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Postcolonial Identity and Gender in North African Fiction:
A Case Study of Assia Djebar's Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade

Thesis submitted to the Department of English Language and Literature as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of *Master* in Literature and civilization.

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this thesis, entitled **"Postcolonial Identity and Gender in North African Fiction: A Case Study of Assia Djebar's** *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade***"** is the result of my own academic work and effort and has been completed independently. I further confirm that all ideas, information, and sources used in the preparation of this thesis have been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with academic standards.

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Date: 22/8/2026

Signature:

Dedication

Every challenging journey becomes easier with the love, support, and encouragement of the people who are always close to our hearts.

First and foremost, I dedicate this work to my beloved mother, who has always been my source of love, strength, and support. You have always believed in me and stood by my side. At this difficult time, I pray that Allah grants you healing, strength, and good health. May He protect you and bless you with many beautiful days ahead.

To my dear father, thank you for your endless support, sacrifices, and encouragement. You have always been a source of strength and inspiration throughout my journey.

To my beloved sisters and my dear brother Yassine, thank you for your love, support, and for always being there for me. Your presence has made every step of this journey easier.

Yasmine

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All Praise is due to Allah; we praise Him, and seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah, Most High, from the evils of our own selves and from our wicked deeds. Whomever Allah guides cannot be misguided, and whomever He leads astray cannot be guided. We testify that there is no true God worthy of being worshipped except Allah, Alone, without partner or associate. We further testify that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger (PBUH). May Allah's salaah and salaam also be granted to the Prophet's pure family and to all of his noble companions. After that:

I extend my sincere thanks and deep gratitude to my supervisor and good mentor, Dr OUHIBA Nawal for their invaluable academic guidance, continuous support, and constructive advice, which contributed to the completion of this research and its current form.

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May God grant me success.

Abstract (English, French, Arabic)

Abstract

This study examines the intersection of postcolonial identity and gender in North African fiction through a close reading of Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (*L'Amour, la fantasia*). Situating the novel within the meeting point of feminist and postcolonial theory, it argues that the Algerian woman writer bears a double burden, pressed at once by colonial domination and by patriarchal tradition, and written out of both the colonial archive and the national myth. The research explores how Djebar confronts this double silencing by turning the colonizer's own language into an instrument of resistance and return. Through the concepts of voice and silence, the subaltern, mimicry, and polyphony, the study analyses how the novel represents the fractured self of the colonized woman, the violence inflicted upon the female body, and the crisis of identity born of writing in French. It further shows how Djebar rewrites the official history of Algeria, from the invasion of 1830 to the War of Independence (1954–1962), not by offering a rival grand narrative, but by assembling a layered, many-voiced counter-history built from archives read against the grain, oral testimony, and personal memory. The study concludes that narration itself becomes an act of resistance through which Algerian women move from silence to voice and emerge as active subjects of their own history.

Keywords: postcolonial identity, gender, Assia Djebar, subaltern, voice and silence, polyphony, rewriting history, double oppression.

Résumé

Cette étude examine l'intersection de l'identité postcoloniale et du genre dans la fiction nord-africaine à travers une lecture attentive de *L'Amour, la fantasia* d'Assia Djebar. Situant le roman au point de rencontre de la théorie féministe et de la théorie postcoloniale, elle soutient que la femme écrivaine algérienne porte un double fardeau, opprimée à la fois par la domination coloniale et par la tradition patriarcale, et effacée aussi bien des archives coloniales que du mythe national. La recherche explore la manière dont Djebar affronte ce double silence en transformant la langue même du colonisateur en un instrument de résistance et de retour. À travers les notions de voix et de silence, de subalterne, de mimétisme et de polyphonie, l'étude analyse comment le roman représente le moi fracturé de la femme colonisée, la violence infligée au corps féminin et la crise identitaire née de l'écriture en français. Elle montre en outre comment Djebar réécrit l'histoire officielle de l'Algérie, de l'invasion de 1830 à la guerre d'indépendance (1954–1962), non pas en proposant un autre grand récit, mais en composant une contre-histoire plurielle et stratifiée, bâtie à partir d'archives lues à rebours, de témoignages oraux et de la mémoire personnelle. L'étude conclut que la narration elle-même devient

un acte de résistance par lequel les femmes algériennes passent du silence à la voix et émergent comme sujets actifs de leur propre histoire.
Mots-clés : identité postcoloniale, genre, Assia Djebar, subalterne, voix et silence, polyphonie, réécriture de l'histoire, double oppression.

ملخّص

تتناول هذه الدراسة تقاطع الهوية ما بعد الكولونيالية والنوع الاجتماعي في الرواية المغاربية من خلال قراءة متأنّية لرواية آسيا جبار *الحبّ، الفنتازيا* (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*). وإذ تضع الرواية عند نقطة التقاء النظرية النسوية بالنظرية ما بعد الكولونيالية، تذهب الدراسة إلى أنّ الكاتبة الجزائرية تحمل عبئًا مزدوجًا، إذ تنوء في آنٍ واحد تحت وطأة الهيمنة الاستعمارية والتقاليد الأبوية، ويُمحى حضورها من الأرشيف الاستعماري ومن الأسطورة الوطنية معًا. وتستكشف الدراسة كيف تواجه جبار هذا الإسكات المزدوج عبر تحويل لغة المستعمِر نفسها إلى أداةٍ للمقاومة والاستعادة. ومن خلال مفاهيم الصوت والصمت، والتابع (Subaltern)، والمحاكاة، وتعدّد الأصوات (Polyphony)، تحلّل الدراسة كيف تصوّر الرواية الذات الممزّقة للمرأة المستعمَرة، والعنف الممارَس على الجسد الأنثوي، وأزمة الهوية الناشئة عن الكتابة بالفرنسية. كما تبيّن كيف تعيد جبار كتابة التاريخ الرسمي للجزائر، من غزو 1830 إلى حرب التحرير (1954–1962)، لا بتقديم سرديةٍ كبرى بديلة، بل بنسج تاريخٍ مضادّ متعدّد الأصوات ومتراكب الطبقات، مبنيٍّ على قراءةٍ معاكسة للأرشيف، وعلى الشهادات الشفوية، والذاكرة الشخصية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أنّ السرد ذاته يغدو فعل مقاومةٍ تنتقل به المرأة الجزائرية من الصمت إلى الصوت، وتبرز بوصفها ذاتًا فاعلة في تاريخها الخاص.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهوية ما بعد الكولونيالية، النوع الاجتماعي، آسيا جبار، التابع، الصوت والصمت، تعدّد الأصوات، إعادة كتابة التاريخ، الاضطهاد المزدوج.

List of Abbreviations

Acronym	Full Form
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front)
PBUH	Peace Be Upon Him
MLA	Modern Language Association
qtd. in	Quoted in
et al.	Et alia (and others)
n.d.	No date
p. / pp.	Page / Pages
vol.	Volume
no.	Number
ed.	Editor / Edition
trans.	Translated by
UP	University Press

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General Introduction

General Introduction

The literature that emerged from the once-colonized societies of North Africa carries a burden unlike that of most other national literatures: it is written, very often, in the language of the former colonizer, about a past that the colonizer had already written first. For the woman who takes up the pen in this setting, the difficulty is doubled. She writes against an empire that reduced her to a veiled figure in a painting or a nameless "Fatma" in an administrative register, and at the same time against a patriarchal order within her own society that had long assigned her silence as a virtue and confinement as a duty. She is, in this precise sense, written out twice, once by the colonizer and once by the nation that later claimed to speak in her name.

Assia Djebar (1936–2015), the pen name of Fatima-Zohra Imalayène, stands among the most searching witnesses to this condition. Born in Cherchell to a Berber family, led by her schoolteacher father to the French colonial school as a small girl, and later the first Algerian Muslim woman admitted to the École Normale Supérieure and the first Maghrebi writer elected to the Académie Française, Djebar lived the very contradictions her writing explores. Her novel *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (*L'Amour, la fantasia*, 1985), the first volume of her "Algerian Quartet," gathers these contradictions into a single, layered text. It interweaves the French conquest of 1830 and the long war that followed, the War of Independence of 1954–1962, and scenes from the author's own childhood, and it does so in a form that refuses the smooth surface of official history.

This study reads *Fantasia* at the meeting point of two large fields of inquiry: feminist thought and postcolonial theory. These are treated here not as separate tracks that happen to cross but as two faces of one problem, since the woman who writes from a colonized culture bears the weight of empire and the weight of patriarchy at once. Reading her work therefore calls for a framework able to hold both pressures together, one drawn from Gayatri Spivak's account of the subaltern, Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial mutilation, Hélène Cixous's call for women to write the body, Fatima Mernissi's reframing of gender in the Muslim setting, and the wider vocabulary of voice and silence, mimicry, ambivalence, and polyphony that postcolonial criticism has developed. Against the colonial archive and the post-independence "national myth" alike, Djebar assembles something other than a rival grand narrative: a many-voiced counter-history built from documents read against the grain, from oral testimony, and from personal memory.

Recovering such a history, however, is far from straightforward. Official accounts of the Algerian past, both the French colonial record and the nationalist narrative that followed independence, have tended to erase women from the story of the nation, either fictionalizing their lives, reducing them to metaphors of a conquered land, or subsuming their resistance beneath a masculine account of the struggle. The colonial archive gave Algerian women little chance to answer

back; the documents that survive are, as the novel itself insists, overwhelmingly French and masculine. Within Algerian society, meanwhile, the cult of silence and the prohibition on a woman saying "I" made the writing of a personal life a transgression in its own right.

The problem this study addresses, then, is how a woman writer, cut off from the mother tongue and compelled to work in the colonizer's language, can recover the silenced experience of Algerian women without either reproducing the colonial fantasy or speaking over the very women she hopes to reach. *Fantasia* poses this problem acutely, because the language that grants Djebar the power to write is the same language that "leans upon the death of her own people." The central difficulty is one of both content and form: how to move the Algerian woman from object to subject, from silence to voice, and from the margins of history to its center, and how to do so through a narrative method equal to that task.

It is to this task that the present study addresses itself. Its general aim is to examine the intersection of postcolonial identity and gender in North African fiction through a close reading of *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, and more specifically to achieve the following objectives:

- To establish a theoretical framework that brings feminist and postcolonial thought together in order to read the double oppression, colonial and patriarchal, that shapes the writing of Algerian women.
- To analyze how Djebar represents the fractured identity of the colonized woman, the crisis born of writing in French, and the ambivalence of a self divided between the "traditional home" and the "French school."
- To investigate the representation of gender in the novel, tracing the physical and psychological violence inflicted on the female body by colonial and patriarchal power, and the movement of the female character from silence toward voice.
- To show how Djebar rewrites the official history of Algeria, from the invasion of 1830 to the War of Independence, by interrogating colonial archives, recovering oral history and personal memory, and assembling a gendered counter-history.
- To demonstrate how narration itself becomes an act of resistance through which Algerian women emerge as active subjects of their own history, and how individual acts of writing, education, and speech open onto a wider social transformation.

In pursuit of these objectives, the study is guided by the following questions:

- How do feminist and postcolonial theory, read together, illuminate the double bind of the colonized Algerian woman as it appears in Djebar's writing?
- In what ways does *Fantasia* dramatize the crisis of identity produced by writing in the colonizer's language, and how does Djebar turn that language into an instrument of resistance rather than submission?

- How does the novel represent the female body and psyche as sites where colonial and patriarchal violence meet, and how does it stage the passage from imposed silence to recovered voice?
- By what strategies, archival rereading, oral testimony, personal memory, and polyphonic form, does Djebar contest the official history of Algeria and rewrite it from the perspective of its silenced women?
- How does the novel move from individual acts of resistance toward a collective awareness in which Algerian women appear as active subjects of history?

In response to these questions, the study advances the following hypotheses:

- The Algerian woman writer occupies a position of double oppression, pressed at once by colonial domination and patriarchal tradition, so that her identity is not inherited intact but built, broken, and rebuilt through memory, language, and history.
- Writing in French is for Djebar both a wound and a weapon: while it cuts her off from the mother tongue and its intimacies, it also becomes the very tool through which she seizes the colonizer's discourse and turns it back upon itself.
- In *Fantasia*, the female body, veiled, confined, and violated, functions not only as the object of colonial and patriarchal violence but also as a space of resistance and expression, and silence itself can become a form of speech rather than mere absence.
- Djebar rewrites Algerian history not by offering a competing grand narrative but by constructing a layered, polyphonic counter-history that reads the colonial archive against the grain and restores oral and personal memory to the record.
- Through narration, the Algerian woman is transformed from a silent object of someone else's story into an active subject of her own, so that the act of writing becomes, in itself, an act of resistance with consequences that reach beyond the individual to collective awareness.

These hypotheses are developed across the body of the study. Beyond this General Introduction and a concluding General Conclusion, the work is organized into three chapters. Chapter One, "Feminism and Postcolonial Perspectives on Identity and Gender," builds the theoretical ground on which the analysis stands. It sets out working definitions of gender and identity, examines the difficult meeting of feminism and postcolonial theory, and develops the key concepts, postcolonial identity, discourse and resistance, voice and silence, and polyphony, that the later chapters put to work.

Chapter Two, "Gender, Identity and Narrative Resistance in Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*," moves from theory to text. It reads the novel closely as a study of the "silent subaltern," the clash of Algerian and French identities, the cultural conflict and identity crisis produced by writing in French, and the representation of the female body under colonial and patriarchal violence, before showing how narration itself becomes an act of resistance and self-recovery.

Chapter Three, "Rewriting History in Djebar's Narrative," concentrates on the historiographical stakes of the project. It examines how colonial history was written and how Djebar challenges it, the alternative narratives of memory and orality she sets against the official record, the gendered dimension of that rewriting, and finally the passage from individual acts of resistance to a social transformation in which women emerge as active historical subjects.

Taken together, the three chapters trace a single movement: from the theoretical framing of the colonized woman's double silence, through the novel's staging of identity, body, and voice, to the rewriting of history by which Algerian women pass, in Djebar's hands, from silence to speech.

Chapter One:

Feminism and Postcolonial Perspectives on Identity and Gender

Chapter One: Feminism and Postcolonial Perspectives on Identity and Gender

I.1. Introduction

This chapter builds the theoretical ground on which the rest of the study stands. It brings together two large fields of inquiry, feminist thought and postcolonial theory, in order to read the tangled questions of identity, gender, voice, and resistance that shape the writing of women in the once-colonized Maghreb, and in Algeria above all. The two fields are not treated here as separate tracks that happen to cross. They are treated as two faces of a single problem, since the woman who writes from a colonized culture carries a double weight: the weight of empire and the weight of patriarchy. Reading her work therefore asks for a framework able to hold both pressures at the same time.

The Algerian case sharpens this problem. After independence, the promise of a shared national self quickly hardened into one official story. Myriem Gueydan-Turek observes that "the government of the FLN (Front de Libération National) had developed an all-encompassing discourse that erased individual experience and identity for the benefit of the uniformity of a national myth" (Gueydan-Turek 86). The price of that uniformity fell heaviest on those who did not fit the mould. As she adds, "this official discourse tried to deny the cultural diversity intrinsic to Algeria, simultaneously effacing both gender and ethnical minorities from public discourse" (Gueydan-Turek 86). Women, in other words, were written out twice, once by the colonizer and once by the nation that claimed to speak in their name.

Against such erasure, a different kind of history becomes necessary, one attentive to the small and private textures of lived experience rather than to grand events alone. Marianne Hirsch describes this shift when she notes that certain feminist and memory-based approaches "open a space for the consideration of affect, embodiment, privacy, and intimacy as concerns of history, and they shift our attention to the minute events of daily life" (Hirsch 16). The chapter follows that lead. It maps the concepts that let us read the intimate, the embodied, and the everyday as sites where identity and resistance are made. The sections that follow move from the definitions of gender and identity, through the meeting of feminism and postcolonial theory, toward the questions of discourse, resistance, voice, silence, and finally the polyphonic form through which silenced experience returns to speech.

I.2. Overview of Gender and Identity

Before feminism and postcolonial theory can be brought into conversation, the two terms that anchor them, gender and identity, need to be set out with some care. Neither term is simple, and neither carries the same meaning across cultures. What follows treats them not as fixed labels but as categories that are made, contested, and remade within specific social and historical settings. The aim is to prepare the reader for the more layered claims that come later, where the making of a self and the taking of a voice will be shown to depend on both gender and colonial history at once.

I.2.1. Definition of Gender

Gender, in the reading this study adopts, is less a natural fact than a social arrangement. Fatima Mernissi's account of the Muslim setting is instructive here precisely because it refuses the familiar Western explanation. For Mernissi, "the existing inequality does not rest on an ideological or biological theory of women's inferiority, but is the outcome of specific social institutions designed to restrain her power: namely, segregation and legal subordination in the family structure" (Mernissi 16). Inequality, on this view, is engineered rather than inherited. It is the product of institutions built to contain something, not to correct a supposed defect.

What those institutions are built to contain is, strikingly, female strength rather than female weakness. Mernissi draws the contrast plainly: "In Western culture, sexual inequality is based on belief in women's biological inferiority… In Islam there is no such belief in female inferiority. On the contrary, the whole system is based on the assumption that women are powerful and dangerous beings" (Mernissi 17). This reversal matters for the whole argument, because it reframes the veil, seclusion, and legal control not as protections of the fragile but as defences against the potent. Gender here names a relation of power, and the mechanisms of that power tell us what a society fears.

I.2.2. Definition of Identity

If gender is made, so too is identity, and it is made unevenly, through breaks as much as through continuities. Stuart Hall's caution is useful at the outset: cultural identity cannot be discussed, he argues, "without recognising its other side, the ruptures and discontinuities" that constitute it (qtd. in Spiridopoulou 7). Identity is not a smooth inheritance handed intact from one generation to the next. It is stitched together out of interruptions.

Much of that stitching is the work of memory. As a recent history of cross-border identity puts it, scholars now trace "a new historiography of identity-building across borders," in which collective memory becomes central to how communities construct a sense of self (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 21). Pierre Nora makes the point in its sharpest form: "Because at the very core

of the identity that forms them is memory" (Nora xii). To ask who a community is, then, is to ask what it remembers and what it has been made to forget.

In the traditional order Mernissi describes, identity is bound tightly to the body and to sexuality. "The most obvious one is that in the traditional system our identities are primarily sexual," she writes; "the system of honour binds the reputation of men and women to their genital apparatus" (Mernissi 83). Nor is this the only knot. Economics is tied into the same figure: "Once again, money and sex are intimately linked in the definition of identity, for both men and women" (Mernissi 83). Selfhood here is not so much chosen from within as assigned from without, through honour, kinship, and property.

For the writer caught between cultures, this assigned identity comes apart. Reflecting on the experience of living across languages, Nancy Huston concludes, as her readers summarize, that identity can only be fragmented, piecemeal and multiple (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 102). Fragmentation, on this account, is not a failure of the self but its truthful condition. It is something that unfolds over a lifetime rather than something settled at birth, since identity "is not given once and for all; it is built and transformed throughout one's existence" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 242).

The stranger, what is more, is not only the person across the border; the stranger lives inside us. Julia Kristeva's formulation, cited in this scholarship, captures the unease at the heart of any identity: "Strangely, the foreigner dwells within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our dwelling, the time in which understanding and fellow-feeling founder" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 249). To recognize the foreigner within is already to give up the comfort of a single, sealed self.

I.2.3. Gender Identity in Literature

Literature is one of the main places where these processes of making and remaking identity become visible. It is not a neutral mirror of a self that already exists elsewhere; it is part of how the self comes to be. As Natoli and Hutcheon put it, literature is "the textual world through which people develop a sense of self and collective identity and relate to one another" (Natoli and Hutcheon 465). For women written out of official history, this claim carries real weight. If identity is built in and through texts, then writing becomes a way of building a self that public discourse had refused them.

I.3. Feminism and Postcolonial Theory

Bringing feminism and postcolonial theory together is not a matter of adding one to the other. Their meeting has a difficult history, because empire often borrowed the language of women's freedom for its own ends. Rafia Zakaria notes that the aesthetic of the colonial harem "first married feminism with imperialism" (Zakaria 69). The image of the oppressed Eastern

woman became a justification for conquest, so that any feminism drawn from the colonial archive risks carrying imperial assumptions along with it.

That risk is one reason feminist theory defines itself against a target of its own. Where postmodern theory, as Natoli and Hutcheon observe, "sees itself as engaging in a debate with modernism, feminism identifies patriarchal ideology as its 'other'" (Natoli and Hutcheon 399). Michel Foucault's work makes room for this reading by placing women among the forces that both suffer power and push back against it; he "mentions women as one of the subjected or marginalized and resisting elements within contemporary culture" (Natoli and Hutcheon 420).

For the Maghrebi woman writer, the struggle is doubled at the level of language and space. Mildred Mortimer describes how her "appropriation of language, particularly literacy in the French language, and of space involves confrontation with two patriarchal discourses, one French and the other Maghrebian" (Mortimer 114). She must contend with the tongue of the colonizer and with the authority of her own society at once, and neither leaves her a comfortable place to stand.

Feminism in the Arab-Muslim world, however, did not simply arrive from outside. Mernissi traces its roots to the region's own movements for freedom. "The feminist movement was an expression and byproduct of Arab-Muslim nationalism," she writes; "Qasim Amin… and Salama Musa… considered the liberation of women as a condition sine qua non for the liberation of Arab-Muslim society from the humiliating hegemony of the West" (Mernissi 13). Its aims, too, took a different shape from the Western movement. Rather than centring the individual woman's claim to equality, she suggests, "while the women's liberation movement in the West focuses on women and their claim for equality with men, in Muslim countries it would tend to focus on the mode of relatedness between the sexes and thus would probably be led by men and women alike" (Mernissi 17).

The call to write is central to this project. Hélène Cixous, whose influence runs throughout the study, insists that "woman must write woman… women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem" (Majeed 117). Read in the Algerian context, this becomes a specific literary task, one that "seeks to acquire a form of feminine writing that liberates women from men's oppression exercised in polygamy and to 'unveil' the existence of Algerian women" (Majeed 119).

Yet the alliance between feminism and postcolonial critique remains uneasy. Some postcolonial thinkers have treated Western feminism as one more imported grand story to be discarded; the reference here is to Prakash's claim that postcolonial rewriting must reject Marxism and feminism as the "meta-narratives" of the West (Lekesizalin 205). Marnia Lazreg presses the criticism from within feminism itself, warning against a scholarship that turns other women into

specimens. In much feminist writing, she argues, this bias "is embedded in the objectification of 'different' women as the unmediated 'other,' the embodiments of cultures presumed inferior and classified as 'traditional' or 'patriarchal'" (Lazreg 7). The Algerian woman, in particular, has too often been handled with a kind of well-meaning distortion, since "Algerian women and their culture have been mystified by more or less well-intentioned social scientists and feminists moved by something akin to missionary zeal" (Lazreg 6).

The postcolonial and the literary are, for this study, deeply intertwined, since "literary texts and the formation of cultural identities involve similar processes of refiguration" (Jadan 130). The veil sits at the centre of that refiguration. Far from being mere cloth, it becomes a charged sign of racial and colonial division. As Jadan explains, "the veil, therefore, is more than a piece of cloth that is shed on the female body but is also used as a racial colonial metaphor, referring to the psychological and racial boundary that stands between the Black and the White, and the colonized and the colonizer" (Jadan 131). Frantz Fanon's account of assimilation stands behind this reading, describing how "the colonized... becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (qtd. in Jadan 131). Against that pull toward whiteness, Fanon holds out a different idea of selfhood, for "to Fanon, genuine identity is based on asserting differences, not on assimilating and hiding them by imitating the White 'other'" (Jadan 131).

Language itself carries this colonial charge, and the very term francophonie is far from innocent. Husung points out that "the notion of francophonie is not neutral but ideologically charged, and this literature is often considered minor and on the margins of the true literature, which is the literature of the French patrimony" (Husung 54). The hierarchy persists in the way the category is used, since "the hegemony of France is still reflected in the concept of francophone literature, which remains 'bound by a kind of colonial inferiority inscribed in the very nature of its strangeness'" (qtd. in Husung 54). To mark the difference between domination and diversity, one commentator distinguishes two spellings of the word: "we can speak of two types of francophonie: a FRANCOPHONIE (written in capitals, whose prefix 'Franco' in italics marks the 'franco' character of the phonie, a globalizing system understood as an institution of political, economic and cultural power) and a francophonie (written in lower case, whose suffix 'phonie' in italics marks the 'phonie' (or polyphony) and the diversity of the French language)" (qtd. in Husung 54). Seen this way, the French-speaking world becomes "a virtual and hybrid region of the world as a space of culture," with French as the smallest common denominator, "indeed the most inaccessible" (qtd. in Husung 54).

The most sustained attempt to fuse the two fields belongs to Gayatri Spivak, for whom the postcolonial and the feminist cannot be pulled apart. As Hiddleston observes, "Spivak conceives her postcolonial critique as necessarily always feminist" (Hiddleston 152), a stance that answers a

real gap, since "a significant failure in postcolonial studies is the lack of attention particularly to female oppression" (Hiddleston 152). The difficulty, as Hiddleston frames it, is that postcolonial resistance is torn between two impulses: "conceptions of postcolonial resistance waver between the urge to privilege concrete agency and subjectivity on the one hand, and liberation through the deconstruction of all specified subject positions on the other" (Hiddleston 14).

This tension surfaces in debates about Assia Djebar's own feminism. Lazreg, for one, is critical of an early tendency to read Algeria through a borrowed universalism; as Gueydan-Turek reports, she "criticizes Djebar's adoption of global feminism to discuss the status of women in Algeria in her earlier texts, a perspective that articulates the predicament of a unified and decontextualized feminine community" (Gueydan-Turek 98). Others read Djebar's project more affirmatively, as a writing that speaks for the voiceless woman in the widest sense. For Deffo and colleagues, "in writing herself and in writing the Algerian woman, Djebar writes the subaltern woman in general" (Deffo et al. 73), through a method that treats the body as an archive, "adopting a poetics of the body that positions the woman as a living archive" (Deffo et al. 73).

Cixous returns us to the founding demand. Her famous injunction states that "woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (Cixous 875). She traces the exclusion to the very order of writing, which she calls marked: "I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as marked writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural, hence political, typically masculine, economy" (Cixous 879). The history of writing, on her account, has been welded to a single tradition, for "nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason … It has been one with the phallocentric tradition" (Cixous 879).

Language is thus never neutral ground for the woman writer, whose bond to it is shaped in advance by gender. Ben Salem describes a complex relationship to language "burdened by gender prerogatives and by the assumption that women, in traditional societies, are bearers of language" (Ben Salem 20), and reminds us that "any identity quest has inevitably to filter through language" (Ben Salem 20). The pressure is double, as Bartiza and Zrizi insist: "women have been doubly colonized and victimized by both their fellow male and male and female colonizers during the colonial era" (Bartiza and Zrizi 24), so that "women in colonized societies face not only the oppressive forces of colonialism but also the patriarchal structures that exist within those societies" (Bartiza and Zrizi 24).

The feminist-postcolonial project must therefore guard against speaking for the very women it hopes to reach. Afilal warns against the fantasy of "a universal woman subject who must bring women to their sense and to their meaning in history" (Afilal 253), and recalls Spivak's

demand that the critic surrender her own advantage: "[I]n seeking to learn to speak (rather than listen or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual systematically 'unlearns' female privilege" (Afilal 246). The colonial condition, besides, does not end when empire withdraws. As Hirsch reminds us, "'postcolonial' does not mean the end of the colonial but its troubling continuity" (Hirsch 5).

I.4. Postcolonial Identity and Literature

Postcolonial identity is shaped by the mark that empire leaves on body and place. Natoli and Hutcheon locate the postcolonial exactly there: it "locates a specifically anti- or post-colonial discursive purchase in culture, one which begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others" (Natoli and Hutcheon 429). Out of that inscription grows a demand for a self defined from within rather than from above, since the colonized feel the "need for an identity granted not in terms of the colonial power, but in terms of themselves" (Natoli and Hutcheon 429).

For a writer in exile, the space between cultures can become a resource rather than a wound. Djebar, on this reading, turns her in-between position to advantage, since as "an exiled writer, Djebar can use the indeterminacy of her third space to take possession of the weapons of the oppressor and put them to good use" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 104). Yet the self so produced stays restless and unfinished. Murdoch describes the postcolonial female self as endlessly incomplete, a "self-perpetuating web of fragmentation, lack, and demand" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 201).

The colonial record deepened this fragmentation by rewriting women's very lives as fiction. Lazreg names the wrong precisely: "to this historical injustice was added the discursive injustice of fictionalizing women's lives" (Lazreg 3). Recovering those lives calls for memory used as a counter-history. Hirsch explains that memory "offered a means to uncover and to restore experiences and life stories that might otherwise remain absent from the historical archive. As a form of counter-history, 'memory' offered a means to account for the power structures animating forgetting, oblivion, and erasure and thus to engage in acts of repair and redress" (Hirsch 15–16).

At its harshest, colonial power works by refusing the other any identity at all. Hiddleston states the logic in four words: "Racism denies the identity of the other" (Hiddleston 29). In response, Homi Bhabha locates the colonized subject in a zone of ambiguity; as Hiddleston summarizes, "the hybrid postcolonial subjects discussed by Bhabha become indeterminate shadows hovering in the 'in-between'. This 'in-between' is conceived early on in Bhabha's work as a 'Third Space' that severs the process of enunciation" (Hiddleston 15). Language cuts through this in-between for Djebar in particular, since "the French language itself separates her from her

Algerian compatriots and places her in an ambivalent position in relation to colonialism, and to Arabisation" (Hiddleston 14).

Against the nation's single story, Djebar's writing opens identity outward. Her work, Gueydan-Turek argues, "exposes the limits of Algeria's monolithic cultural identity through the multiplicity of the text's literary references" (Gueydan-Turek 89), and in doing so "maps out a space of engagement through which Algeria as a nation is redefined within a complex transnational cultural network" (Gueydan-Turek 89). What results is a view of Algerian identity as unfinished and many-voiced, "the examination of Algerian postcolonial identity as a continuing construction articulated by multiple disparate subjectivities" (Gueydan-Turek 96).

Fanon gives the psychic cost of colonization its most direct expression. Colonial rule, he writes, "has settled itself in the very centre of the Algerian individual and has undertaken a sustained work of clean-up, of expulsion of self, of rationally pursued mutilation" (Fanon 50). The target is not one person but a whole people and its past: "it is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction" (Fanon 50).

Where Fanon names the damage, Djebar's poetics reaches toward repair by imagining a new way of belonging to the world. Deffo and colleagues describe this as geopoetics, which "aims to imagine a new way of inhabiting the world" (Deffo et al. 73) and points toward "an alternative way of being in the world: the relational being" (Deffo et al. 81). Identity, in the end, keeps returning to language and to history. Ben Salem holds that identity, "whether at the microcosmic or macrocosmic scale, whether personal or national, resorts to language as one of the most persistent emblems of cultural authenticity" (Ben Salem 21). Afilal adds that "the repossession of identity can only pass through history. The past-present dialectic has to be restored" (Afilal 253), and locates Djebar's answer in a space between times: "for Djebar, identity formation occupies a third space, one that comes at the intersection of the past and the present/ history and fiction and occurs at the text's level" (Afilal 253). Her reply to the Orientalist image, meanwhile, is layered rather than flat, offering "a multi-layered and complex response to Orientalist stereotypes in her representation of 'Islam's woman'" (Barbo 25).

I.5. Postcolonial Discourse and Resistance

If colonial power works through discourse, then resistance must work there too. The veil, once again, becomes a leading example. Rather than a sign of submission, it can function as "a form of resistance and rebellion," an "opaque veil" that "intimates clearly and simply a refusal" (Zakaria 70, 71). Yet the one who most needs to refuse is also the hardest to hear. Spivak's warning is well known: "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" (qtd. in Spiridopoulou 2).

Resistance also runs through reading and through the returned gaze. To read the colonizer's texts is already to enter a contest, since to agree to read the writings of the victor is to enter into his game and to validate his ruse in part (qtd. in Selka 62). Djebar answers by turning the look back on itself. As Ringrose observes, "as Djebar prefigures the active, returning gaze of the native, the challenge is not just to look, to take in the scene, but to see who is looking and to follow that gaze" (Ringrose 46).

Foucault's account of power gives this resistance its theoretical shape. Power, in his often-cited formulation, "is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Natoli and Hutcheon 334), and resistance is folded into it rather than standing outside, for "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Natoli and Hutcheon 336). Because power is dispersed, so is the answer to it: "instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case" (Natoli and Hutcheon 336). Discourse itself cuts both ways, for it "transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Natoli and Hutcheon 340).

One of empire's quieter instruments was the book. Natoli and Hutcheon note that "one of colonialism's most salient technologies for social containment and control is the circulation within colonial cultures of the canonical European literary text" (Natoli and Hutcheon 430). Against it runs a current of refusal, "a network of disidentificatory traditions which J. Michael Dash has eloquently labelled a 'counter-culture of the imagination'" (Natoli and Hutcheon 429). Postcolonial feminist writing joins that current by restoring the women it had lost, a literature that "foregrounds the presence and voices of women silenced by a history that discounts them and fails to consider their agency" (Majeed 122).

For Djebar, the colonizer's language can itself be turned into a weapon of resistance. She resolves her divided loyalty, in the words of two critics, "by creating a translation of sorts in which French is deprived of its oppressive colonizing power and made the accomplice of her resistance" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 105). Resistance also means reading history where it goes quiet, what Miriam Cooke calls "reading in the gaps of historiography" for the conditions of women's agency (qtd. in Lekesizalin 203). The colonial archive gave women little chance to answer back; Lazreg reminds us that European writers "wrote for a French audience about women who did not speak or read their language, and therefore could not agree or disagree with what was made of them. Algerian women were thus thoroughly objectified" (Lazreg 39).

Djebar's rewriting turns this objectification inside out. Instead of collaborating with the colonial fantasy of Algeria as a woman, she "subverts this discourse by ripping the veil which masks the overt violence of colonial invasion" (qtd. in Jadan 132). The strategy is one of return, a

contrapuntal move in Edward Said's sense, since "both authors return the gaze of the rapist and the rape motif on its ear. And that is what Edward Said calls the 'contrapuntal' reading" (Jadan 137). And the violence at issue does not silence its victims forever; on the contrary, "this means that rape does not extinct resistance but ignites it" (Jadan 140).

Displacement, too, generates its own creative energy. Husung points to "the dynamic dimension of the experience of these exiles, of these displaced and deterritorialized people that many North Africans have become, or are in the process of becoming, in the eyes of the world" (qtd. in Husung 55), a movement in which "this dynamic gives rise to a writing that continues to tell the individual and collective destiny by new means and through new voices/pathways" (Husung 55). To think this through, Bhabha shifts the ground of cultural difference: "to reconsider the problem of global space from the postcolonial perspective is to displace the site of cultural difference from the space of demographic plurality to the negotiations of cultural translation" (qtd. in Husung 57).

Not everyone reads the postcolonial as a space of gentle ambiguity. Said defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'" (Hiddleston 85), and Benita Parry, as Hiddleston reports, "criticises Bhabha's The Location of Culture for writing out the inscriptions of conflict in the real world, and for representing colonialism as a space of ambivalence rather than of antagonism" (Hiddleston 17). Sometimes, Hiddleston grants, a firm claim to a national self is exactly what resistance requires, since "the invention of a specific position, and in some cases a belief in national determination, is often a powerful and necessary tool for resisting colonial and neocolonial imposition" (Hiddleston 17).

A further front of resistance concerns the voice as against the written word. Hamdi identifies the supremacy of writing over orality as one of the founding postulates of hegemonic colonial discourse, a hierarchy that branded oral languages as poor, unstable, and primitive while elevating written ones as superior (Hamdi 106). She notes this hierarchy was reinforced even by ostensibly anticolonial texts, so that the oral nature of most colonized societies became a marker of their inferiority (Hamdi 106). Postcolonial studies answers with a new word: the neologism "orature" overturns this relationship and rehabilitates oral forms such as songs, oral poetry, proverbs, folktales, riddles, and legends as essential literary and artistic expressions (Hamdi 106).

Intertextuality serves the same rebellious end. Gueydan-Turek explains that "postcolonial critics have specifically defined intertextual practices as a disruptive literary practice, one that allows the postcolonial author to 'write back' and challenges institutional literary and linguistic hierarchies" (Gueydan-Turek 93-94), and that "just as intertextual practices become a strategy to

overwrite the silencing of the oppressed in colonial texts, so the multilingual aspects participate in the debunking of normative French" (Gueydan-Turek 93).

Fanon returns us to the cultural roots of resistance. The refusals he observes among the colonized "must be related to an attitude of counter-assimilation, of maintenance of a cultural, hence national, originality" (Fanon 27). Under occupation this hardens into everyday cunning: "in the presence of the occupier, the occupied learns to dissemble, to resort to trickery. To the scandal of military occupation, he opposes a scandal of contact" (Fanon 50). Djebar records women who carried this defiance onto the battlefield, calling out to hesitating men: "Where are you running like that? The enemies are on this side! Must a young girl show you how men are supposed to behave? Well then, take a look!" (Djebar 143). Such figures, she reminds us, are not rare in the record: "in the history of Algerian resistance struggles during the last century, numerous episodes, indeed, show women warriors who left the traditional role of spectator. Their formidable look would prod the men's courage, but suddenly also, right where the ultimate despair dawns, their very presence in the boiling movement of battle decides the outcome" (Djebar 143–44).

To recover such episodes is to rewrite history from the other side. Djebar, Deffo and colleagues argue, "develops a poetics that allows her to revisit the entanglement of individual and collective history, an entanglement overshadowed by erasure, with the aim of rewriting this past from the perspective of the colonized, rather than that of the colonizer" (Deffo et al. 73). Resistance can also be quiet and intimate, worked from inside the system that constrains it. Daragmeh and Hamamra propose that, instead of locating these women as the victims of oppression, we "focus attention on the resistance tactics that these women employ to carve their own pleasures from inside the system of oppression" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 69).

Cixous names the territory the woman must reclaim. Girls, she writes, learn early that the ground of their own selfhood is forbidden: "as soon as they begin to speak, at the same time as they're taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black" (Cixous 877). Her rejoinder overturns the metaphor, for "the Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable" (Cixous 884), and, more pointedly still, "the continent is not impenetrably dark. I've been there often" (Cixous 885).

Writing the self is itself an act of political refusal. Ben Salem argues that "by deviating from recognizable autobiographic forms, the project of representing the self acquires a political dimension" (Ben Salem 21), so that "autobiography becomes a political act of resistance to the so-called objectivity of official history and the master-narratives that underpin it" (Ben Salem 23). Malek Alloula performs a version of this return upon the colonial postcard, setting out "to track, then, through the colonial representations of Algerian women, the figures of a phantasm, is to attempt a double operation: first, to uncover the nature and the meaning of the colonialist gaze;

then, to subvert the stereotype that is so tenaciously attached to the bodies of women" (Alloula 5). He describes his own project in these terms: "I attempt here, lagging far behind History, to return this immense postcard to its sender" (Alloula 5).

Fanon's guidance, as cited by Afilal, is that "the colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past to open the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope" (Afilal 246). The endpoint of such resistance is a new voice, one through which "colonial discourses and patriarchal structures are resisted, paving the way for the emergence of a potent feminine post-colonial voice" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 31).

I.6. Voice and Silence

The struggle over identity finally becomes a struggle over voice. To find a voice, for the Algerian woman writer, means breaking a silence that tradition has enforced. Djebar's own gesture, as Ali describes it, is to unveil her own voice and refuse the modest silence dictated by coercive traditions responsible for inhibiting women's subjectivity, and in doing so she releases the voices of other women (Ali 45).

Silence, importantly, is not simply emptiness; it can carry meaning of its own. Jay Winter observes that "silence is the language of mourning," a meaningful presence rather than a mere absence (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 30). Even so, the written word remains the route by which desire and selfhood escape confinement. Ringrose notes that "only the written word can fly through the bars and escape paternal censure, as desire relentlessly pursues its object" (Ringrose 60). Shut-in women rebuild themselves through narrative, since "these women, shut away in their apartments, their dreams, their silences, reassemble their fragmented selves through stories, through memory" (qtd. in Nouari 346).

Foucault again complicates any simple opposition of speech and silence. Discourses, he writes, "are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are" (Natoli and Hutcheon 340), and silence can shelter power and loosen it at once, for "silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance" (Natoli and Hutcheon 340). To speak at all, besides, is to risk speaking into a void: "I enter a discourse, a practice, where there may be no ready audience for my words, no clear listener, uncertain then, that my voice can or will be heard" (Natoli and Hutcheon 512). Some voices were stopped by force, since "many of these voices were silenced by a repressive state; others became inarticulate" (Natoli and Hutcheon 512). And even sympathetic narration can keep a woman quiet, for "he still does not want her to speak for herself" (Natoli and Hutcheon 424).

For a woman in many Muslim-majority settings, telling one's own life aloud already breaks a rule. Mortimer observes that "by bringing private life into the public domain, however,

autobiographical writing transgresses societal values that are present in many Muslim-majority communities" (Mortimer 111). Djebar dramatizes the difficulty of the first-person pronoun itself: "How could a woman speak aloud, even in Arabic, unless on the threshold of extreme age? How could she say 'I', since that would be to scorn the blanket-formulae which ensure that each individual journeys through life in a collective resignation?" (qtd. in Mortimer 112).

Faced with what could not be said directly, women writers made silence itself into a form of expression. Mesli describes how "they turned the unsaid into a form of writing, a way of expressing differently what ordinary language or masculine speech could not formulate" (Mesli 163), so that "Algerian women's literature establishes itself as a site for reconstructing memory and redefining the female subject, at the crossroads of the intimate and the political" (Mesli 163). Orality carries its own charge here, since Arabic is "the language of the underprivileged Algerian sisters back in her homeland, those deprived of the power of writing, their orality the only way to counteract their imposed silence" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 103). The novel thus gives shape to "what was formerly silenced and absent from representation" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 201).

Lazreg makes the ethics of listening explicit. Even respectful speech can overwhelm, she cautions, and so she chooses a lighter touch: "I have chosen to let them 'speak' by describing the games they played, the songs they sang, the customs they practiced" (Lazreg 17). Algerian silence, in her account, is heavy with imposed meaning, since "silence in Algeria is both deadening and eloquent. It is deadening by the sheer weight of the concepts that have condemned Algerian women to an irremediable caricatural existence" (Lazreg 224). Colonizer and colonized, she adds, produced that silence together, for colonialism "created the conditions of possibility of the ideologization of women by colonists and colonized alike and their structural silencing" (Lazreg 2).

The silence around sexual violence is a special case, because the experience itself resists being shown. As Jadan reports, "rape cannot be visualized not only because 'decent' culture would not tolerate such representations of the 'act' but because rape makes the victim invisible.... Finally, rape cannot be visualized because the experience is, physically, as well as psychologically, inner. Rape takes place inside. In this sense, rape is imagined; it can exist only as experience and as memory, as image translated into signs, never adequately 'objectifiable'" (qtd. in Jadan 129). To speak of it, then, is to voice a silence, since "narrating rape means voicing silence over its aftermaths.... Hence, the memory of rape is the memory of silence" (Jadan 130). That silence spreads over the whole self, for it is "knitted as a veil over the identity of women, damaging their psychologies, and pushing them to hide behind silence, losing any ability to say 'I' in society"

(Jadan 133). And it heals nothing: "yet, silence is not a therapeutic approach of rape as the victims think. On the contrary, it splits identity, and increases, hides, perpetuate pains" (Jadan 139).

Writing in French, for Djebar, becomes the means of returning these lost voices to the record. Husung explains that "the author rewrites the colonial and postcolonial History of Algerian women by reconstituting, through writing in French, their voices that were marginalized within the hegemonic discourse" (Husung 55). Djebar states the burden in her own words: "I, an Arab woman, writing Classical Arabic badly, loving and suffering in my mother's dialect, knowing that I must recover the deep song strangled in the throat of my own people, recover it through the image, through the murmur beneath the image" (qtd. in Husung 55), and she aims "to bring back the non-francophone voices, the guttural ones, the wild ones, the rebellious ones, into a French text that at last becomes mine" (qtd. in Husung 59).

Memory, once more, is a matter of power. Hirsch frames it as "a question of how memory is constructed, of what stories are told or withheld, to whom and by whom" (Hirsch 98), and of "how they are repressed, suppressed, or silenced, and of how a feminist analysis can expose those structures" (Hirsch 98–99). Behind all of this stands Spivak's stark conclusion, reported by Hiddleston in three words: "The subaltern cannot speak" (Hiddleston 159). For Spivak, the answer is not simply to hand the other a microphone, since "postcolonial critique is for Spivak not a question of retrieving the Other's voice, of locating a foreign but self-same position" (Hiddleston 19). Djebar's early texts nonetheless strive to do something close to that, working "to unveil or conceive a specific feminine Algerian identity, rescuing Algerian women from occlusion both by colonialism and by Islamic law, and giving voice to this particular oppressed group" (Hiddleston 20).

Djebar's own credo turns writing toward the awakening of voice. As Hamdi records, the project opens on Djebar's line that "writing does not kill the voice, but awakens it" (Djebar qtd. in Hamdi 105), building passages between the worlds of past and present and giving voice to long-silenced experience (Hamdi 105, 117). Gueydan-Turek names the method a poetics of white, one that "seeks to lend a voice to those who are absent without imposing her own upon them" (Gueydan-Turek 87), aware as Djebar is that "she acknowledged the epistemological violence inherent in the silencing of the 'subaltern' by both colonial and local patriarchal powers" (Gueydan-Turek 88). The difficulty runs deep, for "there is no space from which the subaltern can speak as, for it to be heard, the subaltern discursive practice must remain dependent on and over-determined by 'the narrative sanction granted to the colonial subject in dominant groups'" (Gueydan-Turek 88-89). When a voice does break through, it often arrives as wound, since "a voice that assaults the subject, a voice that is separated from her but not leaving her alone, is first and foremost to be interpreted as the voice of trauma" (qtd. in Gueydan-Turek 90).

Fanon captures the pressure of enforced quiet in a single line: under torture, "one grits one's teeth and one prays in silence" (Fanon 99–100). He also records the rare thrill of a voice finally heard, when "very often only the operator, his ear glued to the receiver, had the unhoped-for opportunity of hearing the Voice" (Fanon 69). Djebar, for her part, asks how a woman is to make words out of a silenced past. She writes as a water dowser, searching to "craft words out of so many tones of voice still suspended in the silences of yesterday's seraglio," words "of the veiled body, language that in turn has taken the veil for so long a time" (Djebar 1). Hers is "an excoriated language, from never having appeared in the sunlight, from having sometimes been intoned, declaimed, howled, dramatized, but always mouth and eyes in the dark" (Djebar 1). And the old order does not vanish; it reinstalls itself: "Sound severed once again, the gaze once again forbidden, these are what reconstruct the ancestral barriers. […] There is no seraglio any more. But the 'structure of the seraglio' attempts to impose its laws in the new wasteland: the law of invisibility, the law of silence" (Djebar 151).

Silence, however, is not always defeat. For the women Deffo and colleagues study, "their agency is denied, and their emotions are censored" (Deffo et al. 74); yet Daragmeh and Hamamra read the same quiet as a claim to authority, showing that "these women demonstrate that silence, a conventionally feminine virtue signifying obedience and submission, is a subjective space of women's authority" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 63), so that "while language is a masculine domain of which women are deprived, the grandmother resorts to silence so as to undermine male figures of authority" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 63).

Cixous urges women out of that snare even as she recognizes its power. "Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem" (Cixous 881), she writes, knowing that "every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak" (Cixous 880) before an ear tuned only to men, so that "her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine" (Cixous 880–81). The prohibition reaches the body itself, since "censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" (Cixous 880).

Indirection becomes its own idiom of survival. In the texts Ben Salem reads, "the women dramatize their fate, or exorcize it, but never expose it directly" (qtd. in Ben Salem 22), and the very act of writing about war breaks an ancient rule: "Women who choose to write about wars they have lived are defying an age old silencing code. Their speaking about now and in knowledge of their transgressions allows us to read back into the gaps and silences of the War Story" (qtd. in Ben Salem 70).

Alloula turns to the veil and to the blankness it produces for the colonial eye. "The first thing the foreign eye catches about Algerian women is that they are concealed from sight" (Alloula

7), he writes, and the veil turns the photograph blank, since "the whiteness of the veil becomes the symbolic equivalent of blindness: a leukoma, a white speck on the eye of the photographer and on his viewfinder. Whiteness is the absence of a photo, a veiled photograph, a whiteout, in technical terms" (Alloula 7). Into that blankness the colonial postcard inserts its own fiction, for "since it fills this absence and this silence, the postcard sets its own criteria of truthfulness for the representation of Algerian women and for the discourse that can be held about them" (Alloula 17).

Ali returns to the paradox of writing the self where silence is prized. "How can one write the self in a society that honors silence?" she asks (Ali 43). Djebar's answer treats writing as a leak no guard can seal: "Veil the body of the nubile girl. Make her invisible. Turn her into a being more blind than the blind, kill in her every memory of the outside world" (qtd. in Ali 43). And writing, once more, is resurrection, since "writing does not kill the voice, but awakens it, above all to resurrect so many vanished sisters" (qtd. in Ali 43).

Afilal closes the theme with the ethics of proximity. The task, she writes, is not to speak for or over others but to stand beside them: "Don't claim to 'speak for' or, worse, to 'speak on,' barely speaking next to, and if possible, very close to: these are the first of the solidarities to be taken on the few Arabic women" (Afilal 246). The voice that results cannot be held down, for "the voice, my voice (or rather the voice that issues from my open mouth, gaping as if to vomit, or chant some dirge) cannot be suppressed" (Afilal 256). And the silence it answers is the silence of women who left no record: "Alas! We can't read or write. We don't leave any accounts of what we lived through and all we suffered" (Afilal 245). Abadlia adds the personal cost of losing an oral world, recalling how "to write the most trivial of childhood memories thus refers back to the body stripped of voice" (Abadlia 6).

I.7. Polyphony

The recovery of voice, in Djebar and the tradition around her, does not produce a single triumphant "I" but a chorus. Polyphony names the method by which many voices sound together within one text. Mortimer describes Djebar's use of "polyphonic discourse to blur the boundaries between fiction and experience" (qtd. in Ali 43). The term has a precise sense: polyphony designates the different voices heard within a single discourse, where the speaking subject need not be the locutor, and the locutor need not be the enunciator (qtd. in Selka 62).

In L'Amour, la fantasia this method multiplies the self across several figures. Ringrose identifies them: "the multiple subjects of L'Amour, la fantasia are 'Djebar-enfant, Djebar-femme, L'Algérie-femme' and 'Femmes d'Algérie.' The novel tells the story of these subjects in the process of re-establishing a sense of self in the face of colonial/patriarchal subjugation" (Ringrose 42). The voices weave together like cloth, so that "in this silence, we construct our words the way a fabric is made, each stitch a part of our shared history" (qtd. in Nouari 350).

Polyphony carries a claim about history as well as about form. Traditions, Natoli and Hutcheon suggest, "demonstrate the importance of constituting history as a dialogue among a variety of voices as they struggle within asymetrical [sic] relations of power" (Natoli and Hutcheon 465), for "there is no tradition or story that can speak with authority and certainty for all of humanity" (Natoli and Hutcheon 465). In Djebar's hands, the individual life opens onto the collective and then folds back into it. Mortimer notes that "broadening the scope of autobiography through polyphonic discourse, she places her personal narrative within the greater community of Algerian women" (Mortimer 112), so that "we can view Djebar's personal disclosure as a two-stage process that began as a collective project to articulate community concerns but has resulted in the production of a singular life, a singular voice" (Mortimer 113).

The political payoff of the form is considerable. Mesli argues that polyphony "destabilizes the colonial language, transforms History into polyphony, and founds a writing of the feminine 'we,' plural and intimate" (Mesli 164), producing "a writing that is sinuous, vibrant, traversed by silences that are not holes but breaths, spaces of life" (Mesli 172). Majeed reads the same many-voicedness as a habitable space where opposites can live together, a space that gives "a representative chronicle of women's battle to inscribe themselves in space, a space that is paradigmatic of postcolonial life where past and present, tradition and innovation, and a multiplicity of voices and discourses can comfortably cohabit" (Majeed 118). The four novels of the Algerian Quartet are, in this light, "semi-autobiographical polyphonic texts where Djebar's voice joins those of the previously silenced community of Algerian women" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 104).

The form mixes the oral and the written and imports the rhythms of one language into another. Geesey calls Djebar's work a "polyphonic text" transcribing the oral narratives of the Chenoua women (qtd. in Lekesizalin 202), while Woodhull describes how she mixes the oral and the written, imposing "Arabic rhythms" on Western prose (qtd. in Lekesizalin 202). The result lets the margins in, since this polyphony helps "allow marginal voices to enter the conversation on gender, race, and sexuality" (Jadan 140). Husung describes the technique as one in which "the narrative technique of polyphony displays the diversity of points of view and the interweaving of different textual fragments such as the fictional, the referential and the autobiographical" (Husung 55), matched by a plurality of tongues, since each Algerian woman has "four languages": the oldest, Berber, then Arabic and French, "the language of yesterday's masters," and finally the language of the body, which expresses itself for example in dance and in trance (qtd. in Husung 59).

Hiddleston links the polyphonic form directly to Djebar's recovery of buried experience, since "Djebar's francophone text, her manipulation of the language and her use of an allusive,

polyphonic and fragmented form set out to uncover experiences and identities that have been either forgotten or misrepresented" (Hiddleston 67). Hamdi shows how the chain of oral transmission scatters the heritage across many memories, so that in L'Amour, la fantasia collective memory is built from the fragments of many women's recollections and the heritage "becomes a collective work because polyphonic" (Hamdi 110).

Gueydan-Turek draws out the wider stakes. This many-voiced writing, she argues, "not only provides a safe home for her writing, but also creates an alternative space to that of the nation-state torn apart by the civil war" (Gueydan-Turek 91). It marks a shift in the very nature of the writing subject, moving "from a closed and full structure written by a self-sufficient and totalized subject, to a plural text, produced by multifaceted and decentered subjects" (Gueydan-Turek 96), a polyphony of quotations and anonymous interruptions that, in her reading, "effectively mimics the linguistic character of otherness, and adequately mediates Algeria's multilingual reality" (Gueydan-Turek 95).

Djebar gives this chorus a maternal image. The mother, withdrawing from her own body, returns as an older, collective voice: "as if the mother, recoiling on this side of procreation, were masking her body from us, in order to return as the voice of the unknown ancestress, timeless chorus in which history is retold" (Djebar 147). For Deffo and colleagues, the sum of these devices amounts to nothing less than the making of a new subject, since "through polyphony, multilingualism, orality, and geopoetics, Djebar makes literature a laboratory for the creation of a new being" (Deffo et al. 81).

Cixous supplies the theory of a self that is never in only one place. "As subject for history, woman always occurs simultaneously in several places," she writes (Cixous 882), letting "the other language speak, the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death" (Cixous 889). Benhafsi and Bentounsi hear this same music in Djebar's prose, describing "a polyphony characteristic of woman's condition, a historical subject resurrected from the ruins of memory and from a spatial quest for the affirmation of a presence" (Benhafsi and Bentounsi 243).

For Ben Salem, polyphony is the only honest form for the self in question. The "I," she writes, "will be speaking in tongues or heteroglossia, to paraphrase Bakhtin" (Ben Salem 25), in a mode marked by a "plurality of propositions and positions" that "works against closure and finality" and is "irreducibly polyvocal" (qtd. in Ben Salem 25); and so "an autobiography 'in the plural', in a voice that is hybrid, is the only possible venue for Djebar" (Ben Salem 26). Bartiza and Zrizi trace how, in the later movement of the text, "the voices in the text no longer adhere to discrete chapters in the third section, but rather intertwine and relate to one another. Individual stories become less important as the collective narrative begins to take shape. Connections are

formed among the women, highlighting a sense of shared identity and blurring the boundaries of individual identities" (Bartiza and Zrizi 27).

Ali gathers the strands together. Defying the anonymity imposed on the women of her society, Djebar "dares to write her personal story, but she conceals it within the polyphonic voice of the women she met in the mountains, as well as that of the cloistered women of her family" (Ali 44). The volumes of the quartet are "polyphonic texts that combine personal and collective memory," juxtaposing autobiography with history and, in the second, with myth (qtd. in Ali 48). And the "I" that speaks in such writing is never quite singular, since "autobiographical writing is necessarily retrospective writing in which your 'I' is not always the I; either it is an 'I we' or a multiplied 'I'" (qtd. in Ali 45). Afilal underlines how few of the original voices survived in the archive, recalling that of the thirty-seven descriptions published of the taking of Algiers in July 1830, only three came from the viewpoints of the besieged (Afilal 245), and that in Djebar's retelling "the histories of women in both narratives are not singular but are carried and preserved through a collective female voice" (Afilal 252).

I.8. Conclusion

This chapter has assembled the conceptual tools that the rest of the study will put to work. Read side by side, feminist and postcolonial theory reveal the double bind of the colonized woman, pressed at once by empire and by patriarchy, and written out of both the colonial archive and the national myth. Gender, on the account developed here, is a social arrangement rather than a natural fact, and identity is something built, broken, and rebuilt through memory, language, and history rather than granted once and kept intact.

The chapter has also shown why voice and silence sit at the centre of this literature. Silence, for the Algerian woman, is both an imposition and, at moments, a resource; and the recovery of voice does not restore a single, sovereign speaker but a chorus of many. Polyphony, therefore, is not merely a stylistic choice. It is the formal shape of a politics, a way of writing the collective back into the record without silencing anyone within it. With these ideas in place, the analysis that follows can turn to the texts themselves and trace how the making of identity, the contest over voice, and the many-voiced form work through the writing at the heart of this study.

Chapter Two:
Gender, Identity and Narrative Resistance in Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*

Chapter Two: Gender, Identity and Narrative Resistance in Assia Djebar's Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade

II.1. Introduction

This second chapter moves from theory to text. Where the previous chapter set out the concepts that link feminist and postcolonial thought, this one puts them to work on a single novel, Assia Djebar's Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade (L'Amour, la fantasia). The aim is to read the book closely as a study of gender, identity, and narrative resistance, and to show how its form answers the double silence that empire and patriarchy imposed on Algerian women. The chapter treats the novel not only as a story but as a method, a way of writing history from the side that history had left out.

The reading proceeds in stages. It begins with the figure of the silent subaltern and Djebar's effort to give her a voice. It then turns to the clash of two identities, Algerian and French, and to the colonial hegemony that tried to erase the indigenous voice, before setting the whole novel against its historical ground: the invasion of 1830 and the war of independence of 1954 to 1962. From there the chapter examines the cultural conflict and the crisis of identity that come with writing in the colonizer's tongue, the representation of the female body under colonial and patriarchal violence, and finally the way narration itself becomes an act of resistance and self-recovery.

II.2. Defining the "Silent Subaltern" within Djebar's Narrative

Djebar's project starts from a hard fact: the women whose story she wants to tell left almost no written trace of their own. To write their lives is therefore already a transgression. Mortimer observes that "the novelist comes to autobiography fully aware that subjectivity in life and fiction are transgressions in Algerian culture" (qtd. in Ali 42). Against that prohibition, Djebar "reinserts women into the pages of Algerian history" (Mortimer 114), so that women "whose contribution to the independence struggle had been overlooked, forgotten, or simply not known, assume a properly prominent place in their nation's history" (Mortimer 115).

Silence, in this novel, is not merely a lack. Mesli insists on the point: "in Assia Djebar, feminine silence is not absence, but rather a form of resistance" (Mesli 164), and writing itself becomes a muffled outcry, since "to write is to scream without noise" (qtd. in Mesli 164). The literature Djebar helps to shape thus "foregrounds the presence and voices of women silenced by a history that discounts them and fails to consider their agency" (Majeed 122).

The theoretical anchor here is Spivak's account of the subaltern, yet Djebar complicates it. As one reading suggests, the relation runs in both directions: it is not only that the subaltern cannot speak, as Spivak would put it, but also that the powerful cannot speak without the subaltern (qtd. in

Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 110). The subaltern, in this framework, is the one "created and rendered passive and silent" by Western domination (qtd. in Lekesizalin 206).

For Algerian women, the memory that must be recovered is often the memory of violence, and specifically of rape. As Jadan reports, "[r]emembering the war for women means, inevitably, remembering [rape]" (qtd. in Jadan 130). The testimonies Djebar gathers carry that weight. One voice recalls, "our men ran away... we women left to bear the brunt! When the French came they only found women.... If the enemy caught us we never said a word" (qtd. in Jadan 134); another compresses a whole history of coercion into three words, "I submitted to 'France'" (qtd. in Jadan 134).

The subaltern's silence is also a problem of representation. The Subaltern Studies Collective, Hiddleston notes, is "militant in its call for attention to the ongoing oppression of the people, including women and the peasantry" (Hiddleston 73), yet the peasants "cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (Hiddleston 156). The danger is that every party claiming to speak for the subaltern woman ends by speaking over her. Gueydan-Turek states this sharply: "both the colonial discourse which considers the widow as the brown victim who needs saving from the benevolent white intellectual, and the nativist stand which describes her as a willing participant to the ritual and a supporter of local traditions speak for the subaltern woman, appropriating her voice and participating in its erasure" (Gueydan-Turek 88).

Within Algerian culture itself, silence is taught early and prized highly. Djebar records the lesson: "from childhood on, the little girl is taught 'the cult of silence, which is one of the greatest powers of Arabic society.' What a French general, 'friend to the Arabs,' calls 'power,' is something we feel as a second mutilation" (Djebar 145). The result, Deffo and colleagues argue, is that "Algerian women have been systematically marginalized and excluded from the public sphere, their heroism in the struggle for decolonization often erased from the national narrative" (Deffo et al. 72). Against this, Fantasia is read as "a gynocentric novel that sheds light on the discursive strategies that Djebar and her female protagonists adopt so as to escape the paranoiac, masculine authority" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 59), a text in which "the marginalized language of the native and the voice of subalternity are displayed, flaunting and resisting the linguistic authority of French" (Ben Salem 25).

The historical reasons for this silence are concrete. One account, cited by Ben Salem, stresses how little the moment offered women a language for their own experience: "Literary evidence affirms that during the Revolution, the Algerian women were not conscious of their opportunities… Consequently, it is not so surprising that they made no attempt to inscribe into the war text experiences that may have been transformative" (qtd. in Ben Salem 71). Even so, particular women break through. In the figure of Cherifa, Bartiza and Zrizi argue, "we witness the subaltern expressing her own voice, a woman who courageously confronted oppression" (Bartiza and Zrizi 31), and through such figures "Djebar directly challenges Spivak's assertions regarding the impossibility of expression for subaltern individuals" (Bartiza and Zrizi 33).

The women themselves name the problem of the archive: "Alas! we are illiterate. We leave no accounts of what we have endured and lived through!… You see others who spent their time crouching in holes, and who then recounted whatever they recounted!" (qtd. in Ali 54). Djebar's answer is to catch their spoken testimony in writing, since "it is in the foreign word that Djebar captures the testimonies of the illiterate women of the resistance" (Ali 44). Lazreg describes the same difficulty from the historian's side: "throughout their precolonial and much of their colonial history Algerian women wrote very little, if at all. Having no direct written testimony from women, I decided to have recourse to chronicles, monographs, travelers' accounts and essays written by Algerian men as well as by French men and women" (Lazreg 17).

II.2.1. The Transition from Historical Silence to the Beginning of the "Cavalcade"

The novel opens by placing Djebar's own writing in a long line of witnesses, and by turning the colonizer's language back on the conquest it once served. She writes "using his language, but more than one hundred and fifty years later" (qtd. in Ringrose 49), and in doing so "Djebar's fragments now seem to want to 'give voice' to generations of Algerian women who have been denied the privilege of self-expression" (Hiddleston 55). The aim, as Hiddleston puts it, is to invent a shared idiom: "if Islamic law in Algeria recommended that women refrain from using the first person, and French colonial discourse portrayed them using a series of distorted metaphors and images, Djebar's short stories seek to invent a more appropriate collective idiom that might resuscitate the idiosyncrasies of this forgotten community" (Hiddleston 55).

The last movement of the book gives this idiom its fullest form. Ali notes that "the last part, 'The Buried Voices,' the longest, is devoted to the testimonies of the women of Mount Chenoua who took part in the Algerian revolution and who were interviewed by the narrator during the war, at the Tunisian border" (Ali 44). The cavalcade of the title, meanwhile, is announced in the festive yet ominous scene of the fantasia itself, where "the fantasia of the Berber horsemen began in the marketplace; it stretched on into the hot night" (Abadlia 2). And the whole autobiographical thread begins with a single image that the book returns to again and again, "a little Arab girl going to school for the first time, one autumn morning, walking hand in hand with her father" (Djebar 26), moving toward the sound that closes the novel, "in spite of the tumult of my people all around, I already hear […] I hear the death cry in the Fantasia" (Djebar 209).

II.3. Postcolonial Identity: Ideological and Cultural Dimensions (Algeria vs. France)

The novel sets two identities against each other, and it does so partly through the theme of the gaze. Zakaria captures the paradox of the colonial eye: "that the colonial gaze could be so interested in capturing an image and yet be blind to what it seeks to capture is a great summation of the colonial project as a whole" (Zakaria 71). French national identity, on the other side, is built on a tight bond

between land and history. Nora describes how "the powerful originality of France is to see these two poles linked indissolubly in the definition of its national identity" (Nora vii), a bond that "refers to the notion of territory, by definition limited, therefore presupposing borders inside which power is exercised and, in consequence, history evolves" (Nora vii). That association, he adds, "was henceforth the fundamental association in the definition of national identity, at least until recently, and which in all respects was incarnated by Ernest Lavisse" (Nora x), while frontier regions sharpen the sense of a distinct self, since "it is Alsace's frontier position and its history, buffeted between France and Germany, that forged the awareness there of an identity radically different from that of interior France" (Nora xii).

Against this French self-image, the conquest of Algeria is figured through the violent unveiling of a female body. As one source puts it, "every veil that fell, every Body that became liberated from the traditional embrace of the haïk was a negative expression of the fact that Algeria was beginning to deny herself and was accepting the rape of the colonizer" (qtd. in Jadan 130), and the city itself is imagined as a woman stripped bare: "as the majestic fleet rends the horizon, the Impregnable City sheds her veils and emerges, a wraith-like apparition, through the blue-grey haze" (qtd. in Jadan 132). Jadan draws the parallel out fully: "to Djebar, colonization and rape are alike because both of them involve violence and produce silence, veiling the colonized- women and land. She describes Algeria as a wounded female body, raped and left bleeding in the dust by the conqueror, 'penetrated and deflowered'" (Jadan 132), a logic in which "in case the French win, women are the first to be captured as the spoils of victory" (Jadan 138).

The novel's structure holds these strands together. Hiddleston summarizes it well: "in L'Amour, la fantasia, she attempts to write a collective autobiography of the women of Algeria, interweaving accounts of the invasion of Algiers in 1830 with testimonies from the war of independence and with scenes from her own childhood and youth" (Hiddleston 68). What Djebar achieves through this weave, Barbo argues, is a portrait that escapes the usual traps, since "the late Algerian historian, filmmaker, and novelist Assia Djebar has been successful in re-presenting Maghrebian women without reinforcing a binary discourse between the West and East" (Barbo 25).

II.3.1. Colonial Hegemony: French Cultural Dominance and the Suppression of the Indigenous Voice

Colonial power worked not only through force but through representation and language. In the colonial imagination the native is stripped of all nuance, so that, as one critic notes, "in describing the attributes or actions of the native, issues such as intention, causality, extenuating circumstances, and so forth, are completely ignored; in the 'imaginary' colonialist realm, to say 'native' is automatically to say 'evil'" (qtd. in Ringrose 50). Space itself became an instrument of rule. Nora describes how "space was invested by the forms of power: the voyages of the king, administrative statistics, the steady improvement in maps ... so many instruments for the mastery of space by the

State" (Nora x), and how "it was the marriage of geography to history, promoted to the first rank as the chief instrument in the formation of awareness and of national instruction, that was to set down roots that are much more fundamental" (Nora x).

Literature served the same end. The canonical European text, Natoli and Hutcheon argue, "becomes a powerful machinery for forging what Gramsci called cultural domination by consent" (Natoli and Hutcheon 430), and colonial interpellation works so thoroughly that it makes "the imperial culture appear referentially seamless and the colonial culture appear radically fractured" (Natoli and Hutcheon 430). Djebar's own father embodies the contradiction, since "he, an Algerian Arab schoolteacher, is part of the French colonizing mission, instructing his class of indigenous children in French, the language of the colonizer" (Mortimer 113).

Djebar's response is to make silence itself a refusal. Mesli reads it as "a refusal to speak in the colonizer's language, a refusal to let oneself be spoken" (Mesli 164), setting two positions against each other, "that of the colonizer, who writes History in the language of conquest, and that of the colonized women, condemned to muteness" (Mesli 164). The novel thus becomes a space "paradigmatic of postcolonial life where past and present, tradition and innovation, and a multiplicity of voices and discourses can comfortably cohabit" (Majeed 118).

The colonizer's language carried real rewards, which is part of its power. Djebar's own career shows this, since French, the patriarchal language of the colonizers, "had granted her entrance into the exclusive club of a privileged few: she was the first Maghrebian member of the Académie Française and the recipient of some of the most prestigious French literary prizes" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 103). Yet the same language is also a graveyard. Lekesizalin records the images Djebar uses for it: language as "a dark depository for piled-up corpses," French offered as "the flowers of death" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 213), alongside Ngũgi's description of the mother tongue's suppression as "humiliation" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 213).

Colonial rule reached into names, status, and law. Lazreg lists the losses: "the French venture radically changed women's (as well as men's) lives. It meant a change in name, as people's names had to be transcribed into Latin script; in identity, as individuals were given a new religious status as 'Muslim natives' and women as 'Fatmas'; in language, land tenure system, and the political system" (Lazreg 3). Djebar's task, Husung explains, is one of reconstitution, "reconstituting, through writing in French, their voices marginalized within the hegemonic discourse, that is, oral voices in dialectal Arabic and Berber" (Husung 55), even as she recognizes that the postcolonial state repeated the erasure: "if the French repressed Berber and Arabic in order to undermine Algeria's cultural specificity, 'the military oligarchy of the postcolonial regime undertook to deny the ethnic particularities and the multiple identities of the country'" (qtd. in Husung 58).

Hiddleston names the mechanism directly: "colonialism is also a 'scriptural economy' and colonial domination is assured through the controlling and embellishment of 'official history'"

(Hiddleston 73–74). Hamdi's account of the colonial devaluation of the oral applies directly here, since the indigenous, oral culture is positioned as inferior by a centralized colonial discourse, and inscribing orature into French writing resists that suppression (Hamdi 106). Fanon shows how even a piece of cloth became a target, noting that "the occupying forces, in applying their maximum psychological attention to the veil worn by Algerian women, were obviously bound to achieve some results" (Fanon 27–28), and how any sign of a separate identity was recoded as fanaticism: "what is in fact the assertion of a distinct identity, concern with keeping intact a few shreds of national existence, is attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behaviour" (Fanon 27). Djebar traces the effect inward, describing how "in Algeria, it was precisely when the foreign intrusion began in 1830 […] that a gradual freezing up of indoor communication accompanied the parallel progressive French conquest of exterior space, an indoor communication becoming more and more deeply submerged: between the generations, and even more, between the sexes" (Djebar 140).

The reduction of the colonized to an abstraction runs through these accounts. For Deffo and colleagues, "the Algerian exists merely as an abstraction, an 'invisible fanatic'" (Deffo et al. 79), and Daragmeh and Hamamra remind us that "in many of her interviews, Djebar declares colonialism and patriarchy as equal evils" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 59). The wound left by the colonizer's writing is captured in Djebar's own line: "the first written words, even while promising a fallacious peace, condemn their bearer to death. Any document written by 'The Other' proves fatal, since it is a sign of compromise" (Djebar 50). Alloula's study of the colonial postcard supplies the visual counterpart, describing the colonizer's self-granted right of oversight as "the practice of a right of (over)sight that the colonizer arrogates to himself and that is the bearer of multiform violence" (Alloula 5), a machinery that "produces stereotypes in the manner of great seabirds producing guano. It is the fertilizer of the colonial vision" (Alloula 4). Against all this, Ali reads Djebar's return to speech as a repair, since "rejoining the oral tradition, she restores the ties to her past that were severed by French colonization" (Ali 44), even while the French language "leans upon the death of my own people, sinks its roots into the corpses of those defeated in the conquest" (qtd. in Ali 55).

II.3.2. Historical and Social Context: The 1830 Invasion and the Social Status of Algerian Women

The novel's historical spine is the French assault of 1830 and the long war that followed. Delacroix's The Women of Algiers, Zakaria notes, was displayed "the year when French military control of Algeria was established," which lent the painting "an air of authenticity" (Zakaria 75). Within a dominated society, the woman is assigned the role of guardian of identity. Lalami observes that "the struggle against the colonial order does not allow the questioning of gender relations, especially when these same relations are used as a means of differentiation from the dominant group. Preserving the 'Algerian personality' becomes the role assigned to women" (qtd. in Spiridopoulou 2).

Djebar renders the invasion as a dawn scene of terrible beauty. She writes of "dawn on this thirteenth day of June 1830, at the exact moment when the sun suddenly blazes forth above the fathomless bowl of the bay… As the majestic fleet rends the horizon the Impregnable City sheds her veils and emerges, a wraith-like apparition, through the blue-grey haze" (qtd. in Ringrose 45). The book excavates two linked periods, since, as Mortimer notes, "she unearths a hidden history of two distinct periods: the French conquest of Algeria, 1830–1871, introducing colonial occupation; and the Algerian Revolution, 1954–1962, bringing it to a close" (Mortimer 115). The colonial version of these events is captured, and undercut, in the sentence Mesli quotes, "the French army entered the city; it brought light to it" (qtd. in Mesli 165), set against the mute witness of the women who "watch the horses, the drums, the rifles go by. They keep silent" (qtd. in Mesli 165).

The status of women that this history acts upon is defined less by belief than by law. Mernissi is clear on the point: "what was, and is still, at issue in Morocco and other Muslim societies is not an ideology of female inferiority, but rather a set of laws and customs that ensure that women's status remains one of subjugation. Prime among these are the family laws based on male authority" (Mernissi 12). The conquest brought massacre. Lazreg records that "after the collapse of Emir Abd-El-Kader's resistance (1830 to 1844), it took another forty years of episodic rebellions before the country was finally subdued. The history of the captures of Algiers, Qasantina (or Constantine), Mostaganem and Laghouat, among others, is one of massacres of women, men and children" (Lazreg 42), and that colonial rule scrambled the standing of both sexes, meaning "a loss of status for men, now perceiving themselves as reduced to the social status of women, and an equally important loss of status for women, from decent (that is, Muslim) to immoral" (Lazreg 53).

The equation of nation and violated woman gives the early chapters their charge. As Hiddleston reads it, "this early scene figures Algeria itself as a woman, as if the atrocities committed during the nineteenth century were akin to those inflicted on women silenced by men" (Hiddleston 72), so that "the invasion and subsequent battles are likened to sexual penetration, and Djebar's response seems to be that she is both disgusted, and compelled, by this imagery" (Hiddleston 73). Fanon exposes the hollow concern of colonial society for the very women it oppressed, describing how "colonial society blazes up vehemently against this inferior status of the Algerian woman. Its members worry and show concern for those unfortunate women, doomed 'to produce brats', kept behind walls, banned" (Fanon 26). Djebar answers with the image of the doubly confined woman, "thus, doubly imprisoned in that immense jail, the woman has the right to no more than a space that is doomed to become ever smaller" (Djebar 146). Deffo and colleagues restate the founding metaphor, since "Algeria is perceived by the French colonizer as a 'virgin girl,' an object to be conquered and to satisfy 'carnal' desires" (Deffo et al. 74), and note that "the novel presents two faces of objectified Algerian women" (Deffo et al. 74).

The documentary detail of the invasion runs through the criticism. Bartiza and Zrizi recount that "Djebar retells the events from the very beginning of the conquest, which occurred on June 14th, 1830, when a fleet of over 600 French ships arrived at Sidi Ferredj near Algiers with 37,000 soldiers" (Bartiza and Zrizi 25), reading the whole book as "a form of historiography that documents Algerian history from the French colonial invasion in 1830 to the War for Independence from 1954 to 1962" (Bartiza and Zrizi 26). Alloula reminds us that the fleet carried more than soldiers, since armies "bring missionaries and scholars with their impedimenta as well as painters and photographers forever thirsty for exoticism, folklore, Orientalism" (Alloula 3), producing a record without parallel: "history knows of no other society in which women have been photographed on such a large scale to be delivered to public view" (Alloula 5). Djebar sets against this the fate of an individual girl, veiled and shut away as her body matures, "what became of the baker's daughter? Veiled, surely, taken overnight from the paths to school: her body betrayed her. Her budding breasts, her slimming legs, in short, the emergence of her womanhood turned her into an incarcerated body" (qtd. in Ali 51). The battle scenes themselves are reconstructed from French chronicles, as in the account of "the explosion of Fort l'Empereur, on 4 July 1830, at ten in the morning" (Abadlia 5) and the running count of casualties from Baron Barchou (Abadlia 4). The novel, in Afilal's summary, is "a postcolonial rewriting of French accounts of the conquest of Algeria from 1830 through the 1850s" (Afilal 244).

II.4. Cultural Conflict and Identity Crisis in Djebar's Novel

At the heart of the novel lies a conflict between two cultures that meet inside a single self. Fanon's account of assimilation names the pull toward the colonizer, in which "the colonized... becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (qtd. in Jadan 131), so that, as Jadan glosses, "the Black man wears a veil under the effect of colonial impact, which contorts Blacks to act naturally" (Jadan 131). The sections that follow trace this conflict through language and through the divided space of home and school.

II.4.1. Mimicry and Cultural Conflict: The Algeria–France Struggle and the Irony of the Colonized Adopting the Colonizer's Language

The deepest irony of Djebar's situation is that she resists the colonizer in the colonizer's own tongue. She describes the reversal plainly: "the language of yesterday's enemy became for me the language of the father… in this language there is death, through the testimonies of the conquest that I bring back, but there is also movement, the liberation of the woman's body" (qtd. in Spiridopoulou 6). Writing more than a century after the conquest, she takes up French to answer it (qtd. in Selka 63). Ringrose reads the paradox as a gift turned against its giver, since "by initiating her into the French language, the patriarch has given her the key to her own liberation, and made possible the escape from paternal law into the uncharted waters of desire" (Ringrose 61).

The strategy has a name in postcolonial theory: mimicry and rewriting as assault. Natoli and Hutcheon remind us that "the 'armed version' of modernism is colonialism itself" (Natoli and Hutcheon 427), and describe how a plagiarizing strategy "operates as an anti-colonialist assault on European assumptions about originality and mimicry" (Natoli and Hutcheon 431). Yet the colonizer's language is double-edged. Mortimer warns that "writing in the colonizer's language implies the ambiguity associated with a French education. The latter may liberate and empower the individual; it may also create cultural alienation" (Mortimer 116). Read positively, French can carry what Arabic here cannot voice, becoming the vehicle to compensate for the aphasia of her Algerian sisters if conveniently Arabicized (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 104–105), a weapon seized from the enemy and turned back on the adversary (qtd. in Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 105).

Other writers of the region felt the same ambivalence. Lekesizalin gathers Djebar's images of French as a stolen or poisoned garment, from Ashcroft's "seizing the language of the centre" to French as "a veil" for self-concealment and even "the tunic of Nessus" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 213, 214). The political climate sharpened the charge, since, as Lazreg notes, women writing in French risked the accusation of "mimicking Western women" within "a history of ideological manipulation of women for consolidation of the past colonial order" (Lazreg 196). Husung frames French bluntly, "it is French, the language of the former enemy, the colonizer, that is to be her only tool" (Husung 55), recalling that for Kateb Yacine "the French language was a 'spoil of war'" (Husung 59), and invoking Bhabha's formula for the mimic subject as "almost the same, but not quite" (qtd. in Husung 57).

Hiddleston presses the cost of this bargain. Djebar's "paradoxical relationship with the French language means that while she is allowed to express herself in ways that were not usually permitted, she also simultaneously cuts herself off from singular memories that cannot be contained within the colonial language" (Hiddleston 69–70), so that "the French language of agency seems to confer an excess of clarity that ends in annihilation and betrayal" (Hiddleston 72). Hamdi points to what Djebar calls the "pitching of languages" as a defining trait of her writing, noting her claim that Algerian women possess four languages, the fourth of which, shared by all, is the language of the body (Hamdi 109). Fanon shows how heavily the same tongue once pressed on the colonized ear, since "the French language, a language of occupation, a vehicle of the oppressing power, seemed doomed for eternity to judge the Algerian in a pejorative way" (Fanon 73), where "every French speech heard was an order, a threat or an insult" (Fanon 73), and yet, in a twist Fanon savours, "it is the Algerian Revolution, it is the struggle of the Algerian people, that is facilitating the spreading of the French language in the nation" (Fanon 73).

Djebar registers the loss and the gain together. She remembers fearing that "going from colloquial Arabic to French would bring a loss of all that was truly alive, of the play of colors" (Djebar 2), even as her Franco-Algerian self becomes, for Deffo and colleagues, the very model of a new being who "embraces their history, transcends taboos, empties the page, and enters into a relational

becoming" (Deffo et al. 81). The risk of self-exposure is acute. To write one's life in French, she says, is "beneath the slow scalpel of a live autopsy, to show more than one's skin. To lay myself bare in this language keeps me in permanent danger of detonation: the exercise of autobiography in the language of yesterday's adversary" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 244). The most searching statement of the bind comes when she confesses that in transcribing her foremothers' voices she has half-betrayed them: "I have captured your voice; disguised it with my French without clothing it… the words that I thought to put in your mouth are shrouded in the same mourning garb as those of Bosquet or Saint-Arnaud" (qtd. in Ben Salem 79).

The rewriting is also a mockery of the master's text, a repetition that dislocates it "through…a mimicry that mocks the binary structure" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 25), and finally a claim of ownership, captured in the collective declaration, "we did conquer it, this French language…We made the French language ours… We enriched the French language, its vocabulary as well as its syntax…In short, we inhabited it" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 27). Ali underlines the protective distance the foreign tongue provides, adding to it "that of the 'I we,' which likewise protects the author from exposure" (Ali 45). Abadlia draws the logical conclusion for the genre itself, since the language of autobiography, "when it is not the mother tongue, makes it so that almost inevitably, even without intending it, autobiography becomes fiction" (Abadlia 7), and to write one's life in French is "to take an inevitable distance" (Abadlia 7). Over the whole initiation, in Djebar's words, "a double, contradictory sign reigns" (Djebar 27).

II.4.2. Ambivalence and Identity Crisis: Between the "Traditional Home" and the "French School"

The scene that condenses this whole conflict is the child led to the French school by her father. French, in Spiridopoulou's summary, is at once life and death, oppression and emancipation, stepmother and paternal, the tool of the writer's expression and the source of her future freedom (Spiridopoulou 6). Ali frames the same paradox from the family's side: the father frees his daughter from the enclosure of her peers by sending her to the French school, yet in the same gesture her ties to the mother tongue and maternal culture are cut (Ali 49).

The image recurs across the criticism because it recurs in the novel. Ringrose describes "a tall erect figure in a fez and a European suit, carrying a bag of school books. He is a teacher at the French primary school. A little Arab girl in a village in the Algerian Sahel" (qtd. in Ringrose 59). Behind the French school stands Nora's account of republican education, whose manual told the child, "Child, you must love France because nature has made it beautiful and history has made it grand" (Nora x), and which trained the future citizen to distinguish the small homeland from "the grande patrie, that is, the nation" (Nora x). Mortimer reads the personal cost, noting that "her father's commitment to education liberated her from the female enclosure that constrained her Algerian sisters, but she

reached maturity haunted by a sense of exile" (Mortimer 113), a "western acculturation" that "separated her from far too many aspects of the women's world in her own society" (Mortimer 113).

Between the two languages lies only a thin membrane. Mesli quotes Djebar's sense that "between my language of pain and that of the enemy, there is only a fragile veil" (qtd. in Mesli 164), and yet, in a reversal that drives the whole book, "French, the colonizer's language, paradoxically becomes the tool for reclaiming the past" (Mesli 165), which leaves the writer with an unanswerable question, "how to say in a foreign language what the mother tongue has left unspoken?" (Mesli 165). Husung reads the father's act as "a double transgression of the social codes in this village of 'blind' houses, where Arab girls remain in the paternal home until nubile age and go, at most, to the Quranic school" (Husung 56), after which "the French language becomes, for the young girl, the language of the Enlightenment and of emancipation, a means of escaping the fate reserved for young girls" (Husung 56).

Fanon reads the unveiling that accompanies this schooling as a colonial victory, since "Algerian society with every abandoned veil seemed to express its willingness to attend the master's school and to decide to change its habits under the occupier's direction and patronage" (Fanon 28), each unveiled woman announcing "an Algerian society whose systems of defence were in the process of dislocation, open and breached" (Fanon 28). The gendered geography of childhood sharpens the divide, since, in Deffo and colleagues' words, "in this highly surveilled universe, boys enjoy a space of freedom, while girls are trapped" (Deffo et al. 75).

The emotional core of this crisis is the loss of the mother tongue as a language of love. Djebar confesses that "one knot resisted: the French language could offer me all of its inexhaustible treasures, but not one, not the least of its words of love, would be reserved for me" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 245), and calls French "a stepmother tongue," mourning "this vanished mother tongue that abandoned me on the pavement and fled" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 247), seeking "like a milk from which I had once been weaned, the amorous plenitude of my mother's language" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 246). Ben Salem reads these scenes as a collision of value systems that leaves the writer "on the edge of two cultures, belonging fully to neither" (Ben Salem 21). The most sustained image of this in-betweenness is the "no-man's-land" Djebar describes between the two languages, where "the French tongue, with its body and voice, has established a proud presidio in me, while the mother-tongue, all oral tradition, all rags and tatters, resists and attacks between two breathing spaces" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 27–28). The four languages of desire that Djebar lists gather the whole predicament into one passage: "French for secret missives; Arabic for our stilled aspirations towards God-the-Father […]; Lybico-Berber which takes us back to the pagan idols […]. The fourth language, for all females […] remains that of the body" (Djebar 173). To speak of oneself outside the foremothers' language, as Abadlia puts it, is "to unveil oneself" and truly "to lay oneself bare" (Abadlia 6).

II.5. Gender Representation in Fantasia: Physical and Psychological Dimensions

The novel represents gender through the body and through the mind, and the two are rarely separate. The veil, which seems to guard identity, can instead undo it. Jadan argues that "while the veiled woman thinks that the veil can keep her identity intact, she adheres nevertheless to gender rhetorics which colonize her body and destroy her subjectivity" (Jadan 130–31), and records the bride whose "violence she met during her wedding silenced her as a veil," recalling, "I discovered that I too was veiled" (qtd. in Jadan 132), so that "the rapists doubly victimize the woman: they violate her body and oblige her to live with the speechless memorial wound all her life" (Jadan 133). Said's Orientalism, Hiddleston notes, "allowed subsequent thinkers to develop their understanding of the particular oppression of women by the colonial gaze" (Hiddleston 96). Djebar's own position is that of a "migrant… between cultures and languages" (Husung 55), a woman "of French education" and yet "of Algerian sensibility, or Arab-Berber, or even Muslim when Islam is lived as a culture" (qtd. in Husung 59).

II.5.1. Trauma and the Body: The Physical Impact of Colonial and Patriarchal Violence on Female Characters

The colonial gaze does its violence first upon the body. Zakaria describes how the colonial photographer forces poor women to unveil until "the harem has become a brothel" (Zakaria 74). The colonizer's language, in Spiridopoulou's reading, is a true pharmakon, a medicine that heals and at the same time a poison that brings death (Spiridopoulou 6). The battlefield dead appear in the archive Djebar reworks, as in the account of a man asphyxiated with a woman and child, "in front of him lay a woman with her child in her arms. It was easy to see that this man had been asphyxiated, together with the woman, the child and the ox" (qtd. in Ringrose 54). Natoli and Hutcheon give the general principle, that "women's bodies have always, although in many different ways, been 'colonized' by the intersection of knowledge and power" (Natoli and Hutcheon 420), and that struggles over women's bodies mark "all cultures" (Natoli and Hutcheon 420).

The novel's most infamous atrocity is the smoking-out of the cave-dwellers. Mortimer records how "two French military officers named Pélessier and Saint-Arnaud set fire to caves in the vicinity of Djebar's native Cherchell, smothering to death fifteen hundred rebellious Berbers: men, women, and children" (Mortimer 115). Mesli reads the narrator's relation to French as "an intimate wound" (Mesli 164) and hears in the text the erasure of women who "had no history; they left only shadows on the walls" (qtd. in Mesli 164). Patriarchal violence stands beside colonial violence throughout. Mernissi notes that "the duty of the man to command his wife is embodied in his right to correct her by physical beating. The Koran itself recommends this measure, but only as a last resort" (Mernissi 65), and that piety "required pious women to be modest in their appearance and hide all ornamentation and eye-catching beauty behind veils" (Mernissi 79). The domestic threat turns murderous in the

scenes Majeed cites, where a husband breaks a bottle and swears to blind his wife, "I'll put out your eyes and then you'll never see again! And no one will ever see you either!" (Majeed 120), and where the wife recalls, "he intended to blind me. 'Adulteress,' he muttered, in his hands the whiskey bottle broken in two" (Majeed 122).

Writing about such wounds reopens them. Lekesizalin gathers Djebar's images of writing in French as submitting to "the vivisector's scalpel" and as "stripping oneself naked" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 212, 213). Lazreg records the specific indignities visited on women's bodies during the conquest, since "they were raped, forcibly held by military officers to satisfy their sexual desires, and often assaulted for the gold jewelry they wore. Such assaults took place on live as well as dead women's bodies" (Lazreg 42). Hirsch offers the concept that binds these transmissions together, describing "a structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience" (Hirsch 6) that lets the spectator "enter the image, to imagine the disaster 'in one's own body'" (Hirsch 98). Hiddleston reads colonial violence in Djebar as "an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood" (Hiddleston 30), testifying to "the male colonizer's desire for sexual as well as territorial possession" (Hiddleston 96), while noting how present-day trauma can "disable the women of contemporary Algeria from producing a coherent testimony linking present and past" (Hiddleston 59). The severed foot of a woman, killed so that a soldier could steal her anklet, is the kind of detail Djebar rescues from a general's letters (Hiddleston 74).

Fanon marks the stages by which the female body is drawn into the war, from the moment when "every rejected veil disclosed to the eyes of the colonialists horizons until then forbidden, and revealed to them, piece by piece, the flesh of Algeria laid bare" (Fanon 28), through the knowledge that "any Algerian woman arrested would be tortured to death" (Fanon 35), to the point at which "the Algerian woman penetrates a little further into the flesh of the Revolution" (Fanon 40). Djebar renders the wedding night itself as an assault, "an open wound is etched into the woman's body through the assumption of a virginity that is furiously deflowered […]. The wedding night essentially becomes a night of blood. […] a night of blood that is also a night of the gaze and of silence" (Djebar 141), and records the fighters whose bodies were maimed by the bombs they carried, "some of them came back later with their sex electrocuted, flayed through torture" (Djebar 150). Deffo and colleagues read the wedding night in the same terms, "a night Djebar describes as one of assault, rape, silencing, and mutilation" (Deffo et al. 75), while Daragmeh and Hamamra find in it a turn toward expression, since "her stifled body paradoxically becomes her medium of expression" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 64). Cixous supplies the theory of the confiscated body, arguing that "by writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display, the ailing or dead figure" (Cixous 880), a body from which women have been "turned away… shamefully taught to ignore" (Cixous 885).

The testimonies of burning and torture close this section. Bartiza and Zrizi quote a woman whose hair caught fire as her house burned, "some of them fell on my head… I was half exposed. My hair caught fire…That's how I lost all my hair" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 34), a scene Ben Salem also records in the mother's voice (qtd. in Ben Salem 76). Alloula returns to the postcard's eroticizing of the female body, which it will "paint… up, ready it, and eroticize it in order to offer it up to any and all comers from a clientele moved by the unambiguous desire of possession" (Alloula 5) through "a double violation" that will "unveil the veiled and give figural representation to the forbidden" (Alloula 14). The recurring emblem of the whole theme is the severed hand of the anonymous Algerian woman that the painter Fromentin picks up and throws down, and that Djebar takes up in turn: "later, I seize this living hand, hand of mutilation and of remembrance, and I try to make it carry the reed pen" (qtd. in Ali 51), an amputated hand that becomes "a symbol of an Algeria amputated by a history written by the hands of the French invaders" (Ali 52). Ben Salem adds the ritual by which rape was folded back into silence, as the violated woman washes and returns "to prevent the chancre being opened in the tribal circle […] rape will not be mentioned, will be respected. Swallowed. Until the next alarm" (qtd. in Ben Salem 73).

II.5.2. Male Dominance and Gender Roles: The Traditional Social Fabric and "Double Oppression"

The novel sets colonial domination beside a patriarchal order that also silences women, and often the two reinforce each other. Gadant observes that in writing about herself Djebar breaks "the Law that men themselves must respect. It is therefore twice forbidden for a woman to speak of herself" (qtd. in Spiridopoulou 7). Literacy itself is feared as an opening to scandal, since "any girl who has had some schooling will have learned to write and will without a doubt write that fatal letter" (qtd. in Ringrose 60). The stakes of reclaiming a voice are political as well as personal, as Nouari's reading of Lila suggests, whose "defiance was not just against the colonial power, but against the layers of patriarchal control that sought to silence her. In reclaiming her voice, she reclaimed her place in history" (qtd. in Nouari 350).

The double axis, patriarchal and colonial, is a constant of the criticism. Feminism, in Natoli and Hutcheon's terms, "identifies patriarchal ideology as its 'other'" (Natoli and Hutcheon 399), combined with the colonial axis (Natoli and Hutcheon 429), and Mortimer names the two discourses the woman writer must face, since her "appropriation of language … and of space involves confrontation with two patriarchal discourses, one French and the other Maghrebian" (Mortimer 114). Mernissi describes the structure of male authority in detail, from marriage "based on male dominance" in which women live "under the authority of fathers, brothers, or husbands" (Mernissi 16), to the exchange in which the wife expects "orders" and gives "obedience. It is a power relation" (Mernissi 65), to a society "divided into two categories: men, who have power, and women, who obey" (Mernissi 78), held together by "institutions that foster male dominance through sexual

segregation and polygamy for believers" (Mernissi 24). Majeed's example makes the point in miniature, where a wife calls her own husband the enemy in the coded speech of women, "by enemy, she meant her husband… enemy is just a manner of speaking" (Majeed 121–122).

Sisterhood offers the counterforce. As one reading puts it, "it is only through the symbiosis of their sisterhood that they can resist the patriarchal oppression represented by the husband" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 110). The double constraint remains the analytic key. Lazreg criticizes any account that ignores "the double constraints (social and colonial) that weighed on Algerian women, whose experience she subsumed under her own" (Lazreg 93), and Hiddleston reads Djebar as hoping "to delineate the specificity of Algerian women, oppressed at once by colonialism and by Islamic patriarchy" (Hiddleston 70), through "the double heritage of colonial and patriarchal oppression" (Hiddleston 66). Gueydan-Turek names the same "epistemological violence inherent in the silencing of the 'subaltern' by both colonial and local patriarchal powers" (Gueydan-Turek 88). Fanon, for his part, points an accusing finger at the intellectuals "who keep their wives in a state of semi-slavery" (Fanon 26), and notes how confinement had shaped even a woman's body so that it "did not have the normal mobility before a limitless horizon of avenues, of unfolded sidewalks, of houses, of people dodged or bumped into" (Fanon 34–35).

Djebar gives the confinement its images. The gaze is forbidden upon "the female body one keeps incarcerated, from the age of ten until forty or forty-five, within walls, or better within veils" (Djebar 139), and family life narrows until "only the mother-son relationship has grown stronger to the point of obstructing all other exchanges" (Djebar 146). Deffo and colleagues sum up the reduction of women to "mere 'decorative objects'" (Deffo et al. 74), "spatially repressed and forced to live in veiled spaces (the harem)" (Deffo et al. 76). Daragmeh and Hamamra restate the binary, "men are superior, powerful, public, rational, and present, while women are inferior, weak, private, irrational, voiceless, and nameless" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 64), and note the reversals Djebar stages, where "the female is occupying the subjective position of the spectator and the male is relegated to the position of the object" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 66). The pressure of the collective on the individual is, for Ben Salem, a defining trait of the culture, since "in a Muslim society, the 'we' engulfs and hegemonizes the 'I'" (Ben Salem 21-22). Bartiza and Zrizi note the cost of Djebar's reliance on male-authored sources, which "perpetuates a gendered perspective that emphasizes men's heroic and dominant roles in anti-colonial movements" (Bartiza and Zrizi 24). Zimra reads Fantasia as challenging both hegemonies at once, the "Islamic brothers who extol the return to tradition" as well as "a monological, liberal West that reifies Islam's Woman on canvas" (qtd. in Barbo 25). Ali draws the two together, since "giving speech or the camera to women is to challenge not only the colonial discourse written by the French, but also that of patriarchal history, written by Algerian men" (Ali 54). The everyday erasure of the wife's name, finally, runs through both Djebar and Abadlia, from the household that never names its women, "'the household'" (Djebar 51), to the mother who "never

referred to my father otherwise than by the personal pronoun" standing for "him" (Abadlia 4). Inscribing female orature, Hamdi argues, means bringing to light what both patriarchal and colonial discourses had doubly depreciated (Hamdi 107).

II.5.3. The Fractured Self and Alienation: The Psychological Displacement of Women between "Voice" and "Silence"

The result of this double pressure is a self that fractures along the line between voice and silence. The veil's whiteness, Zakaria notes, is a "symbolic equivalent of blindness," an imposed "sameness" that erases individual identity (Zakaria 71). Djebar names the impasse at the centre of her own writing, "in writing, there is a kind of impossibility; writing flees, it is the cry that takes its place, it is silence" (qtd. in Spiridopoulou 4), and the freedom the French school gave her stays shadowed by the "weight of exile" (qtd. in Ali 50). Ringrose reads her entry into French as a psychic rupture, "a split, a rupture, a thetic crisis creating in her a second and conflicting sense of self… leading to the repression of her Arab identity and language" (Ringrose 56-57).

Voice and its recovery run against this fracture. Mortimer describes how "the symphonic structure of Fantasia allows her to bridge the gap between her unique trajectory and the 'peers in the gynaeceum,' blending their voices, previously silenced, with hers" (Mortimer 116), even as she asks whether "the oppressive nature of Algerian patriarchy may result in a fragmented self which, in desperation, finds expression in the irrational act of self-destruction" (Mortimer 122). Mernissi locates the source of the fracture in the structure of the domestic world, where women are "subordinate to men… deprived of power even within the world in which they are confined" (Mernissi 78), and where "the wider the gap between reality and fantasy (or aspiration), the greater the suffering and the more serious the conflict and tension within us" (Mernissi 83).

Translation across voice, tongue, and idiom is the writer's constant labour, since she must render not only voice into writing and the mother tongue into the other but also one cultural idiom into another (qtd. in Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 107). The self that emerges can feel "voiceless" and "cut off from my mother's words" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 213). Hirsch offers the ethic of witness that answers this condition, the effort, "in Paul Celan's terms, to 'bear witness for the witness'" while respecting long silence (Hirsch 89). Hiddleston reads the text as offering "layers of possible selves, all of which remain partially opaque and irrevocably fragmented by the language in which they are constructed" (Hiddleston 72), so that autobiography "becomes a sort of dissection, cutting open the singular being with the hope of revealing and defining her substance while destroying her in the same process" (Hiddleston 72). For Hamdi the pen becomes the sign of a struggle against oblivion, and writing awakens rather than kills the voice (Hamdi 111; Djebar qtd. in Hamdi 105).

Fanon gives the psychology of colonization its most compressed images, where "the individual's breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing" (Fanon 50), and colonial rule performs "a sustained work of clean-up, of expulsion of self, of rationally pursued

mutilation" at "the very centre of the Algerian individual" (Fanon 50). Djebar shows the woman's world collapsing into "the world of autism" once its whispered tenderness is severed (Djebar 148). Deffo and colleagues describe the "porous" boundary between "the colonial space and the patriarchal space" (Deffo et al. 75), and Daragmeh and Hamamra emphasize the narrator's sympathy for women "confined in the domestic sphere, deprived of their rights of education and movement, and forced to get married at an early age" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 59). Cixous names the muffled condition Djebar sets out to end, women "muffled throughout their history… in silences, in aphonic revolts" (Cixous 886), reduced to "the servant of the militant male, his shadow" (Cixous 880). The impossibility Djebar keeps returning to, "writing flees, it is the cry that takes its place, it is silence" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 248), is partly healed by the "trace of orality" that lets her "plunge into the recesses of her self" (Ben Salem 23). The difficulty of the first person recurs in the passage Ben Salem cites, "how could she say 'I', since that would be to scorn the blanket-formulae which ensure that each individual journeys through life is a collective resignation?" (qtd. in Ben Salem 74), as does the image of the veiled "strange little sister" whose story is transcribed "in a foreign tongue" (qtd. in Ben Salem 72). Bartiza and Zrizi record the same self-wounding autopsy, where "wounds are reopened, veins weep, one's own blood flows and that of others, which has never dried" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 32). Alloula catches the elusiveness of the veiled woman for the colonial eye, since "the eye cannot catch hold of her" (Alloula 7). Ali gives the writer's own sense of expulsion and errand, "I am expelled from over there to hear and to bring back to my people the traces of freedom" (qtd. in Ali 51), and the danger of self-exposure in French, "to lay myself bare in this language keeps me in permanent danger of detonation" (qtd. in Ali 46). Djebar's injunction, "so wrap the nubile girl in veils. Make her invisible" (Djebar 27), and Abadlia's memory of "the body stripped of voice" (Abadlia 6) close the fracture on the same note of enforced silence.

II.6. The Subaltern Woman and Narrative Resistance through Djebar's Writing

Out of this fracture Djebar builds resistance. She insists that she should "first and foremost be moved by the rape or suffering of the anonymous victims, which their writings resurrect," and asks, "how shall I find the strength to tear off my veil unless I have to use it to bandage the running sore nearby from which words exude?" (qtd. in Jadan 131). Her revenge is double, since she proves that colonization is rape and then colonizes the colonizer's language in turn, so that "her writing becomes a rape-like-act meant for revenge" (Jadan 136), a journey taken "at the whim of the former enemy, the enemy whose language I have stolen" (qtd. in Jadan 137). Anti-colonial writers like Djebar, Hiddleston observes, "set out to recreate the image of the colonized woman" (Hiddleston 96). The autobiographical form itself becomes political, since "by deviating from recognizable autobiographic forms, the project of representing the self acquires a political dimension" (Ben Salem 21). In this way Djebar "calls into question the traditionalist identity discourses about Algerian women and inscribes

the forgotten history into collective memory" (Husung 55), taking her stand on the borders of francophonie, "a francophonie in constant and irresistible displacement, why not?" (qtd. in Husung 58).

II.6.1. The Subaltern Condition: Spivak's Theory Applied to the Female

The narrator positions herself as a go-between. Fayad observes that "the narrator therefore views her role as that of an intermediary, not only between her people and the French archives, but also between a male-centered history and one that focuses on the role of Algerian women in the struggle for independence" (qtd. in Ali 47). To write autobiography under the sign of the conqueror's script is, in another formulation, to "learn to be taken seriously by the gendered subaltern who has not mastered that practice" (qtd. in Ringrose 91). The theoretical lineage is well known: anti-colonial critique has been taken up "by post-structuralist or new historicist theorists, the most well known of whom are Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Peter Hulme, and Stephen Greenblatt" (Natoli and Hutcheon 427), even as the First World debate "has systematically ignored the 'theoretical' work of Third World and post-colonial subjects" (Natoli and Hutcheon 435).

Mernissi complicates any simple story of female powerlessness, noting that "the serious blows to male supremacy did not come from women, who have been reduced to helplessness by their historical situation, but from the state" (Mernissi 96), against a family structure organized around "male supremacy and the systematic inhibition of feminine initiative, of female self-determination" (Mernissi 50). Djebar's translation of these lives is, in one reading, "a feminist transcription of the experiences of the colonized subaltern by Sheherezade" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 109). Bhabha's question about "how historical agency is enacted in the slenderness of narrative" frames the same problem (qtd. in Lekesizalin 211), and Hirsch stresses the uneven effects of catastrophe on "different historical subjects" (Hirsch 16).

Spivak's own terms structure the debate. Hiddleston recalls the colonial pretext of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (Hiddleston 156) and Spivak's device of "strategic essentialism" (Hiddleston 151), while insisting that Spivak's "subaltern" "is not an oppressed yet self-contained subject; instead it is singular and its contingency resists delimitation or definition" (Hiddleston 19). The tension in Spivak's position is noted directly, that "her points on minority resistance to Western theoretical doctrine are somewhat unsettled by her ongoing insistence on the inaccessibility of the subaltern subject" (Hiddleston 20). Gueydan-Turek turns this into a criticism, questioning whether Spivak's statement itself "denies the oppressed subject the capacity to self-represent effectively, thus perpetuating the silencing of the subaltern" (Gueydan-Turek 89), and observing that world-traveling writers like Djebar are "utterly empowered by their mobility in comparison to women still residing in Algeria" (Gueydan-Turek 99). Djebar's own ethic answers the danger of appropriation, since she refuses to "'speak for' or, worse, to 'speak on,' barely speaking next to, and if possible very close to: these are the first of the solidarities to be taken on by the few

Arabic women who obtain or acquire freedom of movement, of body and of mind" (Djebar 2). Deffo and colleagues confirm that these women are "absent from citations in colonial texts; their agency is systematically excluded from the narratives of war" (Deffo et al. 79), while Daragmeh and Hamamra find in the novel a "collective sympathy among the subaltern who are brought to life and page by the female author and her protagonists" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 68). Afilal restates Spivak's demand that the intellectual "unlearns" female privilege (Afilal 246), and Djebar registers the strange passivity of the listener before these voices, feeling herself "if not saint or sinner, at any rate mummified" (Djebar 189). The women's own refrain, "Alas! we are illiterate. We leave no accounts of what we have endured and lived through!" (qtd. in Ali 54), returns us to the silence that the postcard's "own criteria of truthfulness" once filled (Alloula 17).

II.6.2. Identity Formation through Narration: Storytelling as Resistance and Self-Recovery

Djebar's answer to silence is narration, and narration remakes the self even as it recovers the past. Jaouad remarks that "what makes this 'autobiographie plurielle' remarkable is that Djebar's narrative unfolds under the fecund sign of the feminine" (qtd. in Ali 45). She is, in Selka's reading, not only a witness of History but an active witness whose narrative works to establish the pairing of history and memory (Selka 64). The act of storytelling reorders the hierarchy of languages, since the words that preface it, "I [Djebar], your cousin, tell you [Lla Zohra in Arabic]," announce "both the displacing of the French language and that of the implied francophone reader in favour of the subaltern" (Ringrose 91). The narrator gathers the testimonies like incense, "I transcribe their cries, their laments; they rise like smoke, like incense, in the perfumed air of history" (qtd. in Nouari 348).

Storytelling here is a form of historical recovery. Natoli and Hutcheon describe this energy as directed "towards the reinsertion into history of those acts and figures of anti-colonialist resistance that imperialist forms of representation have systematically left out" (Natoli and Hutcheon 433), a recuperation of "the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of another knowledge and producer of alternative traditions" (Natoli and Hutcheon 433). Mortimer reads Djebar's acts of writing as "a form of subversion" and quotes her question, "is not writing a way of telling what 'I' am?" (Mortimer 116). Mesli sees the whole logic of History reversed, since "by giving voice to those who could only keep silent, Djebar reverses the colonial and patriarchal logic of History" (Mesli 164), writing "for those who, through silence, bequeathed to me their absence" (qtd. in Mesli 165). Majeed reads the seizing of the camera as "self-affirmation and rebellion," a self-expression that is "paradoxically a collective project, taken explicitly in the name of all the women who suffered repression in the harem" (Majeed 121).

Writing, for Djebar, is thus an act of resistance to her own displacement (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 107), one that gives agency "not only to the subaltern but also to herself as the alienated postcolonial writer she is" (qtd. in Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 110). Cherifa's testimony becomes "torch-words" lighting up her "accomplices" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 210). Lazreg

names the temptation that shadows the whole enterprise, "the temptation to speak in the name of illiterate women who do not have access to the Written word" (Lazreg 17). Hiddleston balances Djebar's confidence, that "her writing succeeds in incorporating the voices of Algeria's forgotten women" (Hiddleston 71), against the way "the text becomes an enterprise of self-investigation, whereby the author endeavours to understand and define her uneasy position" (Hiddleston 76). Gueydan-Turek reads Djebar's shift from writing "on" to writing "beside" as an ethical refusal of ventriloquism, an effort to avoid "any ventriloquizing act through this lexical and ethical shift from 'écrire sur' to 'écrire à côté'" (Gueydan-Turek 89). Fanon supplies the language of rebirth for this new subject, one who "is born, assumes his autonomy, and becomes the creator of his own values" (Fanon 83).

The recovered voice is finally a collective and even a sacred one. Djebar looks in "the fragments of ancient murmuring" for "a restoration of the conversation between women, the very one that Delacroix froze in his painting" (Djebar 151). Deffo and colleagues argue that by "resurrecting the heroines of the past, Djebar not only rehabilitates them but also sanctifies their speech, casting them as guardians of memory, as the living archive of a silenced past" (Deffo et al. 80). Daragmeh and Hamamra list the bodily channels through which her protagonists speak, from "writing clandestine love letters to strangers, ululation, oral documentation of their life history, and dancing themselves into a trance" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 60), so that "the dancer's possession of her sensual body mirrors the author's free access to language which enables her to create her authorial identity" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 71). Cixous frames the stakes as an entry into history, since woman "must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing" (Cixous 880) that lets her draw "her story into history" (Cixous 881).

Djebar's own credo returns once more, that "writing does not kill the voice but awakens it, above all to resurrect so many vanished sisters" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 247), even under the weight of an inheritance that makes her ask, "shall I succumb?" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 248). Ben Salem reads memory in the novel as resurfacing "through storytelling more than through personal recollections" (Ben Salem 23), naming the method "listen, hear, transcribe, write" (Ben Salem 23). The women's war stories dismantle the binaries of the War Story, making "a mockery of such notions as Defender and Defended" and cracking others "such as victory versus defeat, fact versus fiction, action versus writing, experience versus recording, war versus peace" (qtd. in Ben Salem 78). Bartiza and Zrizi read this writing as "a political act of resistance against the constraints of patriarchy, which seek to silence women and suppress their opinions" (Bartiza and Zrizi 30). Ali describes how Djebar, through transcription, "becomes a woman storyteller in her turn and takes her place in the traditional storytelling circle" (Ali 46), her nights stirring "with French words, despite the awakened dead… And the dawns rekindle because I write" (qtd. in Ali 43). Alloula closes his own book on a comparable note, "I close my hand back upon a pen to write my exorcism: this text" (Alloula 5). Afilal gives the

last defiant voices to the girls of the resistance, “kill me, since you love killing” (Afilal 256) and “I’ll leave men behind me!” (Afilal 256), and to Cherifa, “whose voice is now inscribed in history” (Afilal 256). Djebar’s final gesture gathers the whole project into a single image, “I seize on this living hand, hand of mutilation and of memory, and I attempt to bring it the qalam” (Djebar 209), while Abadlia recalls the shut-away girls for whom “writing toward the unknown became… a way of breathing new oxygen” (Abadlia 2).

II.7. Conclusion

This chapter has read Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade as a sustained answer to the double silence imposed on Algerian women. Beginning from the figure of the silent subaltern, it has shown how Djebar recovers the voices that both colonial and patriarchal history had erased, and how she does so by turning the colonizer’s own language into an instrument of return. The clash of Algerian and French identities, staged through the gaze, the veil, and the school, runs through the whole novel and through the writer’s own divided self.

The reading has also shown that the body is where colonial and patriarchal violence meet, and that the wound left there is at once physical and psychological. Djebar’s response is neither to look away nor to speak over the women she writes about, but to place her voice beside theirs, in a plural and polyphonic form that lets the collective speak without silencing the individual. Narration, in this light, is not merely a record of resistance but an act of it. By transcribing the buried voices of Mount Chenoua and the anonymous women of the conquest, Djebar remakes both their history and her own place within it, and gives the severed hand of the past a pen with which to write.

Chapter Three
Rewriting History in Djebar's Narrative

Chapter Three: Rewriting History in Djebar's Narrative

III.1. Introduction

This third chapter turns to the question that gives the study its title: how Djebar rewrites history. The earlier chapters established the theoretical frame and read the novel as a study of gender, identity, and narrative resistance. This chapter concentrates on the historiographical stakes of that project, on the way Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade contests the colonial record of Algeria and puts something else in its place. That something else is not a rival grand narrative but a layered, many-voiced counter-history built from archives read against the grain, from oral testimony, and from personal memory.

The chapter moves through four large stages. It first examines how colonial history was written and how Djebar challenges it, then turns to the alternative narratives of memory and orality that she sets against the official record. From there it considers the specifically gendered dimension of this rewriting, the way the recovery of women's experience reshapes the history of the nation, before tracing the passage from individual acts of resistance to a wider social transformation in which women emerge as active subjects of history.

III.2. Understanding and Challenging Colonial History

Djebar's rewriting begins from the recognition that history is itself a construction, a space in which, on Majeed's reading of her method, "past and present, tradition and innovation, and a multiplicity of voices and discourses can comfortably cohabit" (Majeed 118). Her autobiographical act is inseparable from her historical inquiry, since it "performs a fundamental desire to redefine and recuperate antagonistic and elusive surrogate homes" (qtd. in Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 107). By working on the French texts that cast Algeria as a violated woman, she reconfigures the bond between the nation and its women, since "by exploiting the French writings that describe the colonized Algeria as a raped woman, Djebar re-configurates the link between Algeria and its women" (Jadan 132), so that she and the writers Jadan pairs her with "unsilence the memory of rape, debunking the history of colonization and slavery and their legacies, and taking revenge on the rapist/White colonizer" (Jadan 137).

The core of the enterprise is stated by Husung: "the author rewrites the colonial and postcolonial History of Algerian women by reconstituting, through writing in French, their voices that were marginalized within the hegemonic discourse" (Husung 55). Djebar's own account of her ambition is sweeping: "I had to raise, about my country, all the questions, I decided! About its history,

its identity, its wounds, its taboos, its hidden riches, and the colonial dispossession of an entire century" (qtd. in Husung 59). The method has a theoretical kinship with Foucault, whose archaeology explores "how knowledge operates as a part of a system or network propped up by social and political structures of power" (Hiddleston 76). Yet the labour carries its own danger, since this kind of literature "runs the risk of re-producing and repeating the traumatic events it first intended to cope with" (Gueydan-Turek 85-86).

III.2.1. Colonial Discourse and How History Was Written under Colonial Rule

Colonial history was written from a position of power that shaped what could be seen and said. The conquest was staged, in part, through the unveiling of the harem, since "it is their unveiling and the representation of the harem from the inside that represents colonial conquest" (Zakaria 76). The violence of that history speaks plainly in the orders Djebar exhumes, as when Bugeaud commands his men, "if the scoundrels retreat into their caves, do what Cavaignac did to the Sbeah, smoke them out mercilessly, like foxes!" (qtd. in Ringrose 52). Against this, the postcolonial writer works "to map over colonialism's false historicism with a reconstituted, 'decolonized' sense of historical event" (Natoli and Hutcheon 433).

Djebar's counter-move is set out by Mortimer: she "challenges French colonialism by rewriting the history of France's conquest of Algeria as she uncovers occulted history and reinserts women into the pages of Algerian history" (Mortimer 114), reconstituting through French "their voices marginalized within the hegemonic discourse, that is, oral voices in dialectal Arabic and Berber" (Husung 55). The problem she faces is familiar to subaltern historiography, which has been "dominated by both colonial and bourgeois-nationalist elitism" (Hiddleston 69). Her answer rests "on the identification of ruptures and discontinuities within and between discourses in history" (Hiddleston 78), for she sees that the colonial record turns language into ornament, so that "language becomes an aesthetic ornament, a rhetorical device that paints the exploits of the army in grandiose terms but that connotes only its own pure form" (Hiddleston 74), and that "these artificial narratives, each competing with the other, mask more than they reveal" (Hiddleston 74).

Fanon exposes how colonial knowledge of the Algerian woman was pure projection, describing the cliché by which the Algerian woman "is 'inaccessible, ambivalent, with a masochistic component'" (Fanon 50), a fiction that the revolution shattered, since "in forty-eight hours the Algerian woman has knocked down all the pseudo-truths that years of 'field studies' were believed to have amply confirmed" (Fanon 50). Djebar reads the same orientalizing gaze at work in the record, an eye that "turns in circles around this closed society, stressing its 'feminine mystery' even more in order thus to hide the hostility of an entire Algerian community in danger" (Djebar 146). Alloula's project on the postcard aims "to force the postcard to reveal what it holds back (the ideology of

colonialism) and to expose what is repressed in it (the sexual phantasm)" (Alloula 4), and warns that failing to read it lays "the groundwork for its return in a new guise: a racism and a xenophobia titillated by the nostalgia of the colonial empire" (Alloula 4).

The documents themselves are French and masculine, a point Ali stresses: "Djebar emphasizes how far the historical documents are essentially French and masculine" (Ali 54), so that the writer must cling "to the ridges of French words, reports, narration, testimonies of the past" (qtd. in Ali 55). The colonial press even scripted the family drama of conquest, reducing Algerian grief to fanaticism in headlines Djebar cites, "'Arab father bitterly opposes his son's amputation which the French doctors advise'; 'Muslim fanaticism causes the son's death, despite French medical science'" (Djebar 50), a framing Abadlia records in a slightly different form (Abadlia 7). Afilal draws the epistemological lesson, that "it is historiography's explanatory and narrative 'emplotement' of past events that constructs what we consider historical facts" (Afilal 244), while granting that "for Djebar, the archive serves as a means to explore the invasion of Algeria from both the colonized and the colonizer's perspectives" (Afilal 246).

III.2.2. The Marginalization of Algerian Voices, Especially Women

The story colonial history tells is a story of exclusions. What counts as the past "radically shifts depending on whose memories matter, and what we have remembered" (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 12). The literary institution has worked the same way, since "much of the work of the institution has been, of course, a process of exclusion" (Natoli and Hutcheon 552), so that texts which "challenge conservative assumptions about race, class, or gender, have been systematically marginalized as 'flawed,' or banished from view" (Natoli and Hutcheon 552). A radical practice, by contrast, "should incorporate the voices of displaced, marginalized, exploited, and oppressed black people" (Natoli and Hutcheon 512).

Women bear the sharpest edge of this exclusion. Djebar restores those "whose contribution to the independence struggle had been overlooked, forgotten, or simply not known" (Mortimer 115), against a record whose writers felt the "itch to put pen to paper" and even the "rapist's intoxication" of narrating conquest (qtd. in Lekesizalin 209). Spivak's insistence on "the occlusion of the female subaltern" (Hiddleston 160) names the theoretical stakes, and Hiddleston reads Djebar's collection as concentrating "on the difficulties experienced by generations of Algerian women who have been excluded from history" (Hiddleston 59), a work that "implicitly denounces versions of the revolution that subsume moments of women's resistance beneath the veneer of a patriarchal grand narrative" (Hiddleston 59). Hamdi stresses that female orature, like the women who sustain it, was long devalued and kept in the shadows, all the more vital under a colonization that threatened the whole indigenous culture (Hamdi 107).

Fanon captures the depth of women's invisibility in colonial society, where "it is altogether commonplace to hear a European confess acidly that he has never seen the wife of an Algerian he has known for twenty years" (Fanon 26–27), and Djebar notes that in the record women, if they are still part of their tribe, "can only appear as powerless furies" (Djebar 146). The erasure was doubled, colonial and then national. Deffo and colleagues observe that Algerian women "were central figures of resistance in the struggle for independence yet remain almost entirely absent from colonial accounts" (Deffo et al. 79), and that after independence "the FLN orchestrates a second silencing of Algerian women, denying the heroic role they played in the struggle for liberation and erasing an entire segment of national history" (Deffo et al. 79). Against this double erasure, Djebar "actively participates in Algerian history and discourse by subverting the Algerian norms which cast women as the voiceless Other" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 60), producing "a rewriting of public history in the light of testimonies given through interviews with anonymous women who had their shares in fighting the colonial regimes but who nevertheless were excluded from official historic records" (Ben Salem 21).

Alloula frames his own reading as a response to a missing archive, undertaken because there exist no "photographic traces of the gaze of the colonized upon the colonizer," so that in their absence he attempts "to return this immense postcard to its sender" (Alloula 5). Ali makes the erasure a structural motif of the novel, noting that Djebar focuses "on the role of Algerian women, those forgotten by historians and chroniclers" (Ali 47), and that "this erasure of women from the discourse of the History of Algeria recurs as a leitmotif in Djebar's work in general, and in L'Amour, la fantasia in particular" (Ali 52). Djebar gives the forgotten dead their due in her own elegiac register, since "these men, these women, these children, for whom no mourners could ever officiate […] remain empty shadows" (Djebar 89), and she counts the imbalance of the archive exactly, that of thirty-seven accounts of July 1830 only three came from the side of the besieged (Abadlia 9). The general condition is summarized by Bartiza and Zrizi: "women in postcolonial nations frequently experience marginalization, both as gendered individuals and as colonized subjects, leading to their history being concealed and their voices disregarded" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 24).

III.2.3. Interrogating Colonial Archives and Questioning Official French Records

Djebar does not discard the colonial archive; she reads it against itself. Every site of memory, Jay Winter observes, carries layered meanings, since "that there are layered meanings in sites of memory should surprise no one" (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 23). The method is one of assembly, since a chapter of the novel "is constructed like a jigsaw puzzle, put together using a whole plethora of fragments taken from historical archives that are painstakingly pieced together" (Ringrose 51). Mortimer describes the weave, in which Djebar "intertwines Chenoua women's narratives and

oral documentation of the Algerian War with historical accounts of the nineteenth-century French conquest of Algeria drawn from French colonial archives" (Mortimer 115), and Debra Kelly reads this "exploration or excavation of history" as "bound up with the quest of the writer for the creation of a new place in the world for herself and for the postcolonial writer more generally" (qtd. in Mortimer 115).

The archive, reread, turns hollow. Mesli argues that Djebar "reverses the logic of colonial power: the official discourse, saturated with words, appears hollow, while feminine silence becomes the bearer of truth" (Mesli 165), so that "by revisiting the colonial archives, Djebar interrogates the very status of historical narrative" (Mesli 172). She rereads the chronicles of these first encounters to expose their contrasting styles (qtd. in Lekesizalin 206), and finds in them a "bizarre mix of curiosity, awe, prejudice, contempt and, at times, romanticism" (Lazreg 17), records as "ignorant and fragmented" as those of the East India Company (Hiddleston 156). The document that shocks the narrator most is "Pélissier's report on the asphyxiation of an entire tribe in the caves of Nacmaria in 1845" (Hiddleston 74), for Djebar sets out "to expose the sorts of experiences that official narratives gloss over or leave out" (Hiddleston 59), the "deliberate absence of information about the colonial disaster, an absence produced by methods of erasure, most strikingly the fire and mass graves evoked in Fantasia" (Deffo et al. 78).

The figure of the report becomes the figure of the palimpsest. Djebar recalls the caves through Pélissier and Saint-Arnaud and describes clinging "to the resting places of French words, reports, narration, testimonies of the past" (qtd. in Benhafsi and Bentounsi 248). Ben Salem records the detail that undoes the officer's own composure, the anonymous woman "whose foot had been hacked off, 'cut off for the sake of the khalkhal…'" so that the obscenity of the torn flesh "prevent[s] the ink of the whole letter from drying" (qtd. in Ben Salem 76). Alloula notes the photographers' appetite for "one theme especially" in "this large inventory of images that History sweeps with broad strokes out of its way" (Alloula 5). Ali describes the writer receiving the officer's report "to inscribe upon it, in my turn, the charred passion of the ancestors" (qtd. in Ali 55), so that "convoking the French documents, like Pélissier's, Djebar's writing works against them" (Ali 55). Djebar names Pélissier "butcher-and-recorder" who "brandishes the torch of death which illuminates these martyrs" (Djebar 89), and Abadlia elaborates the paradox that this "executioner-scribe" preserves the dead from oblivion, since "a century of silence has simply frozen them" (Abadlia 9), making Pélissier "the first writer of the first war of Algeria" (Abadlia 10). Bartiza and Zrizi supply the archival fact behind these readings, that Djebar "delved into the French archives and discovered 32 military documents including official reports and soldiers' letters sent home to their families," using them "to reconstruct

the history of Algeria in a new way" (Bartiza and Zrizi 25–26), reports that "are not objective or factual accounts" and "do not reflect a historical truth" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 25).

III.2.4. The Need to Rewrite History through Alternative Perspectives

Out of this interrogation comes the demand for another history. Winter insists that the "polyvalent character of these sites and their lives as palimpsests are also there in front of us, if only we have the eyes to see them" (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 36). Djebar takes up others' narratives as her own material, reading them differently in order to make of them her own interpretation and her own history (Selka 61). She chooses "to emphasise rather than disguise the fragmentation," Ringrose argues, "to draw attention to the mechanics of recovering history, and to the possibility of putting together an alternative picture of the past" (Ringrose 52).

The postcolonial project, Natoli and Hutcheon note, most visibly "takes place in the post-colonial project of rewriting the canonical 'master texts' of Europe" (Natoli and Hutcheon 430) and gestures "towards the question of how a 'history' of the colonized past might come to be rewritten in the future" (Natoli and Hutcheon 433), replacing the modernist view of history with one "decentered, discontinuous, fragmented, and plural" (Natoli and Hutcheon 466). The injustice to be answered is double, since "to this historical injustice was added the discursive injustice of fictionalizing women's lives" (Lazreg 3). Hiddleston reads the rewriting as central to the novel, "continued in L'Amour, la fantasia, where the writing process is theorised even more frequently" (Hiddleston 68), a collection that seeks "to correct the distortions of existing versions, to give voice to women silenced by oppression, and to offer an alternative mode of expression that might make sense of their position" (Hiddleston 59). Djebar looks toward "a concrete and daily liberation of women" (Djebar 151), and, confronting the double effacement, "develops a poetics that rewrites colonial history and restores visibility to the Algerian people, and especially to Algerian women" (Deffo et al. 79).

The result is a counter-history. History "is re-written from the standpoint of the marginalized other" (Ben Salem 22), letting Djebar "rewrite history and contest the official versions that obliterate women's role in the war of independence" (Ben Salem 23). She "reinterprets, depicts, and ultimately revises the history of colonial Algeria to construct a fresh cultural memory" (Bartiza and Zrizi 25), offering "a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse and shedding light on the experiences and perspectives of those who have been marginalized or silenced in the historical record" (Bartiza and Zrizi 26). Barbo reads her as challenging "accepted narratives of colonial Algeria by superimposing stories of the female ancestors over French historical accounts" (Barbo 25), acting "as an 'intercessor' on behalf of her female ancestors by rewriting history" (Barbo 25). Djebar names her own interruption of the record, "and then I intervene, with nomad memory and intermittent voice" (Djebar 209), and Ali gives the counter-history its clearest formulation, that against a monolithic, totalizing History

Djebar "proposes a palimpsest history that restores the hidden history of women who cannot write, a feminine counter history that subverts monolithic, totalizing History" (Ali 57).

III.3. Alternative Narratives: Memory and Orality

If the colonial archive is a palimpsest, then memory and orality supply the layer Djebar writes over it. Winter maintains that "all sites of memory are palimpsests, which have layers of meaning attached to them from their very beginnings," most evidently "when we deal with sites of memory created or adopted or adapted by subaltern or colonial populations, who use their own notation on top or alongside that of the once or still hegemonic power" (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 23). Tradition, in this sense, is "a form of counter-memory that recovers complex, yet submerged identities that constitute the social and political construction of public life" (Natoli and Hutcheon 466). The women's testimony carries exactly this counter-memory, as in the account, "as soon as we young women saw the French coming, we never stayed inside… If the enemy caught us we never said a word" (qtd. in Jadan 138). Memory here is selective and contested, a site "not just of what to remember or to forget, but also of what to select and what to ignore" (qtd. in Jadan 139), and the memory of rape becomes "progressively 'collective', not given but rather 'socially constructed', transgenerational, and multidirectional" (Jadan 139). Djebar frames this preservation as an act of inscription, "to be inscribed, to be preserved, even in French letters and the Latin alphabet!" (qtd. in Husung 59), through which she "inscribes the forgotten history into collective memory" (Husung 55).

III.3.1. The Power of Oral History in Preserving Female Voices

Women, in this tradition, are the keepers of memory. Drawing on Jansen, they are "storekeepers" of the histories of oppression they have lived, so that "one cannot prevent the symbolically mutilated body from communicating meaning" (qtd. in Spiridopoulou 5). Djebar reaffirms "the validity and value of the oral tradition, neglected in official documents that rely more on the written word" (Ali 56). The last part of the novel relies on "the oral testimonies of women who took part in the struggle, recorded by Djebar, and incorporated into the text" (Ringrose 77), so that as she becomes "a scribe and translator of oral history, recording in French women's conversations spoken in Arabic, these women… assume a properly prominent place in their nation's history" (Mortimer 115). The very title of the book, Gauch suggests, names this collage of anonymous women's historiography, translated from the rural Algerians' oral histories and joined to Djebar's own autobiographical reflections (qtd. in Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 105–106).

Orality is a fragile inheritance under threat. Djebar mourns that "my oral tradition… is in danger of vanishing" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 213), and Cooke describes writing the mother tongue "to resist the urge of history to silence women" (qtd. in Lekesizalin 213). Lazreg validates this method from the historian's side, supplementing archives "with interviews of women in their seventies" to

test whether an account was accurate (Lazreg 17). Hirsch gives the concept its fullest theory, describing "postmemory" as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before, to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (Hirsch 5), a memory "powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony" (Hirsch 33). Hiddleston notes how such resistance survives "only through the residual traces of oral history," which are "necessarily fleeting and indistinct" (Hiddleston 66), since women's experience "is more likely to be known through the passing on of musical rhythms or fragmented rumours than through published narratives on the Algerian past" (Hiddleston 60). In Algeria, Hamdi writes, orature is chiefly a female legacy, a "living and moving memory" of both female experience and the wider society (Hamdi 107).

Fanon shows how a besieged people rebuilds its own history through the spoken word, where "the battles of yesterday and the day before would be re-fought in accordance with the deep aspirations and the unshakeable faith of the group" (Fanon 69), and "the listener would compensate for the fragmentary nature of the news by an autonomous creation of information" (Fanon 69). Djebar gives orality its most beautiful image, since "the echoes of the battles lost in the last century […] reside among the illiterate storytellers: the whispered voices of those forgotten women have developed irreplaceable frescoes from these, and have thus woven our sense of history" (Djebar 147), so that "vocal orality thus becomes a means of writing the disaster" (Deffo et al. 80). The narrator's own voice, Daragmeh and Hamamra note, "brings justice to these silenced women, bringing them and their voices from the shelf of forgetfulness" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 60). Cixous hears in women's speech "the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman" and the writing of "white ink" (Cixous 881). Ben Salem describes how, "to reconstruct that memory, Djebar relies on oral tales and stories narrated by old women" (Ben Salem 22), and how in writing her childhood memories she is "taken back to those bodies bereft of voices" (qtd. in Ben Salem 74). Bartiza and Zrizi place her among the "many female authors" who "retrieve suppressed oral traditions, half-forgotten histories, unrecorded private languages, moments of understated or unrecognized women's resistance" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 26), blending archive and oral testimony into "a unique historiography of Algeria's colonial past" (Bartiza and Zrizi 26). Ali sums up the function, since "the voice unburdens memory" and "the whisperings of women" fill the gaps of the male genealogical line (qtd. in Ali 56). Djebar enters "the village homes where the muffled women retell their stories of the cavalcades of a more recent past" (Djebar 210), and Afilal explains that she records these voices not only "to prevent their disappearance in oral culture" but "to unearth the

historical truth of their masked identities" (Afilal 245), preserving testimony as raw as the account of a house burnt three times (Afilal 247).

III.3.2. Personal Memory as a Source of History

Beside collective orality stands the writer's own memory. The quartet, Mortimer notes, combines "personal and collective memory," juxtaposing "autobiographical fragments with Algerian history" (qtd. in Ali 48). Winter distinguishes the terms, preserving "the term 'memory' for the individual" while giving "the site to the group, and to historical analysis" (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 36). Through memory Djebar "recovers, through memory, hidden personal history" (Mortimer 113). The mother's silence becomes a form of transmission, since "my mother did not speak, or only a little. She kept silent the way one prays" (qtd. in Mesli 165), an "invisible transmission, an inheritance passed from women to women" from which Djebar "gathers the extinguished voices into a polyphony where silence acts as an invisible cement" (Mesli 165).

Personal memory, though, cannot simply retrieve the subaltern's life; Spivak's revised essay indicates "the impossibility of telling the subaltern woman's biographical story" (Hiddleston 158). Djebar's text therefore interleaves "memories of her own past" with "interjections, fragments of narratives by women of different epochs as well as self-conscious musings on the difficulties of the very project on which she has embarked" (Hiddleston 68–69). In Femmes d'Alger the character Sarah records, transcribes, and translates traditional women's songs, and listening to a recording plunges her into an exclusively female world where the songs fuse with her own childhood memories (Hamdi 108–09). Djebar roots history in the maternal voice, "the sound of the mother who, woman without a body and without an individual voice, finds once again the sound of the collective and obscure voice, which is necessarily asexual" (Djebar 146–47). Ben Salem confirms "the primacy of memory" in these accounts (Ben Salem 22), where "personal history fuses within the more controversial collective one, giving it legitimacy and authority" (Ben Salem 22). The excavation is bodily and vertiginous, as Djebar leans "over backwards, plunge my face into the shadows, closely examine the vaulted roof of rock or chalk, lend an ear to the whispers that rise up from time out of mind, study this geology stained red with blood" until "my body reverberates with sounds from the endless landslide of generations of my lineage" (qtd. in Ben Salem 77). Alloula recognizes himself as a possible object of the same colonial gaze "at some moment in my personal history" (Alloula 5). Ali returns to the maternal image, the mother who withdraws "to return as the voice of an indefinite foremother, a timeless chorus in which history retells itself" (qtd. in Ali 57), and to Djebar's resolve "to transmit what has been said, then written" among "women of the same tribe" (qtd. in Ali 46). Djebar names the act directly, "I, your cousin, translate this story into our mother tongue, and tell it now to you" (Djebar 163), while Abadlia lets private memory surface unbidden, when "in a blank of my flat, still memory surges the

recollection of a torrid, endless summer" (Abadlia 5), a memory "exhumed from this double ossuary" that "inhabits and animates me" (Abadlia 8).

III.3.3. The Shift from Official Historical Events to Lived Experiences

Djebar's history is finally a history of lived experience rather than official event. The historian's task, the editors argue, "is surely to excavate the forgotten from the layers of memory work to re-center the displaced and furnish a richer understanding of the lost past" (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 11). Djebar dates her own emergence to a remembered fire, by whose glow, a century later, she managed to leave the harem and found the strength to speak (qtd. in Selka 63). She pieces the past together from within, "I, in turn, piece together a picture of that night" (qtd. in Ringrose 53). Nora shows that even national space becomes "the true lieu de mémoire of French space," one "inexhaustible, insoluble, and fertile" (Nora xiii). Mortimer traces Djebar's own movement "from the periphery to the center, from relating other women's lives… to depicting her own" (Mortimer 124), presenting "an 'unofficial' picture of Algerian experience, a set of forgotten moments in women's lives, or a series of incomplete images unaccounted for in mainstream historical texts" (Hiddleston 59–60). Fanon states the enduring toll, that "today there is not a dead person in Algeria who is not the victim of French colonialism" (Fanon 100). Djebar employs travel "as a potent tool in her efforts to recover and unveil the history of Algerian women" (Bartiza and Zrizi 26), gathering both the maternal line and "the rewriting of national history, drawing mainly on the testimonies of women who took part in the war of liberation" (Ali 56). The lived detail overwhelms the official frame, as when the anonymous soldier's own emotion breaks through the report, "what pen could render this scene?" (Abadlia 9), and the book ends among "the muffled women" who "retell their stories […] before they seem to lapse once more into sleep" (Djebar 210).

III.3.4. Giving Voice to Silenced Women in Djebar's Narrative

The aim of all this is to give the silenced woman a voice without speaking in her place. Djebar "gives speech to the women whose 'buried voices' she unearths in the third part of the novel" (Ali 52). She slips in as an intrusive visitor into the vestibule of the recent past, holding her breath in an attempt to hear it all again (qtd. in Selka 64). In these "Voix" sections, Ringrose notes, Djebar "'thinks back through the Mothers of the Revolution' and writes back through her mother tongue, incorporating the oral testimonies of these women into the text" (Ringrose 80), transcribing "their cries, their laments" so that "they rise like smoke, like incense, in the perfumed air of history" (qtd. in Nouari 348). Giving written form to others' lives, "the writer forges new links with women whose lives differ from her own" (Mortimer 116). The crucial ethical nuance is Mesli's, that "the author does not speak in the place of these women, but from within their silence" (Mesli 165), foregrounding "the presence and voices of women silenced by a history that discounts them and fails to consider

their agency" (Majeed 122). This is the work Djebar names when she speaks of a bilingual writing that can "resurrect so many vanished sisters" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 106).

The strategy juxtaposes the colonizer's written accounts with the women's oral ones (qtd. in Lekesizalin 211). Lazreg lets her subjects "speak" by describing "the games they played, the songs they sang, the customs they practiced" (Lazreg 17), and a feminist analysis exposes "how they are repressed, suppressed, or silenced" (Hirsch 98–99). Hiddleston reads the volume as gathering "heterogeneous traces" into "an alternative collective, the shadow of the unknown feminine community lingering behind more familiar accounts of masculine activity" (Hiddleston 60). Through these strategies, Hamdi concludes, Djebar gives voice to experiences long kept in the shadow and creates bridges between worlds, past and present (Hamdi 105, 117). Djebar describes her own listening, "a listening in, by means of which I try to grasp the traces of some ruptures that have reached their term" (Djebar 1), and Daragmeh and Hamamra insist that it is important "to view the women of the trance as the material subjects of their own histories" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 69). In Ben Salem's account the women "speak (whisper) for themselves in the presence of the narrator, their veiled voices emerge, and their stories are eventually heard and transcribed" (Ben Salem 23), and Djebar imagines and resurrects "the unknown woman, whose tale has been handed down by story-tellers" whom "no letter from any French soldier was to describe" (qtd. in Ben Salem 70). The recovered voice takes flight in the novel's imagery, "one prolonged, preliminary cry has escaped her. […] Then the voice cautiously takes wing, the voice soars" (Djebar 126).

III.4. Gender and the Rewriting of History

The rewriting of history is inseparably a rewriting of gender. The purpose of narrating the memory of rape, Jadan argues, is "to break the double silence over rape as a silencing experience and silenced memory" (Jadan 131). The women's resistance is bodily and tactical, since in case of capture "they refuse to look at the colonizer's face and smear their faces with mud and excrement.... they protect themselves from rape and block out the colonizer's gaze" (Jadan 138). Nationalism, meanwhile, tied itself in part to "a resistance to the 'Westernization' of women" (Hiddleston 73), which makes the gendered stakes of Djebar's history especially fraught.

III.4.1. The Impact of Double Oppression (Colonialism and Patriarchy)

Djebar's women are pressed by two powers at once. Patriarchal power itself can be read as "a normatively traumatogenic institution" (qtd. in Spiridopoulou 2), and memory offers no easy cure, since "memory doesn't heal. It can open wounds as easily as closing them" (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 28). The colonized woman's body has "always, although in many different ways, been 'colonized' by the intersection of knowledge and power" (Natoli and Hutcheon 420), and she confronts "two patriarchal discourses, one French and the other Maghrebian" (Mortimer 114).

Mernissi locates the ideology that pits the sexes against each other, a "Muslim ideology, which views men and women as enemies, tries to separate the two, and empowers men with institutionalized means to oppress women" (Mernissi 17). Spivak's theme is precisely "the double subjugation of women by imperialism and by patriarchy" (Hiddleston 152), "the double heritage of colonial and patriarchal oppression" (Hiddleston 66).

The two oppressions interlock in strange ways. Fanon observes that the occupier's campaign to unveil women "had the effect of strengthening the traditional patterns of behaviour" (Fanon 34), and Djebar shows the harem's dialogue "almost definitively blocked" as the society partitions into vanquished and victorious (Djebar 141). The postcolonial state repeated the colonial erasure of difference, since "the military oligarchy of the postcolonial regime undertook to deny the ethnic particularities and the multiple identities of the country" (qtd. in Husung 58). Deffo and colleagues extend the point to "the double oppression of women in memorial practices, not only within colonial contexts, but also within contemporary capitalist and neoliberal societies" (Deffo et al. 82), and Bartiza and Zrizi name the resulting "dual form of marginalization: in the history of women and the history of the colonized" (Bartiza and Zrizi 24). Ali states Djebar's answer, that "by inserting the images and stories of women into the colonial history of Algeria, Djebar brings out the female self and body, buried by colonial violence and patriarchal society" (Ali 56).

III.4.2. The Female Body as a Space of Resistance and Expression

The body that patriarchy and empire sought to control becomes, in Djebar, a place of resistance. The veils are "masks, barriers that resist penetration," extending the protected private space into the public realm (Zakaria 71). The Maghrebi female body, Chikhaoui notes, is "a body clothed in prohibitions and restrictions… These women are dispossessed of their rights but also of their bodies" (qtd. in Spiridopoulou 2). Yet the body finds its voice, "the body seeks for its voice, like a fish swimming upstream" (qtd. in Ringrose 68), and resistance inflames "certain points of the body, certain moments in life, certain types of behavior" (Natoli and Hutcheon 336). Even silence becomes "the language of the shadow, a writing of the body, a trace of pain" (Mesli 170). Mernissi explains why the female body is transgressive in male space, since "a woman is always trespassing in a male space because she is, by definition, a foe… She is actually committing an act of aggression against him merely by being present where she should not be" (Mernissi 80). The translation of women's embodied experience into French is itself transgressive "because of its gendering of language, as female embodiment" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 106–107).

For Djebar the fourth and shared language of women is the language of the body (Hamdi 109), and the wounded body, figured as the severed hand transformed into a hand bearing the pen, becomes an instrument of writing and defiance (Hamdi 111). Fanon records how the woman fighter, "without

apprenticeship, without briefing, without fuss," goes "out into the street with three grenades in her handbag or the activity report of an area in her bodice" (Fanon 35), carrying out revolutionary work "with exemplary constancy, self-mastery and success" (Fanon 39). Djebar links the recovered voice "with a body in danger (in completely spontaneous motion), with a voice that calls, challenges, and abrades" (Djebar 144). Daragmeh and Hamamra read the trance dance as the fullest claim of the body, which "places the dancer in full subject position" and constitutes "her own means of resistance to the patriarchal discourse" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 68), so that Djebar "successfully deploys the female body as a vessel through which she questions the validity of the phallogocentric discourse" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 67). Cixous grounds this in her poetics of the body, since "women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics" (Cixous 886) and "more body, hence more writing" (Cixous 886). Ben Salem reads the reclaimed gaze as liberation, since "reclaiming both the colonizer's gaze and the masculine gaze liberates the female body and therefore voice" (Ben Salem 23), and cites Djebar's fourth language of the body, which "in trances, dances or vociferations, in fits of hope or despair, rebels" (qtd. in Ben Salem 75), and the dancing matron who "became indubitably queen of the city" (qtd. in Ben Salem 75). Bartiza and Zrizi describe a "style of writing that does not kill the voice, but rather awakens it" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 31) and read Zohra, who amid "physical suffering, violence, and profound wounds… discovers strength and seizes control over her pain, reclaiming authority from her oppressor" (Bartiza and Zrizi 34). Alloula turns the veiled woman's gaze back on the photographer, who, "having himself become an object-to-be-seen, he loses initiative: he is dispossessed of his own gaze" (Alloula 14), before "these white islets that dot the landscape" that haunt "the photographer-voyeur" (Alloula 13). Ali reads the camera in the same way, the single veiled silhouette "who, through a free opening in a masked face, devours the world" (qtd. in Ali 53), insisting that what must be subverted is "the medium creating the image" itself (Ali 53). Afilal preserves the fierce testimony of the mother who crushed her child's head rather than surrender it and then died "with her min at peace" (Afilal 251–252), and Abadlia reads Djebar's laying-bare of the body in French as an echo, and a reversal, of the previous century's ransacking (Abadlia 6).

III.4.3. The Movement from Silence to Voice in Representing Women's Experiences

The arc of the whole chapter is the passage from silence to voice. Picasso's abstracted reworking of Delacroix figures "the reconstitution of a people following the intrusion and destruction wrought by colonialism" (Zakaria 77). This post-traumatic approach, Spiridopoulou argues, decenters trauma "from the Western individual towards the trauma of 'subaltern' women" and integrates their silenced and marginalized voices (Spiridopoulou 7). Recovering a marginalized past, Beatrice Wayne contends, means confronting "a forgotten site" and "a broader lacuna in the collective memory," so

that “recentering and remembering… is crucial” (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 216, 218). In “Sistre,” Ringrose notes, the very expression of the song attests that the body “has not only searched for… but also found its voice… in a triumphant victory over… the violent silencing it had endured” (Ringrose 71). Foucault reminds us that “silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds” (Natoli and Hutcheon 340), and that to speak is to be “uncertain then, that my voice can or will be heard” (Natoli and Hutcheon 512).

Mesli reads Djebar’s silence as itself a counter-voice, since “silence is no longer an absence of voice, but a counter-voice, a space where another way of speaking Algeria takes shape” (Mesli 172), and “through this active silence, Assia Djebar rewrites History starting from those who were reduced to muteness” (Mesli 166). The novel “turns silence into a tool of revolt and liberation, where the colonized woman becomes the subject of her own narrative” (Mesli 166). Djebar dramatizes the shredding of the veil of silence in wartime and its re-covering afterward, “a barrier of words came down in transgression, a veil was shredded in front of a threatened reality […]. What words had uncovered in time of war is now being concealed again underneath a thick covering of taboo subjects” (Djebar 150). Fanon marks the woman’s rise “directly to the level of tragedy” (Fanon 36). Deffo and colleagues read this “shift from emotional expression to embodied voice” as dismantling “the vertical hierarchy between women and men, between Algerians and the French” (Deffo et al. 80), and Daragmeh and Hamamra argue that the trance scene “destroys the authority of the phallogocentric system that bridles women’s movement, voices, and passions, and suppresses their proper names” (Daragmeh and Hamamra 71). Cixous issues the imperative, “write your self. Your body must be heard” (Cixous 880). The image that carries this movement is the girl who writes, whose “voice, albeit silenced, will circulate,” whose “written word will take flight from the patio, will be tossed from a terrace” (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 29–30). Ali reads the result plainly, “no longer anonymous, the Algerian woman comes to life, because she writes” (Ali 52), and Afilal restates the credo that writing “does not silence the voice, but awakens it, above all to resurrect so many vanished sisters” (Afilal 253), even as the writer must stand “alone, stripped bear, unveiled” before “these images of darkness” (Afilal 253).

III.5. From Individual Resistance to Social Transformation

The final movement of the chapter follows the passage from private acts to public change. The novel’s polyphony, Selka argues, allowed another representation of colonization, though an ambiguous one, since the writer resorted to a great deal of subjectivity in order to lift the facts toward an aesthetic dimension (Selka 69). The murmur of the foremothers accompanies the writing hand, “so many voices splashing in a slow vertigo of mourning, while my hand runs” (qtd. in Mesli 171). Jadan reads decolonization as having “a cathartic effect” that “compensates for the victims’ trauma

of rape and humiliation" (Jadan 139), since the raped women "never give up resistance" and "refuse being dislocated and displaced into oblivion" (Jadan 140), so that both writers "subvert rape and avenge the victims while narrating the victims' 'petit recits' of rape, returning the gaze of the rapist" (Jadan 140). Displacement itself generates "a writing that continues to tell the individual and collective destiny by new means and through new voices/pathways" (Husung 55), a project of bringing banned cultures "into a new text, into a script that becomes my French" (qtd. in Husung 59). Gueydan-Turek reads the whole textual polyphony as signalling "the need to rethink the Algerian nation" (Gueydan-Turek 100), a writing "beyond restrictive geopolitical borders" (Gueydan-Turek 100) that "consciously deconstructs the straightjacketing imposed by both the French metropolitan literary market and postcolonial studies on Algerian writers as 'native informant'" (Gueydan-Turek 100).

III.5.1. Small Individual Acts of Resistance (Writing, Education, Speaking)

Change begins in small acts: a letter, a lesson, a spoken word. The pen, the key, and the camera lens, Ali writes, "consecrate Djebar's feminist project, founded on the reappropriation of language, space, gaze, and history" (Ali 54). Literacy in French gives the girl a strange mobility, as if the language "suddenly had eyes… I could move freely, run headlong down every street, annex the outdoors for my cloistered companions, for the matriarchs of my family who endured a living death" (qtd. in Ringrose 88). Writing becomes "the act of writing as a form of subversion" that moves "beyond social conventions that have limited many, or most, Algerian women's lives" (Mortimer 116), and the multiplicity of languages and selves lets writing "transform personal desire into social responsibility, where the self links with the community" (Fernández Hoyos and Sánchez Espinosa 108). Hirsch notes that feminist movements make "activism integral to scholarship" (Hirsch 16). Hiddleston reads the girls' clandestine letters as covert rebellion, since through them "they covertly rebel against a tradition of arranged marriages that denies them their agency" (Hiddleston 76). Hamdi argues that the heiresses of orature are not passive receivers but become creators in turn, grafting their own experiences onto an ancestral heritage, so that by writing orature into her novels Djebar perpetuates the heritage and even calls one figure "the metaphor of Algerian women who write today" (Djebar qtd. in Hamdi 114).

Even a walk into the European city is a victory "over herself, over her childish fears" (Fanon 38). Djebar records the call to arms that entered legend, after which "the 'Song of Messaouda' has been sung by the tribes in the Algerian south" (Djebar 143), and writing itself "becomes an act of resurrection or reincarnation" (Deffo et al. 80). Daragmeh and Hamamra trace a line of "strong, strategic, pleasure-seeking women who possess a remarkable ability to evade patriarchal laws and oppressive norms in order to create their own domestic spaces of freedom" (Daragmeh and Hamamra

62). Cixous insists that "a feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic" (Cixous 888), and that "writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought" (Cixous 879). Ben Salem reads literacy as "the outdoors and the risk, instead of the prison of my peers" with "the ultimate power to unveil" (Ben Salem 24), and preserves the resourceful testimony of the fighter who coached a frightened child to weep on cue (qtd. in Ben Salem 78). Bartiza and Zrizi conclude that "literacy breaks the ice and breaks silence by providing a platform for women to express themselves, even in environments where women's voices are heavily monitored and controlled" (Bartiza and Zrizi 30), and that Djebar's travels let women "have a platform and influence discourse, as well as serve as catalysts for social and political transformation" (qtd. in Bartiza and Zrizi 26). Djebar's grandmother thrusts the key into a woman's hand, "here, take this key I am holding! Take it!… Go out simply for the sake of going out!… it is your key!" (qtd. in Ali 53). Afilal recalls Fanon's charge that "the colonized man who writes for his people ought to use the past to open the future" (Afilal 246), so that "through narrative, Djebar's women gain agency and open future horizons of hope and healing" (Afilal 246). Djebar frames writing as revelation "of the mobility of my body, and so of my future freedom" (Djebar 173), and Alloula closes his hand "back upon a pen to write my exorcism: this text" (Alloula 5).

III.5.2. The Social Impact of These Acts on Collective Awareness

These private acts ripple outward into collective awareness. Winter describes how memory agents "form small groups and engage in public acts of remembrance," and how "the work of these memory agents breathes life into these sites of memory and mourning" (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 22). One woman's voice becomes "a thread in the tapestry of resistance," connecting "her personal liberation to the collective struggle for freedom" (qtd. in Nouari 348). Hiddleston reads Djebar as arguing that "ongoing communication and dialogue will be necessary for women's further emancipation" (Hiddleston 60). Fanon describes how "the breaches made in colonialism are the result of a victory of the colonized over their old fear and over the atmosphere of despair" (Fanon 38). Deffo and colleagues argue that voicing these experiences "not only grants legitimacy to female speech but also bestows upon it an agency powerful enough to shape a new mode of existence in the world" (Deffo et al. 80). Djebar's "torch-words which light up my women-companions, my accomplices" even as "these words divide me from them once and for all" (Djebar 144), and the severed hand she gives her sisters "becomes the symbol of women's liberation and of their need to tell their own stories" (Ali 52).

III.5.3. The Emergence of Women as Active Historical Subjects

The endpoint of the process is the woman as an active subject of history, since "no longer anonymous, the Algerian woman comes to life, because she writes" (Ali 52). Individual memories,

O'Malley shows, "can divert and contest the official historical narratives… by revealing the gaps" left by dominant institutions (Sluga, Darian-Smith, and Herren 11). As Djebar re-enters "the semiotic recesses of her mind," Ringrose argues, she accesses "the repressed voices of other women whose cries have been stifled for generations" (Ringrose 62-63). The strategic codification of points of resistance "makes a revolution possible" (Natoli and Hutcheon 337), recuperating "the role of the native as historical subject and combatant, possessor of another knowledge and producer of alternative traditions" (Natoli and Hutcheon 433). Mortimer notes that Djebar "alerts western readers to instances of Algerian women's agency, particularly in her portrayal of women combatants" (Mortimer 114). Mesli reads the outcome as a new kind of narration, since "silence is no longer an absence of voice, but a counter-voice" and Djebar "introduces the feminine, the fragmentary, the whispered, in order to break with the virile and triumphant narration" (Mesli 172). Mernissi observes a real historical "erosion of male supremacy" generating "greater tension between the sexes, at least in this transitional period" (Mernissi 96).

The record of women's combat is concrete. Lazreg counts the statistic of 10,949 fighting women, some 3.1% of active combatants (qtd. in Lekesizalin 211), and Hiddleston draws Djebar's "oblique comparison between the heroism of Messaouda, who when her tribe's fort was besieged in 1839 climbed onto the ramparts to call her brothers to arms, and the bomb-carriers of the war of independence" (Hiddleston 66). Fanon calls the decision "to have the Revolution depend on their presence and their action in this or that sector" a "wholly revolutionary step" (Fanon 34), predicting that "more and more, it is the Algerian woman, the Algerian girl, who will be assuming these tasks" (Fanon 38). Djebar centres the "fire carriers," the young women "whom the enemy incarcerates" (Djebar 144), and Deffo and colleagues describe how "women transcended their domestic roles and rose up as warriors to liberate Algeria from French domination" (Deffo et al. 80). Cixous names the long "history of gynocide" and declares, "I say woman overturns the 'personal'" (Cixous 888). Ben Salem reads Djebar's "role as 'the daughter of the nation' and the engaged writer" as fulfilled (Ben Salem 23), and Bartiza and Zrizi see the women "shape their own history actively" through "a counter-narrative that challenges dominant patriarchal interpretations" (Bartiza and Zrizi 36). Ali names the whole gesture "a feminization of History" (Ali 56), enacted through the living hand that Djebar tries "to make it carry the reed pen" (qtd. in Ali 52), while Daragmeh and Hamamra conclude that author and protagonists together "undermine the patriarchal ideology that casts women as the other defined by powerlessness, lack, and passivity" (Daragmeh and Hamamra 70), the grandmother reclaiming her body "for self-regeneration and self-invention" every time she dances (Daragmeh and Hamamra 71).

III.6. Conclusion

This chapter has read Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade as an act of historiographical repair. Djebar does not answer the colonial record with a rival grand narrative but with a palimpsest, a history layered from archives read against the grain, from oral testimony, and from personal memory. She interrogates the French military reports and the colonial postcard, exposes the exclusions on which official history rested, and restores to the record the women whom both the colonizer and the nation had erased.

The rewriting is gendered at every level. Because the colonial fantasy figured Algeria as a violated woman, and because patriarchy silenced the real women beside empire, the recovery of history and the recovery of women's voices become a single task. Djebar carries that task from the smallest private acts, a letter, a lesson, a dance, toward a collective awakening in which women appear at last as active subjects of their own history rather than objects of someone else's. The severed hand of the anonymous woman, taken up to carry the pen, is the emblem of the whole project: a history rewritten so that those it once buried can begin to speak.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

This study set out to examine the intersection of postcolonial identity and gender in North African fiction through a close reading of Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (*L'Amour, la fantasia*). Its guiding problem was the double silence imposed on the Algerian woman writer: written out once by the colonial archive, which reduced her to a veiled figure or a nameless "Fatma," and once more by the post-independence national myth, which subsumed her resistance beneath a masculine account of the struggle. The central question was how a woman cut off from her mother tongue and compelled to work in the colonizer's language might recover that silenced experience without either reproducing the colonial fantasy or speaking over the very women she hoped to reach.

To hold both pressures, empire and patriarchy, within a single frame, the study read the novel at the meeting point of feminist and postcolonial theory, drawing on Spivak's subaltern, Fanon's account of colonial mutilation, Cixous's call to write the body, Mernissi's reframing of gender in the Muslim setting, and the wider vocabulary of voice and silence, mimicry, ambivalence, and polyphony.

The analysis that followed yielded several connected findings. The first chapter established that gender, in Djebar's world, is a social arrangement engineered to contain rather than a natural fact, and that identity is not inherited intact but built, broken, and rebuilt through memory, language, and history. It also showed why feminism and postcolonial critique, for all their uneasy history, must be read together when the subject is the doubly colonized woman.

The second chapter carried these concepts into the text itself, demonstrating that *Fantasia* stages the crisis of a self divided between the traditional home and the French school, that the female body is the precise site where colonial and patriarchal violence converge, and that writing in the colonizer's tongue is for Djebar at once a wound and a weapon.

The third chapter argued that Djebar answers the official record not with a rival grand narrative but with a palimpsest, a layered, many-voiced counter-history assembled from French military reports read against the grain, from oral testimony, and from personal memory, and that this historiographical repair is gendered at every level, since the recovery of history and the recovery of women's voices prove to be a single task.

Taken together, these findings confirm the hypotheses advanced at the outset. The Algerian woman writer does occupy a position of double oppression, and her identity is indeed constructed rather than given. Writing in French functions, as anticipated, as both severance and instrument, allowing Djebar to seize the colonizer's discourse and turn it back upon itself. The female body emerges not only as the object of violence but as a space of resistance and expression, and silence

itself is shown to operate, at moments, as a form of speech rather than mere absence. Djebar rewrites Algerian history through polyphony rather than through a competing monologue, and, through narration, the Algerian woman is transformed from the silent object of another's story into the active subject of her own, so that the act of writing becomes, in itself, an act of resistance whose consequences reach beyond the individual toward collective awareness.

The theoretical contribution of the study lies in this insistence on holding feminist and postcolonial thought together rather than in sequence. By treating the colonial and the patriarchal not as two separate determinations but as two faces of one predicament, the reading offered here shows that concepts often applied singly, Spivak's subaltern, Fanon's expulsion of the self, Cixous's writing of the body, gain new precision when brought to bear on a text in which empire and tradition silence the same woman at the same moment. The study also reframes polyphony as more than a stylistic device: in Djebar's hands it becomes the formal shape of a politics, a way of writing the collective back into the record without silencing any single voice within it.

The study is nevertheless bound by certain limitations that should be stated plainly. It is a single-text case study, and its conclusions, however suggestive for North African women's writing more broadly, are drawn from one novel and cannot simply be generalized across the region or the genre. The analysis relies on the English translation by Dorothy S. Blair and on a body of criticism written across French, English, and other languages, which means that some of the linguistic texture on which Djebar's argument depends, the interplay of French, Arabic, Berber, and the "language of the body", is necessarily approached at one remove. The reading is also literary and theoretical rather than empirical: it interprets Djebar's representation of women's testimony but does not itself gather or verify the oral histories the novel transcribes. Finally, because the focus falls on *Fantasia* alone, the fuller trajectory of the "Algerian Quartet," within which this first volume was designed to resonate, remains largely outside the study's frame.

These limits point toward the prospects for further research. A comparative study extending the present framework to the other volumes of the Quartet, *Ombre sultane*, *Vaste est la prison*, and the later autobiographical work, would test how far Djebar's poetics of voice and silence develops across the sequence. A dedicated analysis of her cinema, and of the relation between her camera and her pen, would enrich the account of the returned gaze sketched here. Comparative readings alongside other Maghrebi and postcolonial women writers, or across the francophone and anglophone traditions, could clarify what is specific to the Algerian case and what belongs to a wider condition of double colonization. And a study attentive to reception, how Djebar is read within Algeria as against the metropolitan literary market, would address the very charge of the "native informant" that

the novel itself anticipates. Approaches drawing on translation studies and on trauma and memory theory, only touched upon here, likewise remain open and promising.

In the end, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* stands as proof that narration can itself be an act of resistance. Djebar neither looks away from the buried violence of the Algerian past nor speaks over the women who endured it; she places her voice beside theirs, and gives the severed hand of the anonymous woman a pen with which, at last, to write. It is in this gesture, history rewritten so that those it once buried can begin to speak, that the Algerian woman passes, in Djebar's hands, from silence to voice, and emerges as the active subject of her own history.

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Assia Djebar, Biographical Profile and Literary Chronology

Assia Djebar is the pen name of Fatima-Zohra Imalayène, born on 30 June 1936 in Cherchell, a coastal town west of Algiers, into a traditional Algerian family of Berber (Chenoua) origin. Her father, Tahar Imalayène, was a teacher of French, and it was largely through him that she attended the French colonial primary school at an early age, the founding scene to which *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (originally *L'Amour, la fantasia*, 1985) repeatedly returns. She also studied at a private Quranic school, an early experience of the two languages and two worlds that structure her writing.
In 1954 she travelled to Paris to continue her studies, and in 1955 she became the first Algerian Muslim woman admitted to the elite École Normale Supérieure de jeunes filles. She adopted the pseudonym "Assia Djebar" in 1957 for the publication of her first novel, *La Soif* (translated as *The Mischief*), reportedly so as not to shock her family; "Assia" evokes consolation and "Djebar" intransigence. She went on to become a novelist, historian, translator, and filmmaker, widely regarded as one of the Maghreb's most influential writers. She was awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1996 and, on 16 June 2005, was elected to the Académie Française, the first writer from the Maghreb to be so honoured. She died on 6 February 2015 in Paris.

Chronology of Life and Selected Works

Year	Event / Work
1936	Born Fatima-Zohra Imalayène on 30 June in Cherchell, French Algeria.
1954	Travels to France to continue her studies (khâgne, Paris).
1955	First Algerian Muslim woman admitted to the École Normale Supérieure de jeunes filles.
1957	Publishes her first novel, La Soif, adopting the pen name "Assia Djebar."
1959	Publishes Les Impatients.
1962	Publishes Les Enfants du nouveau monde; Algeria gains independence.
1967	Publishes Les Alouettes naïves.
1985	Publishes L'Amour, la fantasia (Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade), first volume of the "Algerian Quartet."
1987	Publishes Ombre sultane (A Sister to Scheherazade).
1991	Publishes Loin de Médine (Far from Madina).
1995	Publishes Vaste est la prison (So Vast the Prison).
1996	Awarded the Neustadt International Prize for Literature.
1999	Defends her doctoral thesis at Paul-Valéry University, Montpellier III.
2001	Becomes a full professor at New York University.
2005	Elected to the Académie Française (16 June), the first Maghrebi writer admitted.
2015	Dies on 6 February in Paris.

Source(s): https://www.britannica.com/biography/Assia-Djebar

https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/assia-djebar/

Appendix B: The Structure of Fantasia and Its Corpus of Voices

Representative Voices Discussed in the Thesis

Figure	Role in the novel / study
Cherifa	A young woman of the resistance whose recorded testimony Djebar preserves; read by Bartiza and Zrizi as a subaltern who "expresses her own voice."
Lla Zohra	An elder kinswoman whose spoken account Djebar translates and relays ("I, your cousin, translate this story…").
Messaouda	The historical woman who, when her tribe's fort was besieged (1839), climbed the ramparts to rally the men; the "Song of Messaouda" commemorates her.
The anonymous women of the caves	The Ouled Riah and other victims of the enfumades, whom Djebar restores to the record from the French officers' own reports.
The narrator / "I"	Djebar's own shifting first person, sometimes "I," sometimes an "I-we", which conceals the personal story within the collective, polyphonic voice.

Source(s): https://www.herodote.net/almanach-ID-2991.php