudice about the victimization of women in culture, Emecheta and Djébar show that colonialism, which could by no means be denoted as the cause of gender inequality, has helped to obscure many cultural values under which a woman could enjoy respect, as it helped to install new male-privileging values. However, all seem to agree that women's bodies have always been used as symbols of narrowly defined cultural values. For instance, clitoridectomy and veiling, which were considered by the colonizer as signs of inferiority, become the symbols of cultural integrity for the colonized.

Though rewriting history has allowed the three writers to dig out much of what has been forgotten or to warn against the misappropriation of history, which has effaced much of women's lived reality, the rewriting task has involved the writers in challenges that sometimes the writers have failed to overcome. For instance, writing from without has involved Walker in repeating the historical injustice that has been installed since colonial times. When Walker has adopted the 'oppressed' category to represent the pains of what she calls her late grandmother, she relegates women to silence, as did all men and women who appropriated then effaced the history of Africana womanhood speaking against them while claiming to speak for them. Additionally, it was not easy for both Emecheta and Djébar to untie themselves from the colonial culture reflected in their use of the colonized language which alienates them from the reality of the women they sought to represent, and which for instance makes the narrator author in Djébar's novel

feel as a stranger in her hometown "l'étrangère pas tellement étrangère." However, despite their alienation, Djébar and Emecheta have perhaps been more attuned to women's needs and interests than Walker has.

Writing in the language of the colonizer has alienated these women writers from the societies they represent and from the women they want to empower with voice. Actually, very few women in the respective societies have access to the novels of these women writers writing in the language of the colonizer. Though these women writers have achieved international fame,<sup>1</sup> they remain unknown by the women they write about and those they write for. The audience of these writers is limited to academics. For instance, Djébar is unknown among the new generation of Algerians even in her hometown, Césarié.<sup>2</sup>

Actually, using the colonizer's language underlies the writers' preoccupation with an audience larger than the African reader. This preoccupation with audience may very well be related to the degree of colonial nostalgia present in the novels. For instance, when Walker makes use of Western psychoanalysis and of Western friends who help her protagonist heal from the wounds of tradition, she reinstalls the colonial myth about the colonial civilizing mission. Likewise, Emecheta could hardly avoid colonial nostalgia as her whole novel seems to be focused on the dilemma of a woman caught between tradition and modernity, and while she overtly condemns the traditions causing gender inequality, she just indirectly hints to the role of colonialism in reinforcing this tradition. To avoid colonial nostalgia, Djébar sets up her protagonist as a rebel against all that might constrain her freedom, whether traditional values or colonialism. By avoiding colonial nostalgia, she could demystify much of the Algerian woman's reality.

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1 Djébar was elected to the Académie Française on 2005, and she was awarded the 1996 Neustadt International Prize for Literature. Emecheta won considerable critical acclaim and honors, including an Order of the British Empire in 2005. Walker won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award in 1983.

2 Throughout my teaching experience at the University of Algiers, I have rarely met a student who has read one of Djébar's novels. However, I have always found students who have read Algerian female writers writing in Algerian Arabic not in the language of the ex-colonizer.

Finally, we should note that whether the return trips that our writers undertook to rewrite history have attained their epistemological objectives in uncovering and/or demystifying what has been forgotten or distorted, the novels offer a valuable opportunity to reflect upon the aesthetics of rewriting history. The experimentation with the polyphonic novel and polyvocality and the use of the oral tradition to modify western languages and western art styles are new aesthetics, resulting from the reworking of old artistic conventions, which offer students of literature a good opportunity to explore artistic renewal. Additionally, the novels offer an opportunity to reflect upon the requirements of continuity in literature—or the requirements to write within a literary tradition which constitutes a rationale for self-evaluation among writers and a rationale for critical evaluation. This tradition posits on a number of factors that Africana writers need to observe. These include:

1. the reevaluation of Africana women's experiences through the fictional rewriting of history vigilant to appropriate and *engrave* against the imperialist dynamics of appropriation and effacement,
2. the challenge of gender inequality embedded in patriarchal institutions not through cultural change but through the reevaluation of the cultural and historical structures underscoring the empowerment of women,
3. the challenge of the naturalistic overtones of the doomed victimization of women and the denial of agency for women of African descent,
4. the cross-cultural negotiation and exchange through the use of self-reflexive renovate techniques resulting from mixing western languages and native languages,
5. the awareness to the challenges of writing from without, using western languages, and addressing a double audience. Dealing with these challenges requires:
  - a. firstly, overcoming the risks of writing from without, which can be achieved through sufficient knowledge and close understanding of the recovered history.
  - b. additionally, dealing with language vigilantly; indeed though using western languages might alienate writers from the reality of the women they sought to represent, empowering these women with voice may negate the imperialistic overtones of western languages and inscribe the wisdom of the oral tradition.

- c. finally, though addressing a double audience might result in colonial nostalgia, this situation could be overcome by neither exaggerating the negative effects of colonialism nor minimizing them.

We end our reading by with this final comment about the responsibilities of the critical reader of the novel written in western languages by postcolonial African female writers. Indeed, this tradition requires the critical evaluation of this novel according to the principles of aesthetic criticism, which establish the relationships between text and context and the reader's roles in reconstructing the text in order to uncover the subtleties of texts written between two languages to uncover hidden or distorted histories.

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"نساء يعدن كتابة التاريخ من أجل كتابة تقليد أدبي: قراءة التناص بين مباهج الأمومة (1979)

*The Joys of Motherhood* لبوتشي إميشتا BUCHI Emecheta، و *امتلاك سر الفرح* (1996)

*Possessing the Secret of Joy* لأليس ووكر Alice Walker و *امرأة بلا قبر* (2002)

*La Femme sans Sépulture* لآسيا جبار Assia Djebar

اهتمت مجموعة من الكاتبات الإفريقيات بمراجعة التاريخ لإعادة الاعتبار لتجارب النساء الإفريقيات (أي من القارة الإفريقية أو من أصل إفريقي في جميع أنحاء المعمورة) التي تعرضت الى التحريف أو التهميش من قبل الأدب الاستعماري و الأدب الرجالي والتاريخ الرسمي. استعملت هؤلاء الكاتبات لغة المستعمر التي تم تعديلها لتثبيت لغة جديدة غنية فنيا بسبب إنشاء تقنيات فنية جديدة لسرد الروايات. اردنا الإهتمام بهذا الأدب عن طريق بحثنا الذي يندرج ضمن التدخلات النقدية التي تهتم بدراسة مجموعة من النصوص الإبداعية من قبل كاتبات افريكانا يكتبن بلغات أجنبية و هي لغات المستعمر من اجل اعادة كتابة التاريخ. إذن، "نساء يعدن كتابة التاريخ من أجل كتابة تقليد أدبي" هي دراسة مقارنة بين ثلاث نماذج من هذا الأدب و إختارنا الروايات مباهج الأمومة *The Joys of Motherhood* للكاتبة النيجيرية بوتشي إميشتا BUCHI Emecheta، و *امرأة بلا قبر La Femme sans Sépulture* للجزائرية آسيا جبار Assia Djebar و *امتلاك سر الفرح Possessing the Secret of Joy* للإفريقية أمريكية أليس ووكر Alice Walker .

نعالج على وجه التحديد الطرق التي تم عن طريقها نقل التجارب اليومية للنساء الإفريقيات الى نصوص أدبية تسعى عن طريق التحاور فيما بينها الى الى كتابة تقليد أو تيار أدبي يجمع التجارب الفنية و الإبداعية لكتابة نسوية أفريكانية تهدف إلى مسح الغبار على تجارب نسوية أريد طمسها عن عمد أو بدون عمد و الإرتقاء بصوت المرأة ورؤيتها في مجالات كثيرة بواسطة الفن و الإبداع.

الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة، التي تقوم على تحليل لنصوص من الروايات ثلاث ، هو دراسة ديناميات إعادة كتابة التاريخ و ديناميات الحوار الفني الناشئ بين الكاتبات الثلاث. هدفنا هو إظهار كيف حاولت كل كاتبة مواجهة طرق تهميش تجارب المرأة الأفريكانية مع محاولة إضهار أن الحوار الناشئ بين نصوص الروايات الثلاث يدل على وعي الكاتبات لضرورة الكتابة ضمن تيار ادبي موحد يسعى الى إعادة الاعتبار لتجارب المرأة و الأدب الأفريكان ضد الصمت والتهميش.

تولت الكاتبات الثلاث مهمة إعادة كتابة التاريخ. وبالتالي، حاولت إميشتا Emecheta إعادة كتابة التاريخ من خلال التركيز على معانات المرأة في مرحلة الاستعمار وما بعد الاستعمار بنيجيريا؛ وقامت بوضع المرأة بين التقليد والحداثة من أجل معرفة تأثير كل منهما على حياة ومصالح النساء. و بالتالي عبرت بغضب ضد إهمال معانات المرأة و عدم قدرتها العيش و التأقلم في مجتمع تباينت فيه التقاليد والحداثة في عهد الاستعمار وما بعد الاستعمار. و من منظار آخر، قامت الكاتبة آسيا جبار بإعادة النظر في الماضي الاستعماري لإظهار دور المرأة الجزائرية في الكفاح من أجل الاستقلال، فوضعت المرأة بين الخطاب الاستعماري الذي تحركه الرغبة الجنسية نحو المرأة الجزائرية التي صورها على أنها ضحية المجتمع الذي تتحكم فيه تقاليد بطريركية، وإعادة هذا الخطاب و لكن بمنظار مختلف في فترة ما بعد الاستعمار، فبقيت وضعية المرأة الجزائرية دائما تتحكم فيها

الإختلافات الجنسية. ففي رواية *امرأة بلا قبر* تتحدى جبار تكرار النظرة الإستعمارية في تحديد أدوار كل من الجنسين في مرحلة ما بعد الاستعمار التي تميزت بتهيش و إبعاد المرأة. و من منظور آخر، حاولت ووكر Walker مواجهة إيذاء المرأة بسبب ممارسات محلية تقليدية مترسخة في ثقافات الشعوب الإفريقية تعتمد الى إسكات المرأة من طرف سلطة أبوية متسلطة. والدافع وراء محاولتها لإعادة كتابة التاريخ هو الكشف عن الآثار الضارة لبعض هذه الممارسات المحلية التي كثيرا ما تتسبب في تشويهات لجسم المرأة.