Feminism or Feminisms? Algerian Women Authors in Dialogue

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This research examines the ways in which women's interwar fiction in Algeria (1962/1991) advocates women's emancipation on different grounds, sometimes according to opposing ideologies, to serve certain cultures and agendas. It unearths the intellectual, historical, and socio-political factors that contribute to such a diversity. This research draws on decolonial and transnational theories which develop a normative feminism for 'other' women that goes beyond the long-established antagonism: anti-imperialism/Feminism. This defines the ways in which models of emancipation for Algerian interwar women are not - and should not be - only associated with French and Western values. Devoted to the study of ten novels by six leading women authors, this thesis will argue that women's interwar fiction offers four different models of womanhood, echoing the findings of contemporary studies by Algerian sociologists. Although a significant amount of research has been carried out on women's representation in the Algerian novel, there has been no effort to audaciously address the ideological nature of the discourses communicated on women. Additionally, the existing literature has not sought to examine the effects of discourses on the textual. This is why part of this thesis consists in arguing that each model of womanhood develops - and is developed by - an apposite language of writing.

The thesis unfolds in four analytical chapters. After an introduction to the historical, literary, and theoretical backgrounds to this research, each chapter is a case study and detailed narrative analysis which examines how a given perception of the feminine is inflected by a distinct system of ideals. The first chapter analyses two texts by Zhor Ounissi to explore the 'traditionalist' perception of women's emancipation as theorised by Boutefnouchet. The chapter traces the origins of this conservative conception by establishing existing links with the written and preached teachings of the Algerian reformist school where Ounissi herself was a student. The second chapter looks at a selected set of texts by Hawa Djabali, Myriam Ben, and Nina Bouraoui to explore the ways in which women's emancipation in these works is defended according to Western

ethnocentric variants of ‘universal’ feminism. These variants are analysed in terms of the radical critique of communal values, conservative religions, and ‘patriarchal’ traditions as seen by Westerners. The third chapter is mainly devoted to the study of two novels by Aïcha Lemsine. It demonstrates how *La Chrysalide* and *Ciel de Porphyre* do not simply criticise patriarchal traditions as would do Western feminists. It argues that these texts propose a ‘reconciliatory’ approach to women’s emancipation in the sense that the traditional and the Western go hand in hand, to reproduce values belonging to Islamic socialism as conceived by Ben Bella and Boumedienne (1962/1979). The chapter traces the origins of this conception on the level of the literary by establishing links with colonial literatures, namely Djamila Debèche’s *Leïla, jeune fille d’Algérie*. The fourth chapter looks at three novels by Assia Djebar. Overall, it shows how intellectual and academic Djebar succeeds in formulating an authentic theory to account for gender inequality. The chapter focuses on how Djebar’s narrators criticise specifically Algerian forms of gender oppression. Additionally, it shows how female agency in these works remains attached to the author’s traditions, religion, and culture.

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Chapter 3 - Women and progressive Islam in Lemsine's *La Chrysalide* and *Ciel de Porphyre*

Chapter 4 - Djebar and Algerian feminism

Notes on translation and transliteration

The translation of quotes from Arabic texts to English in chapter one is our own. Translation has been approved by Dr. Hanem el-Farahaty, currently a senior lecturer and specialist in translation at the University of Leeds. Concerning transliteration, it is true that this thesis deals with Algerian literary texts which would probably invite the reader to expect a transliteration according to Maghrebi, more or less Algerian Arabic. This, however, adds complexity to both Middle Eastern Arabic and non-Arabic readers to whom a Maghrebi transliteration of words such as Ben Badis may well seem different to the more common Ibnu Badis, or what they may have generally read elsewhere and thus causes disorientation.

Thus, for the sake of clarity the adopted transliteration for this thesis is basic and very simplified. There is no use of accents to try to give a certain phonetic to words. For instance, there is no use of macrons on long vowels or diacritics on emphatic consonants. The use of the closing apostrophe indicates the Arabic hamza. This applies to Arabic

words where the hamza is placed in the middle of the word. One recurring example in this thesis is the word ‘Qur’an’. The Arabic letter ‘qaf’ is marked with the Latin letter ‘q’. The Arabic letter *‘ayn’,* if occurring as word initial, is marked with the closest corresponding vowel in English. For instance, the letter ‘ayn’, depending on the umlaut, can be marked with the Latin letter ‘u’ as in the word ‘Ulemas’. It can also be marked with the Latin letter ‘a’ as in the proper name ‘Amar’. If the umlaut happens to be the strong Arabic ‘dama’, ‘Ayn’ is marked with the Latin letter ‘o’ as in ‘Omar’. Note: if the Arabic letter ‘ayn’ is mid-word, it is indicated by a closing single quotation mark. One recurring example in this thesis is the word ‘shari’a’.

Proper names are spelt as commonly found in secondary literature. Accordingly, we follow a formal, conventional form of writing proper names. For instance, Abdu al-hamid Ibnu Badis instead of Abdelhamid Ben Badis. Overall, Arabic names are spelt in an Arabised transliteration for ease of reading unless quoted or referred to from a given source. Surnames are gallicised. Names of clubs and journals are written as found in most secondary sources to make it easy for readers to identify names they may have read elsewhere.

Introduction

Back in 1830, the invasion of the capital Algiers by the French marked the military, political and social occupation of Algeria, a presence that lasted 132 years. During this period, Algerian men and women were kept in unprecedented subjection and hardship. Although most of the time that the French spent in Algeria during the nineteenth century consisted in fighting the different rebellions which the indigenous population waged against their oppressive colonisers, one must not forget the cultural invasion that was taking place simultaneously. The French did not acknowledge the existence of an Algerian culture and considered local traditions barbaric. The best example one could think of is the French author Louis Bertrand who considered Algeria originally French. (See especially his 1899 *Le Sang des races*).

Invading Algeria culturally, however, was by no means an easy mission and had to be completed in the light of a well-planned project. Colonists quickly understood the importance of education to their goal of assimilating the colonised in order for them to guarantee a future generation of Francophone Algerians. These Francophone Algerians would not only be expected to speak French, but also and most importantly, to feel belonging to French civilisation. While this was the view of important figures in the colonisation of Algeria such as Genty de Bussy, who was government representative, we also learn in Nicolas Harrison's *Our Civilising Mission*, *lessons of colonial education* that the project was more about acculturation than francisation. He interestingly observes that, in a confidential report addressed to Jules Ferry as Ministre de l'instruction publique:

> In 1888, Inspecteur général Leysenne wrote: «On offre à l'enfant indigène une instruction française qui le tire en apparence de son milieu mais qui le laisse ensuite désarmé, incapable de se faire une place entre une civilisation qui l'abandonne et une barbarie qui le reprend» (Harrison, 2019, p.45).

It is worth observing that although the indigenous population in their vast majority did not trust French education, a minority was nevertheless tempted by the better living conditions such an education could potentially provide in the future. The majority which chose not to attend French schools, most notably for religious reasons, lived in unprecedented poverty since they had been for decades oppressed and stripped of their lands.

After the First World War, this project began to bear fruit. This could be seen, among other things, in the formation of an Algerian middle class. Members of this class came to be known as the 'Young Algerians', *Les Jeunes algériens*. They represented a very small percentage of the Algerian population. Knauss notes that 'In 1919 the new middle class scarcely numbered one thousand people' (Knauss, 1987, p.47). Although they were proud to belong to France, the 'Young Algerians' did not reject their status as Muslims. It is the first French-educated generation however, who wanted to spread the benefits of what they regarded as a 'civilising mission'. The ideas of this class are expressed in works such as *Le Jeune algérien. De la colonie vers la province* by Ferhat Abbas (1930).

The French education provided to the ‘Young Algerians’, however, was generally completely denied to local girls and women for a number of reasons. This could be partly explained by the fact that colonial France was far from fully recognising basic constitutional principles - that were supposed to establish France as a democratic republic - such as equality among French men and women themselves locally, let alone among men and women they had just colonised. In addition to this, the military nature of French colonialism in Algeria since 1830 meant that it was mainly males fighting other males which kept women completely out of public affairs.

Additionally, one must not forget that the nature of this education was both imperialist and gender based. Despite the absence of a political project to educate girls, there may have been some individual efforts to educate them. Similar to what was being planned for their brothers, these efforts were intended to prepare a future generation of French educated mothers who would certainly become the bearers of a fully assimilated class. The aim was thus not to educate these women per se but to benefit colonial France in the first place. So that the French education these girls received would pass on to the next generation in the most efficient of ways, most of these pupils, girls and boys, were selectively orphans. This because these orphans, having grown up together since childhood, would form a community and would most likely get married among themselves and thus secure the aspired future generation. In addition, despite it conveying French ideals, these individual efforts for education were in many ways limited to preparing women to be future housewives. For instance, weaving, knitting, and sewing were regularly taught to girls unlike boys. Thus, indigenous girls who were chosen for this privilege, education, were not seen as students for professional careers and skilled jobs. However, one must not forget to note two points: although this educated minority was dominated by males over females, the very limited number of Algerian women who could read and write during the first three decades of the 20th century belonged to this middle class. In addition, the first Algerian feminists after the Second World War emerged from its ranks.

Members of this French educated class, however, were so different and so distant from their fellow countrymen. These latter were isolated from political and social life in general

as they were considered little more than second class citizens in their own land, far from being considered equals to French settlers as wished for by the Algerian middle class. Colonial France justified the exclusion of Algerians by putting it down to their religion which in the eyes of the French made the indigenous different, savages, uncivilised, and thus inferior. This institutionalised exclusion as we shall see shortly, was significant to the colonised and more so to women. It is in fact best exposed when it comes to analysing the status of colonised women. Professor Mary Ann Tetreault explains that 'French educational policy and personal status regulations discriminated against Algerian girls and women, worsening their positions in a native culture where they already stood below their brothers' (Tetreault, 1995, p.358).

Of course, referring men and women to a special court and laws such as 'le Statut personnel' which regulated family relations, inheritance, marriage, and divorce, and which depends on shari'a, that is Islamic law, aimed at excluding the indigenous. McDougall remarks that according to the 1865 personal status law, ''The Muslim native is French', declared article 1…Nonetheless, he will continue to be governed by Muslim law' (McDougall, 2017 p.122). McDougall goes on to note that 'This, to republican lawmakers, was a matter of social norms, behaviours and religious beliefs that, like immaturity in adolescents or irrationality in women, were incompatible with the full exercise of citizenship' (McDougall, 2017, p.123). What McDougall seems to overlook however, is that this became paradoxically the fundamental element that would give these Algerians an identity. Of course, the indigenous population was first defined by belonging to this status. The fact of defining themselves in relation to this status, that is to say to religion, was not simply a mechanical effect of a given law being imposed on a given population. In fact, their real social bond was religious, and it is through this belonging to Islam that cultural nationalism was born.

The masses - mostly women - suffering from social exclusion and the aforementioned middle class facing the inevitable prospect of francisation were not without response. This class division being caused by religion in the first place as we have just seen, it is hardly surprising that the response in question would be based on religious grounds and principles. Indeed, a certain category of Arabic-educated Algerians, educated or at least

influenced by the Middle East, emerged. Members of this category sought to guide their compatriots and address problems caused by ignorance, exclusion, and acculturation. These were the exemplary Algerian reformists. (See especially Ali Merad's 1967 *Le Réformisme Musulman en Algérie de 1925 à 1940*). Reformists were led by Sheikh Abdu al-hamid Ibnu Badis. Also known as the Algerian Ulemas, they elaborated ways to improve the cultural and socio-economic situation of their compatriots drawing on Islamic teachings. This consists in considering the Qur'an a main source of ethics and social development. This theological and moralistic approach was in itself a reaction to the secular - and sometimes Christian - values offered to Algerians by their European colonisers as modern models to follow. The Ulemas held French modernity responsible for all social ills, such as prostitution and ignorance in the case of women. In fact, reformists overemphasised on women. Studies such as Ali Merad's (1967) consider reformist views anti-modern and in many ways very conservative when it comes to women.

Looking at education, for instance, despite their advocacy of Muslim women's education, their approach was gender-based, in some ways similar to the kind of education offered to French-educated women, though for different reasons. Their educational approach aimed at preparing women for domestic tasks and was by no means aimed at helping women gain marketable skills. This was motivated by the will to keep women at home and to control prostitution. Algerian men were encouraged to choose housewives as these were considered good women. Faith was the virtue demanded of females most particularly. Thanks to this moralistic approach, reformists began to be increasingly popular among the indigenous population. By the end of the 1920s and early 1930s, the Ulemas encouraged the masses to send their daughters to Arabic and religious schools (al-madrasa). This because only religious education for them could possibly guarantee a future generation of moral guardians and most notably of veiled women.

The veil in particular played a significant role in giving shape to this culturally anti-colonial identity. This was so significant that in order to weaken the War of Liberation (1954/1962), colonists sought to win over Algerian women by using the question of the veil to their favour. This was the case of the various colonial campaigns which, under the colonialist

propaganda of emancipating women, sought to unveil Muslims. The best example one could probably think of is the 1959 reform of the *statut personnel*. Perego argues that around the 1950s, colonial officials began 'to treat the veil as a matter of utmost importance to the state' (Perego, 2013, p.162). The aforementioned campaigns did eventually meet with a strong reaction from Algerian women who organised themselves in associations such as the AFMA (Association of Algerian Muslim women) in 1947, which was presided by Mamia Chentouf. This was also the position held by the National Liberation Front (FLN) which found in the veil a means to unite Algerian men and women against the French and thus join their ranks.

This colonial history of Algeria is directly relevant to the discussion of women's representation in literature. It is worth observing that the situation of women both during and after colonisation was significantly shaped by the antagonistic discourses expressed by the 'Young Algerians' on the one hand, and the conservative theologians on the other. As we shall see shortly in the next section, these discourses resonated heavily in colonial Algerian literatures. On this note, one must not forget that this bipolar literature, bipolar both language and discourse wise, affected postcolonial literatures massively in its turn. As we shall see in chapters one and three, these influential discourses orchestrated the perception of various notions concerning the construction of the image of women in postcolonial literature.

The Algerian Literary Scene

Perceptions of women, albeit by the aforementioned conservative reformists or by the French-educated middle class, were expressed through journals and social groups which served as an outlet at the time. As far as the French-educated Algerians are concerned, societies such as the Cercle des jeunes algériens in Tlemcen and the Cercle de Salah Bey in Constantine since 1907 were indispensable to spreading the modern values they had learnt in French schools. They also had their own presses such as al-Misbah, which was founded in 1904. Despite the hostile environment of a colonised society which clearly favoured its male members, this French-integrated minority was open to feminist

ideology. It was not uncommon to find articles defending women's rights that were borrowed from European and international journals published in their famous periodical *La voix des humbles* for instance. As previously stated, works of literature also remain a massive reservoir for such legacies. Many novels were used to showcase the impact that the colonial modernity brought by the French had had on women. (See for instance, Abdu al-qadir Hadj Hamou's 1925 *Zohra, la femme du mineur* and Mohammed Ould Cheikh's 1936 *Myriam dans les palmes*).

As for reformists, the Arabic-educated faction, they voiced their ideas - including those on women - in cultural societies such as Nadi al-Taraqi (1926), as well as in their famous journal *al-Shihab* (1925), and also *al-Basa'ir* (1936). Arabophone poetry at the time, too, echoed the concerns of the Ulemas and their conservative views concerning the place of women. It is worth citing the example of the poet Al-hadi al-Senoussi who wrote a poem entitled *The Algerian woman*. This poem praises the Arab origins of the Algerian girl in question. According to the poet, as for reformists, Muslim men were the saviours of their sisters (for reference, see Ahlem Mosteghanemi's 1985 PhD thesis *Algerie Femme et Ecritures*). Around the mid-1930s, a new literary genre was born, and this was the short story. Encouraged by the Ulemas, this new literary genre gave an extra dimension to tackling the problems faced by women and of course, distributing reformist propaganda (see chapter 1). As a result, this new genre did not take long to occupy an important place in *al-Shihab*. One can hardly skip citing the example of Redha Houhou. In a short story entitled *Aïcha*, this author extols the benefits of the Ulemas and their reformism in matters relating to women. He is particularly grateful to the Ulemas and their role in fighting prostitution and encouraging women's education (for reference see also Mosteghanemi's 1985 PhD thesis).

Thesis Structure

Up to this point, the reader may have already observed that in such a society which had been undergoing economic and social upheaval since 1830, the question of women was important not only to intellectuals from both camps, reformists and the 'Young Algerians', but also to writers. One must not forget that the question of women in particular provided

a perfect platform to bring to light the competing ideologies holding sway in such a colonial setting. For instance, the representation of the indigenous female subject allowed a space of literary creativity to freely convey an anti-colonial message which otherwise would have met with severe censorship. This meant, among other things, that Algerian women's representation, let alone their place in colonial society, was problematic. Cheref explains that 'In countries with a history of colonialism, women's quest for emancipation, self-identity and fulfilment can be seen to represent a traitorous act, a betrayal not simply of traditional codes of practice and belief but of the wider struggle for liberation and nationalism.' (Nasta, 1991, cited in Cheref, 2010, p.48)

It is in this sense that the political divided the Algerian literary scene around the question of women into two camps. If Arabophone literature devoted a central place to women, it was mainly to protect them from the harmful influence of colonial society. Similarly, Francophones sought to assimilate women and thus bolster the project of cultural colonisation. The battle for women was for writers a purely ideological issue in the first place. In many Arabophone works, emancipation for women is represented in such a way that the female characters who subvert traditional ways of living can only aspire to French values. In a word, the question of women's emancipation was seen as a choice of being either Algerian or French.

This conflictual situation was most eloquently expressed in the Algerian novel that was produced during the first three decades after independence. Modernity in the postcolonial novel is constantly associated with colonisation. One must not forget that during the first two decades after independence, the spirit of nationalism was at its peak, including among authors themselves, since many of them had actively participated in the War of Liberation. In most of their texts, women who want to break with tradition, for instance, find themselves unconsciously reviving an alien civilisation. From this perspective, independence saw the advent of a literature which did not completely break with literatures of previous generations, though it did - and still does - tackle new themes centred on a questioning of contemporary issues. Indeed, during the 1970s, the demarcation with War Literature, colonisation, and pre-independence was becoming increasingly profound. Socio-historical conditions were disrupted as economic and

political priorities evolved. The situation of women was becoming increasingly important to the social and ideological fields, and consequently to literature.

The questioning of contemporary issues meant that postcolonial writers were involved in the reconstruction of their nation. Their literature echoed all the expectations of the people. In addition to the question of women, the quest for identity was at the centre of many novels. For instance, Mammeri's heroes in his *La Traversée* (1982) show how the question of national identity was still very complex despite the departure of the French. Writers now directly challenged a socio-political system they deemed inadequate. As a result, it is hardly surprising that under the one-party regime which ruled the country for almost 27 years, censorship was often standing in the way of such authors. One example is that of Boudjedra who was imprisoned 3 times during the Boumedienne era. Guest of Le Café Littéraire on the 19th of January 2019, a weekly conference mainly organised by university teachers and postgraduate researchers, Boudjedra closely links his attempts to learn Berber on the 15th June 1965 with his imprisonment four days later and with the coup d'état of 1965. Furthermore, the place of women and gender oppression now unearthed intellectual confrontations, political debates, as well as philosophical and psychological dimensions in a way that went beyond the already discussed dichotomy, (tradition/modernity). The female characters of Rachid Boudjedra raise epistemological and ontological questions that generally elude the average reader. Assia Djebar's works denounce patriarchal traditions, politics and historical narratives that oppress Algerian women. We learn in her 1967 *Les Alouettes Naives* that despite women's sacrifices in the War, women were betrayed, as they were considered little more than second class citizens.

Writing for postcolonial women authors was even more complicated. Indeed, writing about women in a literature that is very patriarchal in a country that is even more patriarchal remained a taboo practice. The postcolonial setting in which Lemsine and her fellow women authors began to write was dominated by images of existing hierarchies such as class and especially gender. Technically, Francophone women authors - such as Djebar most notably - had to liberate themselves from a language of writing that is burdened with a dominant male ideology. It is on this level that the Arabophone novel was losing ground

to the Francophone novel since the 1950s and especially after independence.

Relatively free from the burdens of tradition, women's Francophone writing is not merely a description of society, but a deep reflection on the lived and hidden aspects of women's social, sexual and psychological life. Francophone women writers looked with interest at questions relating to the place of women inside the couple, and the new relationships that they wished to see established between spouses. Francophone texts by Algerian women authors sought to question the patriarchal nature of the Algerian traditional family. On this note, authors like Djebar such as in her *Ombre sultane* (1987) dared to discuss some of the most intimate issues. This is the case for other Francophone women writers. One could probably think of Ben, especially in her *Sabrina, ils t'ont volé ta vie* (1986), and Lemsine's famous novel *La Chrysalide* (1976). This is unlike the Arabophone novel where themes relating to love, the female body, and female sexuality are treated superficially. This was not only the case for Arabophone women authors as we shall see with Ounissi in chapter one, but also the 'isolated' male authors writing in both Arabic and French as we shall see briefly in the literature review.

Despite this feminist willingness to both broach sensitive topics and to denounce women's oppression, the aforementioned Francophone women authors seem to advance different strategies to subvert patriarchal tradition. One main aspect of this difference concerns the extent to which these authors succeed in negotiating a balance between culture consciousness and feminism. Some women authors seem to advocate ready-made Western formulas relating to women's emancipation, overlooking the specificities of the Algerian cultural environment as discussed in chapter two. Others have succeeded in appropriating and redefining the term feminism to acquire meaning in an authentic cultural context as we shall see with Djebar in chapter four. Other authors belonged to an Algerian bourgeoisie and thus showcased the moral codes of the one-party state under the rule of Ben Bella and Boumedienne, most notably as we shall see with Lemsine in chapter three.

All in all, this thesis consists in setting forth the different ways in which the first postcolonial generation of Algerian women authors respond to patriarchal values. In other words, this thesis will argue that there is no representation per se of Algerian women's emancipation,

but different ways to conceive of emancipation. Additionally, the socio-literary character of this research looks to trace the origins of each perception on literary, historical, cultural, as well as socio-political levels. As we shall see in the literature review, this research draws on an existing body of scholarly inquiry relating to sociology, feminism, women writers, and criticism in general. In terms of primary materials, the thesis covers a set of interwar texts (1962/1991) by Djebar, Lemsine, Djabali, Ben, Bouraoui, and Ounissi. It studies better known writers, such as Djebar and Bouraoui, alongside lesser-known writers like Djabali, Ben and Ounissi. In this way, the thesis enriches the pre-existing body of secondary criticism on Francophone writers by looking across the Algerian literary field to production in Arabic and to those writers who have been neglected by critics working in US, UK, and French contexts.

Assessment of the literature

It is worth reviewing the massive contribution of certain works to the subject of womanhood and the different types of women's emancipation in interwar Algeria (1962/1992). These works provide a solid platform to open up a discussion of the subject from a literary perspective. It is important to note that this literature review focuses first on sociological works, in order to ground the study in a sociological method that seeks to place these sociological texts into a critical dialogue with the literary texts studied in this thesis. Boutefnouchet's 1982 work, *La Famille Algérienne: Evolution et Caractéristiques Récentes* decodes and 'defends' a certain conception of women's emancipation which was dominant among the majority of Algerian men and women both during and after colonisation. For her part, in her 1985 *Les Algériennes du Quotidien,* Khodja explores the different models available to women after independence and the ways in which these women construct their notion of emancipation.

These two works in particular have been crucial to the articulation of the different types of emancipation in our discussion of the feminine in Algerian women's writings after independence. Boutefnouchet's aforementioned work for instance, will be mainly applied to chapters one and four. His minute description of the 'traditionalist' model in Algeria has

been vital for the deconstruction of Ounissi's perception of women's emancipation. Simultaneously, his views seem to constitute the very notions of which other women authors such as Djebar are particularly critical. Khodja's articulation of Algerian women's models, however, has also been applied to chapters two and three. Her critique of 'la femme sérieuse' has allowed us to situate her 'adoption' of an imported modernity which seems to orchestrate notions of femininity for some Algerian women authors such as Bouraoui, Ben and Djabali. Additionally, her sound analysis of a typically Algerian model which she regards as 'moderated' has also been useful to the understanding of how authors like Lemsine adhered to this notion. Despite the massive contribution of both works to this thesis, they have been carried out from a strictly sociological point of view. The works are based on observations of women's lives and behaviour in society and often resort to data collection such as interviews with participants as well as statistics.

As for studies on the emancipation of women, in works of literature that were published after 1962, they are definitely not lacking, though as we shall see in this section, these works leave gaps which our research seeks to address. While the assessment of the existing literature in general will be carried out in relation to four main points, the rest of the section will review some relevant literature for this thesis. First, works of criticism have generally been applied to the Francophone novel more than the Arabophone novel. This is especially true for the first three decades after 1962. The reason behind this is partly the fact that works written in French were clearly more numerous, and partly because they were better known, given that a great number of Francophone works were published in well-established publication-houses in France. It is worth keeping in mind that the Arabophone novel was born as late as the 1970s: the first Algerian novel written in Arabic was *Le vent du sud* by Abdu al-hamid Ben Hadouga and was published in 1971, almost ten years after the independence of the country. It is worth explaining why it took this long for the Algerian Arabophone novel to be born. The minority of Algerians who could read and write during the 1960s had received a French education, including authors themselves. For instance, Malek Haddad who wrote in French before 1962 wanted to write in Arabic after independence to avoid reproducing a colonial legacy. He nevertheless failed to master standard Arabic and thus stopped writing. This is why the one-party state after 1962 had to support what is known as the Arabisation project and

called on artists, actors, and teachers to express the Arabisation of Algeria. The project began to bear fruit by the beginning of the 1970s as a new generation of Arabophone authors emerged.

Second, the studies in question focus on women as seen by Algerian and Maghrebi male authors. Critics conducting these studies often focus on the predominance of masculine discourses and male representation of women. Such works generally use a historicist approach, taking into account elements of the author's life to spot any peculiar attitudes on women. For example, Mosteghanemi's PhD thesis discusses among other themes the tendency of Algerian male authors to marry French women, which may have played a part in isolating them from the lived reality of their sisters. The vast majority of such feminist scholars resorted to male-authored works examining how women are frequently described as submissive and marginalised, as creatures who have to suffer the humiliations of obedience, polygamy and repudiation. On this note, it is worth observing that studies on Djebar's novels particularly, represent a very important first step towards the liberation of feminist criticism from the restriction to study only males' representation of women. This, among many other things, resulted in the recognition of Algerian women's writing as a distinct literary canon.

It is worth reviewing the likes of Christiane Achour's *Diwan d'inquiétude et d'espoir: la littérature féminine algérienne de langue française* which she published in 1991. This is arguably the most pertinent work on Algerian Women's representation as far as the first three decades after independence are concerned. This is because Achour's study is exclusively devoted to a set of female-authored texts and is therefore paradigmatic of this shift from what could be considered as an obsession with masculine discourses and the prejudices of male authors against women. In addition to this, the work is very inclusive as it explores works from different literary genres such as the novel, the short story, poetry, and also the theatre. The novel in particular, is central to Achour's work as it covers both colonial and postcolonial productions (1947/1987).

Third, the vast majority of analyses up to date, including Achour's, have been mainly carried out from a thematic point of view, where leitmotifs are generally at the centre of

research. Such works usually focus on the status of women in traditional life most notably and discuss a set of obstacles that are encountered by traditional women. One would probably review Mosteghanemi's 1985 PhD thesis which, except for a tiny subsection where she superficially examines a divergence in terms of feminist ideology, the vast majority of the work consists of a purely thematic analysis. For instance, her first chapter is on maternity and social issues relating to it and how they are represented, the second on foreign women, and the third on women fighters and their contribution to the war. Subsequent chapters include themes such as emancipation, sexual objectification, prostitution, as well as the affirmation of women and the reasons responsible for it. A similar approach to research can be found in Mildred Mortimer's 1988 *Assia Djebar,* for instance.

Fourth, most of the existing scholarship, including that on works that are not necessarily covered in this thesis, examines certain themes relating to women using a purely linguistic approach. Mortimer (1990), Déjeux (1994), and Segarra (1997) analyse the transgression of patriarchal tradition on the level of language. In her *Journeys through the French African novel* (1990), Mortimer assesses African women's fiction, looking at the movement of women into public space as confirmed both in the spoken and the written word. Focusing on enclosure for her analysis of Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* (1985) and *Ombre sultane* (1987), she observes that 'Djebar's fifth novel, *L'Amour, la fantasia*, an autobiographical incident recalled four decades after the event, set in motion the conquest of space and language necessary for the writer's development as an artist and an intellectual' (Mortimer, 1990, pp.149-150). From this same perspective, works on narrative techniques for instance, are worth reading. One should review Anne Marie Miraglia's 2005 *Des Voix contre le silence*, in which she examines the importance of some adopted narrative techniques in subverting the limitations of patriarchal tradition. For instance, the work explores the question of collectivism and solidarity among women through Djebar's use of dialogical technique.

What is noteworthy is that while these works address the linguistic and aesthetic aspects of literary works, they often overlook their ideological projects. This is of paramount importance to note, given the nature of the Algerian novel that was produced during the

first three decades after independence. During this period, if one excludes Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer* (1962), most authors were consumed by different ideologies: religion, socialism, liberalism, Islamism, the quest of authentic values, in addition to cultural questions such as Arabisation and Berber culture, dictatorship after 1962, the implications of 132 years of colonisation, acculturation, and solidarity with the Palestinian cause. This could be explained by the fact that at the dawn of independence, these newly independent authors were still looking for themselves. This is unlike the 1990s, the fourth decade after independence, which saw violence and a stricken country on all levels. This has had repercussions on the literary production of the time which is often described, such as by Charles Bonn, as a 'littérature d'urgence' (Bonn, 1999). The interwar era is also different to contemporary literature in the sense that today's authors tend to use 'experimental forms to respond to the increasing surreality of things' (Treacy, 2017, p.125).

As we have just seen, while interwar literature is politically, culturally and socially committed, most of the existing scholarship deals with its aesthetic aspect, overlooking the ideological dimension that characterises it. It is in this sense that works of criticism as reviewed below in this section, specify the literature, providing an important platform for discussion of the general argument that is defended in this thesis. In Algeria, as in most North-African and Middle-Eastern settings, the spirit of nationalism is at its peak during the first years after colonisation. In Algeria, this added to the cultural and ideological conflicts between those educated by the French school and those who sought to preserve the authenticity of Algeria. The former wanted to 'frenchify' and secularise the country, whereas the latter opted for the controversial and theological Arabisation project. Such ideological debates occupied an important place in novels, the written press, as well as official documents by the FLN. Much to the interest of this thesis, this was crucial for Algerian women who were so often at the centre of these debates.

Indeed, the question of women was, as in most Arab and Muslim settings, held hostage to such ideological conflicts. The emancipation of Algerian women was hardly dissociated from imperialist and secular values. Feminism was - and still is - directly associated with colonialism, the alien Western, and cultural domination. It is worth noting that unless the

form of feminism that is associated with imperialism and Western domination is clearly specified/defined, which it will be below in this section, the use of the terms alien and Western in this sense may well call to mind a colonial construct, that is a form of Occidentalism, and thereby reproduce a reductive binary that is unhelpful for understanding the complexities of what was actually going on in Algeria. That being said, this association is present - unquestionably and sometimes unconsciously - in the discourses expressed by both sides of the debate: modern progressives on the one hand, and conservatives on the other. Before reviewing literary works that adhere to such and other perceptions, one must introduce the theoretical framework from which all knowledge is constructed, especially as a significant body of scholarship has been published on the subject. As far as modern progressives are concerned, it is worth reviewing Ayaan Hirsi Ali's instructive 2007 *Infidel.* In this work, Ali recounts how in the African and Middle Eastern societies where she lived, she has fallen victim to Muslim practices such as female genital mutilation and veiling. For Hirsi Ali, faith is the main reason behind women's oppression. She describes her journey to Europe as a move from faith to reason. Local traditions are also seen with an eye of suspicion as far as modern progressives are concerned. French philosopher Elisabeth Badinter rejects adherence to non-Western traditions. For her these are at the root of gender oppression (1989). Badinter is famous for her campaigns against Muslim veiling.

Response to these views can hardly be presented without reviewing works by the likes of Saba Mahmood and Lila Abu-Lughod. In her *Politics of Piety* (2005)*,* Mahmood argues that women's emancipation is a notion that is imported from the West. On this note, Abu-Lughod's 2002 *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving*? warns against women's emancipation which, according to her, aims at the destruction of non-Western traditions. She argues that women's emancipation and 'other' women's traditions are so different in nature that they cannot coexist. The reader of this literature review may have the impression that one can either support women's emancipation and criticise faith and traditions, or else celebrate one's culture and reject women's emancipation. This is why it is also important to present scholarship on an authentic form of feminism which emerged as a result of such a constricting antagonism, and which defends women's agency without rejecting 'other' women's culture, religion and traditions.

This means that this authentic feminist current sought to determine the very traditions and practices that women need distancing from to avoid sexist oppression. On a first glance, in her *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, Seyla Benhabib (1992) seems to join the aforementioned Western progressive feminists in questioning social conformism. One must stress however, that her view is in disagreement with Ali's and Badinter's idea that the elimination of faith and traditions works in women's favour. Simultaneously, Benhabib's view rejects Mahmood's and Abu-Lughod's absolute unquestioning of religion and traditions. As Khader explains, 'Mahmood's da'wa women are clearly not feminists' (Khader, 2019, p.127). Khader wonders however, if it is 'possible to reject sexist oppression from a worldview like theirs, one that values unquestioning submission to certain inherited dictates?' (Khader, 2019, p.127). The answer to this question could be found in works by Islamic feminists. These offer a sample of gender justice by developing normative requirements.

One should be cautious however, when deploying the term Islamic feminism. This because context specificity plays an important role in shaping contemporary contexts. It is worth observing that each different cultural milieu brings to women their particular weight of customs and traditions, challenges, and injustices, which often remain unknown to women from other countries and cultural backgrounds. This applies to the Arab world, let alone the Muslim world. The latter is very large: it spans over three continents and it embraces different races and hundreds of ethnic groups speaking hundreds of languages. On this note, Camillia El-Solh and Judy Mabro (1994) argue that despite this unifying religious framework, the Islamic world is characterised by significant diversities from one Muslim country to another. Interestingly enough, other scholars have taken the discussion of this cultural characteristic in the Muslim world further as they focused on the implications of this diversity on women. For example, the critic Valentine Moghadam is particularly critical of the political and religious, and thus the ideological divergences that exist among Muslim women. It goes to show that the study of 'other' women is not merely a matter of class/race/age (1993).

Of course, history, social evolution, and the traditions that characterise each Muslim community exert a significant influence on the ways that women go about their faith and

their interpretation of the Qur'an. One could probably think of the wearing of the veil. The veil is considered an inherent part of Islam in some countries but not in other Muslim countries where it takes different shapes and colours. The veil may or may not cover the woman's face to different degrees. Perego is critical of 'the veil as it existed in the contemporary writings of French officials, settlers, and international observers that reduced all of the various types of head covering worn by some, but not all Muslim and non-Muslim women in Algeria to a single, universal garment' (Perego, 2013, p.163). In addition to the different forms of the veil, it has also served different functions. One could probably think of the use of the veil after the Second World War in Algeria where it became no longer an eroticised piece of clothing in the eyes of exotic colonialists, but also a politicised practice.

Other practices such as the controversial excision of the clitoris and infibulation are not practiced by Muslim women in Algeria while it is an integral part of customs in other Arab-Muslim countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Sudan. Leila Ahmed argues that:

> One important area of difference between Egypt and other Arab countries is with respect to culturally but not religiously sanctioned practices, in particular clitoridectomy. By and large this custom, practiced by some classes in Egypt, appears to be geographically confined, among Arab countries, to Egypt, the Sudan, and some parts of Arabia (Ahmed, 1992, p.176).

Although as we have seen, feminism for 'other' women is not based on a single, monolithic view of justice, no research has sought to analyse the already discussed feminist ideologies in Algerian interwar literature (1962/1992). One main reason why no research has been published on the subject is the fact that male authors, by far more productive than women authors, at least during the first two decades after independence, were disconnected from the lived reality of their sisters. Colonisation played a massive role in distancing certain writers from their local societies. Apart from Mouloud Feraoun and Redha Houhou who were murdered, so many other authors were sent to exile. One could probably think of Kateb Yacine who travelled to Paris in 1954, Mouloud Mammeri who took refuge in Morocco in 1957, Mohammed Dib who settled permanently in France

in 1959 after his expulsion from the country and Hacène Chebli who also left for France in 1952. Malek Haddad was already studying in France. Mourad Bourboune was a student in Tunis then he went to Paris. Rachid Boudjedra, also a student in Tunis, settled for a time in France. Ben Hadouga, wanted by the police, went to France in 1955.

Unlike male-authored texts, it seems that women's novels reproduce the different views on women's emancipation as defended by the aforementioned Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Saba Mahmood, and Benhabib. In a short sub-section in Mosteghanemi's 1985 PhD study, *Algerie Femme et Ecritures*, we learn that Algerian women authors themselves hold different views and sometimes adopt opposing ideologies on women's emancipation and their place in society. This is hugely important to our research. Despite the scarcity of Algerian women authored novels during the first two decades after independence, Mosteghanemi, who has now become arguably Algeria's most prolific Arabophone author, can spot some telling differences in the ways each woman author poses the problems of women. The bilingualism referred to previously is a phenomenon that she underlines by identifying the existence of two distinct currents which emerged as early as the 1950s and which continued to coexist, each one on its own, without the least interaction and even with a certain reciprocal contempt. She distinguishes the 'conservative' current which she explains, was mainly led by Zhor Ounissi, an Arabophone short story writer. She does also distinguish a second ideological orientation she describes as more 'liberal', and which she associates with authors writing in French, especially the essayist Fadila M'Rabet as we read clearly in this passage:

> N'est-il pas étonnant de constater que deux écrivains de la même génération comme Zhour Ouanissi et Fadila M'Rabet originaires toutes les deux de la même ville (Constantine) se retrouvent aux antipodes de cette production littéraire? L'une (Ouanissi), écrit en langue arabe, critique vivement le mariage mixte, et prend la défense de la société traditionnelle, alors que l'autre (M'Rabet), véhicule sa pensée en français et mène un combat acharné contre les traditions et les coutumes, s'en prenant avec violence à la «gente masculine» de son pays et finit elle-même par épouser un Français (Mosteghanemi, 1985, pp.285-286).

It is true that Mosteghanemi is aware of this ideological divergence. Her work, however, offers no interpretation that would take into consideration any given ideological framework or school of thought according to which femininity is defined by each author. For instance, she goes no further than describing Ounissi's ideological orientation as 'traditional', overlooking the impact that her reformist education may have had on her literary production. Indeed, most of the first generation of Arabophone writers who rose to prominence after independence were former students of certain schools that were created by the Ulemas, or at least were graduates of universities of the Machreq such as Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad as well as the Maghreb, especially Tunis, al-Zaituna University. This elite opted for a fairly rigid conformism on the literary level as well as on the social and political, which of course did not fail to have repercussions in their conception of women.

In addition to this, Mosteghanemi overlooks the impact of writing in Modern Standard Arabic when it comes to the silencing of women in Ounissi's texts. The fact that Mosteghanemi has herself chosen Modern Standard Arabic for her career later on as a novelist may explain her willingness to acquit Arabic from what can be regarded as a 'guilt' of masculinising discourse when it comes to women's representation. This is particularly worth noting when observing that writing in French has been very helpful for many Algerian authors. Writing in French allowed the likes of Assia Djebar, Lemsine, Ben and Djabali to be at least relatively freed from the burden of tradition and to audaciously address taboo issues such as female sexuality and love. It is an obstacle that Arabic does not offer the same possibilities of expression without breaching standards of acceptable language and thus provoking public disapproval.

Fadila M'Rabet attracts the attention of Mosteghanemi (1985). This because, in both her essays (1965/1967), M'Rabet expresses a radical revolt against religion and tradition which she holds responsible for women's oppression. Her acutely provocative style and her tendency to generalise critique of traditional society left her exposed to a significant disapproval of men without really contributing to improve the situation of women. What is of interest to note is that such secular - not to say Western - ideas and radical views against Algerian men and Algerian ways of living could also be found in novels which

Mosteghanemi's corpus does not cover. The Algerian literature which expresses such 'radical' views is generally produced by artists and authors who usually come from different religious backgrounds other than Islam or who are at least pure products of the colonial school. The likes of Ben, Djabali and Bouraoui seem to choose an imported representation for their female characters. Western modernity in all its forms, cultural, sexual, and economic is generally celebrated in their works. Given that Mosteghanemi's research is limited to examining works published before the 1980s, she finds it necessary to resort to other genres to shed light on this ideological divergence among women authors: the short-story and the essay, for instance, deputise for the novel. It is worth noting that it was not until the mid-1980s that the number of novels by and on women saw a considerable surge as we learn from Dejeux's statistics and observations:

> Les années 80 sont, d'un bout à l'autre du Maghreb, fécondes pour la littérature de langue française: auteurs nouveaux, écritures nouvelles, augmentation des romans de femmes… Mais d'une façon générale, de 1984 à 1991, la production algérienne des romans et recueils de nouvelles est en augmentation. Ainsi en 1984, sur 37 romans et recueils de nouvelles, nous comptons 5 romans et recueils de nouvelles de femmes, en 1985 sur 12: 4, en 1986 sur 38: 5, en 1987 sur 15: 2, en 1988 sur 13: 3, en 1989 sur 29: 3, en 1990 sur 34: 11, en 1991 sur 21: 5. L'année 1990 est particulièrement féconde (Déjeux, 1994, pp.26-29).

It is true that to speak of 'radical' views such as those expressed by M'Rabet compared with 'traditional' views as in the case of Ounissi's texts is to speak of a certain dialectic that is present in many postcolonial contexts. One must not forget, however, that Mosteghanemi (1985) overlooks the specificity that the Algerian context brings to this - basically cultural - antagonism. Of course, what tradition and gender oppression mean in the context of the Maghreb does not necessarily correspond to the definition of tradition and patriarchy in the case of Chinese women, for instance. Furthermore, to speak of feminism in the Maghreb is often to speak of a specifically ethnocentric French modernity. This is why the deconstruction of sociological codes and discourses on Algerian women after 1962 remains hugely important to our research. As previously stated at the beginning of this section, Boutefnouchet's 1982 work, *La Famille Algérienne: Evolution et*

Caractéristiques Récentes decodes a traditional and purely Algerian conception of femininity. This was dominant among the majority of Algerian men and women both during and after colonisation. Likewise, in her 1985 *Les Algériennes du Quotidien,* Khodja explores, among other models, a 'universalist' model of femininity. This is a model/perception that represents the point of view of Algerian women who want to be above differences of sex, culture, and nationality, to find a way of total self-expression. Although this may seem a demand of basic human rights, the adoption of certain values as necessary for feminism remains problematic in the Algerian context as it revives a colonial culture through what is referred to in this thesis as Western feminism. One could probably think of values such as the secular, individualism, sex-mixing, unveiling, and homosexuality as we shall see in chapter two.

It is of paramount importance to clarify the use of the term Western feminism in this thesis, because the diverse corpus of feminist theories withstands homogeneity and simplifications. One must not forget to note that in its context, in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom most notably, and to some extent France after the Second World War, what is generally referred to as Western feminism should be credited for its massive roles in improving women's situation and thus humanity. One could think of fighting against gendered politics locally, campaigning for equal rights when it comes to matrimonial issues as well as advocating women's rights to vote, to work, to own property and to receive education. Furthermore, feminism contributed in criminalising certain practices against women such as sexual assault etc. Additionally, feminists in the aforementioned countries, though to varying degrees, advocated women's access to contraception and abortion.

Historically, Western feminism dates from the age of enlightenment which Europe saw towards the end of the seventeenth century and during the whole period of the eighteenth century. One important expression of feminism in this sense was Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). It is not simply a case of coincidence that feminism emerged during the age of enlightenment. In fact, feminism was deeply rooted in the ideas of 18th and 19th century European philosophers. One could most probably think of advocating women's rights to live according to reasons that are taken as their

(women's) own and not the product of external forces such as traditions and religion. One can hardly skip mentioning Immanuel Kant's *What Is Enlightenment?* (1784) which theorised such thoughts. John Stuart Mill is also known for adhering to such ideas. Such philosophers considered religion and tradition serious impediments to individual freedom.

What is also of interest to note is that the first and second waves of feminism were mainly dominated by white middle class women. This meant that feminism was limited to advocating rights for women according to the values of an emerging capitalist class in nineteenth century England and North America. One main aspect of this limitation could be seen in that members of this class emphasised change through legal reform, not through revolutions as would do socialist or Marxist feminism. Of course, the aforementioned equality rights were mainly advocated for women with men of their own class, without challenging the status quo or extending their struggle to deal with the patriarchy suffered by women from lower classes and non-white women. At some point in the recent history of Britain, this form of feminism was to some extent dominant. One could most probably think of the neo-liberalism supported by Margaret Thatcher (1979/1990) whereby working class women were mostly affected as the public sector saw the closure of many services traditionally dominated by women such as nurseries etc.

Up until the mid- 1970s, it is safe to say that this was the only form of feminism, worldwide, to exist as a formal, structured, political and intellectual movement. The 1960s saw what is known as the second wave of feminism which sought to address the limited nature of women's participation in the workplace and prevailing notions which directly or indirectly participated in confining women to the home. The limited number of feminist movements which existed in the colonised world such as in French Algeria and Egypt tended to defend similar rights and values for women. Describing them as 'dominant' in 'Egypt and in the Arab Middle East for most of the century' (Ahmed, 1992, p.174), Ahmed observes that:

> the dominant voice of feminism, which affiliated itself, albeit generally discreetly, with the Westernizing, secularizing tendencies of society, predominantly tendencies of the upper, upper-middle, and middle-middle classes, promoted a feminism that assumed the desirability of progress toward Western-type societies (Ahmed, 1992, p.174).

This Western ethnocentric form of feminism as applied in Western contexts, with both its achievements and shortcomings, is outside the scope of this thesis. The Western form of feminism which is referred to in this research and which is mainly discussed in chapter 2 is the already defined secular, white middle class feminism when meeting three conditions. First, when this form of feminism is applied to - not to say imposed on - non-Western contexts, in this case Algerian society and precisely women's emancipation as represented in the Algerian novel. Second, when it is based on the assumption that what is universally worthwhile for women is - and should solely be - a specific Western way of life. This means that feminism and the wellbeing of women generally are not limited to only fighting sexism, but necessarily require re-imagining the world according to specific - of course Western - cultural norms. This includes, among other things, the idea that late stage capitalism, a form of capitalism that is irrational and unregulated, will necessarily improve women's condition in non-Western countries. Third, when this form of feminism gives grounds for imperialist domination. It is worth paying attention to the gendered history of colonialism and how this persisted in affecting indigenous women's lives after independences. Both during and after colonisation, colonial powers in general, and France particularly, monitored what was regarded as social progress. As with the second condition, social progress was synonymous with adherence to French culture and manners. It is in this sense that the traditions and local culture taken up by Algerian women were devalued in the eyes of the colonising West. However, local traditions and culture were also deemed a form of rebellion against colonial rule. Some examples of this include fighting against the traditional veil and headscarves etc. This is the case of Suzanne Massu's organisation during the War of Liberation which sought to forcefully unveil Algerian women as this was perceived as a symbol of anti-colonialism. This continued, though from overseas and not through violence as during colonisation, with feminist organisations in Europe, mainly France, and also the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. One could probably think of an organisation called Women Living under Muslim Laws which formed close ties with Algerian women organisations during the 1990s, and which sought to promote the aforementioned rights as advocated by white middle class women and showcased unveiling and secular values for women. What is also of interest to note is that such movements and feminist groups as the

Rassemblement Algérien des Femmes Démocratiques mobilised women for a 'democratic' and non-Islamist Algeria. This meant that feminism was directly a vehicle for imperialism, since it sought to justify an imported political order (democratic values as suit Western interests), for a foreign, independent country. It is worth citing the example of feminism in Iraq after the 2003 War. This form of feminism justified direct rule, militarism and economic exploitation etc. What is taken into consideration in this thesis is only indirect forms of imperialism such as when parochial values are part of a regime of cultural and to some extent economic domination. This includes values such as individualism and the secular as necessary conditions for women's emancipation. The Western nature of such values will be discussed in the section 'A polarising feminism' (see chapter 2). It is from this perspective that Western feminism, principally in chapter 2, is interchangeably referred to in such terms as white and middle class feminism, Western ethnocentric feminism, imperialist feminism, 'universal' feminism, enlightened feminism, and also colonial feminism. It is worth noting that this form of Western feminism is the viewpoint of certain scholars and feminists such as Okin, Ali, and Badinter, and not all Western feminists.

The two extremes, namely the 'traditionalist' and the Western, however, seem to have been avoided by Assia Djebar and Aïcha Lemsine. These followed from inside and with a certain intellectual level, the evolution of society and women. This is why the emancipation of Algerian women is not so simply decided in their texts as we have seen with radicals and traditionalists. Lemsine's approach to women's emancipation, unlike Djebar's, does not subvert patriarchy, but tries to 'reconcile' traditional views with liberal and Western values instead. Nagy convincingly argues that the author of *La Chrysalide* (1976) 'makes several attempts to reconcile this irreconcilable antagonism' (Nagy, 2002, p.7). This results in an ambivalence of values as we shall see in our analysis of both her *La Chrysalide* (1976) and *Ciel de Porphyre* (1978).

It is worth adding that this tradition of reconciling traditional and modern values to come up with a model for women was not new for Algerian literature by the time Lemsine started publishing her works. Indeed, as early as the 1920s, a movement of cultural and political assimilation emerged. As we shall see in chapter three, this assimilation was recurring in

novels written during the 1930s and 1940s. Djamila Debèche's *Leïla, jeune fille d'Algérie* (1947) seems to present itself in many ways as a forerunner of Lemsine's thoughts. *Politics, Poetics and The Algerian Novel* (1999) is a study in which Zahia Smail Salhi seeks to study the Francophone Algerian novel from its emergence in 1908 to the independence of Algeria in 1962. The interest of this work to this research lies in that Salhi relates female representation in the early Francophone Algerian novel, including *Leïla, jeune fille d'Algérie,* to ideologies which occupied the socio-political context of French Algeria such as assimilation, as exemplified by Ferhat Abbas. The research remains however, restricted to a study of the colonial novel from 1908 to 1962.

It is worth introducing some determining landmarks in the history of this assimilationist tradition in Algeria. The Algerian intellectuals during the 1930s and 1940s who were mainly French educated, found themselves torn between the obligation to stay faithful to their native culture on the one hand, and the necessity to showcase values of the 'civilising' mission out of gratitude to their 'civilisers' on the other. Professor Salhi describes the cultural specificities of this class during colonisation. She argues that even though these intellectuals loved French culture and civilisation, they were also attached to their own religion. She describes their assimilation as 'only partial' (1999). Interestingly enough, Salhi examines Ferhat Abbas's declarations on this issue:

> It is French thought which is at the basis of the principles of our moral life. To the empiricism of the patrimony left to us by parents and tradition, the spirit of the French writers has added an explanation, a scientific, rational one if I may say so. And yet, Islam has remained our pure faith, the belief which gives a meaning to life, our spiritual homeland (Abbas, cited in Salhi, 1999, p.51).

If this project of cultural rapprochement was not practical in postcolonial Algeria as argued in chapter three, how is it possible to put into practice such a vision during colonisation? In other words, if assimilation proved to be unrealistic among Algerians themselves, how can it be realistic to reconcile the representatives of those ideas, namely colonisers and the colonised! It is not hard to imagine how unrealistic this project may have been, given that the decade following the publication of *Leila* saw the War of Liberation, which is an

answer in itself to the failure of such colonial reforms. In parallel terms, the unrealism of this reconciliatory project was replicated in the representation of the feminine. It is in this sense that Achour's argument on orientalism (1991) in the 1947 novel is interesting enough. The heroine proposed by Debèche, according to Achour, is one that conveys exotic manners, a representation of women as seen by a colonial eye, and which has little to do with lived reality.

In the same way that the socio-cultural and political context during colonisation calls into question the characterisation of the 1947 novel as realist, the ramifications of such historical events after the independence of the country were equally a challenge to any realistic portrayal of contemporary Algerian society (see chapter 3). This may seem an overstatement when considering that *La Chrysalide* for instance, has been presented as a narration of facts, as a realistic novel describing the reality of Algerian society. Nisbet notes that 'le sous-titre, *Chroniques algériennes*, inscrit la fiction dans l'histoire, donc dans les faits de culture' (Nisbet, 1982, p.85). The unrealistic representation of the feminine in Debèche's production is mainly down to the fact that assimilation was only adopted by an isolated French educated minority. Similarly, unrealism is also there in Lemsine's representation of the feminine because, after 1962, cultural assimilation was mainly adopted by a bourgeois minority. It is important to observe that this Algerian bourgeoisie became the main inheritor of the assimilationist values primarily adopted by the said French educated elite during colonisation. This bourgeoisie, newly constituted, aspired for ways of living that were not necessarily adapted to the lived reality of most Algerians.

It is in many ways a response to this inauthentic representation of the feminine that other authors sought to particularly showcase the authentic. These sought to deal with Algerian women's oppression without resorting to the aforementioned reforms or the imported forms of feminism which were defended by many Algerian authors. It is not by coincidence that among all her novels, Djebar chose to publish *Ombre sultane* and *Loin de Médine* in 1987 and 1991 respectively. It is worth observing that the latter half of the 1980s is not without significance for 'other' women if one takes into consideration the considerable amount of conceptual work on cultural feminism in the US most specifically (see Alexander and Mohanty, 1997). This context saw a considerable number of conferences

on the question of women worldwide and on the emergence of different feminisms. Such conferences were according to Conway (2017), mainly organised by the United Nations. The rise of different schools of feminist thought was in itself a response to mainstream feminism. To speak of mainstream feminism in this sense is to speak of the hitherto dominant Western form of feminism which was an intellectual product of a distinct category of white middle-class women. Western feminism was accused by the then-emerging international feminisms of universalising third-world women's experiences. It is in this specific historical and intellectual context that transnational and transcultural feminism were born (see, for example, Mohanty, 1991).

The Algerian context which saw a significant development on political, social and demographic levels was in many ways paradigmatic of this specific situation for women that could no longer be studied in relation to widespread values belonging to Westerners. In Jane Hiddleston's *Out of Algeria*, the section on *Loin de Médine* takes into consideration the context of 1991, date of the novel's publication. This contextualisation, however, does not explore the Algerian socio-political specificities in what concerns women. Apart from passages where Hiddleston examines language such as through Djebar's re-appropriation of voice and memory, which are meant as a response to Ibn Saad's and Tabari's versions of history, her assessment of religious fundamentalism is not a situation that is unique to Algeria. The Arab world has known this phenomenon to varying degrees. According to Saadawi, this phenomenon is international, and women are always the first victims:

> Wherever there is a religious revival, women are among the first victims. All fundamentalist groups, whether Christian, Jewish, or Islamic, are antagonistic to women's liberation and women's rights. The backlash against women's rights is thus also a universal phenomenon and is not restricted to our region (El Saadawi, 1997, p.17).

It is worth noting that prior to the publication of Djebar's aforementioned novels, feminists and women authors in Algeria remained oblivious to the typically Algerian issues which ensue from an entanglement of politics, (nationalism, socialism, religious

fundamentalism), and culture (Islamic tradition, Berber culture, and postcolonial themes). To understand the obstacles hindering Algerian women's emancipation one must look at the interplay of such factors. Benabdessadok (1984) argues that women's lives are different as they engaged in a process of adaptation to a complex situation where the modern and the traditional attitudes towards life and self, intertwine.

Interestingly enough, *L'amour, la fantasia*, *Ombre sultane* and *Loin de Médine* seem to question established values as resulting from the entanglement of such factors. As an author and historian, Assia Djebar was aware of the complexity of the Algerian society and sought to determine the genuine poles that orchestrated perceptions of power against her female compatriots. Djebar's writing in this sense was representative of the struggle that was beginning to take place everywhere in the world - by the then-emerging feminisms. This because non-Western feminists like Djebar saw that there is a clear denial of their social and cultural specificities which unfold on different levels such as class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and colonialism. Arguably the best example one could think of in this field is *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa which was originally published in 1987 and re-edited in 2012. In this autobiographical work, Anzaldúa explains how her feminine identity is constructed by a variety of non-identical cultures and factors. It is in this specific historical and intellectual context that we can speak of the first traces of transnational and transcultural feminism in Algeria as far as the novel is concerned.

Chapter overviews

Foregrounding the ideological, cultural and literary ideals of a set of texts authored by women, this research will examine the different ways in which Algerian women novelists conceived of women's emancipation. The reader of the literature review may have already noticed that the aforementioned Algerian women authors seem to espouse different feminist ideologies. From a purely 'traditionalist' conception of the feminine, to a Western ethnocentric perception, to a 'reconciliation' of these two opposing perceptions, to a transnational feminist project, we found ourselves tempted to write the four following chapters.

The first chapter of this research will examine the ‘traditionalist’ perception of women’s emancipation as theorised by the Algerian sociologist Boutefnouchet. This will be looked at in a set of selected texts by Zhor Ounissi, namely *[min yawmiyat mudarisa hura]* (1979), translated into French as *Journal d’une institutrice libre and* [a*la al-chati' al-'akhar*] (1974), translated into French as *Sur l’autre rive.* First, the chapter will trace the origins of this conservative conception by establishing the existing links with the written and preached teachings of the Algerian reformist school. This is important to bring to our discussion considering that Ounissi was a student of this school and the content of her reformist education significantly supports ‘traditionalist’ gender roles. Second, the chapter will focus on traditional gender roles as being interwoven with a specific historical context that was mainly characterised by a spirit of reformism and anti-colonialism. Third, the chapter will also focus on the celebration of the ‘traditionalist’ for women as resulting from the nature of the Algerian family, the *ayla*. Fourth, the chapter also looks into the ways in which Zhor Ounissi’s texts, as a result of the aforementioned factors, devalue women in the process of narration. Indeed, narration seems to present a point of view on women that is strictly masculine. There is an indirect presentation of female characters. Views on women seem to be developed through a look, a body, images, and a word of man only. This will be completed while addressing the aforementioned arguments. Overall, the general aim of the chapter is to investigate to what extent such an Arab-oriented education has affected postcolonial literary productions in terms of femininity.

The second chapter will look at a selected set of Francophone women-authored texts, mainly *La voyeuse interdite* (1991) *Sabrina, ils t'ont volé ta vie* (1986), and *Agave* (1983). The chapter will argue that these texts are representative of a significant change as far as the vision on women is concerned. If in the aforementioned novels, namely *Journal d’une institutrice libre* (Ounissi, 1979) and *Sur l’autre rive* (Ounissi, 1974) women appear to be dominated in a patriarchal setting and relatively devalued in the process of narration, the subsequent works that are discussed in this chapter illustrate a total reversal of this representation. First, the chapter will focus on how the place of women in these works is defended according to ethnocentric variants of ‘universal’ feminism. These variants will be analysed in terms of politicised codes, communal values, conservative religions, ‘patriarchal’ traditions as seen by Westerners. In so doing, the chapter will argue that

these texts succeed in articulating a feminist position that prescribes Western cultural domination. Second, the chapter will show that the valorisation of heroines according to Western norms is representative of both a 'universalist' model for Algerian women who adopt values regardless of their own culture, and of women's movements and the socio-political context locally during the 1980s. Third, on the level of the narrative, the chapter will investigate the 'imported' techniques that enable these texts to be written from a point of view where women acquire a fundamental dimension, thus significantly marking this literary production. This progression is not decoded only in terms of the significant presence of female characters, but also in terms of writing (écriture), and orality 'la parole féminine' as modes of narrativity.

The third chapter will investigate the view that Aïcha Lemsin's *La Chrysalide* (1976) and *Ciel de Porphyre* (1978) are literary productions that claim Western feminism as their cover and source of intellectual legitimacy. While ethnocentric variants of Western feminism still seem to be central to Lemsine's texts, there is enough to suggest that the adopted feminism in both *La Chrysalide* and *Ciel de Porphyre* is not simply a critique and a reflection of patriarchal traditions as seen by Westerners. Surprisingly enough, as equally, and in certain cases even more constitutive an element than the Western simultaneously, the traditional is also decisive and seems to orchestrate perceptions around women in these novels. First, this chapter will examine the ways in which this amalgam of opposing elements functions, following a 'moderated' approach. The chapter will show that this attempt to bring Western and conservative values together is often in 'solidarity' with the latter. Second, it will look at the repercussions of this cultural amalgam on the level of textual construction. This mainly consists in demonstrating that while patriarchal tradition is transgressed in terms of representation, this transgression is denied on the level of narration. Third, the chapter will establish links with external factors such as the cultural, social and political contexts of the Boumedienne era (1965/1979): a context which seems to have inspired Lemsine to choose for her heroines this model of femininity. Fourth, the chapter will trace the origins of this conception on the level of the literary. Djamila Debèche's *Leïla, jeune fille d'Algérie,* even though written in French and in many ways a product of the civilising mission, remains attached to its Arab and oriental ancestors with a tight umbilical cord. The chapter will bring both authors' works to

establish links as far as the construction of the image of femininity is concerned.

The fourth chapter looks at how other Algerian women authors, usually intellectuals and academic feminists, succeed in formulating an authentic theory to account for gender inequality. For this, three novels by Assia Djebar have been selected: *L'amour, la fantasia* (1985), *Ombre sultane* (1987), and *Loin de Médine (1991)*. Whereas Lemsine's texts attempt to 'reconcile' local traditions with Western values, Djebar selectively rejects 'patriarchal' traditions. First, the chapter will argue that Djebar's *Ombre sultane* criticises specifically Algerian forms of gender oppression. The first analytical section of the chapter focuses on the narrator's questioning of some basic principles in Boutefnouchet's 'traditionalist' model of femininity. Second, the chapter will argue that this feminist critique is not rooted solely in Western feminist thought. The second analytical section of the chapter will show how female agency in these works is also attached to the author's traditions, religion, and culture. Third, the chapter will argue that this awareness of Algerian women's situation is reflected on the level of language. It examines how Djebar re-appropriates French for familiarisation of the audience with Algerian women's experiences.

Methodology

The work is mainly conducted in relation to three aspects. The first is only a method and research mechanism, content analysis, precisely latent and manifest. Although not used to serve a quantitative approach as it is usually the case, content analysis will be efficient to assemble, compare, and contrast different profiles of women as represented in different women authored novels. This makes it possible to come up with one representation that comprises the features of a given and distinct model of femininity. During and prior to this process, a historicist approach to research has been particularly useful. This consists in taking into account the author's biography, as well as the socio-political and the cultural contexts of the literary production in question. For instance, Lemsine belongs to an Algerian bourgeoisie which is representative of the views adopted by the FLN from 1962 to 1979. Ounissi however, belongs to an Arabic-Badisi educated class. Ben is a pure

product of the French school and comes from a different religious background to most Algerians. Djebar is an intellectual (historian) and this is important for her perception of femininity. It is partly in relation to such details that links and differentiations could on a first level of analysis be established.

On a second level of analysis, and because we are dealing with literary texts, the previously explained process goes on to cover the textual aspect of these works. This means that this research examines how the selected novels are linguistically constructed. It seems that every author chooses a certain way to use language and to describe women's experiences. This is why in almost all chapters of this research there is an analysis of word-use, semantics, grammar, as well as the sound and writing systems such as in chapter four on Djebar's use of Berber and Colloquial Arabic. However, one must stress that because this research is carried out from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, (CDA), it is not simply a matter of examining the textual aspect of works. Interestingly enough, Richardson paraphrases Gerbner to explain that 'we shouldn't consider elements of vocabulary, grammar, semantics (and so on) to be of profound and direct significance in themselves; rather it is the function that such elements serve in the moment of their use that is of interest' (Gerbner, 1958, cited in Richardson, 2007, p.38).

The third aspect of our analysis builds on Gerbner's aforementioned recognition of the 'function' that words can serve 'at the moment of their use'. Fairclough observes that CDA demands that the text's 'socio-cultural practice' be analysed, of course, in relation to the previously discussed textual element: words, grammar etc (Fairclough, 1995, p.57). In fact, Richardson considers this procedure as the stage where textual analysis becomes critical discourse analysis. Concerning this research, to speak of the function of language at the moment of its use is to speak of different levels of abstraction. In chapters 2 and 3, there is an examination of the immediate situational context. One could probably think of the textual construction of Lemsine's texts which serves to publicise the workings of an Algerian bourgeois culture in orchestrating notions of femininity.

From this perspective, our research looks at what the selected literary texts - in their textual construction - tell about the society in which they were written and the society that

they were written for. This is of course in what concerns the theme of women's emancipation. For instance, the thesis examines how the narrative construction of a given work is made to justify certain 'culturally connoted' practices for women. It is thus worth explaining our methodology for investigating the dialectic text/discourse. Drawing on narratological theory makes it possible to distinguish between what is referred to as 'story' on the one hand, and 'plot' on the other. Whereas the former is defined as the 'actual sequence of events as they happen' (Barry, 2017, p.224), Barry defines the latter as the way those events are 'edited, ordered, packaged, and presented in what we recognise as a narrative' (Barry, 2017, p.224). Barry observes that North American narratology uses 'instead of "plot" the term 'discourse'. Interestingly enough, he observes that this term 'is sensible, because it isn't just "plot" in the narrow sense which is at issue, but style, viewpoint, pace, and so on, which is to say, the whole "packaging" of the narrative which creates the overall effect' (Barry, 2017, p.224).

In many instances, the construction of narratives in a certain way allows the author to affect the reader's understanding of femininity and the 'appropriate' values according to which women should behave. This could be seen in terms of the order of events that each author chooses for her narrative. This example is worth noting because techniques such as flashback and flash forward guide the reader to focus on certain scenes and events, to have a high/low opinion of a given reality. Directing the reader to focus on certain things, however, is not without meaning. This is so often motivated by ideological landmarks and socio-political referents. This is why it has been particularly useful to draw on sociological findings not to merely shed light on women's social reality in interwar Algeria and how this is manifested in those novels. Instead, the sociological is taken into account in order to unveil the functions of certain political and social discourses on women which prevailed during the first three decades after 1962 and the way they are expressed, represented, legitimated, and reproduced in women authored texts. This makes it possible to look at female profiles in texts as discursive components. This is of interest to note considering that the vast majority of analyses on the subject have mainly been interested in decoding women's representation in terms of what is said and done by female characters, (story). This is only the superficial and explicit aspect of a character, and which often leaves such analyses at a descriptive stage. In its analysis of 'discourse' however, our work builds on

sociological insights to introduce each ‘type of women’ as defined by sociologist Souad Khodja (1985) most notably and analyse it within a literary context.

We have selected primary sources that meet certain criteria. The first criterion is the importance occupied by the theme of women’s emancipation. Second, the selected texts for this thesis represent an enriching diversity in the sense that every category of novels seems to propose a distinct representation of Algerian women. Although Francophone novels constitute 80% of the selected primary sources, the thesis covers two Arabophone works translated into French and so many other languages. These belong to Ounissi. Ounissi is the only *Arabophone* woman author during the first three decades after independence to write in Arabic. This allows the research to broaden the field of investigation and to reflect on the ideological discourses present in both Arabophone and Francophone literatures. This helps to unearth the unity of concerns that cross social and cultural formations.

The formal aspect of texts has also been taken into consideration. It is widely known that fundamental differences exist between the writings of not only different writers, but of the same writer. An example one could think of is Mohamed Dib’s classic. Even if there is continuity in the work and in the overall perspective of the talented elder statesman of Algerian literature, there is no stylistic similarity between the writing of the *Trilogie Algerie* and what is called the *Nordic Trilogie*. Salhi notes that ‘Readers who were used to Dib's naturalistic portrayal of social and political conditions in his *Algérie trilogy* were rather surprised by the author's bewildering vision of life in his new novel’ (Salhi 1999, p.210). This divergence, in what concerns style, is best seen when comparing Lemsine’s writings which have no common measure with those by Assia Djebar and by Hawa Djabali. The former belong to a didactic literature and school writing, whereas the latter are an exploration of aesthetic, formal, and semiotic conceptions.

It is worth adding that apart from Djebar and to some extent Bouraoui, the selected authors for this thesis have not been sufficiently discussed, despite the centrality of the question of women in their works. There has been very little scholarship on works by Ounissi except for few works mainly examining the theme of women’s participation in the

War of Liberation. One could probably think of a study by Salah Mefquda of a novel entitled *Lunja wa al-ghul*. His study thus falls in the aforementioned category of thematic-based research. The same applies to Djabali and Lemsine who, apart from Achour (1991) and Nisbet (1982) respectively, one can hardly think of other critics audaciously discussing women's representation in their novels. One could think of a variety of reasons that are responsible for this. First, at the dawn of independence, the vast majority of educated people could only read and write in French which explains why authors like Ounissi who wrote in Arabic were less studied. Other authors like Djabali used a very elevated style that was not necessarily accessible to a newly independent population where levels of illiteracy were considerably high. In fact, because most interwar works in French were published in France, many copies were - and still are - extremely hard to get hold of.

Although this thesis examines the voice of the text, readers may notice that this is occasionally elided with the voice of the author. This could be partly explained by the fact that three out of the ten primary sources selected for this thesis are of an autobiographical nature. While Ounissi's 1979 work is purely an autobiography, Djebar's 1985 *L'amour, la fantasia is a semi-autobiography.* Bouraoui describes her works including *La voyeuse interdite* as 'auto-fiction'. Additionally, the voice of the text and that of the author are only elided when the author, as we learn in interviews and works done on her life, shares the same viewpoint as the narrator. This is why the introduction of each chapter focuses on the biography of the author. While this does not necessarily mean that the author is always herself the narrator, it is worth noting that in the case of *La Chrysalide* for instance, there is a preface introducing the reader to the context of the novel and stating its subject and aims. This 'implication' of the author in the text is even more significant when taking into account the fact that in the same novel, Lemsine writes Chapter 7 using a non-fictional style. In this case, the voice of the narrative is reasonably no one else's other than the author's.

The terms Classical Arabic (CA) and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) are used interchangeably. Although the terms are not normally used to refer to the same form of language, they are so here because of two main reasons. First, Classical Arabic is a form

of old Arabic as spoken by the Arabs of Mecca about fifteen centuries ago. Modern Standard Arabic is the current, and on many linguistic levels only an updated form of CA. For instance, newspaper articles published in Saudi Arabia and Yemen today are very close to Classical Arabic. Second, this academic, updated form of CA, uses a unified grammar across the whole Arab world. From the Gulf to the Atlantic, MSA is used for education, official statements, newspapers etc. Most importantly, MSA in this sense replaces Colloquial Arabic (daily communication language). Colloquial Arabic is a form of Arabic that is adapted to the ways in which a given non-Arab population used to speak before Arabic. It is in this sense that the use of MSA has been widely criticised not only for the marginalisation of Algerian dialect but also for being a vehicle to promote Arabisation - which is embedded in CA - to the detriment of local cultures (see for instance chapter 4: writing the feminine in Algerian dialect). It is from this perspective that CA and MSA juxtapose Colloquial Arabic.

Chapter One

Ounissi and the Algerian model of traditional womanhood.

Introduction

Born on the 13th of December 1936, Zhor Ounissi is a prolific Algerian author. She is known for her [*min yawmiyat mudarisa hura*] (1979), translated into French as *Journal d'une institutrice libre*; [a*la al-chati' al-'akhar*] (1974), translated into French as *Sur l'autre rive*; [*al-rasif al-na'im*] (1967), translated into French as *Le trottoir endormi*; and [*Lunja wa al-ghul*] (1994). She recently published a work on Ibnu Badis entitled *L'imam Abdelhamid Benbadis et la renaissance d'une ouma: histoire d'une vie,* 2015. Prior to this she also published *D'Aveux et de nostalgie* in 2011 where an emotional topography is drawn through her memories and impressions in Constantine.

In fact, she was born and raised in Constantine, 'the city of bridges' as it is generally known among Algerians. Constantine fully justifies its appellation for the many picturesque bridges that connect the hills upon which it is perched. There is a minute description of the city in almost all Ounissi's works. In the different literary genres in which she chose to write, namely the short story, the novel, and the memoir, Ounissi does not hesitate to express her strong attachment to Constantine. As we shall see shortly, this attachment is not simply on account of the city being her birthplace.

Indeed, Ounissi's education and her cultural, political, and literary convictions are deeply imbedded in the ideals of the Constantinese reformist school. It is worth noting that to this day, Constantine is referred to as the city of 'science and scholars' thanks to the considerable number of Ulemas including Ibnu Badis himself who come from this city. As discussed in the general introduction, the Ulemas sought to complete a religious reform in colonial Algeria at the dawn of the twentieth century. Education in a Madrasa which was purely Arabophone and culturally pro-arabisation allowed Ounissi to become the first Algerian woman author to publish novels in Arabic.

It is true that the choice of Arabic for writing as far as Ounissi is concerned is one main aspect of the impact that the reformist school has had on her. It is also true however, that her conception of modernity is in line with reformist values. In fact, the woman author contributed significantly to the spreading of reformist ideals considering that she was influential both as a politician and as a woman in the media. Her efforts to put reformist ideology into practice were particularly significant when Ounissi became a minister. One

of the first women to mark Algerian political history, she became minister of Social Affairs in 1982. Four years later, she was also appointed head of the Department of Education for a period of 18 months. She returned to political life in 1997 through Parliament and firmly defended reformist values especially in matters relating to women. Vince remarks that:

> Zhor Ounissi, a member of the wartime National Liberation Front FLN (and Minister for Education, 1985–88) from a Constantine Ulema background passionately critiqued mixed marriages in 1965. Writing in the newspaper of the Algerian army, *El Djeïch*, she asked: 'What will become of virility, Algerian glory, the Arabo-Islamic national character of our vigorous youth? In what state will our young men be when they see their sisters in the arms of foreigners who are their enemies and the enemies of all the Arab nation?' (Vince, 2015, p.152).

The Ulema background referred to in the quoted passage by Vince orchestrates Ounissi's perception of various notions when it comes to women. It is worth remembering that Ounissi openly declares herself as a proponent of Ibnu Badis's views. She believes that he started 'a peaceful and harmonious cultural renaissance supported by both men and women, providing knowledge and education for every member of society' (Ounissi, 1998, p.146). She acknowledges Ibnu Badis as granting women a degree of equality with men and quotes him as follows: 'Whoever educates a man educates an individual. Whoever educates a woman educates a nation' (Ounissi, 1998, p.146). It is true that Ounissi was slightly critical of his successors after his death in 1940. It is also true however, that she believes these were for the progression of women and their education as long as this is achieved 'within a framework of religious and moral values' (Ounissi, 1998, p.146). She describes such a framework as 'civilised, clean and noble' (Ounissi, 1998, p.146).

It is this framework of religious and moral values for women which seems to be defended by Ounissi in her literary works. Exemplary women in Ounissi's novels as we shall see in this chapter are constantly bound to religious and conservative values. In a newspaper article published in *El Watan* on the 18th of April 2015, we learn that Ounissi's 'œuvre est souvent axée sur la place de la femme dans la société et aspire à une libération dans le

respect des valeurs traditionnelles' (El Watan, 2015). What particularly arouses one's intrigue is that while the theme of women's emancipation is central to Ounissi's works, her ultimatum demands respect for the often sexist traditions as we have just read in the quoted passage on Ibnu Badis. Despite the importance of 'traditional emancipation' to most of her works, no research has sought to address this antagonism.

This antagonism refers to two opposing discourses on women: (the feminist vs the traditional). The sections entitled 'Ounissi and reformist feminism' as well as ''Traditionalist' women into text' will respectively examine both discourses in Ounissi's 1974 and 1979 works. These discourses consist of a set of - selected and well-defined - feminist claims as permitted by the Ulemas on the one hand, and 'mainly' the 'traditionalist' as called for by the said Ulemas on the other. Stressing the Ulemas' adoption of both the 'traditionalist' and certain feminist rights is to distinguish Ounissi's notion of the feminine from seemingly similar positions held by some Francophone authors such as Lemsine.

Lemsine's works, as we shall see in chapter 3, are centred around these two opposing poles. The difference, however, is that while Ounissi seems to be selective in terms of what feminist rights she claims for her essentially 'traditionalist' heroines, Lemsine adopts a 'moderating' approach for all feminist claims. For instance, if Ounissi goes all the way to advocate women's right to education, Lemsine advocates women's education in moderation. Education in moderation means that a woman must not be pursuing diplomas to the detriment of her marital life, because her priority is to find a husband at some point in her life. Moderation with regards to the content of this education could also be seen in that Lemsine's heroines are encouraged to learn both Arabic and French in order to avoid cultural and political extremism. While Lemsine is open to accepting all sorts of feminist rights as generally advocated by Westerners provided that these rights should only be celebrated within limits, Ounissi allows her heroine 'certain' feminist rights and fully defends them while most aspects of her heroines' lives remain purely 'traditionalist'.

The next section will define the 'traditionalist' as a model of femininity. It will examine the workings of Algerian reformism in orchestrating notions of such a model. Basic reformist

principles such as spatial separation of the sexes and segregation-based veiling seem to constitute the most fundamental and defining aspects of Boutefnouchet's 'traditionalist' model. The following sections will explore this model on the level of the literary. Most of Ounissi's works show women, but how do they present them? According to what norms do they propose emancipation for them? Overall, this chapter will focus on the viewpoint held in *Journal d'une institutrice libre* as well as *Sur l'autre rive* to answer these questions.

'Traditionalist' women from reformism to literature

It is important to start by discussing the 'traditionalist' because the three different conceptions of women's emancipation which are explored in the following three chapters are in many ways a response to 'traditionalist' gender roles. Response should not be only perceived in its social dimension such as the emergence of new models for Algerian women, what is normally examined by a sociologist. Response can also be discerned on the level of the literary. Indeed, these three different conceptions as we shall see are defended by Francophone authors and are written back against the 'traditionalist'. While the different conceptions are among other things a response to the 'traditionalist' view, it is also true that this latter depends on its opposition to the former, representing modern perceptions of the feminine as imported from Western societies. These are deemed foreign to local culture and as a result justify and perpetuate the 'traditionalist'.

As far as this chapter is concerned, to speak of 'traditionalist' women is to speak of a distinct representation of the feminine. The 'traditionalist' is characterised by a set of well-defined roles for women. These roles result from an interplay of religious, cultural, and traditional values. Consciously and unconsciously dominant in the manners and attitudes of most Algerians, the 'traditionalist' was - most notably during the first 3 decades after independence - a constitutive element in the lives of women. Before delving into the literary, it is important to clearly define this purely Algerian conception of the feminine and to explore its workings in sociological terms.

In this model/conception, women are generally expected to behave according to certain

gender roles. They are expected to play their roles as housewives and to stay at home almost all the time. They are supposed to be separated from male strangers. They are obliged to wear the traditional veil. They are also required to bear children preferably sons. In addition to this, women are not allowed certain practices, not necessarily because of religion, but mainly due to tradition. Such practices include, for instance, smoking and alcohol consumption. A traditional woman must express reserve and modest attitudes in both words and gestures. Furthermore, a woman is not supposed to travel on her own, that is without a family male guardian. This could be her husband, her father, her brother, or her son. The absence of these, under some circumstances such as attending funerals and weddings, may also include nephews as male guardians. A woman must also have absolute respect and perform servitude for the parents of her husband. According to Boutefnouchet, 'Concernant les principes fondamentaux caractérisant le rôle de la femme algérienne dans la famille traditionnelle: intégrité physique; statut domestique; statut économique; fonction de mère féconde' (Boutefnouchet, 1982, p.72).

What is of particular interest to note is that these roles and traits for women are rooted in discourses adopted by the exemplary Algerian reformists of the 1920s and 1930s. Founded in 1931 by Cheikh Abdu al-Hamid Ibnu Badis, the association of Ulemas took a purely traditional position on many important issues affecting Muslim social life. There are many reasons for their traditional approach. These include the fact that the general views presented by the Ulemas were placed in a context of anti-colonial struggle, which promoted the idea of countering the Western in general. One could probably think of French (being always associated with the coloniser). This is why members of this reformist movement were exclusively and intentionally Arabophone. This left them disconnected from modern issues such as those relating to Western philosophy. One could probably think of utilitarianism in 19th century England notably in works by the British John Stuart Mill as well as pragmatism later in the United States. One could also think of contemporary political and ideological issues such as those leading to the First and Second World Wars, in addition to the activism of the women suffragette movement in its intellectual dimension. There is also neglect of modern notions of labour and economy. In a word, they neglected the implications that the aforementioned issues may have had on the lives of men and women in the 20th century. Reformists did thus not

build on contemporary ideas on the said issues to take into account Marxism and liberalism for instance. Their ideas were mainly paradigmatic of a Muslim society that was during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, barely freed from its cultural Middle Ages. A society that was still impregnated with archaic conceptions of work and social exchange. The considerable weight of the past, aggravated by the mediocrity of the social conditions offered to the Muslim population within the framework of the 'indigénat' as we have seen in the General Introduction, prevented reformists from questioning traditional structures.

Among the questions on which reformists had no clear vision was the question of women. Although reformists devoted considerable effort to problems raised by the evolution of Muslim women in modern society, it was not to promote this development, nor was it to respond to contemporary feminists. Response to contemporary feminists would have brought to discussion, among other things, the specific struggles of Muslim women as would do Muslim feminists for example. Their efforts, however, were mainly aimed at reminding the indigenous people in what direction and according to which ideology the question of women should be defended. This of course, so that women's rights should be carried out according to Islam and not against it. Alarmed by the increasingly emerging feminist tendencies from both inside and outside the country, Algerian reformists made it their duty to raise the voice of Islam. Feminists from the inside were generally led by a young generation of Muslims educated in French Schools. As for 'threats' of feminism coming from abroad, they were mainly presented by influential Egyptian reformists such as Qasim Amin.

Members of the reformist movement in Algeria were fervent supporters of sunna, that is to say, all that had been established by the virtuous Elders. It is safe to say that as a result of such beliefs, their reformism was not aimed at offering progressive interpretations of religious law. Progressive interpretations in this sense would enable religion to deal with contemporary issues, as would do Arab feminism (see for instance chapter 4). On the contrary, veneration of the aforementioned virtuous Elders placed them in the obligation to look back and scrutinise the religious and cultural past. This return to the past was considered as the only source to discover models likely to be suitable for 20th century Muslim women.

As with Boutefnouchet's model, it is important to define the essential elements of this reformist ideology with regards to women. Merad's 1967 research examines the perspective of the Ulemas with regards to women's emancipation in-depth. Merad is particularly interested in a series of articles published in *al-Shihab* which were borrowed from Manār. In these articles R. Riḍā deals with all aspects of women's emancipation. It is worth adding that Riḍā's ideas were, as Lazreg observes, 'inspiring' to Abdu al-hamid Ibnu Badis who she explains, 'espoused many of his ideas about the role of Islam in everyday life' (Lazreg, 1994, p.81). The aforementioned direct borrowing allows Merad to bring to the surface the views of Algerian reformism in matters relating to feminism. Merad examines a conference/debate which took place on January 8, 1930, at the Faculty of Law in Cairo on equal rights and duties for men and women. He presents both the arguments advanced by proponents of feminism on the one hand, as well as those by R. Riḍā on the other. He starts by presenting feminist demands:

— droit à la libre circulation (abolition des contraintes de la claustration et du voile).

— droit à l'instruction.

— droit à la libre disposition de sa personne.

— droit de choisir son futur époux.

— droit de se défendre contre la polygamie, et de demander le divorce.

— droit de regard sur l'éducation et l'orientation des enfants.

— droit de propriété.

— droit à une part égale à celle de l'homme dans les successions («Les Musulmans», note M. 'Azmī, «ont pratiquement abandonné l'application des peines canoniques *(ḥudūd).* Pourquoi n'auraient-ils pas le droit d'abandonner aussi le système successoral coranique? »).

— droit d'accession à la Fonction publique.

— droits civiques égaux à ceux de l'homme (droit de vote, éligibilité) (Merad, 1967, p.327).

It is worth observing that these quoted points on women's emancipation are in their entirety defended by some Algerian Francophone women authors. This is the case of, for instance, Fadila Merabet, Ben and Djabali as discussed in chapter 2.

The critique expressed by the other side of the debate, the orthodox point of view as Merad prefers to call it, which inspired the Algerian reformists, could be formulated in the following points. The first point concerns the question of the veil. R. Riḍā rejects, Merad explains, the idea of the need to abolish the wearing of the veil. The second is about the rejection of Muslim women's free interaction with men, that is, the advocation of the aforementioned 'traditionalist' division of spaces (public and private for men and women respectively). In addition to this, R. Riḍā is also very circumspect about divorce: according to R. Riḍā, if divorce was to be fully allowed for women, as for men, it would be a ruin of households. Divorce should only be allowed for women in extreme cases. This does not mean, as Merad explains, that R. Riḍā is unfavourable to polygamy. The other point R. Riḍā disagrees with is equality in matters relating to inheritance. This leads Merad to observe:

> qu'à part des concessions sans portée spectaculaire (relativement au droit des femmes à l'instruction), la doctrine de R. Riḍā demeure fidèle à la tradition sunnite. Ce qui donne à son *réformisme* et à celui des Algériens qui se réclamaient hautement de son autorité, une allure de conservatisme puritain (Merad, 1967, p.328).

Indeed, their views are conservative. This is because apart from issues relating to the education of women, the right for property, and the choice of a future husband (points of agreement), other points are not shared with feminists. These are thus points we refer to in this chapter as points of disagreement. This is the case of issues relating to the wearing of the veil, separation of the sexes, and equality in inheritance. It is safe to situate the position of Algerian reformists on women's emancipation in such points of agreement and disagreement with feminists. Accordingly, in *al-Shihab* which was not merely a journal but the main mouthpiece of the reformist association, readers can notice Abdu al-hamid Ibnu

Badis's emphasis on women's education. This is the case of an article entitled *'le droit des femmes à l'enseignement'*. As for the content of this education, it purely serves objectives of the Ulemas which were far from supporting women's individual preferences. For instance, reformist education did not seek to provide women with the freedom to choose whether or not they want to wear the veil. This is hardly surprising considering that the Ulemas were religious men with rigid attitudes - and in many ways misogynistic ones - regarding themes such as sex-mixing in public places, productive roles such as paid work, divorce, travelling freely without a male guardian, and of course unveiling. As a result, the Ulemas could go no further than advocating for women an education that would give them the necessary and sufficient knowledge to be able to manage their houses and educate their children. It is worth clarifying that it is not religion that is necessarily anti-feminist - rigidity and backwardness in this sense reside in masculine interpretations of sacred texts.

The role of this association was not restricted to defining the status of indigenous women by allowing and forbidding rights for them. Their role when it comes to women was also influential in matters relating to art. This could be seen in the creation of an Algerian Arabophone literature. The Ulemas encouraged literary production, especially the short story, in hopes of making of it a means of explanation and propaganda. In her 1985 PhD research, Mostaghanemi looks at the immediate link that existed between the ideology of reformists and literatures of the time such as Redha Houhou's. This chapter, however, explores the impact that *al-Shihab* has had on postcolonial literary production. As a genre, the short story did not take long before it occupied an important place in newspapers and journals of the Association which allowed it to become highly popular. This inspired a student at this school, Zhor Ounissi, to start publishing literary works for the reformist press.

Ounissi and reformist feminism

Referred to towards the end of the previous section as points of agreement with feminists, these rights are similarly claimed by Ounissi's narrators. Her postcolonial works, especially [*ala al-chati' al-'akhar*], and [*min yawmiyat moudarisa hura*], are in many ways

literary reprints of *al-Shihab*'s instructions for women. In the former*, Sur l'autre rive* for instance, although female characters are presented as essentially 'traditionalist', they are allowed certain feminist rights. These rights are defended within a well-defined range of issues. One could probably think of issues relating to matrimonial life, denouncing physical and verbal violence against women, the right to inheritance as well as to education.

There is the right to reject forced marriage which is claimed by the *Ulemas*. Forced marriage is denounced by the narrator of *al-thawbu al-'abyad*, a short-story in *Sur l'autre rive*. In this story, Zahia, aged 15, finds herself forced to get married to an unknown man. All that has been imparted to her about him is that he is 'ibnu al-halal': a son of halal, a common expression that has strong religious connotations. The term halal means that a given object/person is lawful according to Islamic law:

> Why God? Why can I not say, no, never? And me who will get married? Maybe they hated me and so wanted to move me away from them to a different house? Wherein lives ibnu al-halal, and who is this ibnu al-halal to whom clings my father? And how can I live with a human being that I do not know? I have not known anything about him other than he is a son of family (Ounissi, 2007, p. 69. Translation is mine).

This is an instance that results in the narrator cutting a forlorn figure of the adolescent girl. Prompting a young girl or a woman in general to get married to someone against her will, it should be observed, is a tradition that is rejected by R. Riḍā and feminists alike (a point of agreement), as we have seen previously. It is from this perspective that other rights are allowed to women in Ounissi's writings.

For instance, there is the denunciation of the deplorable situation that is generally inflicted on housewives and women in general. Although traditional marriage - which remains mainly based on the idea of spatial gender division - is celebrated, it is not uncommon to find a narrator's critique of verbal and physical violence against women. The fact that a woman can be divorced without any form of trial is denounced. Narration eloquently expresses the total insecurity and arbitrariness to which women placed under such circumstances are subjected. Similarly, the narrators of Ounissi's 1974 and 1979 works

criticise other forms of women's oppression. This is the case of the injustice suffered by women who do not have sons. It is worth noting that the privilege traditional society gives to women bearing boys is the only detail that Ounissi and reformists denounce in 'traditionalist' ways of living. In addition, Ounissi's works defend the Ulemas' views when it comes to inheritance. A critical tone is expressed in *Sur l'autre rive* against the traditional morality which is exclusively imposed on women to deprive them from rights relating to inheritance to favour male members of the family.

Furthermore, *Sur l'autre rive* denounces women's alienation in matters relating to education. There is a critique of processes leading to women's ignorance. Illiteracy leaves women confined in the spirit of man's omnipotence and submission to his desires. Both *Sur l'autre rive* and *Journal d'une institutrice libre* express this point eloquently. In the former which is a collection of interrelated short-stories, such as in [*al-thawbu al-'abyad*], readers discover the life of Zahia. Saddened and miserable at the beginning of the story as the prospect of quitting school and a forced marriage loom on the horizon, Zahia has her education however, strongly defended by the dominant hetero-diegetic narrator. Zahia's mother's dreams to see her daughter educated melt to only satisfy the whims of a patriarchal father. Such dreams are supported by the narrator and the fact that the daughter is unable to realise them is dramatised. The dramatisation of women's lack of education is not only denounced by the narrator who in long spells of the story remains external. It is also expressed through the minute description of the girl's strong connection with school since her childhood which is particularly appealing to the reader. Zahia is depicted as a happy girl at school as in instances where she and her female classmates make fun of their bald English teacher. She is dubbed 'philosopher' among her classmates.

In such issues as consent to marriage, education, inheritance, and the denunciation of matrimonial issues such as domestic violence, it is safe to say that Ounissi's works succeed in expressing feminist views. Communicating the inherent contestation of women's situation in the aforementioned issues is in line with what is referred to in this chapter as reformist feminism (see points of agreement with feminists in the previous section). It is worth observing that contestation of such rights for women is also in line

with the controversial 1984 *Family Code*. For instance, in its broad lines the family status proposes a section entitled *Des Elements Fondamentaux Du Mariage.* The fifth article in this section is on the formation of the marriage contract. Marriage we learn, is formed by the request of one of the two future spouses and acceptance by the other. The term used can be any term meaning marriage legally. Consent can be expressed by any means: through language or custom, writing or signs. Ounissi's advocation of women's right to ownership is also there in the *Family Code*. In Article 31 on the rights of the wife, the fourth element stipulates freedom to dispose of one's property (*Code de la Famille*, 1984).

Other than the 1984 *Family Code*, Ounissi's reformist contestation of women's rights is also reminiscent of Arabophone literatures of the 1930s. As noted in the previous section, these served as propaganda for reformists. One could for instance think of Mohamed El Abed El Djilali's 1935 short-story publications in *al-Shihab*. In *Le bonheur mutilé* for example, he describes some of the evils that plague Algerian society and makes a plea in favour of marriage for love and the choice of future spouses for women before marriage. One could also think of Redha Houhou's publications to tackle certain taboos such as the status of women. Respecting, too, the religious framework within which women's rights should be advocated, Houhou is critical of certain traditions and social structures. In 1947, he dedicated his book *La jeune fille d'Oum El Koura* to women by introducing it as follows: 'A celle qui est privée du bienfait de l'amour, du bienfait de la science, du bienfait de la liberté, à cette misérable créature négligée dans cette existence, à la femme algérienne…*'* (Houhou, 1947, preface).

What seems to characterise Ounissi's postcolonial production compared to the aforementioned works is the partial feminisation of the text. As carefully explained in the introduction to chapter 2, the feminisation of writing refers to the use of certain stylistic and linguistic approaches that allow a full representation of women's experiences in literary and journalistic texts. While in the set of Francophone texts discussed in the next chapter feminisation allows women to be entirely visible, the use of feminine words and expressions in Ounissi's texts recounts the world from a female perspective only in ways that conform with the ideology of Algerian reformism. For instance, towards the end of [*al-thawbu al-'abyad*], readers can notice a feminisation that is reminiscent of Francophone

texts where women's pent up feelings are expressed and women's oppression is denounced such as in *Sabrina* (1986) and *La voyeuse interdite* (1991). The difference is that these succeed in expressing radical and 'universalist' views (see chapter 2). Untypical of Ounissi's female characters in general, Zahia speaks and expresses her 'I', her subjectivity, only to claim reformist rights, however. One could most probably think of putting the female body and sexuality into text which is genuinely absent in Ounissi's texts. For Ounissi's female character to speak is, in itself, some sort of discrepancy. This because as we shall see shortly, the narrative construction of Ounissi's text remains paradigmatic of the conservative ideas that silence women and exclude them from certain roles. It is nevertheless important to first acknowledge the way in which Ounissi's writings support certain rights for women.

'Traditionalist' women into text

1. Writing in the language of reformists

Although Ounissi advocates the right for women's education like the Ulemas, one must not forget that the content of this education is also culturally paradigmatic of reformist ideology. Like the Ulemas, Ounissi advocates for her Muslim female characters an education that is remarkably gender-based. In both her short-stories and her autobiography where Ounissi herself is the teacher, education aims at preparing women for domestic tasks and is by no means aimed at helping women gain marketable skills. In the last chapter of *Journal d'une institutrice libre* we learn that women 'learnt reading and writing, and came to the centre to accomplish their knowledge of house-keeping… the most important that may, actually, benefit the girl, in the future… when she becomes a wife, and a mother' (Ounissi, 2007, p174. translation is mine).

It is true that the title of her autobiographical work, *Journal d'une institutrice libre* denotes a characteristic of the Ulemas and their followers, namely volunteering, since we learn in Courreye's Doctoral research that the Ulemas, refusing by political conviction to be officials of worship in official mosques, resorted as a result to 'l'enseignement libre étant

uniquement financé par la communauté' (Courreye, 2016, p.16). It is also true that Ounissi is equally a fervent supporter of Arabic education and of arabisation most notably.

Indeed, one must not forget that Ounissi and to a greater extent the Ulemas are credited with re-instituting Arabic as language for education. The Ulemas played a greater role considering that these scholars advocated such rights at times of colonisation when ignorance was widespread among the colonised. In addition, the *Ulemas*' advocation of Arabic education was in many ways an expression of anti-colonialism and an unequivocal assertion of cultural nationalism which attests to the valiant and important role they played. Similarly, Ounissi, though mainly after 1962, is critical of the teaching of other languages especially French, being the language of the coloniser, unless it is taught for personal reasons. According to her, French must by no means be used for expressing oneself and one's identity, an attitude the result of which is crucial to the ways in which women are represented in her texts as we shall see in this section. This position in favour of Arabic education is expressed not only by her narrators, but also by Ounissi herself. This is the case of her autobiographical work, *Journal d'une institutrice libre,* where Ounissi, a teenage teacher, volunteers to give a group of young indigenous girls, Arabic education (Ounissi, 2007).

Amari observes that in this work, Ounissi considers Arabic as an essential component of the Algerian personality, and it is one of the national constants that are declared by the declaration of the first of November 1954 (Amari, 2017). Amari goes on to argue that the narrator expresses not only an appreciation for Arabic but through it, she extols the virtues defended by the Muslim Scholars. She thus valorises the role reformists played in preserving authenticity (Amari, 2017). In agreement with Amari, it is worth noting that in *Journal d'une institutrice libre* Arabic is described as the 'language of the Qur'an' and is directly linked to the reformist newspaper *al-Basa'ir*, where Ounissi herself started publishing her early works.

Conceiving of Arabic as such affects the author's representation of femininity. This is important to note given that the aforementioned autobiographical work is mainly about the life of Ounissi as a woman, but also about Arabic being essential to her own education

and to the adolescent girls she teaches. With the exception of telling expressions which she borrows from Algerian Arabic, such as words standing for a specific notion of honour as we shall see in the next section, Ounissi writes in Modern Standard Arabic in all her works. On this note, it is worth dwelling on the linguistic specificities of MSA which must not be overlooked when it comes to women's representation. As previously stated, Arabic is described in *Journal d'une institutrice libre* as the 'language of the Qur′an'. The Qur′an is perceived as being characterised by an extreme and unrivalled originality. This originality is, according to Khatibi, conceived as a radical theory of the sign, of the word and of Scriptures (Khatibi, 1986). This originality of Qur′anic language it should be observed, is based on a series of immutable signifiers regardless of age and time. This because the perceived originality of the Qur′an demands that the signified and the signifier be so indissolubly united. This is very paradigmatic of close readings prior to the emergence of structuralism by the dawn of the 20th century. The signified and the signifier being so indissolubly united means that MSA, like Classical Arabic, remains so anchored in tradition that it does not allow the space that is necessary for literary creativity.

Segarra likens this immutability to 'une pierre précieuse incorruptible et maintenue avec soin, dont la plus petite variation serait considérée comme un défaut de sa surface parfaite' (Segarra, 1997, p.18.) Interestingly enough, this image of the stone Segarra adds is found in *Chronique frontalière* where Arabic is defined as "langue-destin". Segarra observes how the protagonist of *Chronique frontalière* admits with a certain bitterness that her daughters 'ont été amenées à découvrir à leur tour, au printemps de l'âge, que l'essentiel ne se dit pas dans leur langue, que cette dernière passe à côté des choses de leur vie' (Bel Haj Yahia, 1991, cited in Segarra, 1997, p.160).

If immutability is a characteristic of Qur′anic language, what implications may this have on women and their representation in Arabophone texts such as Ounissi's? Modern Standard Arabic, unlike French it should be observed, is adapted and assimilated to 'Arab patriarchy' which limits women's self-expression. This is especially true of women's expression in public, an activity which remained for many centuries an exclusive privilege for men. For a woman to speak openly was viewed not only as a transgression, but as a *fitna*, a threat to the base upon which sit moral values and religious beliefs that underpin

traditional society.

The workings of *fitna* are at work in the production of Ounissi. Women are basically seen partially only. They are never developed as an entity, they exist only as mothers, sisters, cousins, and reproductive objects. That this is due to their situation in patriarchal society is only part of the explanation. In other works, such as we shall see in the three following chapters, even if the condition of women in society is not fundamentally different, there is a more balanced representation that does not fail to give readers other facets of women's reality. It is safe to say that in Francophone novels by authors like Djebar, Lemsine, Bouraoui, and Ben, women are perceived in their multiple dimensions, albeit social, cultural, and especially personal. One could assume that this is a trait of the community and the particular family structure described - and valorised - in Ounissi's novels. But such an assumption does not stand because even in Ounissi's aforementioned auto-biography, in Arabic [*min yawmiyat mudarisa hura*], she, almost the only female character who has a valued social activity and a certain independence through work, a relative freedom of movement, and self-expression in particular, is no exception. She works in al-madrasa, lives independently, but she is never described in her personal setting. She appears only in relation to other men and there she exists only as a sister or teacher.

Similarly, what characterises *Sur l'autre rive* is that the point of view on women is strictly masculine. There is almost no expression or direct presentation of female characters. This is not the case of Francophone novels where characters of both sexes are relatively developed by a narrative that defines them in themselves and in relation to each other, giving the reader different perspectives. As for Ounissi's works, all we know about women, the vision that is offered, the ideas that are communicated about them, everything is done through a look, a body, images, and a word of man only. So much so that when they are presented in the story with many details and minute descriptions, women are only in relation to male characters that what is happening in them is reflected.

While arguing that Arabic as language has contributed to the silencing of women's voices in such works, one must not forget that this argument taken alone, risks homogenising the experience of Arab women's writing. This as a result, blurs the specificity of Ounissi's

reformist ideology including that on women. Indeed, during this period, the 1960s and 1970s, Arab women authors from different Arab countries wrote in Arabic and hardly succeeded in transgressing taboos when it comes to women. One could probably think of the Egyptian Alifa Rifaat who, although widely recognised as vocal in her denunciation of sexist oppression, remains silent notably in matters relating to female sexuality, similar to Ounissi.

It is true that intimate issues such as those relating to female sexuality - female masturbation and female circumcision - remain taboo subjects in North Africa and the Middle East. Most importantly, a scholar like Nkealah (2008) convincingly argues that such issues are also not exposed by feminist authors writing fiction in Arabic like Alifa Rifaat herself. He examines her famous *Distant View of a Minaret* (1983) where he describes a suppressed female sexuality by a 'tellingly unnamed' wife who struggles to bring her husband to longer enjoyment of the marital bed. Despite Rifaat's effort to transgress taboos of the private as she discusses details of the sex act, Nkealah argues that 'the female character is trapped in a situation where she cannot freely express her wishes and desires either to her husband or to her women friends' (Nkealah, 2008, pp.26-27). Nkealah concludes that this shyness leads the female character to 'resort to body language' (Nkealah, 2008, p.27) as alternative to her silenced words in order for her to fulfil her sexuality.

It is true as Nkealah observes that this silence when it comes to female sexuality is a trait of what Mernissi calls 'active female sexuality', a mode she considers 'destructive' to the Muslim social order. (Mernissi, 1987, cited in Nkealah, 2008, p.27). It is also true however, that the specific Algerian context in which Ounissi was born, raised, and educated - a context that was mainly dominated by a reformist, anti-colonial spirit - explains this silence on different grounds to the homogenising 'active female sexuality' proposed by Mernissi. It is hardly surprising to bring anti-colonialism to the discussion of women's 'exclusion' from self-expression in Ounissi's texts, considering that anti-colonialism constitutes, along with women's participation in the War of Liberation, the fundamental theme around which all Ounissi's works are centred.

2. Reformism and the anti-colonial feminine

The prevailing and fervent anti-colonial mood among Algerians since the very first day of colonisation resulted in a tradition of masculinisation. Masculinisation was meant as a direct response to the colonisation of the country. Indeed, the colonisation of 1830 was not a mere appropriation of the land. As discussed in the general introduction, cultural invasion and acculturation were at the centre of French colonialism. Islam which did, and still does, constitute the main pillar of the Algerian identity, the main source of the Algerian imaginary, was targeted not only by turning places of worship into stables for animals, but also by tampering with the very discourses conveyed in religious preachings, in order to serve colonial interests.

This unprecedented change (the tampering with the religious) was so significant that it interfered with day-to-day life details of the indigenous people. Interestingly enough, Lazreg examines a set of oral texts to demonstrate the effects of such a change. The oral texts in question are by minstrels who served at the time as the media as they moved from one village to another to inform their countrymen on issues that concerned the community. This included narratives warning against changes affecting food such as the introduction of 'impure products' (Lazreg, 1994, p.52). One could mention the example of sugar being 'bleached through a process using bones of forbidden animals' (Lazreg, 1994, p.52). In addition to food, rituals were also affected by this intrusion according to these minstrels such as candles lit for their saints being 'made with pork [fat]' (Lazreg, 1994, p.53). Other examples include soap being 'adulterated' (Lazreg, 1994, p.52). They (the minstrels) thus concluded that they 'can no longer live in a state of purity' (Lazreg, 1994, p.52). Most importantly and relating to our argument, impurity concerns revealing Muslims' '*ser'*. Lazreg explains that:

> Translation of "*ser*" as secret is grammatically correct but contextually incomplete. In colloquial Arabic "*ser*" means both secret and essence of something, especially charm. It refers to an intangible quality that accounts for the attractiveness of a person. In other words, this term indicates the specialness of the condition of being Muslim, which was about to be destroyed by becoming vulnerable to the scrutiny of

outsiders (Lazreg, 19 94, p.52).

Most of al-Shihab's denunciation of foreign cultural intrusion aimed at the preservation of this purity. Indeed, reformists were devoted to fighting colonial currents which they saw as seeking to convert Muslim society to European ways of living. This mainly includes religious conversion and thus a loss of the Islamic character. A loss of Islamic values was perceived as paving the way for moral decadence. It is in this sense that the preservation of local 'customs' was crucial for reformists. On this note, the notion of *orf*, which means in English custom in what venerates the religious and the traditional, especially collective, and communal values, is important in matters relating to safeguarding women's purity. Merad paraphrases the Egyptian reformist R. Riḍā who argues that some rights claimed by feminists '«....sont inadmissibles *(munkarāt)*, au point de vue de la loi religieuse, de la loi civile et de la coutume (*'urf)*»' (Merad, 1967, p.327).

It is important to dwell on *orf* because it is this cultural norm that shapes notions of femininity in *Sur l'autre rive*, especially in *Soumia*. The story describes life in a colonial but purely 'traditionalist' setting that is almost identical to Ounissi's life as we learn in her autobiography and her several interviews. The narrator of the story evokes with a certain sense of pride the workings of *orf*, which is what draws boundaries between women and outsiders. In the aforementioned story, we learn that it is not acceptable 'that a girl, regardless of her age is still outside at sunset... an *orf* that must be respected and practiced by all' (Ounissi, 2007, p.29. Translation is mine). This is also the case of *Journal d'une institutrice libre* where Ounissi observes that *orf* does not allow mixed sexes in schools (Ounissi, 2007).

The narrator of *Soumia* resorts to *orf* to justify the obligation of 'traditionalist' roles for women. The absence of *orf*, the narrator warns, results in 'shame'. The word 'shame' is stressed by the narrator in that it is expressed using day-to-day Algerian Arabic Darija, the words 'ayb' 'ar', instead of merely using Standard Arabic. This use of specifically Algerian dialect indicates the existence of a common knowledge between the narrator and the reader. The knowledge in question is the specifically Maghrebi notion of 'honour'. More than a mere feeling, more than a mere value, honour is a practice whose rules

govern specifically Maghrebi societies. In his study of Kabyle society, Pierre Bourdieu shows to what degree cultural tradition in no way allows to escape this code (Bourdieu, 1979, cited in Nisbet, 1982, p.21). The very notion of honour as we learn in his influential anthropological study, is formulated through two main axes: *nif*, and *hurma*.

The former is the pressure exerted by the group on the male individual and thus the outside world, to perform revenge for shame. He who does not take revenge, Nisbet explains, no longer exists for others. In this sense, honour and the being merge (Nisbet, 1982). Unlike *nif*, *hurma* implies all that is sacred. The sacred in this sense refers to the inside and more precisely the feminine universe, the world of secrecy, 'l'espace clos de la maison, par opposition au dehors, au monde ouvert de la place publique [...], réservé aux hommes' (Nisbet, 1982, p.33). The term derives from the religious word *ḥaram* which means the forbidden. Any attack on *hurma* is not merely a challenge of honour but a sacrilegious outrage.

The defining characteristic of Ounissi's 'traditionalist' female characters in *Sur l'autre rive* is based on the notion of *hurma*. Djamila and her mother Fatima in *Soumiya*, similar to Zahia in *al-thawbu al-'abyad*, look to preserve *hurma*. Djamila is presented to the reader as a purely traditional woman following in the footsteps of her mother Fatima. Djamila and Zahia follow the social and religious conventions which leave women 'confined' to domestic life. Women are depicted as happy creatures when 'locked' at home. Readers can discover through the narrator of both works that women's basic virtue naturally consists of the accomplishment of household chores.

This description of the feminine corresponds to Boutefnouchet's propositions for the place of women in society. For him, the world of women predominates and must predominate in its separation from the world of men. The latter according to him takes place in the outside, in public places, such as in markets and administrations (1982). Far from worrying the sociologist, Khodja observes, this gendered division of spaces seems to him quite natural. He does not wonder, she adds, if in the same way that some men who refuse all the responsibilities that traditional society imposes on them, there may exist women, who have the will and the capacity to live in broad daylight, in public places, in

markets, or even to trade (1985). To listen to Boutefnouchet, Khodja remonstrates, one would be almost tempted to thank Algerian society for granting women the minimal space they are allowed, where they can breathe, eat and sleep (1985).

Similarly, the fact that traditional society does not tolerate a young girl of marriageable age enjoying her freedom especially outside the domestic sphere does not seem to be an issue for Ounissi's narrator. On the contrary, the narrator validates the docile and even complicit attitudes towards patriarchal tradition which ensue from the mechanisms of the aforementioned mother/daughter relationship. This relationship as well as the father-daughter relationship will, on different grounds as we shall see in chapters 2 and 4, be reversed by Francophone authors. As for Ounissi's *Sur l'autre rive*, there is a valorisation of the materialistic, social, and ideological conditions in which female characters evolve as imprisoned objects.

Hurma which dictates women's domestic confinement is also central to her 1979 work. In *Journal d'une institutrice libre*, Ounissi, herself the narrator of the story, is aware of the important role education plays in the lives of her adolescent female pupils. Although she describes the end of the school year as the beginning of a prison sentence for these girls, Ounissi is by no means critical of this situation for women (Ounissi, 2007). The author/narrator digresses to play down the effects of domestic confinement on women. She admits that the end of the school year may take 'some of her freedom' (Ounissi, 2007). This suggests, similar to Boutefnouchet's views, that women's seclusion does not necessarily mean a complete lack of freedom: women can also be free staying at home through sight for instance (see chapter 4).

This gendered division of spaces is mostly telling in the 1974 novel's last story, *Fatima*. In the process of preserving purity through *'ser'*, *hurma* is strongly emphasised. Strong emphasis on the notion of *hurma* here aims at protecting the aforementioned sacred feminine space from the gaze of the coloniser. Left at home to fend for her child, Fatima, whose husband is away fighting colonial France, finds herself exposed to French soldiers. The unnamed French soldier who attempts to reveal Fatima's '*ser*' as he asks her to show him how she is beautiful, is tellingly drunk - to underline his impurity. His physical contact

with Fatima is described as messing with a woman's 'dignity' and 'honour' (Ounissi, 2007, p.186). These two qualities according to the narrator of Fatima, cannot be taught in institutes, but are essentialist values that Algerian women are born with (Ounissi, 2007).

It is true that this may be a generally rightful assertion given that any individual regardless of any specific cultural background can express resentment against sexual assault. It is worth observing however, that, similar to Boutefnouchet's notion of women's honour, the narrator sees the dignity of Fatima in the reputation of her husband, and not in her own individual value. This is why the French soldier who tries to sexually assault Fatima looks to humiliate her by reminding her of her absent husband as he keeps asking where he is while she is being assaulted (Ounissi, 2007). This reveals the workings of *nif*. The absence of individual value in the case of Fatima calls to mind Khodja's critique of Boutefnouchet's 'traditionalist' propositions.

It is worth reminding that in the traditional setting described by Boutefnouchet, this division of spaces along with veiling are necessary for ensuring the place of women as a reserve, a discretion, a secret to be kept out of the gaze of strangers. It is through this reserve that men can preserve their prestige, honour, and pride (1982). For Khodja (1985) however, both men and women can have pride and discretion, both can be honourable in themselves, thanks to the temperament, the personality, and aptitudes of every individual. In Ounissi's aforementioned text, Fatima's only chance to have value must go through the pride her husband gains through her. As for her personal value per se, it has no importance. Khodja observes that this idea (honour through man), is rather surprising from a sociologist who in the introduction to his book affirms his adherence to socialist ideology, which theoretically takes into consideration only the personal value of the individual (1985).

This emphasis on the reserve and discretion of women paves the way for men to be significantly more visible in all Ounissi's writings. It is true that the effacement of femininity in *Sur l'autre rive* is partly a matter of valorising honour through the masculine as we have just seen with *Fatima*. It is also a matter however, of avoiding emasculation. The already discussed colonisation of the country and the effects of impurity among the colonised was

not merely a risk of exposing '*ser*'. It also meant a risk for colonised men to lose their masculinity. Algerian men, in the process of refraining from interaction with the 'impure' world of the French, found themselves facing the prospect of losing their status as men since they had to stay at home and resort to different financial resources to survive. This saw their roles in society becoming more than any time before similar to that of women from their own community. This point is made clear by Lazreg who convincingly argues that:

> The devout Muslim should rarely venture outside of his home. If he must, he should lower his hood over his face and walk with his eyes averted 'just like a woman wrapped in her veil.'*_ the recurring comparison with women denotes Algerian men's concern with losing all the trappings of masculinity and being rendered helpless, as they perceived women to be. A *guwal* put this point eloquently: 'This race [the French] will get rid of all our exemplary heroes, shave our beards [a symbol of emasculation], and forbid us from carrying weapons. And so, it will make us look like women' (Lazreg, 1994, p.53).

In *Journal d'une institutrice libre*, Khaled, Ounissi's nephew, asks his mother why she does not allow him to go to the beach. Ounissi's sister, his mother, explains that French soldiers throng such places: he should not risk blending with them. The child's inquisitive nature makes him wonder why soldiers who are supposed to protect people may possibly harm them. The mother explains that these only care for colonists and leads the child to enjoy cooling off in the bathroom tub instead. The narrator/Ounissi follows on this scene and explains how women, such as Khaled's mother, helped create new circumstances for their children away from the reality of the outside world (Ounissi, 2007).

It is in response to this perceived emasculation, such as the aforementioned creation of new circumstances, that certain 'traditionalist' traits are emphasised to remind the postcolonial reader of the Algerian masculine. Ounissi's aforementioned female characters show adherence to this 'traditionalist' framework by preserving the active - and often superior - status of their husbands/fathers. *Journal d'une institutrice libre* and, to a greater extent, *Sur l'autre rive* remain dominated by the father as a central figure. The

father in the latter is constantly present both openly and in an underlying way. If Amar is the central pivot around whom the narrative and relations between different characters are articulated, the mother, Fatima, and women in general are always left in the background to play subsidiary roles.

This sense of male superiority is so anchored in *al-Shihab*'s publications. It is only through man that the situation of women could be improved according to Ibnu Badis (1929). Indeed, in one of the lectures in which he sought to discuss the issue of gender, we can discern this masculine discourse. The lecture is entitled *The Muslim Algerian Man* (1929). The role of the Muslim man we learn, is to protect woman as a father or as a husband because man is 'the source of her good and her evil' (Ibnu Badis, 1929, cited in McMahon, 2011, p.119). There is thus no improvement for Algerian women without the role of men, because it is only men who can enlighten women. This because he concludes, women are weaker than men in essence. Lawrence W. McMahon quotes Abd Al-Hamid Ibnu Badis: 'It is necessary for us [men] to teach women everything that they need in order to fulfil their job… We must instruct her in feminine morals which make her into a woman, not [a creature which is] half man and half woman.' (Ibnu Badis, 1929, cited in McMahon, 2011, pp.119-120).

In *Sur l'autre rive,* Amar is the absolute and charismatic leader of the family, the mighty patriarch who feeds, gratifies, and denies. He unquestionably dominates all others around him: both women and children. This is thanks to his feudal power, thanks to his money, thanks to the authority that religion and traditional relations give him. These factors make of him the absolute master, the essence of all lives, literally and metaphorically. He is the ideal to reach and the model by whom one must be accepted. It should be noted that in works by Francophone women authors as we shall see, the 'traditionalist' connotations of the father figure as dominant and domineering evolves, and his representation becomes more distanced and balanced.

Boutefnouchet states that 'L'homme adulte algérien demeure, il est vrai, l'élément constitutif le plus apparent socio-économiquement, le membre le plus visible parce que cette société a choisi de montrer ses hommes' (Boutefnouchet, 1982, p.68). What is

particularly worth paying attention to is that Boutefnouchet justifies this position by the fact that the traditional man has duties towards his female family members (1982). It is from this very perspective that the position held by Amar in *Sur l'autre rive* is not questioned. It is not considered a privilege by the narrator. His roles as guardian over women are presented as an obligation and a responsibility. In this sense, the narrator focuses on how Amar is rather dominated, as he has to satisfy the needs of other members in society including women.

Exposing the masculine - which as we have seen was in response to colonial emasculation - meant further hiding of women. It is in this sense that colonisation came to further veil women. This means acquiring new forms and functions of the veil that went beyond the religious to answer the needs of certain historical developments. Lazreg observes that:

> The veil became women's refuge from the French denuding gaze. However, its form changed, becoming longer, and it acquired a new significance as a symbol of not only cultural difference but also protection from and resistance to colonial-*qua*-Christian domination. The idea of veiling one's self early, before the onset of puberty, and *voluntarily* became a sign of virtue among many Algerian girls growing up during the colonial era (Lazreg, 1994, pp.53-54).

Likewise, a veiled woman in Ounissi's 1974 and 1979 works sets herself up as a living barrier between two worlds, that of the coloniser and that of the colonised. In this political trajectory, the 1979 autobiography extols the anti-colonial function of the veil. In chapter 5, the 'exemplary' Safia, Ounissi's friend and colleague, is described as a free woman with principles. Veiling is what characterises this woman as an activist against colonial France (Ounissi, 2007). Most importantly, Ounissi's representation of the veil as such equates veiling with hiding from the colonial denuding gaze, and thus with a separation from the outside world. It is in this sense that Ounissi's notion of veiling corresponds to the veil's latter stages of development when it became a means of patriarchal domination. The function of the veil in this sense consists in safeguarding Boutefnouchet's 'intégrité physique' which is essential to the status of the 'traditionalist' woman.

Known among Algerians as the ‘hijab’, the veil in Ounissi’s texts is understood both metaphorically and literally. As far as the former is concerned, it is worth observing that in Maghrebi contexts, etymologically hijab means protection. However, protection is not restricted to the wearing of a piece of cloth. It also includes lowering the eyes, veiling the female voice in order not for them (veiled women) to be heard in public. Additionally, the narrator’s discourse in *Sur l’autre rive* valorises the literal meaning of the veil. This is in line with Ibnu Badis’s definition of veiling. Through the creation of an imaginary man in one of his lectures, Ibnu Badis responds to the modernist education proposed by the likes of the Egyptian reformist Qasim Amin (1929). Lawrence W. McMahon quotes the fictional man created by Ibnu Badis who declares that ‘if you seek the true reform of women, then raise the veil of ignorance from her mind before you raise the veil of hijab from her face, for it is this veil of ignorance which hinders her progress’ (Badis, 1929, cited in McMahon, 2011, p.119).

3. The feminine and the *ayla*

As we have just seen, the ‘traditionalist’ gender roles that are valued by the narrators of Ounissi’s 1974 and 1979 works are interwoven with a specific historical context. This context was mainly characterised by a spirit of reformism and anti-colonialism. It is worth observing however, that the prevailing ‘traditionalist’ in Ounissi’s texts is also reflective of the Algerian family structure. Algerian society, notably both pre- and post- the war for independence, was significantly shaped by the workings of the ayla. The word ayla in Arabic means family. Ounissi’s use of the word in certain contexts and as part of a certain lexicon conjures up a ‘traditionalist’ notion of the family. One could probably think of the expression ‘ibn ayla’: son of family. In both Ounissi’s works, the ayla is highly valued. Additionally, there is a telling description of its social composition.

First, it is worth providing some important insights into the sociological characteristics of the ayla. The ayla, also referred to as the traditional family, is made up of close relatives who form a socio-economic entity that is based on mutual rights and obligations. Evolving under the perpetual pressure of modern values, the notion of the ayla is not based only on consanguinity. It is also based on social belonging to the tribe, and in certain cases to

a common geographical origin. Boutefnouchet argues that ‘Il suffit, parfois, d'être de la même région du pays pour mériter l'appellation de ben ammi (mon cousin)’ (Boutefnouchet, 1982, p.21). This is why in *Journal d’une institutrice libre*, Ounissi’s young and inquisitive nephew learns that the beach is guarded by French soldiers who are there to protect their cousins and not the indigenous like himself (Ounissi, 2007). This abstract notion of the Algerian traditional family was, according to Boutefnouchet, very perceptible under French colonisation, when every Algerian presented another Algerian to the colonial administration as a cousin (Boutefnouchet, 1982).

What is particularly worth noting is that the ayla does not ascribe value to the individual. Its manifestations, including the most personal ones, are significantly shaped, controlled, at times even opposed by the group. It is not the individual subject that experiences - that feels and that decides - according to personal appreciations. It is a set of socially established conventions that regulate the individual’s conduct. This applies to both economic and private matters. In a word, this system favours the collective over the individual. It is not by coincidence that in her *Journal d’une institutrice libre*, Ounissi so tellingly chooses to entitle chapter 5: [*indama yadubu al-'afradu fi al-majmu’a*]. This is literally translated into English as: when individuals melt in the group.

The collective nature of the ayla as carefully described in the chapter is significant for women. Females appear not as individuals with agency. A woman is simply a daughter of ayla. Presented to the reader as ‘the friend of the ayla,' Safia is Ounissi’s example for the woman she aspires to be (Ounissi, 2007, pp.115-116). It is worth observing however, that the reader of the chapter is given no detail that describes Safia personally. All we know about her, is the nature of the principles that she espouses: choice of the future husband, arabisation, and the veil. Ounissi observes that what brings her, and this woman together is the composition of society and civilisation (Ounissi 2007).

The absence of the personal is also the case of Ounissi herself in her autobiography. Despite her being almost the only female character who has a high social rank and independence through work, she is no exception. She works in al-madrasa, but she is never described other than as a teacher or daughter. This is the case of Ounissi’s sister

whom the author has replaced as teacher as she (Ounissi's sister) is on maternity leave. Ounissi's sister is present in almost all chapters of the book, but nothing is known about her other than she is a mother and teacher. Women are hardly seen other than as a homogenous entity.

This homogeneity as far as women are concerned is manifested in the architecture that is favourably presented by Ounissi. The family house where she grew up, we learn, is made up of several small houses with a courtyard in the middle. Referred to in chapter 4 of her autobiography as the house of neighbours, the family house gathers many flats in a maximum of three floors. Each flat is occupied by a family leading its separate life. Despite this separation, community life is what pervades most. The narrator of *Journal d'une institutrice libre* accurately describes collective activities such as how each family on its turn does the cleaning of the whole house from top to bottom. The lavatory is shared among all families and is located in the courtyard.

The chapter entitled *Soumia* in *Sur l'autre rive* provides accurate descriptions of collective activities among women neighbours. The courtyard in the middle of the family house gathers all women neighbours to share domestic chores: a woman does the dishes of the whole house, another the clothes, another the children. The water is shared among all neighbours. In chapter 4 of the autobiography, the author/narrator grows wistful when recollecting such details. It is remarkable how in both works Ounissi dwells on describing the happy times spent in the idyllic house in which she and her fictional female characters live. In the house of neighbours, the rare scenes where a woman is at the centre of description remain dominated by a tone of narration that showcases such collective activities. Indeed, in this world women are defined essentially as housewives, as they alone are responsible for such group activities as cleaning and cooking. There is a description of cooking for neighbours on certain religious and traditional festivities. It is in this sense that a woman is not described in her personal setting: she is a housewife, and emphasis is placed on the roles assigned to a housewife.

The communal-based architecture of the family house as presented by Ounissi is designed to suit the - often sexist - objectives of the 'traditionalist' for women. For instance,

it objectifies the female body to make of it a means of procreation. It is worth noting that the architecture of the house of neighbours is based on a strict separation between male and female spaces. In *Soumia*, when Amar is approaching the house, he clears his throat to make the gossiping women in the courtyard aware of his presence and immediately quit the place lest they should reveal themselves to him (Ounissi, 2007). In her study of the *ayla*, Khodja observes that:

> Les lieux réservés aux hommes de la maison, qui mangent à part, ou aux visiteurs masculins, sont séparés de ceux des femmes. L'intérieur de la maison (cuisine, cour intérieur) est réservé aux femmes, et un homme s'y aventure rarement sous peine de déchoir (Khodja, 1985, p.22).

On this note, Khodja is particularly critical of the effects of such spatial and social separation. Such a separation, she explains, makes 'La rencontre entre hommes et femmes n'ayant lieu qu'à l'occasion des rapports sexuels conjugaux, dans la majorité des cas. L'architecture même des habitations est prévue pour cela' (Khodja, 1985, p.22). Most importantly, this separation as we learn in her study is accompanied by a separation of sexual functions which is significantly at work in Ounissi's novels. A separation of sexual functions means, among other things, that women are assigned the individual-blurring role of procreation, while men, pleasure and measuring their virility by the number of children of whom they are the father.

Given the non-representation of female sexuality - which as we have seen is partly down to Standard Arabic as language - we may have no direct scenes attesting to Khodja's conclusions. Khodja's conclusions mean that encounters between men and women take place only during the sex-act. We nevertheless have indications that confirm her interpretation. In *Soumia*, the one and only occasion where Amar has contact with his wife is after her childbirth. This, though it may not literally express Khodja's idea on encounters between men and women being purely sexual, it certainly relates to the ensuing function referred to in Khodja's study, namely procreation. Almost nothing is known of the wife in question, Fatima, other than her role as a procreator.

One must observe that Ounissi's narrator is not critical of this situation for women like

Fatima. Instead, critique repeatedly consists in denouncing the social pressure exerted on women who do not have sons. The main worry of Fatima - as of the women around her - is the birth of another girl. Her utmost concern is to satisfy Amar by giving birth to a boy. The nature of this denunciation, along with women's ignorance and disinheritance is not only paradigmatic of reformist ideology as we have seen in the section Ounissi and reformist feminism.

Indeed, such a partial critique of women's oppression is also formulated to suit a fundamental ideological characteristic of the *ayla*. The system of values inside the family house is characterised by an intermingling of religion and tradition. As a result of this intermingling, the roles proposed for Ounissi's female characters turn out to be very complex. Ounissi's narrators denounce women's situation provided that there is no transgression of this system. In Khodja's aforementioned study of the *ayla*, we learn that according to a hypothesis put forward by Tillion, Islam would only have come to the Maghreb to consecrate and indirectly reinforce a pre-existing social reality (1985).

For instance, she explains that to preserve the purity of blood, the 'nobles bordering the Mediterranean' married their daughters within the clan. This practice of inbreeding had as a direct consequence the confinement of women since they had to be kept out of members of other groups (translation of Tillion, 1966, cited in Khodja, 1985, p.21). It is true that the introduction of women's right to inheritance thanks to Islam meant that the old endogamous Maghreb underwent a revolution. This revolution, however, would be quickly countered. Indeed, to avoid the dislocation of the family patrimony that the right to inheritance could have caused, girls would no longer be married only within the clan, but preferably with the paternal first cousin (Tillion, 1966, cited in Khodja, 1985, p.22).

In [*indama yadubu al-'afradu fi al-majmu'a*], the only described couple is that of Si Brahim. A local militant, Brahim is educated at the hands of reformists and works as a carpenter. He and his uneducated wife are a mismatch. The narrator expresses surprise at the incompatibility of Brahim and his wife. We learn that 'disparity seems to be significant between them… even though she is his cousin' (Ounissi, 2007, pp.124-125. Translation is mine). Blood kinship is emphasised more than twice in the passage. The reader is given

the impression that married cousins are not expected to suffer incompatibility. This is confirmed in *Sur l'autre rive* where Ounissi devotes the whole of chapter 6 to extol the benefits of marriage among cousins. Zakia, much to her father's surprise, accepts marriage with her father's cousin, she who has always rejected marriage offers. She is described as a happy bride, despite the groom living in the countryside, when she has grown up in the city. The narrator surmises that this unexpected consent to marriage may well have been thanks to her blood kinship with the groom (Ounissi, 1974).

Conclusion

We have seen that Ounissi succeeds in denouncing certain aspects of the domination of women. This should be noted for some appreciation of her vision on women's emancipation. However, during the first three decades after the independence of Algeria, this was not in itself a new contribution since this denunciation had already been expressed by Francophone authors. The denunciation of women's plight in Ounissi's texts is only made to express reformist ideology and to preserve the 'traditionalist'. In this sense, it is safe to say that Ounissi's works are unique in the way they demonstrate a tension between women's rights and reformism.

The theme of women's participation in the War of Liberation is at the centre of Ounissi's 1974 and 1979 works. The constricting 'traditionalist' lifestyle that she chooses for her heroines, however, underestimates the fighting and warfare roles played by her sisters for the independence of their country. The same year that Ounissi published her *Sur l'autre rive* (1974), the Ministry for Veterans' Affairs estimated the number of Algerian women who were directly involved in the War at around 11,000. For Djamila Amrane Minne, this figure underrates women's participation in the War (1993, 219). Unlike Ounissi and the discourses expressed by the aforementioned ministry, Frantz Fanon (1965) recognises the full contribution that Algerian women, particularly those living in urban cities, had made as militants and bomb carriers - roles that are not presented to the reader of Ounissi's works. The purely traditional way of living that she stresses in her texts restrict women to play subsidiary roles such as hiding freedom fighters and other gendered roles such as knitting and cleaning clothes for male fighters.

Ounissi's masculinised Standard Arabic one must not forget, also left some very important experiences by Algerian women untold in both her works. Indeed, women were often victims of multivalent violence. One could probably think of rape by French soldiers. This as we shall see in chapter 4, thanks to a re-invention of the French language through the use of Colloquial Arabic instead, was voiced by Assia Djebar. Similarly, there is an effacement of women's unveiling which nevertheless remains a major detail in the roles played by female freedom fighters and thus the history of Algeria. In accordance with the discourses expressed by the Ulemas, this effacement is a symbol of cultural resistance. Unveiling was considered as a sign of Western dominance and thus had to be played down in Ounissi's works as well as in the national narrative.

It is important to speak of the national narrative: the discourses expressed by the FLN official texts, both written and oral. Although the FLN generally served an Algerian bourgeois culture during the first two decades after independence as discussed in chapter 3, the Personal Status Codes issued during this period resonate heavily in Ounissi's contemporary productions. It is true that the FLN showcased images of female figureheads such as the iconic Djamila Bouhired. It is also true however, that the FLN's *Personal Status Code* of 1976 for instance, is very conservative when it comes to women. This conservatism was reinforced by the immediate postcolonial governments (1962/1979) most notably. These governments succeeded in silencing leftist factions. One aspect of this silencing could be seen in that progressive discourses on women became in many ways synonymous with the idea of an alien, western cultural invasion. In this context, the ideal figure of the silent - though proud - Algerian woman emerged. To express feminist ideas was to be unpatriotic.

The three following chapters are on Francophone texts that are authored by women who went to French schools and chose to write in French because this foreign language enabled them to 'express their real-life matters, hidden truths, taboos, refused rights and to escape the feminine destiny of submission and silence.' We will see that in the next three chapters, issues such as female sexuality, the gendered division of spaces, the veil, the place of the mother and especially the father, the place of religion and traditions, as well as the language of writing are negotiated differently.

Chapter 2

Universal Feminism in Algerian women's writing

Introduction

It is true that colonialism, and colonial women in particular, played a massive role in mythifying Algerian women and their history. French women artists preceded through their works and ideas the development of feminism in Algeria. This is all the more interesting to note when considering that the feminism adopted by Algerian women's movements during the 1980s was similarly secular, similarly anti-non-western tradition, and looked at sexist oppression with a colonial eye. One can hardly skip mentioning the example of Aurélie Picard. This French woman settler had no respect for Islam and regarded Islamic culture with total contempt. She is nevertheless recognised as a valiant and historic Algerian woman by the likes of Jean Déjeux (see the section 'French Appropriation of Feminism' in Larzeg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (1994)).

As for the other characteristic of the post-independence women's movements in Algeria, looking at sexist oppression with a colonial eye, it is also at the centre of biographies and works by colonial women. One could probably think of the colonial woman settler Isabelle

Eberhardt. This Russian woman whose exotic texts are paradigmatic of nineteenth century French/colonial literatures represented a world in which colonialism never seemed to harm Algerian women. She was concerned about her personal identity as a woman settler living in a newly-discovered land and had no concern for the dispossession of indigenous men and women from their own lands. She did not consider the repercussions that such a dispossession may have inflicted on local women's lives neither. Aurélie Picard also served French colonisation and showcased French ways of living for men and women.

Likewise, the generation of Algerian women who succeeded Picard and who most importantly had a French education valued French manners and tastes. Ben and Djabali, two Algerian women authors, witnessed colonisation from within and from abroad, lived in France or at least had a purely French education. Such factors seem to have contributed to the francisation of their views on many themes including women's emancipation. Their writings never seemed to question the cultural repercussions that colonialism had had on Algerian women's lives. In this writing trajectory, one must not forget to add the emergence of a Franco-Algerian women's fiction by the mid-eighties. It is true that many of the authors who belong to this category were born in France and thus sought to voice the concerns of an immigrant community suffering from alienation in a French society. It is also true however, that Beur literature reinforces colonial values from a colonised perspective. Nina Bouraoui's *La voyeuse interdite* (1991), thanks to its filmic quality, shows the suffering endured by the Algerian female narrator using a colonial lens as we shall see in this chapter. The presentation of the individual biographies of Ben, Djabali and Bouraoui in this chapter introduction serves to establish the links which seem to have made these authors culturally converge when it comes to the place of women in their works.

Marylise Ben HaÏm, known by the name of Myriam Ben, was a prolific Algerian author. She was born on the 10th of October 1928 in the capital Algiers and died in 2001 at the age of 73. She was involved in a variety of artistic and non-artistic fields to express her individual and collective concerns such as her emancipation as a woman and her political struggle against colonialism respectively. This mix of politics and arts reflects her family

influence: her mother was a musician and her father a communist who had joined the French army. Anne Marie Miraglia (2005) likens this aspect of Ben's writing to the committed literature advocated by Jean-Paul Sartre whose thoughts according to her, greatly inspired the authors of the first male writings of the former French colonies. Thanks to her city-dwelling, Ben was taught to read and write in French, which allowed her to discover and to value a colonial and European way of living. This factor, city-dwelling, meant that Ben was much more privileged than Algerian women from rural areas where access to school was not very common for most men let alone for women. This is reminiscent of Taos Amrouche and her mother, Fadhma Ait Mansour, who originate from the Kabyle region and who only owe their status as authors to their stay in town, Tunis. This allowed Ben to have a culturally French education which is perceptible in her works.

Ben's strong attachment to French culture, despite her being a fervent anti-colonialist when it comes to her political position, shaped her 'radical' views on women's emancipation. Her views could be considered as such given the 'traditionalist' life that was - and still is - led by most Algerians. Ben's culturally French perspective as it seems to be, makes it possible to distinguish her position on women's emancipation from other Algerian authors. Such authors may be for instance, women from remote villages - for example, Djebar - who waged a symbolic fight against male domination by drawing on their own culture without going through a referent of a French education to transmit a vision of resistance against different forms of subjugation.

Her writings serve as a wake-up call for archaic men and women against patriarchal values born of tradition and religion. The theme of women's oppression occupies an important place in her *Ainsi naquit un homme* in 1982, and more notably in her famous novel *Sabrina, ils t'ont volé ta vie* which she published four years later. Since the publication of her short-story *L'âme de Sabrina*, (1982), Ben was introduced to prose and began to be an influential figure in the eyes of critics on both sides of the Mediterranean. She is generally considered an ardent denouncer of an Algerian patriarchal society where women's economic dependence reinforces an infériorisation systematically cultivated by an alienating education. As previously stated, in 1986 followed her famous and only novel *Sabrina, Ils t'ont volé ta vie*, where it is not hard to see the author's concerns about a

society that lives under the yoke of the patriarch. In this work Ben is critical of the fate reserved for women who rightfully choose to lead an independent life, assuming themselves outside of their 'cultural' ties to religion, traditions, and the family:

> Mon but premier était de montrer comment, dans notre société actuelle, la jeunesse tire en avant et comment les traditions, les parents, tout un système de valeurs du passé freinent sous prétexte d'un retour, par ailleurs nécessaire à l'authenticité, provoquant une arriération qui tend à contrarier l'élan de la jeunesse (Miraglia, 2005, p.48).

It is from this perspective that Ben's contestation of women's rights could be seen to reduce the issue of women's plight in Algeria to the narrative of (tradition/modernity), precisely French and European modernity, the latter being synonymous with gender equality, whereas the former with patriarchy. Contemporary male authors in Algeria tended to adopt this polarising approach to deal with different forms of oppression. One could most probably think of Rachid Mimouni's *Le Fleuve détourné* which was published in 1982. In this novel, the unknown narrator of the story showcases Western modernity in a purely traditional village named Zitouna. In an interview given after the publication of the novel, Mimouni, although he describes the imposition of modernity in Third World countries like Algeria as 'violent', does not hesitate to defend modern ways of living for his compatriots. He describes modernity as 'incontournable' and regrets the ways in which modernity is perceived in Algeria. For instance, Mimouni is critical of only adopting modernity in its material and economic dimension, while overlooking the values which, according to him, constitute this modernity. It is worth noting that this position was both consciously and unconsciously taken by such authors. While some writers such as Nina Bouraoui as we shall see shortly advocated French and Western modernity for her female characters, because she ideologically considered the danger that Islamic ways of living could potentially pose to women and homosexuals, other authors seem to reproduce European narratives of women's emancipation inadvertently in their texts on account of their life circumstances. For the latter case, one could most probably think of Hawa Djabali.

Indeed, if under colonisation city-dwelling contributed significantly to the valorisation of French culture as far as Ben is concerned, what could be said of Djabali who was born, raised and educated in France? The woman author was born in 1949 in Créteil, France. Djabali's family moved back to Algeria straight after the independence of the country, and lived there for about three decades. During her stay in her country of origin, Djabali published several artistic and journalistic works in different fields and genres, though poetry was never one.-Djabali's stay in Algeria was brought to an end following threats by Islamists who targeted her personally. After this Djabali flew to Belgium and pursued her artistic career. One massive contribution that Djabali made to her country and which unfortunately had to end on account of the threats she faced, was her radio programmes on women workers in Algeria. This was hugely important, given that Djabali here preferred to be directly involved in the reintegration of her sisters in social life. Paid labour for these authors as we shall see is indispensable for women's emancipation. It is not surprising that this was arguably the most visible reason why she was targeted by Islamists, given that women's work was not acceptable according to fundamentalist ideology. It is worth raising the issue of Islamism for the discussion of these authors, because, increasingly during the whole period of the 1980s, it was becoming hardly possible for them (authors) to be extricated from binary presentations as the progressive, modern Algerian was pitted against the violent Islamist. This situation reached its peak in the 1990s (see especially chapter 1 in Ford's *Writing the Black Decade: Conflict and Criticism in Francophone Algerian Literature*). This binary situation is echoed in Djabali's subsequent literary productions. It is also worth observing that this situation was not simplistic in the sense that modernity was not only juxtaposed with Islamism and local tradition, but also - and often interchangeably - with Islam and Islamic culture as we shall see with Bouraoui.

It is worth providing a brief presentation of Djabali's career. Despite her being less known than the likes of Assia Djebar and Malika Moukadem as a woman writer, the France born author had a rich and fulfilling career. In theatre for instance, Djabali published several works such as *L'Épopée de Gilgameh* which she published in 1995 after she had left Algeria. Two years later came *Cinq mille ans de la vie d'une femme*, and the same year, 1997, saw the publication of *Le Zajel maure du désir.* The following year Djabali published *Le Huitième Voyage de Sindbad*. It is worth noting that the theatre was a common interest

for both Djabali and Ben, given that the latter also wrote some significant plays such *as Le soleil assassiné, Au carrefour des sacrifices*, in addition to *Le chemin de nos pas*. Ben however, is also famous for her short-story which is entitled *L'âme de Sabrina.* While Ben's only novel was published in 1986 under the title of *Sabrina, ils t'ont volé ta vie*, Djabali's novelistic production was relatively more significant. In addition to her 1983 *Agave*, Djabali wrote *Glaise Rouge* in 1998, and more recently in 2013 *Noirs Jasmins*.

In fact, there are more significant similarities shared by the two authors. The Créteil born author seems to share the same vision with Ben when it comes to the basis upon which women's condition is denounced. Djabali's thoughts on the main reasons behind the persistence of patriarchy also focus on religion, local tradition, and of course the traditional family as defined in the previous chapter. The couple in their texts cannot flourish under the traditional family structure. The celebration - or at least the demand - of specifically French and European ways of living for their heroines as discussed in this chapter meant that there are shared characteristics between writers like Ben, Djabali and Bouraoui in the way their literary works conform to a particular idea of feminism that tends towards ethnocentrism.

Another Algerian woman author whose literary works seem to conform to this ethnocentric form of feminism is Nina Bouraoui. Author and song-writer, Bouraoui was born in Rennes (France) in 1967. She is known for her famous novel *La voyeuse interdite* which she published in 1991 and which was translated into English as *Forbidden Vision* in 1999. Although Bouraoui is sometimes recognised as a French author, her novel *La voyeuse interdite* is included in our thesis because this novel deals with women's plight in the Algerian context. In addition, Bouraoui is born to a French mother and an Algerian father originating from the coastal town of Jijel. The author ardently opposed religious and traditional perceptions and thus perpetuated the aforementioned polarising narrative. In her literary texts as in her various interviews, Bouraoui seems to combine critique of fundamentalism with Islam as she seems determined to emphasise the so-called dark side of the Islamic religion in terms of sexism and violence. One could probably think of the growing of beards as a mark of Islamism which seems to be confounded with the practice in its purely religious and spiritual dimension as had been the case ere the

emergence of Islamism. This is reminiscent of Rachid Mimouni as we learn in Ford's work on the Black Decade in Algeria. Ford explains that 'In a glossary of terms directed to readers from outside Algeria, Mimouni notes how the "barbus" are, quite simply, "des intégristes" [fundamentalists]' (2021, pp. 35-36). Ford interestingly notes that 'This analysis also fed what Vincent Geisser refers to as the construction of an "ideal type" of the "media Muslim" in France, whereby the media regularly seized upon "the image of the fanatical bearded man" to encapsulate the supposed threat Islam posed' (2021, p. 35). In the case of Bouraoui, this construction involved seeing Islam and local traditions with an eye of exoticism, in ways reminiscent of 19th century literatures by French settlers in Algeria.

Because this thesis deals with literary texts, it is worth observing that this opposition to the traditional involves 'necessary' ways of writing, stylistic and linguistic approaches, whereby women's roles in society are entirely reflected in texts. Referred to in this thesis as the feminisation of the narrative, this often means using feminine words and expressions to make women visible in written materials. It also means re-imagining, describing, and recounting the world from a female perspective. It entails, among other things, putting the female body and sexuality into text. In short, it is a counter discourse against male ideology in written texts. In his analysis of women's representation in a number of male and female authored novels, Gafaiti chooses to entitle the fourth part of his work *Boudjedra ou la feminisation de l'ecriture*. He points out that 'L'affirmation de la parole féminine se fait par un renversement de l'image de la femme et par une critique du discours, de la représentation et de la sexualité masculins qui aboutissent à ce que j'appelle une sexualisation et une féminisation de l'écriture' (1996, p. 234). If the narrative construction of Ounissi's text as we have seen in the previous chapter remains paradigmatic of the traditional - and thus of the often conservative - ideas that silence women and exclude them from certain roles and experiences, the feminisation of the texts selected for this chapter allows women to acquire a fundamental dimension on the level of narration. Femininity as we shall see is perceived not only in terms of motherhood and sisterhood, but in its multiple dimensions, albeit professional, social, and sexual. The feminisation of texts in this sense counters masculine ways of writing and thus masculine discourses. If in *Sur l'autre rive* the point of view on women is strictly masculine as there

is almost no expression or direct presentation of female characters and everything is mainly done through images and words of men, authors such as Djabali are critical of this situation. On a rare interview accorded to Achour back in 1986, Djabali declares:

> Je ne pouvais pas rentrer dans le roman classique que j'aime mais qui me brimait au niveau du rythme, le roman classique a un rythme masculin dans lequel je ne me reconnais pas. Mon rythme est fait de paliers aménagés, de reprises, de leitmotivs.
>
> Une autre question demande de préciser cette distinction rythme féminin et rythme masculin. N'y a-t-il pas des écrivains hommes qui ont senti ces contraintes et qui ont voulu s'en libérer? Il faudrait plutôt parler de romans *symboliquement* masculins. C'est-à-dire qui répondent à une idée de la masculinité telle qu'on la voulait. A partir d'un moment il y a eu une remise en question violente de ces contraintes de création chez les créateurs hommes qui s'est traduite par une mise en pratique poétique introduisant la dimension féminine et étouffée, les hommes ont voulu *réendosser leur féminité,* la féminité telle qu'elle était définie et qui était refoulée dans l'acte de création. C'est en partie dans ce mouvement que des femmes ont pu alors s'exprimer, émerger. Pour l'écrivain, prendre le droit d'écrire c'est prendre le droit de jouer toute sa sensibilité et le droit aussi de vivre, quotidiennement, de façon catastrophique. Ecrire, c'est accepter ses multiples sensibilités [sic] (Achour, 1991, pp.542-543).

The feminisation of writing in this sense is there in Bouraoui's novels. Her style of writing, auto-fiction, is what characterises almost all her works. This entails borrowing elements proper to French styles of writing. The elements in question refer mainly to techniques intended to distance the reader from any autobiographical perception, even though certain detectable details seem to relate to an experienced reality. The use of 'je' in this way allows Bouraoui to no longer seek to hide. She exposes her life to her reader and her quest is clearly displayed. In her novels, themes relating to the discovery of the female body, romantic love, sexual liberty and homosexuality are at work. In her most recent works (see for instance, her 2017 *Les hommes desirent naturellement savoir* and her 2021 *Satisfaction*), Bouraoui speaks openly about her homosexuality. In this sense,

Bouraoui seems to integrate homosexuality in the feminist project that she constantly defends in her works. This is reminiscent of Boudjedra's contemporary works. In his subtitle **'**L'intégration de l'homosexualité dans le discours féministe', Gafaiti comments on Boudjedra's 1983 novel, *Le demantelement*, as follows:

> La révolte contre la société s'exprime également par une contestation des valeurs masculines, notamment par une critique de la sexualité des hommes basée sur une vision archaïque et féodale de la virilité. Elle est approfondie par une remise en question des rapports entre les hommes qui aboutit à une intégration de l'homosexualité comme expression naturelle et légitime de l'amour. Cela est mis en avant dans l'attitude de Selma vis-à-vis de son frère Latif et dans les conclusions idéologiques et politiques qu'elle en tire ainsi que dans la signification en résultant pour l'articulation du personnage et de son discours dans l'économie générale du roman (1996, p. 272).

In accordance with Gafaiti's point on the 'ideological' and 'political' conclusions drawn from such a feminisation of Boudjedra's text, it is worth noting that this approach to writing for the texts discussed in this chapter fosters a reductive way in which the Algerian masculine - and often the traditional and religious that underpin it - is regarded. The worth imitating, visible, and of course modern heroines of these authors are constantly juxtaposed with the 'misogynistic', 'traditional', and 'uncivilised' father, brother, and husband. In this sense, the feminisation of Bouraoui's texts for instance, brings to play predetermined representations that conform to an overarching set of values and ideologies. This mainly consists in a modernity that called for unveiling and fighting other religious or traditional practices. It also advocates the right to work and equality between the sexes, demands usually associated with the Western form of feminism defined in the literature review. This means that the feminisation of the text devises certain - supposedly necessary - conditions that do not reflect the multifaceted and complex reality of Algerian women. This also means that the use of what may be seen as a feminised language in this sense allows these authors to plot narratives that anticipate the fate of women living in Algerian Muslim and traditional milieus. Djabali's, Ben's, and Bouraoui's heroines are all presented as doomed to failure from the very outset. Flash forwards are often used as

it is the case with Ben's work to display Sabrina's 'inevitable' misfortune.

A polarising feminism

The origins of a modern Algerian woman have often been a subject of interest to scholars working on the Algerian novel. A considerable number of studies have put the emergence of an emancipated modern female character down to the complicity that characterises the mother/son relationship. The son according to such studies, (see for instance Mostaghanemi's 1985 PhD thesis), is the one who will set out to free his mother from patriarchal traditions and taboos, thus bringing her to become aware of the society around her and the role she can play in it. Generally, in the Maghrebi novel, the mother-son relations aim at overcoming the traditional force of inertia to create new structures, a new framework where the liberation of women and social progress are made possible. Male authored texts in Algeria often get the credit of presenting such a modern image of the Algerian woman. Dib's and Boudjedra's works are commonly acknowledged among critics to have retraced the route of a psycho-sociological evolution of women. Boudjedra's works, most notably those published during the 1980s, and especially when compared with the sexist tone expressed in his first novel, *La Repudiation* (1969), signal a remarkable evolution towards modernity and women's emancipation. What is of particular interest to note is that in this process, Boudjedra emphasises values such as the secular and the anti-traditional, as well as the purely individualistic character of his exemplary heroines. One could most probably remember the sexual and psychological liberation of *Selma in Le Demantelement* (1983) which is inspired by such imported - often Western and culturally colonial - values. When it comes to women's writings, the lack of an audacious investigation on the different ideologies and discourses that orchestrate notions of femininity is the main reason why, until today, the likes of Djamila Debèche and Assia Djebar are still considered the first to have presented such a modern image of women. It is true that Djebar, especially in her early novels, retraces, starting from the depiction of heroines placed in extreme situations, a process of emancipation which suggests changes in the traditional perception of the place of women. This factor, Djebar's unequivocal critique of patriarchal tradition, in addition to her French education and the scarcity of women authored novels during the 1960s and 1970s that celebrate

Westernisation, as is the case with Boudjedra's Selma for instance, have paved the way for critics in a number of studies on women's representation to focus on Djebar as representative of Western modernity. However, these critics have neglected to take account of how Djebar, as argued in chapter 4, is representative of an authentic vision, of a transnational project to liberate women. For Djebar, liberating women is not, and should not be, necessarily equated with westernisation or the rejection of local traditions. Djamila Debèche's texts, too, seem to be in many ways forerunners to Lemsine's ideas on bringing together this antagonism of tradition and Westernisation as discussed in chapter 3. Although the celebration of modernity and Western values is indeed there in her texts, such values are not advantaged over the traditional, they rather go hand-in-hand.

As previously stated, Algerian society perceived colonial rule as a constant threat to its Islamic character. This meant that a return to traditional ways of living was synonymous with a rejection of an imposed colonial identity. After independence, modern lifestyles continued to be seen to cooperate with France's projects to secularise Algerians. According to Lazreg, it is from this perspective that Algerian women - and the position on the place of women generally - had to cling to backward customs so as to guard against the infiltration of Western and neocolonial modes of thought (Lazreg, 1994). Thus Algerian women who survived the war of revolution were disappointed to see that patriarchy persisted after the independence of the country.

On this note, one must not forget to add that the persistence of patriarchy could also be put down to the lack of a feminist project that had to go hand in hand with the War of Liberation 1954/1962. The lack of a feminist project during those eight years, however, is understandable since the collective independence of the country was expected to guarantee all sorts of individual independences including that of women. The best example one could think of is that of Djebar whose first novel, *La soif* (1957) met with opprobrium and was particularly reviled by the FLN as it failed to show the author's anti-colonial commitments. The party considered the novel's central theme of women's suffering under the yoke of patriarchy a trivial issue at a time when Algerians were fully into fighting France. This caused Djebar to emphasise anti-colonial themes in her subsequent works to show her nationalist commitments.

In matters relating to the place of Algerian women in society, it is worth noting that clinging to traditional - and often backward - customs after the departure of the French was an idea/position which the governments of Ben Bela, Boumedienne, and Bendjedid (1962/1992) also bought into, as they institutionalised several sexist perceptions. One could most probably think of the 1984 *Family Code* which stresses the importance of the *ayla*, the Algerian traditional family as defined in the previous chapter, and thus, most importantly, communal values. The communal was supported with a certain sense of pride since it was perceived as a direct response to the increasing advancement of Western models of life and especially femininity. This because, according to Hiddleston, 'the very gesture of female rebellion is associated with the individualist psychology of Western secularism and capitalism' (Hiddleston, 2006, p. 85). It is true that a *collective* politics has always been central to Western feminism. However, one must stress that this mainly concerned the political aspect of feminist activism. In her much cited *Out of Algeria*, Hiddleston observes that Nawal El Saadawi insists on solidarity among women as a necessary condition for individual agency (Hiddleston, 2006). Although El Saadawi is aware that 'Women must express themselves individually' (Hiddleston, 2006, p. 85), Hiddleston explains, 'feminist political critique relies on the assertion of a feminine community' (Hiddleston, 2006, p. 85). Hiddleston quotes El Saadawi to stress the importance of collective work to feminism in a political sense:

> Freedom for women will never be achieved unless they unite into an organised political force powerful enough and conscious enough to truly represent half of society. To my mind the real reason why women have been unable to complete their emancipation, even in the socialist countries, is that they have failed to constitute themselves into a political force powerful, conscious and dynamic enough to impose their rights (El Saadawi, 1980, cited in Hiddleston, 2006, p.85).

One example of this could be seen in the emergence of women's movements in Algeria during the 1980s and 1990s, which worked in close collaboration with feminist groups in France and the United States. The cultural fabric that such women's groups advocated, however, was considerably individualistic in the sense that women's individual preferences challenge traditional family structures and other forms of bonding that

characterise Maghrebi cultures such as arranged marriage which is often - and mistakenly - perceived as some form of forced marriage in the Western imaginary. We learn in Hiddleston's *Out of Algeria* that although Hélène Cixous grew up in Algeria, 'her relationship with the Algerian community is one of exile and nonbelonging' (Hiddleston, 2006, p.86). She explains that her thinking 'is steeped in 'French theory'' (Hiddleston, 2006, p.86), as she proposes introspection and personal self-expression as likely tools for resistance. The privileging of individualism to the detriment of collaboration on relational, social and cultural levels and its benefits in non-Western contexts may well harm women as minutely demonstrated in Khader's decolonial feminism. Hiddleston points out that 'Cixous can be seen to be guilty of reproducing a (Western?) myth of individualism while failing to analyse the importance of interactive networks' (2006, p. 87).

It is in advocating individualism and other Western values that the secular feminists of the 1980s in Algeria could be seen to strengthen the view that feminism was a foreign, Western tradition. In addition to individual liberation, women's emancipation was reduced to being a question of equality between the sexes, of being civilised, and of better living conditions. Instead of dissecting the real issues encountered by women and capitalising on the Democrats' critique of religious fundamentalism and other real issues in Algeria, Algerian feminists were content with advocating a modernity which advocated the right to work, to unveil, and equality between the sexes, demands usually associated with the Western form of feminism previously defined in this thesis (see pages 33-36). Monique Gadant is critical of this form of feminism in Algeria which underwrites a purely Western modernity. Commenting on a newspaper intervention on women's day by Hachemi Cherif, general Secretary of PAGS, Gadant observes that the content of the intervention 'censée être à la gloire des femmes et le comble de la pensée moderniste' (Gadant, 1995, pp.25-26), Gadant interestingly notes that 'Il n'a pas rencontré la moindre critique' (Gadant, 1995, p.26). It is in this sense that feminists and the postcolonial governments alike remained oblivious to the real issues in Algeria which ensue from an entanglement of politics, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, culture, tradition, religion, socialism, and class.

However, one must not forget to add that Western feminism is not simply a defence of

equality between the sexes, of being civilised, and of better living conditions as previously stated. To speak of feminism as a Western value in this sense is also to speak of certain attitudes that consist of radically wanting to break with local traditions and cultures. The borrowing/imitation of such attitudes as far as the Algerian secular feminists of the 1980s seems to stem from the idea that Western feminism is a universal feminism. Indeed, Western feminism is generally and mistakenly associated with the notion of universal values. White and middle-class feminism is the idea that social enhancement for women across the world is possible if certain conditions are present. These consist of a radical break with non-Western traditions and the rejection of relations other than chosen ones on a personal level. One should also add the rejection of any economic model other than capitalism, and thus the universalisation of individual independence in matters relating to income. This goes without saying that communal relations in the family and in society generally are considered traditions that must be eradicated.

It is worth noting that the context of the 1980s which saw the emergence of the aforementioned secular women's groups saw also the publication of a set of Francophone and women authored works which, like Boudjedra's *Le Demantelement and La Pluie,* celebrate individualism for women as well as the secular and the anti-traditional. These women authored novels were articulated around a number of problems relating to the situation of women, questioning the values established on this subject. Most Francophone authors seem to have converged with the aforementioned feminists on issues relating to modernity in that they, too, advocated ready-made Western formulas relating to women's liberation and as a result reduced the role of heroines in their texts to quests of being modern, of being secular, and of claiming better living conditions.

The overarching argument of this chapter is that Djabali, Ben and Bouraoui portray, or at least defend a profile of women who are paradigmatic of this Western trend. The chapter will demonstrate how women in their texts strive to occupy a place which in the eyes of Western ethnocentric feminism is rightfully theirs, regardless of their nationality, culture, religion, and race. The chapter will thus argue that transgression of certain gender roles in their texts concerns patriarchal practices that prevail in the West, or at least practices which are understood to be as such by Westerners. One pole through which this vision is

analysed is the severe critique of marriage, albeit a ‘sacred institution’ in the Maghrebi context. This Western critique targets this ‘oppressive’ institution, as well as the religious which serves as a justification to perpetuate these relations.

The chapter will also argue that such a representation of the Algerian woman is a vehicle for imperialism. This because imported roles for women entail restricted values which impose the existence of a certain regime of cultural domination. If we examine all the descriptive elements of female characters and the functioning mechanisms that express their relationships in these works, we see that they are organised according to an ethnocentric system. These elements are mainly unveiling, individualism, autonomy, and the secular. Such traits are projected through some themes such as discovery of the female body, the re-imagining of the notion of the couple, as well as assertion of the female ego.

Imperialist Individualism

From the outset of Djabali’s 1983 text, there is a clear eulogy of women’s solitude. Solitude is presented as an expression of Farida’s revolt against patriarchal relations that are based on infantilism and domination. For instance, it is meant as a rebellion against traditional forms of bonding such as parental ties and arranged marriage most notably. At the beginning of the story, we discover Farida, a well off female doctor who prefers the reality of isolation. Her isolation from the ‘world of men’ is described as a choice and as an asceticism, and not an imposed reality as in the case of Hajila in *Ombre sultane*. As far as the Maghrebi novel is concerned, this dimension for female characters contributed to the creation of a new type of woman who is capable of self-realisation.

The selected works for this chapter realise a remarkable subversion in a context where the traditional family - which is purely based on communal values - remains central to the composition of Algerian society. In Ben’s *Sabrina*, family bonds are considered obstacles for the liberation of women. Likewise, the heroine of Bouraoui’s *La voyeuse interdite* expresses a devaluation of the traditional family as defined in the previous chapter. It is worth observing that such an approach to women’s emancipation leads the heroines of *Agave*, of *La voyeuse interdite*, of *Sabrina* as well as of *La Chrysalide* where Faiza breaks

with family ties and settles her own couple away in Algiers, to suffer tragic endings and at times humiliating ones. The devaluation of such values leaves Farida in *Agave* at odds with men of her community. This is perceptible in her seclusion away from her husband and more tellingly from her own father. It is particularly worth dwelling on the figure of the father. In Algerian society as in the Maghrebi novel, the father is a central figure. He is respected, and at times idealised for his filial love as it is recurring in many of Djebar's texts. Deeply rooted in the teachings of Islam and thus widespread in Algerian society, the idealisation of the father is almost unquestionable. That being said, his roles in the family are also problematic since they are generally at odds with women's individual liberation. This problematic and anti-feminist representation of the father is emphasised in the novels covered in this chapter.

In Bouraoui's *La voyeuse interdite*, Fikria, the only narrator of the novel, dwells heavily on the father's brutal behaviour. His behaviour is described as such on account of him being the one to decide not only on the life of his children, but also on their perception of the world and their beliefs. He is often likened and identified with the dictator against whom no family member dares revolt lest they should suffer terrible ramifications. The father is also the one to make decisions on the freedom of movement, access to education, and consent to marriage of his sons and especially daughters, without even having to give explanations for the decision he takes, which equates him to a dictator in that respect. In this novel, the female narrator openly condemns her father: 'Mon père a été le déclencheur de ma violence. Le responsable que j'accuse! Complice secret de Satan il m'a donné goût à un plaisir sans bornes mais que je paye bien cher le lendemain!' (Bouraoui, 1991, p.66). He often uses violence as we read in the following scene where he extinguishes a cigarette on the narrator's face.

Similarly, the passages quoted below from Ben's novel attest to the father's violence to put 'order' and punish the rebellious young woman. As in *La voyeuse interdite*, in *Sabrina* this tends to draw a certain picture of the father as the hated figure. He is again the kind of father who holds absolute power over the fate of his sons and especially daughters as we can read in the two following passages on Sabrina's father and Saber's own respectively:

«Qui est-ce qui pleure ici?», hurlait le père sortant de la chambre où il vivait enfermé. Elle s'arrêtait net. Il s'approchait d'elle: «Pourquoi tu pleures, hein, je ne veux pas entendre pleurer ici, tu m'entends, si tu pleures je te tue», et terrorisée par ses yeux exhorbités, elle s'arrêtait de pleurer, et elle allait aider sa mère à la cuisine

…Le père fixa un moment son fils et levant lourdement son bras, lui envoya de toutes ses forces une gifle magistrale.

Il ajouta:

— Fais tes bagages. Et quitte immédiatement la maison. Avec celle-là, dit-il en désignant Sabrina (Ben, 1986, pp.42-93).

The break with the father characterises Ben's 1986 novel. The young woman, namely the protagonist Sabrina, puts an end to her father's social power through her chosen love. The modern form of marriage that she chooses is a symbolic challenge to masculinity and an inherent denial of the father's power which traditional society grants him. This vision of the world seems to propose a new entry of femininity, regardless of whether or not it corresponds to a realistic conception of an Algerian reality:

il ignorait tout des fiançailles de sa fille, il ignorait qu'elle n'avait pas respecté le serment qu'il lui arrachait à chaque visite que seule elle lui rendait... Mais le père, c'est une autre histoire, une autre histoire (Ben, 1986, pp.23-24).

Le père arrêta alors la jeune femme:

— Où tu vas?

— Avec lui, répondit-elle en baissant les yeux…

— Tu m'as renvoyé, je pars.

— Eh bien tu partiras seul. Ta mère a besoin de ta femme ici.

— C'est ma femme qui décidera.

— Ah oui? Parce que maintenant ce sont les femmes qui décident?

— Oui. Elle fera ce qu'elle décidera. Je ne la force pas. Là-dessus…

Le père l'arrêta:

— Où tu vas?

— Je ne sais pas, je suis mon mari (Ben, 1986, pp.95-96).

The recurring representation of the father figure as dominant and domineering now is not only challenged by women. It is ignored and ridiculed, a rare representation in the contemporary Maghrebi novel. One could probably think of Boudjedra's *La pluie* (1987) where female characters understand that in fact the father's pseudo-power is based on their weakness and fear of others which contributes to the 'feminisation' of Boudjedra's text. Most significantly, this challenge of the father's traditional roles in *Sabrina* as in the other novels is a challenge of a social order that is structured according to the communal. Whether this is a neglect of the benefits that the communal provides to women in Algerian society or simply an imitation of Western forms of family organisation, the feminist vision in the novel favours Sabrina's individual emancipation from the parental and husband's parental family which is a typically Western trait.

While women authors and feminists might reasonably be expected to take a critical view of social and family structures such as by supporting individualism when this benefits women, these novels adhere to a specific form of individualism which one must clearly define in this paragraph. According to Susan Moller Okin, the erosion of non-Western forms of bonding such as familial and communal ties should be at the centre of feminism because such associations impede the individual freedom of women (1999). For her part, Khader is critical of Okin's view because it 'seems to tacitly underwrite many feminisms that become complicit in imperialism' (2019, p. 21). One must further specify which form of individualism is imperialist. Individualism in this sense devalues local cultures, especially through the destruction of the traditional family structure which is based on arranged marriage and familial ties in order to promote a Western parochial way of life instead. Danielle Dunand Zimmerman (2015) paraphrases Bowen (2007) who identifies

the ‘communal’ as one of three threats to French modernity (Bowen, 2007, cited in Zimmerman, 2015, p.149). This form of individualism values modernity, Western late-capitalist life, and the implementation of neoliberal projects in non-Western contexts which are not necessarily in local women’s favour. For instance, the idea of encouraging women to have a paid job and to quit the parental home/family neglects that females’ wellbeing in countries such as Algeria is often in participating in communal networks and relational resources.

It is worth observing that the idea of eroding/eradicating familial and paternal links in this sense finds roots in a significant body of scholarship in Algerian women’s writing. One could probably think of M’rabet’s two massive but controversial essays *La femme Algerienne* and *Les Algeriennes.* She published these two works in 1965 and 1967 respectively. Her works are considered controversial not only on account of the imported emancipation she advocates for her sisters both as author and radio presenter, but also and most notably, on account of the strenuous critique she expresses against traditional forms of bonding, especially bonds with fathers and all Algerian men. This generalisation may well be the result of the fact that M’rabet wrote her 1965 essay in response to letters she received from Algerian women living in hard circumstances, cases that are so often nothing more than exceptions. It is worth noting that M’rabet only returned to Algeria after independence, having spent many years in Strasbourg where she completed her PhD in biology. In many instances, the average Algerian male reader may well be offended by the orientalist depiction of his brothers as disrespectful, oppressors, and sexual predators. While similar to Bouraoui in the sense that her critique of patriarchy is distinguished by an essentialist and radical revolt against a social order where women are kept in a situation of oppression, one must not forget that this kind of critique remains unauthentic for a feminist whose aforementioned works are widely seen as landmarks in the history of what is supposed to be Algerian feminism. Of course, reducing feminism to, among other values, the rejection of family and especially parental ties does not reflect a deep awareness of the real obstacles hindering women’s emancipation in a purely communal society which is not necessarily gender oppressive as discussed below in this section:

«Tu épouseras ce garçon... Maintenant, tu dois mettre le voile... Lave cette chemise

(ou: «mes pieds»: d'un père à sa fille, étudiante) ... Tu ne porteras pas de jupes serrées, ça ne se fait pas...»

Qu'en saurait-elle? Son domaine, c'est la cuisine, les gosses, le ménage (M'rabet, 1965, pp.14-15)

M'rabet is also critical of other forms of traditional bonding. For instance, the Algerian feminist recognises neither the economic benefits nor the moral merits of arranged marriage. In one passage attesting to the author's generalising tone, M'rabet states that 'il n'est pas excessif d'avancer que tous les jeunes gens considèrent le mariage traditionnel comme un achat: il faut payer—et souvent très cher (2.000 dinars, soit 200.000 AF, en moyenne, à Ghardaïa)—pour avoir une fille' (M'rabet, 1965, p.37). A considerable amount of scholarship on decolonial and anti-imperialist feminism demonstrates how in non-Western contexts subverting traditional bonds is not necessarily in local women's favour. In purely traditional contexts such as the places briefly visited and described by M'rabet, marrying into the right family, which is most frequently only completed through arranged marriage and thus the consent of parents, is in women's best interest. This does not mean that local women's best interest is to not have the right to choose their husbands. The critique of arranged marriage in the texts selected for this chapter, including M'rabet's 1965 and 1967 works, is constantly accompanied by a preference for individualism in ways that radically challenge the structure of the traditional family. However, one should observe that Algerian feminism which is supposed to be original in its critique, and consequently in its demands, should not equate the well-being of Algerian women with the freedom not to be influenced in one's marital choices to emulate the 'Western' reduction of feminism to individualism. In other words, Algerian feminists should have looked to address the mechanisms responsible for promoting women's oppression in the specific context of Algerian interwar society, instead of looking to transform an originally communal society. This because a communal society is not necessarily oppressive, nor is an individualist society necessarily free of women's oppression.

In addition to parental ties and arranged marriage, other forms of family associations are

also not desirable for the Western form of individualism discussed in this chapter. In Ghardaïa for instance, the rural region mentioned in M'rabet's passage, local women rely considerably on sharing and informal lending which are normally only present in family associations and communal cultures. In such places as Ghardaïa, engaging in a professional activity which generates income and which is believed to free women in matters relating to marriage is often not available. Instead, pastoralism is profitable for women in Ghardaïa. This immediately calls to mind Lila Abu-Lughod's 2013 ethnographic work. Abu-Lughod explains that among the nomadic Arabs of the desert, women can be harmed as a result of the Western destruction of familial structures which leaves them (women) deprived of support and over reliant on themselves individually. Khader is specifically interested in one of her examples which concerns a widow called Gateefa. We learn that the female:

> expresses nostalgia for a time when she lived in an extended multigenerational household, despite at the time having disliked elements of it, such as the presence of co-wives. Now, partly as a result of economic changes, changes in educational expectations, and the physical displacement of her Bedouin community, her sons live in separate households, and her daughters-in-law (selfishly, in her view) focus on the needs of their individual children. In other words, Gateefa's support system for care (and power) in old age, one she had invested in when she was younger by fulfilling household commitments, including commitments for dependency work, had dissipated (2019, p.55).

In Ben's work as in Bouraoui's *La voyeuse interdite*, female rebellion is not directed against fathers only. It is also meant against women who are accomplices in perpetuating the values of what the narrator considers to be a patriarchal system. On this note, McIlvanney's observations on Bouraoui's 1991 novel are interesting. McIlvanney underlines the narrator's mother's role and identifies it with the 'spiteful Beauvoirian maternal model who seeks sadistic revenge for her own unhappy existence by subjecting her daughter to a similar fate' (McIlvanney, 2004, p.110). Thus McIlvanney observes the narrator's pessimistic attitude about the future of Algerian women and Fikria's 'futility of

any individual resistance to it' (McIlvanney, 2004, p.110). McIlvanney goes on to provide a careful psychoanalytic examination of the negative mother-daughter relationship in the novel. This negative representation also concerns the role played by the aunt, the sister, and the cousin. Similarly, Ben's heroine, Sabrina, denounces the resignation of her female family members and in particular the servility of the mother and the grandmother. The figure of the latter in particular accentuates archaism and the belonging to a bygone past that is no longer the world of the young girl. In Ben's work, the mother is almost completely absent while the grandmother is the representative of this traditional universe whose representation is similarly perceived in a negative way. The narrator stresses the girl's resentment at the injustice suffered by her mother at the hands of the father with the complicity of other women.

While the ties of young women to their mothers are generally presented as traditional relations and thus undesirable, it is worth observing that such ties are surprisingly welcome when they serve to advance a Western way of life. The events that take place following Sabrina's prospect of a 'forced' marriage with the wealthy 'fils Ben Ameur' provide a picture of an unusual subversion of this anti-familial and individualist economy. While forced marriage remains unacceptable under any circumstances, the form of marriage that is chosen by Sabrina and valued by the narrator to juxtapose this 'forced' marriage paves the way for a purely Western lifestyle. The grandmother, traditional as she is, makes the most of the prerogatives that traditional society grants her. She wants to impose this unwanted marriage on the young Sabrina. The role played by Sabrina's mother however, and the unprecedented collectivism that ensues between them (Sabrina and her mother) show that individualism and anti-familial ties could be unnecessary in certain contexts where individualism does not justify a Western vision of the world.

The prospect of this 'forced' marriage prompts young Sabrina to write a letter of rescue to her brothers. The mother is aware of the ramifications that might ensue if the father of Sabrina discovers his sons' visit to save young Sabrina following her letter, and thus makes sure this does not reach him: 'Oui, je sais, je sais, dis-leur vite de partir chez ta grand-mère, si leur père les trouve ici, il est capable de tout. Va, va, dis-leur doucement de partir sans faire de bruit' (Ben, 1986, p.47). The mother warns Sabrina and summons

her sons to join her at their grandmother's, far from their father. This is symbolic of the mother's complicit attitude against what is perceived as patriarchy in favour of the cause of her daughter. Accordingly, the protagonist's brothers manage to safely come and see their grandmother and promise to save their little sister: 'Non, personne ne te forcera à te marier. Mais toi, fais bien attention à toi, garde-toi bien pour celui qui te plaira, et surtout, surtout, ne fais pas attention à l'argent' (Ben, 1986, p.48). Her brothers' directions materialise in her marriage with Saber. Consequently, this marriage foregrounds a symbolism of Western ways of living. One could think for instance of unveiling, which, thanks to this marriage, is made possible to think of for the first time in Sabrina's life. Sabrina and her husband also lead a kind of life that explicitly defies traditions and Islamic ways of living.

Other than this example, the rejection of parental and familial ties is what generally sets the ground for imperialist values. Concerning the anti-familial and individualism in this sense, to speak of imperialist values is to speak of both economic and cultural agendas. As we shall see in the next section on the secular, imperialist feminism also targets religious beliefs. The attitudes of Farida and Fikria convey the idea that women's wellbeing is better when they are extricated from attachments with their parents, let alone with other members of their traditional communities. As previously stated, because this form of individualism targets precisely structures of the traditional family, the narrators of these novels showcase ways of living in which certain kinds of bonding are welcome. One could probably think of chosen relationships which do not involve the families of the future spouses, and more generally as it is prevalent in the West, concubinage. Unlike arranged marriage, a cultural trait of Maghrebi and many Arab societies, 'chosen' relationships in this sense are constantly advanced as modern and progressive.

This shows that it is not bonding, such as through marriage per se that threatens a woman's individual liberty. It is rather arranged marriage that stands in the way of the Western form of feminism discussed in this chapter. This does not mean that other forms of Western feminism that do not justify imperialism also choose to criticise only non-Western forms of marriage. Western anti-imperialist feminism - which is not covered in this thesis - considers marriage, regardless of its nature, a patriarchal institution as long

as it impedes women's freedom and their individual preferences. However, it also takes a critical view of marriage as long as it justifies a specific culture or way of life. Khader argues that discussions surrounding forced marriage in the United Kingdom confirm that 'it is not marriage that is seen to be undesirable, it is arranged marriage and multigenerational families' (Khader, 2019, p.62). Khader paraphrases Mairead Enright (2009) who argues that:

> Policies surrounding forced marriage in the United Kingdom, because they blur the line between arranged and forced marriage (see also Phillips 2009) and occur against a backdrop of criminalizing South Asian and Muslims, infringe on the autonomy of young women who seek arranged marriages and reduce the likelihood that they can expect equal treatment from the state. A policy raising the age at which one could migrate a foreign spouse in the United Kingdom to twenty-one threatened to prevent adult women who chose arranged marriages from being able to engage in them (Enright, 2009, cited in Khader, 2019, p.57).

In some cases as we shall see, marriage for love as perceived by Westerners may well harm women. Khader observes that young women avoiding what is perceived as forced marriage are often subjected to 'religious and racial harassment as, for example, in domestic-violence shelters' (Khanum, 2008, cited in Khader, 2019, p.57). This echoes the ramifications suffered by Sabrina. Indeed, the lack of conformism to what is moral in the Algerian context, such as the defiance of parents and family, arouses in the family all sorts of jealousy, envy and hostility. Saber's family members find themselves confronted with a couple that is clearly different from their own, and which give them an implacable image of their own lives. The more the couple shows love, the more hostile the family environment turns out to be. Saber's mother does not tolerate Sabrina being filled with love. The father rejects Saber's independence, his access to adulthood, and his status as a responsible man. The brother is also jealous of his brother's deep love for a woman. The intolerance of the family aims at the division of the couple, the enslavement of Sabrina and the domination of Saber. Because of her status as a housewife, it is Sabrina who is most affected by the family's unkindness. Her submission and obedience correlate with silence. She does not report to Saber the overwork imposed by her mother-in-law

who she has to obey. She assumes in silence hunger, insults and even the sexual assault inflicted by her father-in-law. She stifles her revolt because of the love of her husband.

First, there is the idea of adopting Western ideals such as marriage for love, which results in such harms because it does not answer the specific needs of ‘other’ women. Most importantly as we shall see shortly, there is also the idea that the only individualism advocated for women in these works is the one that is linked with a specific standard of what values are important in women’s lives. The former idea is a result of the latter. Second, we speak of two distinct forms of individualism: one that guarantees full personhood of the individual woman without particularly targeting the erosion of local customs, while the other conveys imperialist agendas. What confirms the adoption of the latter notion in these novels is that forms of familial bonding that allow the spread of Western values become desirable, which means that it is not the personhood of a woman per se that counts.

What also confirms the adoption of the latter notion, is that the form of individualism that is advocated for women is one that justifies a capitalist system. Indeed, the kind of bonds that are not acceptable in these novels are associations that leave women dependent in matters relating to income. It is important to dwell on financial dependence, because according to Western ethnocentric feminism, modernisation requires economic independence which in turn guarantees freedom of the individual. The combination of these conditions is at the centre of Western feminism. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon explain that historically, in the West, people only came to value independence at times of industrialisation. As a result, individual independence was only embraced when used to describe the condition of wage labourers (1994). On this note, Khader adds that according to this Western feminist stance, ‘Sexist oppression is an artifact of premodernity, and it will ostensibly disappear once the trappings of modern capitalism allow people to move from "traditional" to market-dictated roles’ (Khader, 2019, p.64).

This historical reality resonated heavily with the ideology of Algerian women’s movements. Indeed, the idea that financial income is necessary for women’s independence was crucial to Algerian feminists who sought to respond to the socio-

economic context of the 1980s. Prior to this decade, Boumedienne had ruled the country for almost fourteen years. With regards to women's situation, this tenure (1965/1979) saw what may arguably be considered as an institutionalisation of pre-war roles for women. On this note, the socio-political context of the 1960s and 1970s did also influence literatures of the time and significantly shaped notions of women's emancipation (see for instance, chapter 3 on Lemsine). Although this chapter looks mainly at texts published during the 1980s onwards, tracing our analysis back to the Boumedienne era is useful because much of the gender politics that characterised the 1980s were in many ways a result of the preceding two decades.

The socialist state that Boumedienne wanted to build depended on the existence of a large Algerian population. Policies were thus issued to promote demographic growth. One could probably think of policies relating to the promotion of marriage as well as the banning of birth-control consumption. Thus the 1980s saw an unprecedented demographic growth turning Algeria into a country of youth. At this juncture, the vast majority of women were only assigned reproductive roles: rare were the women who had paid jobs, as procreation was the priority. This tendency to see women as housewives one should observe, was emphasised by the scarcity of jobs during the 1980s. This meant that if any job opportunity was offered, it had to be a right of a father. This gendered labour division was also the result of many factors. The nature of the Algerian economy which depended - and still does - on oil and gas industries mostly required what was then perceived as male-adapted jobs. Oil and gas, in addition to industries relating to other natural resources taking place mainly in mines, demanded physical strength. In addition, with nationalism at its peak less than two decades after national independence, paid labour for women was still considered as a mark of colonial values.

Women's movements in Algeria which emerged in this socio-economic context sought to tackle these issues. They considered the persistence of patriarchy which results from 'familial' bonds synonymous with economic dependence. Mainly represented by a class of educated women who benefited from Boumedienne's socialist policies to free education, these movements first sought to improve women's social integration for more equality in matters relating to jobs and income as a response to this economic crisis. One

expression of this material conception of women's independence could be seen in the 1979 conference which was attended by hundreds of students and university women at the industrial workers' union headquarters to voice their concerns. Interestingly enough, Knauss explains that part of the reason why these women called themselves workers was to 'underscore their identity as employed women' (Knauss, 1987, p.130).

Likewise, to subvert patriarchal traditions in the case of the aforementioned novels, women must have their individual economic independence. Indeed, the discourses expressed by the narrator in 'elle' in *Sabrina,* as well as the first-person narrator in *La voyeuse interdite,* do not fail to emphasise the material domination of men over women given the structures of the community to which they belong. Narrations stress how women are confined to domestic chores, representing no productive value. Whether this is caused by their fathers, their brothers, their husbands or the social authorities in general, they are almost always dependent on the mercy of men. In *Agave*, Farida's autonomy at the beginning is made possible because she has a liberal job and occupies a symbolically important social position. She is a doctor, and her economic independence allows her to lead an independent life. She has responsibilities that put her on the same level and at times on a higher level than her husband's:

> Farida, musulmane par hérédité, privilégiée matériellement par évidence, gagnée au raisonnement matérialiste par ses lectures, rendue déjà au complexe de supériorité de sa future profession, produit du circonstanCiel vide culturel où nous perdons pied, installée au milieu de son mutisme intellectuel, désireuse de tout, certaine de rien, Farida (Djabali, 1983, p.17).

While the advocation of women's rights to work is at the centre of universal feminism, women's wellbeing does not necessarily require women to have paid jobs. Women who choose not to engage in professional activities, preferring traditional ways of living where the husband is generally the one assigned the duty of providing for his family, should not be necessarily seen as oppressed. In fact, material independence often worsens the existing gender relations in Arab contexts. This focus on income for Farida encourages 'il' to see Farida as an object for financial gain and social prestige, which is admittedly the

sole reason why ‘il’ wants to get married to Farida at the beginning of the story. (See for instance, Serene J. Khader (2016) on the harm of marrying non-Western women for financial reasons). Her liberal job has also sexual and psychological consequences. Farida herself is aware of this: ‘Sa supériorité de cadre médical cède parfois à une profonde anxiété: elle veut prouver que l'instruction ne l'a pas "déféminisée" et que tout ce qui était le domaine privé de sa mère lui a échu, intégralement’ (Djabali, 1983, p.62). Her social position engenders sexual objectification and negativity in the couple. Her relationship with her husband at the beginning is limited to a sexuality expressed in terms of abnormality, violence and marginality:

> Il s'approche pour l'embrasser, elle se raidit, il l'embrasse sur le front, sur les joues, il lui caresse les cheveux, il dit allonge-toi, détends-toi, elle rougit. Elle dit fais vite, il dit ce n'est pas une opération chirurgicale, elle dit c'est la même chose, il dit j'ai envie de te battre, et elle, ça commence bien, tu es comme tous les autres (Djabali 1983, p.48).

Farida’s likening of the sex-act to a surgery shows how she abstracts the sex act from its feelings and passionate love which such relations are supposed to entail and thus instrumentalises it. ‘Il’ admits the start of a negative relationship: ‘Nous allons commencer à nous détester’ (Djabali, 1983, p.49).

The secular as Universal feminism

The discourses expressed in the selected novels for this chapter seem to echo a Western ethnocentric imaginary which is in many ways culture-related. This is hugely important for the understanding of sexism as being mainly caused by religion and local traditions. This means that the erosion of sexism naturally requires the erosion of these two crucial elements in the lives of Algerian men and women. Although this ethnocentric view generally applies to what is interchangeably referred to as ‘other’ and ‘southern’ cultures, Algerian men and women are specified here because this chapter examines Algerian works of literature.

It is particularly worth citing Okin’s (1999) article *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* on

this Western-oriented view. Okin argues that one important link between culture and gender consists of the fact that almost all cultures across the world converge in promoting male domination over women. Okin examines myths of, among other things, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For her these ‘are rife with attempts to justify the control and subordination of women. Such myths she adds, consist of ‘characterizations of women as overly emotional, untrustworthy, evil, or sexually dangerous’ (Okin, 1999, p.13). The same attitude is expressed against local traditions. She argues that traditions and cultures often hinder women’s wellbeing (1999). Interestingly enough, she focuses on formerly conquered or colonised nations such as in Africa and the Middle East which she argues, ‘have elaborate patterns of socialization, rituals, matrimonial customs, and other cultural practices (including systems of property ownership and control of resources) aimed at bringing women's sexuality and reproductive capabilities under men's control’ (Okin, 1999, p.14).

While Okin’s view remains in some ways reasonable to some extent, it is very problematic. What is particularly noteworthy in Okin’s article as Khader so interestingly observes, is her radical position against non-Western cultures. Khader opens her section on individualism by quoting Okin as follows: ‘Some women living in patriarchal non-Western cultures "*might* be much better off if the culture[s] they were born into were... to become extinct”' (Okin, 1999, cited in Khader, 2019, p.85). This means, among other things, that the main reasons behind Western notions of feminism are not simply the struggle for improving women’s lives. They are rather the adherence to a Western-based vision of the world. This because, not only non-Western cultures alone are responsible for the plight of women according to Okin’s view, but Western cultural ways of living such as the secular, individualism, and liberalism, are proposed as the most suited to guarantee gender justice.

It is worth noting that this Western ethnocentric feminism, such as that pursued by Okin, resonated heavily in the discourses adopted by Algerian feminists during the 1980s, what is also known as the post-Boumedienne era. This borrowing influenced the intellectual context in which Ben and the selected women authors for this chapter resorted to writing. Simultaneously, this juncture represents the socio-political context to which these women

authors wrote back. If contestation for these authors is mainly inspired by Okin's feminism, it is because, among other things, in their texts Algerian women are expected to subvert cultural norms and are at odds with both religion and tradition. One should note that in this chapter, religion and tradition are used interchangeably. Although the terms are not normally interchangeable, they are so here because they are both rejected by this Western form of feminism (see pages 33-36). In the selected set of texts for this chapter, women share certain characteristics or are at least portrayed as victims for not having access to certain rights. Even married, women are no longer expected to devote themselves entirely to their traditionally familial duties as in the set of novels selected for the previous chapter. A woman is no longer dependent on her procreation to survive. She is freed, or at least on her way to freeing herself from the typically traditional qualities that are usually required of women such as those of a good cook, a housewife, and a caring mother. Tradition as a whole is criticised. Interestingly enough, McIlvanney quotes the following passage from *La voyeuse interdite*: 'La tradition est une dame vengeresse contre qui je ne peux lutter. C'etait ainsi pour elles, ce sera comme ca pour les autres' (Bouraoui, 1991, cited in McIlvanney, 2004, p.110). Women in these novels can - or are at least expected to - practise sport and read. They are often interested in political or cultural issues. Husbands play a pivotal role in this as they remarkably agree to share tasks relating to the domestic sphere. This is the case of Saber for instance, in *Sabrina, ils t'ont volé ta vie* (1986). This because the liberation of the couple is essential to women's individual liberty. Miraglia (2005) describes Ben's novel as 'ouvertement engagés et portant essentiellement sur l'existence féminine à l'intérieur du couple' (Miraglia, 2005, p.11). These women authors succeed in, or at least aim at redefining traditional relationships inside the couple. The notion of the traditional couple as most recurring in Ounissi's works is denounced.

Western attitudes are expressed more clearly through Farida than through Sabrina. The aforementioned characteristics of Western women are at work in Djabali's *Agave*. Farida is defiant of the traditional reality around her. She is confident about her liberation as a woman according to Western norms. This could be seen in her lifestyle. In addition to her presentation as someone who has a paid and 'prestigious' job, Westernisation could be seen in her autonomy, education, clothing, and look. In a word, Farida's Western

emancipation is fulfilled from the very beginning of the story. However, in Ben's work as in Bouraoui's, it is safe to say that Westernisation is mainly a demand and an assertion. It is generally claimed in the process of fighting against patriarchy. This means that female characters interpret women's oppression according to Western understandings and thus strive for a Western lifestyle. In the 1986 novel, the few scenes where Sabrina and her husband manage to live according to Western norms concern only personal and matrimonial issues. Farida, however, plays a more visible role as an independent, liberal, modern woman whose lifestyle is nothing different to that of 20th century Western female characters as for instance, Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway:

> Farida s'est éloignée. Perdu sur la terrasse de marbre de cette villa néo-coloniale, plutôt européenne, représentant (les stucs gauffrés) une néo-arabie heureuse et esclavagiste
>
> Farida déteste la campagne, elle dit "il paraît qu'il n'y a rien de mangeable et c'est plein de puces et de poux"
>
> Farida, comme toutes les fées, ne peut pas vivre sans baguette magique, "sans moyens" comme on dit chez les mortels. Farida ne supporte la nuit que lorsque l'électricité la transforme, elle n'apprécie la campagne qu'en automobile, elle n'aime le bord de mer que pleine d'huile solaire sur un matelas de caoutchouc; elle ne tient pas beaucoup à la forêt, même avec son transistor; Farida ne goûte vraiment les fruits que cuisinés, glacés, morts.
>
> _Il faut disposer d'une villa comme celle-là pour organiser un festin comme celui-ci (Djabali, 1983, p.19).

Overall, traditional ways of living are rejected. For instance, in these texts denunciation of sexism can be discerned in the presentation of women's economic dependence (see for instance, the previous section on imperialist individualism). It is directed against veiling and the place of women in an under-developed, 'pre-modern' society as we shall see towards the end of this section. One should also add opposition to gendered spatial division according to the orientalist dichotomy of private/public, opposition to women's

inheritance according to Islamic law, the restricted education of girls, the deplorable situation of women in matrimonial life, and the almost non-existence of a sexual liberty. It is important to dwell on these obstacles because it is such issues which preoccupied what can be seen as Algerian westernised authors.

Not only did these authors write back to a socio-political context of the 1980s as discussed below, but they also gave voice to a category of Algerian women. These women agreed with the aforementioned rejections and mistakenly considered such claims 'universal' rights. Of course, one must observe that these rights which they defended were not driven by universalism in its broad sense. They are only driven by a 'universalism' blended with a culturally Western notion of gender justice. In her 1985 sociological research, Khodja identifies a feminine model she so inadvertently calls 'universalist'. Inadvertently identified as such because mainstream feminism, that is Western forms of gender equality, are often unconsciously and unquestionably taken to be 'universal' rights by feminists of colour themselves. The sociologist Khodja is a good example of this tendency. One could also think of Nawal el Saadawi in Egypt. The narrowly-defined notion of gender justice, Okin's feminism, constitutes most of Khodja's definition of this supposedly 'universaliste' model.

It is worth keeping in mind that although there is no straightforward definition of this category in her work, yet her critique of traditional practices in the same section on 'universalist' women makes it possible to establish links and similarities between Okin's Western trend and her notion of 'universal' gender justice. It is her notion, because Khodja openly supports this category, and does not hesitate to express her personal opinions in its favour. This could be discerned in her radical critique of the traditional notion of 'la femme sérieuse' who she describes as a woman who has voluntarily limited her freedom of movement, the one who remains locked up at home all the time, only going out into the street for very important reasons. Women considered not serious she explains, are those who refuse to respect these 'ridiculous' prohibitions (Khodja, 1985):

> Il suffit parfois de parler à un collègue masculin ou d'élever un peu la voix, pour que les «ancêtres redoublent de férocité ...»; «Que faire? Nous n'en savons rien. Après

> tout, nous vivons ici, et, maintenant, et nous voulons avoir le droit d'être considérées commes des êtres à part entière, et non pas seulement comme des objets sexuels, toujours prêts à fauter, car habitées par le diable… Tant qu'il y aura des jeunes femmes répudiées, sans aucun motif, tant que la scolarisation ne sera pas généralisée, tant qu'il n'y aura pas une plus grande participation de la femme au travail, tant que les hommes maltraiteront leurs femmes… Nous refusons de nous voiler le corps, de ne plus rire en publique ou parler à un collègue au risque de ... Nous refusons de baisser les yeux, et plier le corps ..., et de vivre "mortes-vivantes". .. Nous considérons que nous faisons certainement plus preuve de sérieux, en étudiant, en faisant des efforts pour participer au développement social qu'en nous enfermant dans nos maisons. Nous nous trouvons dans une société où les femmes ont appris à parler le langage de la modernité, alors que les hommes continuent à parler le langage de la tradition.» (Khodja, 1985, pp.125-126).

Likewise, Farida in *Agave* claims access to the outside world. She affirms the reality of her body. Ceding consciously to defy a hypocritical and oppressive society, she imposes her body on the street as a violent affirmation of a woman defying the symbolic and physical violence of men: ‘Farida s'habille et se maquille soigneusement: tailleur rose, chemisier noir à fleurs mauves, rose aux joues, hauts talons, sa façon à elle de lutter contre la fatigue et la colère, contre la saleté aussi, les odeurs de l'hôpital’ (Djabali, 1983, p.51). Similarly, the 1986 work offers a critique of the aforementioned issues raised by Khodja in scenes that take place prior to Sabrina’s marriage. The young woman is presented as being oppressed for having to wear the veil. Sabrina is also forced to quit school at the age of eleven though she has always excelled in her studies unlike her brothers who are never as good but who are nevertheless encouraged to go to school.

As previously stated, the set of quests pursued by these heroines responded to the socio-political context ‘imposed’ on women during the 1980s. If the already introduced post-Boumedienne women’s movements sought to achieve economic equality among men and women as observed in the previous section, this mainly dominated their discourses during the immediate years after 1979. Although these feminists continued to claim such rights later on, given that many of these women were leftists like Louisa Hannoun who

would later become the longest serving president of the Workers' Party, yet the promulgation of the controversial 1984 *Family Code* attracted much of their attention and its critique took centre stage. Severe critiques of the Code led these feminists to 'radical' positions.

The 'radical' position advocated by these feminists was paradigmatic of women's movements in early twentieth century Western Europe. Reminiscent of Okin's views, much of their demands were in stark opposition to the teachings of Islam. While such demands as we shall name some shortly remain democratically indisputable rights, other feminists challenged patriarchy without calling for the eradication of religion and tradition. These latter as we shall see with Djebar in chapter 4, determined sexism in an Algerian context and sought to oppose gender inequality in ways that do not subvert cultural authenticity. The former however, blur the line between sexism and culture, and in so doing promote acculturation and licence cultural aggression. While they highly valued the secular for their feminist project, their demands also echoed what could be seen as a Western universalisation of feminist values.

Their response to the 1984 misogynistic *Family Code* reveals adherence to both a secular and 'universal' feminist ideology. We learn in Moghadam's *Organizing Women - The New Women's Movement in Algeria* (2001) that in a quick response to the Code's drafting in 1981, feminists gathered and protested in front of the parliament. This gathering saw the participation of the moudjahidates, women war veterans. Interestingly enough, Moghadam paraphrases Bouatta (1997) to mention some of the salient demands of this group: 'monogamy; the unconditional right of women to seek employment; the equal division of family property; the same age of majority for women and men; identical conditions of divorce for men and women; and effective protection of abandoned children' (2001, p.137). An iconic figure of these movements, self-identified as secularist, was Khalida Messaoudi. Her interviewer introduces her as a courageous woman whose goals are to guarantee 'a woman's right to pursue her studies, practice a profession, make a living, marry and divorce freely, and walk the streets without a veil' (Messaoudi, 1998, p.26). These demands are often referred to in such terms as basic 'legal', 'human', and 'civil' rights in a considerable body of scholarship on feminism in Algeria (see for instance,

Messaoudi and Schemla (1998), and Fatima Sadiqi's *Facing Challenges and Pioneering Feminist and Gender Studies: Women in Post-colonial and Today's Maghrib*). Looking at the equal division of family property for instance, we can see that these feminists defended imported values and in so doing, they promoted misconceptions against Islamic law. Of course, they criticise the Family Code for drawing on Islamic law to give males the right to inherit twice more the inherited value than an equal female family member. It is of paramount importance to clarify that Muslim women can receive equal shares to men, more than men, less than men, and in certain instances the whole inherited amount, depending on their roles and position in the family. For instance, a woman can be a mother, a sister, a daughter, or wife etc.

Additionally, the way in which such demands were advocated is problematic. Although such feminist demands are indisputable in their own right when defending the noble cause of women's emancipation, the post-Boumedienne women's movements advocated these rights as the only possible ways in which women's emancipation could be perceived. It is worth keeping in mind that Messaoudi has never used her platform as a feminist, as a politician, as a Minister of Communication and Culture, and especially as a President of the Algerian Cultural Centre in Paris after 2014, to voice the concerns of Algerian and Muslim women who were not allowed to wear the veil in France. For a feminist whose main concern is the noble cause of fighting women's oppression in all its forms including laws and traditions that obligate women to wear the veil and to dress in certain ways, laws that do not allow women to freely wear the veil should also be opposed. In the same vein, women who freely choose to lead a 'traditionalist' life are not defended by the Trotskyist Hannoun in her several interventions. Her definition of feminism is reduced to the right of women to work, to earn income and to challenge outdated traditions. For instance, the feminist overlooks the specific concerns of 'traditionalist' women in rural regions who choose not to engage in 'productive' activities such as through paid jobs, preferring in some cases pastoralism or simply domestic duties. However, the massive roles played by such women in the development of rural economy should not be underestimated, according to anti-imperialist feminists who sought to address the very obstacles faced by these women.

It is from this problematic perspective that the aforementioned feminist demands are both consciously and unconsciously defended in the novels discussed in this chapter. The women authors who selectively advocated for their heroines such rights are critical of patriarchal tradition in ways that project a 'universalist' vision of the world, as we shall see shortly with *Sabrina*. However, this universalisation of certain values relating to women's emancipation *idealises* a Western way of life which among other things abstracts gender justice from religion and tradition. Of course, feminism must take a critical view of religion and tradition when they pose a threat to women's wellbeing, but this does not mean feminism should necessarily be equated with the secular. For instance, during the same period that saw the emergence of these secular movements in Algeria, the likes of Farida Bennani, Zainab Maadi, and Latifa Jbabdi in Morocco, were 'advocating for a reinterpretation of the sacred texts (the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings) from a feminist perspective. It is such endeavors that led to the recent revision of the Moroccan Family Law' (Sadiqi, 2008, p.459). It is worth noting that Mernissi and these Moroccan feminists were academics, sociologists, and university researchers which allowed them to take a critical view of the specific male ideology practised in Moroccan society and which is so often fed by masculine interpretations of sacred texts. All-in-all, they were critical enough to equate feminism with fighting women's oppression, not with imitating certain Western ways of living which encourage women to simply reject their religion. This was not the case for the aforementioned Algerian feminists who were politicians serving certain ideologies. Messaoudi, for instance, was a secondary school teacher and then became a leftist politician. Imitating Western forms of feminism overlooks the sociocultural context of Algerian women, the forms of agency that are possible in their specific cultural context, as well as the beliefs and morals that orchestrate Algerian women's femininity. Examining original forms of Muslim women's agency in Djebar's *Loin de Médine,* Zimra (1993, p.116) likens such active roles to the proud Berber Queen Kahina who valiantly fought off Arab conquerers centuries ago. Djebar, lecturer and historian one must stress, was inspired by Muslim and North African historiography which is full of original forms of female agency.

However, the representation and defence of 'universalist' rights as the only feminism available to Algerian women means that the situation of Algerian women is nothing different to the situation of other women across the world. In *Sabrina*, critique is classic in

the sense that it aims at both the sexist surveillance of the ruling class through its repressive state apparatuses such as the police who defend the oppressive husbands when their wives complain of their irresponsible behaviours, and also in terms of court if one considers the fact that women can be divorced without any form of trial which eloquently expresses the total insecurity and arbitrariness to which they are subjected in a world made solely for men. The narrator of *Sabrina* is critical of the state's ideological apparatuses such as school. A generic denunciation readers may expect to find in Brazilian, Bangladeshi, as well as in English novels, though Algerian women faced - and still do - specific issues. Although these obstacles are part of women's oppression everywhere in the world, they are not the only and main factors of women's plight in an Algerian society that is so rich in cultural implications.

This generic denunciation is only framed according to a neo-Marxist theory. It echoes Louis Althusser's concept of over-determinism. The latter considers as observed above, education, the police, and court as apparatuses used for the controlling of, among other oppressed groups, women. Most significantly, over-determinism is in many ways a challenge of traditional Marxism which holds that solely the economic base (the means of production and distribution) is influential on the superstructure which contain society, school, ideology, culture, and religion. This challenge means, among other things, that factors which traditional Marxism considers subsidiary in shaping people's lives such as religion, are, according to Althusser, influential and determine reality. It is from this 'universal' perspective that religion and tradition are influential and thus rejected in these novels.

Ben's *Sabrina* and especially Bouraoui's *La voyeuse interdite* are texts that succeed in depicting the extension of this traditional interpretation of oppression from a Marxist perspective to 'dare' hold tradition and especially religion responsible for much of the suffering of women in Algeria. Interestingly enough, Belarbi observes in his article on *La voyeuse interdite* that:

> Décorant les intérieurs maghrébins, les objets décrits sont significatifs d'une certaine culture, culture du cuivre, des plateaux, la main de Fatma, la gauche ou le sens de

> l'écriture arabe de la droite vers la gauche, poufs, coussins, table basse. Ainsi disséminés, ces indices nous renvoient à la culture arabo-musulmane, au harem*_ dont l'auteur semble faire ici le procès.
>
> A travers ces passages, la narratrice semble supposer que la culture participe à la claustration, à l'emprisonnement et à l'aliénation de ses sujets et que la religion n'est pas vécue dans son acception la plus authentique et les éléments s'y référant sont surtout attribuables à la tradition (Belarbi, 2005, p.124).

In contrast with Belarbi, it seems that Bouraoui's novel does not content itself with critiquing Islamic tradition: it seems that the female narrator equates Islam with sexist oppression. Indeed, Bouraoui's narrator seems to animate Okin's assumptions that non-Western traditions and Islam are deeply at odds with feminism. This argument will be developed below in this section. Similarly though less explicitly, *Sabrina* conveys this secular discourse. This could be discerned in Ben's novels' radical discourse against veiling as we shall also see shortly. One could also think of the depiction of a happy couple as not being bound to the teachings of Islam, such as the scene where Saber and Sabrina go on holiday during the sacred month of Ramadhan.

It is true that in many cases, novels that dare to transgress the 'sacred' belong to agnostic - and in some cases atheist - women authors, or at least authors whose religion is generally other than Islam. One could for instance think of Myriam Ben, Nina Bouraoui, Taos Amrouche, and Fadila Merabet. We learn in Achour's long interview that 'Par son père, Myriam Ben est descendante de la tribu des Ben Mochi de Constantine, tribu berbère judaïsée' (Achour, 1989, p.12). The Amrouches were Christians and their views on Islam and women's oppression are in many ways identical to Ben's. This suggests that there is a family habitus at the origin of this subversion. It is worth noting that family influence in the case of authors belonging to religious minorities or to small ethnic communities remains a significant source of ideology. Ben for instance, was introduced to the arts thanks to her mother who was an artist herself, and was heavily influenced by her father's political views, and it is this mix which eventually forged her personality. This brings to mind once again Taos's experience, given that she owes her brother Jean

Amrouche, who was a poet and writer, her initiation to literature.

This means that advocating secular values for women is not always part of a modernisation project. The autobiography of Fadhma, Taos' mother who was herself born of an extra-marital relationship is a good example. This Christian woman, against all odds, raised her daughter Taos in Kabylia. This region was - and still is - governed by religious and traditional laws, despite colonial efforts to secularise it. Fadhma was one of the first Algerian women to bring to public notice this exceptional situation. She did so however, not on account of the discussed ethnocentric ideology considering that Okin's Western feminism considers all religions including Christianity responsible for women's inferior status, but merely on account of personal circumstances.

As previously stated, in *La voyeuse interdite* the female narrator of the story dwells heavily on the influence of Islam in misleading women to accept misogynistic attitudes. The negative image of the father in her text is directly linked to religion. Islam and God, not the interpretation of religion as we shall see in chapter 4, are responsible for a young woman's oppression:

> Comment ne pas s'ennuyer dans un pays musulman quand on est une fille musulmane?
>
> Tout d'abord, ignorer le temps, il ne passe pas, il trépasse, cacher pendules et montres, sabliers et métronomes, agendas et calendriers, prendre en compte les choses et uniquement les choses en oubliant que de l'autre côté de la mer, des adolescents marchent main dans la main sans un Dieu ni un père pour entraver leur route (Bouraoui, 1991, p.65).

It is true that the first line of the last quoted passage may particularly have caught the attention of readers. The narrator of Bouraoui however, goes on to offer solutions for Muslim women to free them from this 'confining' Muslim world. Her two solutions as we can read relate to time and space. Time in a Muslim world goes by slowly. The time-clock is stuck and is not ticking, in contrast to the other side of the Mediterranean. This explicitly means that monotony is hard for 'imprisoned' women. Implicitly however, this means that

the stagnating pace of time leaves the southern side of the Mediterranean stuck in the past, compared to an advanced European society that lives in future. This dichotomy of the past belonging to 'other', 'third-world' cultures unlike Westerners is central to Arab feminism. One could probably think of Abu-Lughod who often notes in conferences as in essays, how Muslim women are seen by Westerners to be stuck in the past, whereas white middle-class women belong to a future-oriented culture. Abu-Lughod (2002) offers a very relevant example of how colonial France in Algeria, among other means, was justified by the pretext that the French were giving Algerian women the opportunity to access this modern, future world that was not as yet achieved in colonised societies. Khader's observation with regards to this very point is pertinent:

> This association of the West with the future of humanity can be traced to a common narrative about modernity that resonates with thought of many Enlightenment philosophers*_ and has been extensively theorized in decolonial and postcolonial thought.*_ According to it, the world is divided into 'primitive' and 'modern' societies, and all societies are naturally progressing toward modernity—some more quickly than others (Khader, 2019, p.25).

Bouraoui's narrator expresses this temporal dichotomy very eloquently. The Muslim world for her, the narrator, is archaic. It is backward and stuck in a bygone past. Whereas her 'world' is well advanced in time. In *La voyeuse interdite* we read: 'Ils vivaient en l'an 1380 du calendrier hégirien, pour nous, c'était le tout début des années soixante-dix' (1991, p. 22). It is this time offset that allows Bouraoui's female narrator to advocate as we shall see, 'modern' values for Muslim women. Interestingly enough, Abu-Lughod explains that:

> Missionary feminists already know the details of what Afghan women will look like after "salvation." This improved society will be free of the cultural forms that mark Muslims in the Western imaginary; women will, for example, be free of veils of any kind. Western cultural forms *just are* the gender-just way of life (Khader, 2019, p.24).

It is worth clarifying this chapter's position in relation to the aforementioned issues such

as unveiling. This chapter one must stress, is not intended as an argument against unveiling for women. Unveiling as an individual practice expressing one's personal lifestyle is an indisputable right which Arab feminists themselves advocate (see for instance, *Post-colonial Feminism and the Veil* (Odeh, 1993)). Unveiling in this sense expresses a woman's personhood and does not oppose other forms of women's clothing including veiling. What is considered objectionable in this chapter is the definition of unveiling as being synonymous with freedom, whereas veiling with backwardness and women's oppression.

Abu-Lughod's quoted passage on veiling resonates in the discourses adopted in these novels. In *La voyeuse interdite* as in *Sabrina*, the wearing of the veil is an archaic practice and is held responsible for women's oppression and alienation as that makes them invisible and restricts their spatial freedom. Saber spurs Sabrina to go out unveiled for the first time in her life defying his own father: 'Je ne veux pas te voir voilée, tu m'entends? Nous sommes au vingtième siècle, et nous sommes jeunes, nous sommes jeunes, jeunes! Le voile c'est bon pour les vieilles, pas pour toi' (Ben, 1986, p.95). Saber, like the female character of *La voyeuse interdite*, lives in the twentieth century whereas veiled women are not as yet. This Western imaginary of veiled women belonging to archaic, 'third-world' cultures unlike Westerners, shows how for these women authors it is some sort of second nature that secular lifestyles are the only required conditions that allow gender justice.

The rejection of women's veiling as grounded in a secular approach can hardly be explored without touching on how the question around unveiling was beginning to be most dominant in France and within French Republican discourse since the 1980s. In September 1989, three female students were suspended from school for refusing to take off their head scarves in what came to be known as 'l'affaire du foulard'. In fact, this context saw a growing concern among French feminists, politicians and even certain academics such as Alain Finkielkraut over veiling in public places. Some of these overstated their point on the issue. For instance, Laurence Rossignol describes veiling as 'submitting oneself to slavery' (Scott, 2016). This likening seems to have fed Messaoudi's islamophobic statements as we shall see below in this section. One must stress that this

anti-veiling position was supported by the idea that ‘laïcité’ which can be defined as ‘the absence of all but the most discreet signs of religious affiliation’ (Scott, 2016) is a pre-requisite for membership in the nation. Back in 1871, proponents of ‘laïcité’ worked towards ending the public power of the Catholic Church in France. However, the term is now used to refer to ‘a Frenchness that excludes Muslims’. This does not simply mean that the concept of ‘laïcité’ is now used against Muslims instead of Christians. Most importantly, this evolution is a shift from secularism, which is what the 1905 Law demands, that is state neutrality in matters of religion, to the secular. It is worth drawing on Talal Asad's (2003) distinction between secularism and the secular. According to Asad, the secular consists in locating people’s rights, duties, and agency in human and not divine law, whereas secularism concerns the relationship between religious institutions such as the church and the state. This is why in November 1989, following the aforementioned ‘affaire du foulard’, the Conseil d’état ruled that veiling, despite its religious significance, was compatible with ‘laïcité’ because secularism applied to schools themselves and not to students and their own ways of living. On this note, Joan Wallach Scott observes that it is rather what François Baroins calls ‘la nouvelle laïcité’ that ‘relocates a requirement of neutrality from the state to its citizens, from state offices and state representatives to all public space and to all inhabitants of that space’ (Scott, 2016). It is from this perspective that ‘laïcité’ is no longer perceived as a political identity. It is also a cultural identity that valorises Frenchness as a secular way of life.

This is all the more important to observe because the aforementioned post-Boumedienne secular movements advocated unveiling for women as a symbol for freedom. In fact, unveiling was a priority in their list of demands (see for instance, Messaoudi and Schemla, 1998). In fairness to these women’s movements however, this radical, Western position on unveiling was in many ways meant as a response to another radical definition of veiling. Indeed, the emergence of these women’s movements in 1979 is not without significance. On an international level, 1979 saw the Iranian Revolution. Won by Islamists, this revolution meant that veiling became compulsory for Iranian women. This fundamentalist sentiment was rapidly spreading across the Arab world. The 1980s saw an unprecedented strengthening of Islamist ideology in Algeria.

In this sense, it is true that Algerian women's movements after 1979 could be considered as the first feminist associations of postcolonial Algeria. This said, one must not forget that as early as 1962, what is known as the UNFA (Union national des femmes Algerienne) was formed. The UNFA however, was a tool of the state and did little to tackle women's issues. In contrast, the emergence of secular feminist groups after 1979 was defiant of both the state and Islamism and improving women's status in society was a main concern in their list. The aim of this chapter is not to discredit the role played by these groups as feminists, but to question the nature of the rights that they and the contemporary 'feminist' novel called for.

The democratic state that these feminists called for, despite all its pros, should have been adapted to the ideological, cultural, and historical specificities of this population. Islam which had been since at least the turn of the twentieth century central to the construction of Algerian nationalism, and one of the three constants of the post-colonial nation-state, would by no means guarantee a woman's agency for these feminists. Islam was thus deemed an obstacle for feminism. It is not uncommon for the representatives of such movements to express animosity against Islam. Khalida Messaoudi is one such case: a famous passage in Messaoudi's interview which met with considerable hostility among all ranks of the Algerian population attests to this animosity. She openly describes the Muslim prayer as 'humiliating' (1998, p.17). She goes on to liken prostrating which is sacred for Muslims as a slavery position. Her standpoint on Islam as summed in this passage, along with her role as minister (2002/2014) during Bouteflika's controversial rule, earned Messaoudi a hostile public opinion. She and all representatives of this rule came to be known as 'al-isaba'. This word which pejoratively means the gang, was adopted by the historical 2019 Algerian Hirak. The Algerian Hirak saw massive popular protests which thronged the streets of the country to put an end to Bouteflika's twenty-year rule. At the time of writing this chapter, Messaoudi is imprisoned for corruption.

The association of feminism with the secular, which often expressed Islamophobia as in the last quoted passage, was one main reason why such feminists never won the trust of the masses in Algeria. Feminists were constantly at odds with the vast majority of the people including women themselves. They were so insomuch that women organised

themselves in massive protests to show their support for fundamentalists against feminism. Moghadam observes that ‘Unfortunately, the fundamentalist discourse and agenda of the FIS were supported by a segment of the female population, and in April 1989 a demonstration of 100,000 women in favor of Islamism and sex-segregation shocked the anti-fundamentalist women’ (2001, p.138). However, women did not necessarily support religious fundamentalism for its regressive gender politics, but rather as a protest against secularism and the secular. This support for Islamists confirms Verges’ observation that:

> Lutter contre le fémi-impérialisme, c'est faire resurgir du silence les vies des femmes «anonymes», refuser le processus de pacification et analyser pourquoi et comment les droits des femmes sont devenus une arme idéologique au service du néolibéralisme (qui peut tout à fait soutenir ailleurs un régime misogyne, homophobe et raciste) (Verges, 2019, p.30).

Support of misogynistic regimes has been observed in two ways in this chapter: the imposition of neo-liberal ways of living as we have seen with economic independence and its repercussions on women’s lives as represented in literary texts, and the reactionary support of fundamentalists as we have just seen. Because Islam was - and still is - the religion of the vast majority of Algerians, it was hardly surprising that these secular feminists would find themselves struggling against a people.

This struggling sentiment on the part of feminists was echoed in the selected novels for this chapter. In ways very reminiscent of M’rabet’s ‘radical’ views, Nina Bouraoui (author/narrator) expresses a strenuous critique of Islam and all Algerian men:

> j’ai vite compris que je devais me retirer de ce pays masculin, ce vaste asile psychiatrique. Nous étions parmi des hommes fous séparés à jamais des femmes par la religion musulmane, ils se touchaient, s'étreignaient, crachaient sur les pare-brise des voitures ou dans leurs mains, soulevaient les voiles des vieillardes, urinaient dans l'autobus et caressaient les enfants. Ils riaient d'ennui et de désespoir.
>
> A mon tour, je baissais les yeux devant les jeunes garçons qui descendaient leurs

> braguettes en nous voyant; ma mère, muette, laissait courir sur son corps cinq doigts étrangers. On ne pouvait rien dire, les femmes qui sortaient dans la rue étaient des poufïasses! (Bouraoui, 1991, p. 21)

Similar to M'rabet, the narrator's description of Algerian men and religion is not authentic. In many such instances, had these works not been published in a postcolonial era by Algerian authors, one would easily have taken them for nineteenth century orientalist literature by travellers and the French army. This link with bygone colonial works becomes particularly striking when considering that such an unrealistic depiction of the Algerian reality is often accompanied by valorisation of French culture. If in the case of M'rabet this is down to the fact that she formulated her views against women's oppression based on exceptions, reasons behind Bouraoui's inauthenticity are far more significant. Bouraoui holds such an orientalist position because, among other things, she did not live in Algeria long enough to spot the moral merits of the specific values and history of this country. Additionally, one must not forget that her mother is French.

Muslim women in *La voyeuse interdite* are referred to using the pejorative and connoted expression: 'les Mauresques' (e.g., p.11) in English the Moors. The word Moorish conjures up an orientalist myth that is deeply anchored in the collective unconscious of the metropolitan. Relating only to the historical contextualisation of the Maghreb and Andalusia, the word brings to mind an already told, an already written about. The Moors are the typical women of 'over there'. Fikria has some sort of contempt for these women. This image of the Moors is crudely described. The narrator deliberately uses a saying imbued with negativity. The general characterisation of the description of the Moors is metaphorised by a whole lexicon which identifies them with animals and more particularly with those deemed to be the most brain-deprived. We notice the recurrence of verbs such as "cackle", "peep", "chuckle", "yelp" which have a dehumanising effect. Although such words are well attributed to women's 'confinement', the representation is nonetheless disparaging. It designates the Moorish as having a special place in the social hierarchy of the novel.

In Ben's work, the idealisation of French culture is not only seen through Saber. The idea

that France is representative of moral progress is prevalent in the novel. One could probably think of Sabrina's mother and the idealising discourse that is expressed in favour of her own mother, that is Sabrina's grandmother. The grandmother is French and her valorisation could be best appreciated in the conflicting dichotomy of Sabrina's mother on the one hand, and her Algerian aunt on the other, where the unpleasant and rude behaviour of the latter to the detriment of the former are emphasised on account of the grandmother's French origins. This unfriendliness is critiqued with cultural undertones and is entangled with the issue of women's condition. This because Sabrina's mother, separated from her French mother as a child, finds herself locked in a patriarchal setting where she is forced to get married at the age of fifteen to free herself.

The feminisation of narration

The tradition of orality is often problematic for women authors in the Maghreb, and this is addressed in *Agave*. The obstacle usually faced by Hawa's sisters when implementing orality in their texts is that women's identity becomes inextricable from the constraints of collectivity. This means that the process of individualising the storyteller's experience as a woman is hard to achieve. This because to speak of orality is to speak of women's voices, which are a massive reservoir of traditions, and thus often the established patriarchal order. This is the case of honour, shame, and fear, among other values, which are instilled in women since their youth, and are transmitted to the next generation by the means of women's voices. This role, however, is overturned in *Agave*.

Indeed, this is completed not only in terms of the social dimension of liberating women, but in terms of the narrative too. On the level of the former, the values adopted this time by 'la conteuse' on women's liberation are expressed according to liberal values, notably individualism. One could probably think of the example where individual quest enables the eloping woman to have an ego and thus attacks the patriarchal system. This is in stark contrast with the interpretation of Achour, who holds the role of storytelling in *Agave* responsible or at least representative of traditional values. Achour's position however, is mainly defended in relation to the general vision of the novel, the quest of true love, in valorising the mountain and the countryside over modernisation, but not in relation to

women's liberation. Aïcha is a rare example of a female storyteller who is not representative of the traditionally confined woman, as it is generally the case with grandmothers who perform the act of storytelling. She transgresses the domestic sphere, travels, and goes to the mountain. It will be a head-scratcher to think of any other woman fulfilling this role. One rare example is that of Djebar's *Loin de Médine* (1991), which stages the role of 'Rawiyates', among whom is certainly the Prophet's wife Aïcha, whose status has little to do with that of the traditional wife and traditional motherhood. It remains intriguing whether the similarity of names denotes this common role or whether it is just a coincidence.

One other element that enables *Agave* to feminise orality and thus soften the effects of patriarchal values is the resort to legendary themes. Indeed, the vast majority of works implementing this narrative technique rely on family chronicles and memories from childhood. This of course, leaves these works inserted and significantly related to the central fabric. As a result, the use of legends and riddles instead of childhood and the family in *Agave* participates in weakening this typical characteristic of collectivisation in orality. Through legends, Aïcha is able to affirm the identity of her own self, because for a woman to speak, is to assert herself in her own words, and not in the words of the society she may have grown in, and thus makes it almost impossible not to be blurred in the collective.

It is worth keeping in mind the role of French as language. French enables orality to be freed from the cultural and the traditional with which Arabic, as a language, is burdened as discussed in the previous chapter. One could for instance think of the semi-biography of Djebar (1985), whose childhood in the paternal town of Mouzaya, the place where her father first took her to school, is linked with French, her father's language, and with rationality. This is not the case for Cherchell, the maternal town, where Djebar observes a space reserved for women, which is linked to Arabic, her mother's language. This feminine space has of course its own codes, its own traditions, and it is these which Arabic reproduces in other texts deploying orality. This is of paramount importance to note, if we consider the effects of words in the Arabic language. It is incomparably powerful, it is unique. This because on the one hand, in Arabic intonation is that meaningful that it can

change the whole meaning of a word. On the other, it should be noted that Arab and local culture are oral. Discussing a relevant point, Segarra (1997) explains that

> Il est indicatif que cette fascination s'exerce exclusivement sur des mots arabes; selon W. J. Ong*_ les cultures orales considèrent que les mots, dans leur essence sonore, ont un pouvoir direct sur les choses, et pour la plupart des auteurs que nous travaillons, l'arabe est associé à l'oralité et le français à l'écriture (Segarra, 1997, p.34).

As for Ben's work, it succeeds in expressing a set of critical views on the structures of patriarchal society. However, if this presentation of women's domination is an integral part of the story, and if it should be noted for any appreciation of the work, it should also be noted that at the time of the publication of this novel, it was not in itself a new contribution in the sense that these views had already been expressed by a number of authors in a considerable number of literary works. One could think of the early works by Djebar, or *Muezzin* (1968) by Bourboune, and of course Boudjedra in a number of his novels.

What seems to characterise Ben's novel however, is that in terms of narration, the point of view that is expressed on women is strictly feminine. This is not to simply say that the author is a woman, but that there is a direct presentation of female characters. This means that similar to *Agave* in the second part and to *Ombre sultane*, woman is no longer represented from the perspective of a male character. The external narrator of the first part presents characters of both sexes through a narrative that defines them in themselves and in relation to each other, giving the reader different perspectives. This 'desexualisation' of the narrative makes it possible to advance a vision, a set of ideas that are no longer developed through a look, a body, images and a word of man only. This is worth noting because the Algerian literature that dominated the 1960s and 1970s - by men mainly - was so much so that when women are presented in stories with many details and minute descriptions, it is only in relation to male characters that what is happening in them is reflected. The most striking example one could probably think of is Boudjedra's 1969 *La Repudiation.* This 'desexualisation' of the narrative enables Sabrina on many occasions to metaphorically end patriarchal power. It also enables the reader to

appreciate how the couple assumes difference and reciprocity. If sexuality continues to be lived on the mode of negativity, this no longer seems to be put down to female and feminine nature but to the inauthenticity of relations between the sexes.

If any similarities may be drawn between women's writing in the first two decades after independence including Lemsine's and Ounissi's novels as far as women's representation is concerned, it would mainly be that in all of these novels, it is predominantly women who listen, while the word of men is valued. There is a fundamental difference however, between the representation of Khadidja in Lemsine's 1976 work and that of Sabrina and Fikria. In the former, the role of woman mainly consists in listening, not to say enduring, the confession and the delirium of man as we shall see in the following chapter. Khadidja plays no active or constitutive role as heroine which leaves women devalued in terms of the narrative. On the other hand, in *Sabrina, ils t'ont volé ta vie* as well as in *La voyeuse interdite*, the status of Sabrina and Fikria respectively is diametrically reversed. Although this reversal is best expressed in *Agave*. The denunciation of the female character's oppression in Ben's and Bouraoui's works is structurally valued, supported and validated both in terms of narrative construction as well as in terms of representation.

Agave succeeds in 'feminising' the text. As far as the social dimension of characters is concerned, this means that *Agave* propels the emancipation of women to another level. In terms of the narrative however, women now act, speak, and are not merely represented. Discourse wise, Farida seems to dominate the narrative in the first part of *Agave* which is significant to the feminisation of the mode of narration. Despite it being narrated by 'il', and despite the rarity of dialogue between him and the young woman, the latter does not play a passive role. On the contrary, it is rather she who initiates the story of 'il', it is she who flushes out the male character/narrator and pushes him into his entrenchments.

From the outset, reference to the husband is made on a mode of impersonality and generalisation. The husband of Farida is not named. This is unlike the two female characters, namely Farida and Aïcha, who have names, and which are also symbolic.

Farida in Arabic means unique, alone, and which is a reflection of her ‘individualistic’ approach to life. The male character, however, is designated mainly by the term ‘il’. This designation has significant connotations. There is the idea of patriarchal oppression which is reversed. It is a symbolic critique of patriarchy considering that the idea of not naming the husband refers to the Algerian Arabic dialect in which the word "man" carries a meaning from which particularly emerges the quality of absolute master, of "owner of the house" as it is usually said metaphorically. The "house" means place and wife in this idiomatic expression. Thus, man appears as a fundamental otherness.

Conclusion

Western forms of women’s emancipation are particularly problematic in settings with a recent colonial past. The selected literary texts for this chapter criticise women’s oppression in ways that reproduce the workings of colonial feminism. This is formulated in opposition to an Algerian identity that had been itself considerably articulated by the anti-colonial. Women’s unveiling - which takes centre stage in the feminist project of these works - is one theme through which this colonial/anti-colonial dichotomy could be best displayed. One could probably think of an organisation set up by Suzanne Massu during the War of Liberation under the name of The Emancipation of Muslim Women. This organisation directly sought to unveil Algerian women. The unveiling campaigns led by this lady took place in the country’s big cities. It is also commonly acknowledged that violence was used in the process. In Algiers for instance, women were forcefully gathered by the French army to make them unveil. Such acts caused Algerian women to more than ever before stick to the veil as a symbol of anti-colonialism in the first place. This is reminiscent of the aforementioned tens of thousands of veiled women who took to the streets of Algiers to show their support to Islamists against the post-Boumedienne secular feminists. As far as form is concerned, this opposition is also at work on the linguistic level. Colonial feminism which had, according to Laura Nader, looked to extricate Algerian women from ‘Arab patriarchy’ (1989, p.344) is expressed in these texts in a colonial language. This colonial language one must not forget, had been emphasised in a process of acculturation by the banning of Arabic teaching.

It is safe to say that such an opposition to Algerian culture and traditions left these women authors isolated from the lived reality of their sisters. Following a question on the use of ‘elle’ in her 1986 work, Ben declares in arguably the most significant work done on her, namely the long interview accorded to Achour (1989), that ‘Dans Sabrina, j'ai senti une distance parce que le thème me concernait mais je n'étais pas impliquée directement. Il n'y a pas eu d'identification’ (Achour, 1989, p.85). The first part of the novel which is mainly told from the perspective of the narrator through the pronoun ‘elle’ consists among other things, of a ‘universal’ vision, of a proposed model of women’s emancipation that could best be seen in the depiction of Saber and Sabrina’s Western lifestyle. Despite the constricting limitations of traditional society around the couple which alienate Ben and ‘distance’ her from her story, it is such limitations which prompt the author/narrator to resort to ‘je’ in the second part.

The ‘identification’ of the author with the last fifteen pages where she uses ‘je’ instead is thus an identification with who she really is as a person, Ben’s actions, that is her committed writings, her political activism and her revolutionary character. This could best be supported by the fact that in the last fifteen pages of the novel, Sabrina’s imaginary dialogue with her absent father serves to remind him both of her participation in the country's War of Liberation, and also that only through this collective independence can women’s independence be achieved. From this perspective, Ben’s declaration that ‘le thème me concernait mais je n'étais pas impliquée’ (Achour, 1989, p.86) means that while women’s emancipation was of interest to her in the first part, she did not feel part of this emancipation, which prompts Ben to shift to ‘je’ to denounce the obstacles hindering the Western, liberal, and progressive vision expressed in the first part of her work.

Aspirations to Western ways of living as showcased in the selected set of works for this chapter remain inauthentic for Algerian women, and in many ways serve patriarchal views. Indeed, despite their remarkable subversions, heroines and female characters in general end up failing not because patriarchy is indestructible. At the end of the 1986 and 1991 novels, patriarchy persists because instead of limiting feminist critique to the denunciation of women’s oppression, this form of feminism as expressed by the narrators of these novels seeks to showcase what lifestyles and ideals are appropriate for women.

This means that the kind of critique we find in these novels suggests that women's emancipation is not compatible with local cultures and religion to which, one must not forget, Algerians are inextricably attached. Heroines find themselves struggling against their own culture instead of simply fighting patriarchy. Imitation of the West being seemingly the only solution to emancipate Algerian women has always caused a reinforcement and a perpetuation of the anti-colonial - but patriarchal - 'traditionalist' culture. This dialectic was echoed in the discourses expressed by the first two Algerian leaders, Ahmed ben Bela and Boumedienne (1962/1979). One could probably think of Boumedienne's 1966 talk where he addressed a crowd of women to remind them of the religious, traditional, and cultural framework within which the place of women should be conceived. The women who attended the talk wanted to leave the place, had it not been for the police who made them go back to their seats. The Algerian women who refused to live under the yoke of the prevailing 'traditionalist' experienced an unprecedented alienation. They did not identify with the social reality around them and many had to leave their country. On this note, it is worth remembering that through such low endings in these novels, narration shows how unrealistic it is for Algerian women at that point in history to aspire to Western models of 'freedom'.

This resentment/pressure such as we have just seen with Boumedienne's 1966 female audience had to be absorbed by the then one-party state. There had to be some sort of social reform. As far as women are concerned, the UNFA, a branch of the FLN, was created. It is true that this was the only official women's movement for almost two decades after 1962, but what role did this organisation play in improving women's situation? According to what feminine identity did it seek to change women's status? According to what cultural heritage was the feminine modelled? Most importantly and much to the interest of the next chapter, how was this 'newly' perceived notion of the feminine reproduced in literary texts?

Chapter 3

Women and progressive Islam in Lemsine's La Chrysalide and Ciel de Porphyre.

Introduction

Born in 1942 in the eastern city of Tébessa. Aïcha Lemsine is one of the rare Algerian women authors who rose to prominence during the 1970s. She was particularly famous for her novels *La Chrysalide* (1976) and *Ciel de Porphyre* (1978). Although a considerable number of sources, including a preface added to a translated version of *La Chrysalide* (1993) and Guettafi's thesis (2006) note that the author was elected Arab woman of the year in 1984, the awarding organisation is unnamed. She published articles for the local and international press. She was Vice President of women's club 'Pen of the World', the women's organisation for rights, literature and development. Her numerous conferences on the history of Islam and Muslim women's rights provided her with a deep understanding of women's emancipation in Algeria. Lemsine is a pseudonym that is composed of 'Lem' and 'Sine', the Arabic initials of both her and her husband's names. Her real name is Aicha Laidi. Although she was born in Tébessa, she is of Kabyle origins. Like most prominent thinkers and intellectuals, Lemsine had to leave Algeria under the growing menaces of Islamic fundamentalism (Forjas, 1996).

One must not forget to add that Lemsine belonged to a 'newly' created Algerian bourgeoisie. It is worth defining this class socially and culturally. Members of this middle class are generally merchants, officials of high ranks, and especially the elite. This bourgeoisie is culturally assimilationist. This means that it integrates colonial culture into the dominant Algerian 'traditionalist' culture. As a result of this integration, material and to a large extent cultural imitation of French tastes and manners became a relatively natural conduct for them. Lemsine whose husband was an ambassador in the United Kingdom and previously a wali (someone who has authority over a county), 'is the mouthpiece' of this Algerian Bourgeois culture to borrow Lazreg's words (Lazreg, 1994, p.202).

Lemsine's bourgeois culture orchestrates the perception of various notions in her aforementioned novels. The humanist morality put forward to justify fraternal links of Europeans with the indigenous population during colonisation can hardly escape the reader's notice. Narration softens the effects of the coloniser's cultural aggression in order to adapt it to an Algerian reality. One aspect of this attempt at cultural rapprochement can be seen in the narrators' gratitude to the colonial school for its benevolence in relation to the indigenous population. The main protagonists of Lemsine's novels, Ali, Mouloud and

Faïza, valorise French education to animate the ideology of the ‘civilising mission’.

What is particularly worth noting is that this conception of cultural rapprochement was coming to the fore against a backdrop of increasing intellectual conflict. As previously stated in the introduction to the thesis, the pro-Arabisation and pro-Francisation camps held extreme views. For the former, modernity was constantly associated with colonisation. For the latter, Islam, tradition, and local culture were synonymous with backwardness. One main aspect of this conflict unfolded among authors themselves: those who wanted to write in French and those who wanted Arabic instead. For the latter, French had to be replaced because it was the language of their colonisers. Professor Zahia Smail Salhi (1999) in the conclusion of her book *Politics, Poetics and The Algerian Novel* explains that even for some authors who had written in French prior to the independence of the country, now ‘the French language was a remnant of colonial rule’ (Salhi, 1999, p.228).

La Chrysalide and *Ciel de Porphyre* seek balance by reconciling these opposing views. For instance, the aforementioned protagonists gladly learn and speak both Arabic and French. Additionally, they seem to embrace a curious amalgam of the modern and the traditional. Despite her being associated in the minds of villagers with Western ways of living, Khadija represents a composite of Western and ‘traditionalist’ conventions. In this sense, Lemsine creates archetypes of the Algerian socialism which dominated the economic and socio-political context of the 1960s and 1970s as discussed at length in this chapter.

This approach to life is best exposed in discourses relating to women. The themes of women’s participation in the War of Liberation and their intellectual awakening occupy an important place in the 1976 and 1978 novels. Both works voice Algerian women’s struggles against patriarchal practices during and after colonisation. In the context of the 1970s where the modern meant hardly anything other than the Western, Lemsine’s ‘partial assimilationist’ attitude would attempt at bringing women’s ‘traditionalist’ ways of living into conformity with Western norms of emancipation. Déjeux points out that ‘Aïcha Lemsine expliqua qu'elle avait voulu <<réhabiliter la femme algérienne aux yeux de

l'Occident>> Bref, c'est toujours par rapport à l'Autre qu'il faut se dire, s'expliquer comme pour se justifier' (Déjeux, 1994, p.26).

This means, among other things, that the West serves as a more or less desirable model for Lemsine. This is particularly striking when considering the positive description of colonisers in both her works. Lazreg (1994) is critical of this. She explains that *La Chrysalide* 'strikes a note of colonial nostalgia by attributing changes in customs to a benevolent French woman who symbolizes a benign colonialism' (Lazreg, 1994, p.202). Women's representation in Lemsine's works however, cannot be condensed in such a straightforward fashion. Lemsine's approach to women's emancipation is not a one-way direction in favour of colonial modernity as in the case of Ben and M'rabet. Instead, the 1976 and 1978 novels attempt at reconciling French women's manners and tastes with the patriarchal 'traditionalist'. Interestingly enough, Nagy points out that the author of *La Chrysalide* (1976) 'makes several attempts to reconcile this irreconcilable antagonism' (Nagy, 2002, p.7). Similarly, Lazreg inadvertently notes that 'her characters assume their culture while trying to change it' (1994, p. 201).

This chapter will investigate the ways in which Lemsine's narrators negotiate a balanced emancipation for women to avoid cultural extremism. It may have caught the reader's attention that the Western-like Faïza in *La Chrysalide* follows a middle way of emancipation since she does not completely break with the 'traditionalist' lifestyles of her fellow villagers. This chapter will focus on the workings of history, morality, and religion to support the likes of Faïza's attitudes which seem to represent the previously defined Algerian bourgeoisie, in the sense that such attitudes are culturally assimilationist and call to mind the unique way in which this bourgeoisie integrates Westernisation into the dominant 'traditionalist'. It is true that the workings of such factors as history and religion serve to keep women's leanings towards Western lifestyles within reasonable limits. One must not forget however, that in this process, conservative ideas on women are justified. Commenting on Lemsine's approach to women's emancipation, Khodja notes that:

> il s'agirait seulement d'inventer une consommation différente, dont les éléments seront empruntés aux deux cultures, bien que les façons d'être et de voir le monde

> demeurent à quelques détails près, très solidaires de la domination traditionnelle de la femme (Khodja, 1985, p.102).

For instance, the narrator of the 1976 novel evokes history to contend that although certain life circumstances were unfavourable for women after colonisation, the situation was much better than it had been in the past. This echoes the Algerian one-party ideology on women as we read in the 1976 National Charter. This written charter is one FLN document serving as a consolation for women at the time.

Women's 'moderate' emancipation between fiction and Algerian socialism

132 years of French colonisation did not fail to profoundly mark the configuration of Algerian society. Although colonialism perpetuated modernity in cities most notably, it left the rest of the country with considerable residues of traditional life. As far as economic structures are concerned, Algeria was modernised during the 1960s and 1970s. Traditional it remained however, in the daily reality experienced by almost all population. This rigid dichotomy was palpable on the level of gender relations. The Algerian man who had been told throughout his life that he is the undisputed master of everything, including the life of his wife, could not understand why one day the latter decides to question this situation. Rare were the women who managed to maintain a relationship of equality with their husbands.

In fact, this tradition/modernity dichotomy as far as gender relations are concerned was institutionalised. In an introduction added to a translated version of *La Chrysalide* (1993), Lemsine describes the socio-political circumstances that formed the setting for her publication of *La Chrysalide* in 1976. She states that after 1962:

> the political system, inspired by Marxism, was to confine women in a dual socio-cultural debate since, on the one hand, the Constitution of 1976 sets out that, 'Women must fully participate in the building of Socialism and national development' (article 81) while, on the other hand, the family code considers a woman as a minor in the eyes of the law. It is this paradox of 'egalitarian socialism', in a country where Islam

is a state religion, which I wished to demystify in *The Chrysalis* (1993, viii).

For the intellectual and political elite of the 1960s and 1970s, it was a matter of avoiding excess. Lemsine, the FLN and the political leaders of the time sought to address this ‘paradox’ to borrow Lemsine’s word, by seeking moderation. One main aspect of a modern Algeria was the participation of women in economic reconstruction. The socialist state that Ben Bella and Boumedienne (1962/1978) wanted to build demanded women’s entry into the public sphere. This was frequently openly declared by both presidents (see for instance, chapter 4 in Vince’s *Our Fighting Sisters*). One must not forget however, that for the sake of ‘moderation’ this leftist ideology was only applied in its empirical and materialistic definition. Its formal dimension was not there by any shape or form. In other words, socialism was resolutely applied to the economic, not to the social and the cultural. Marxism being mainly limited to economy, it is hardly surprising that religion was no longer the opium of peoples. It is worth clarifying this expression. German sociologist Karl Marx used the dictum ‘Opium des Volkes’ in his *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, to refer to religion as a sigh of the oppressed creature, as an opium used to ‘calm’ and console the masses for their plight. Marxist values being solely applied to financial management in the context of 1960s and 1970s Algeria, such a statement was no longer an issue for governments that considered Islam a ‘state religion’.

For women, this meant traditional values had to go hand-in-hand with socialism. One can hardly skip mentioning two passages in Vince’s aforementioned work on Ben Bella and Boumedienne. Commenting on the former’s speech during his visit to Oran, Vince points out that Ben Bella’s ‘proclaimed socialist society would simultaneously defend women from losing their collective identity through neo-colonial mimicry and protect them from the potentially lascivious gaze of male co-workers’ (Vince, 2015, p.143). Additionally, she introduces Boumedienne as ‘more socially conservative’ than Ben Bella, seeking to pair the development of a modern, industrialised nation with a greater commitment to ‘rediscovering' Algeria's 'Arab Islamic' roots’ (Vince, 2015, p.144). Concerning women, Vince quotes Boumedienne’s speech in a 1966 UNFA conference. After hailing the Algerian woman for her massive role in the construction of a modern, socialist society, he stresses that this evolution must take ‘place in a natural way and within the framework of

the Muslim religion, since our society is at the same time Arab, Muslim and socialist and it has foundations and traditions which we must respect' (Vince, 2015, p.144).

This pairing was at work in the political texts issued at the time. It is worth analysing the National Charter which was issued in 1976. This important document could be summarised in the following lines. The condition of women which feudal ethics and traditions opposed to the emancipatory spirit of Islam, has deteriorated in the Algerian society. Socialism has nevertheless improved the situation of women since the War of National Liberation. The promotion of women's emancipation still requires sustained efforts. This promotion, far from being subordinated to the patriotic role played by women alongside their comrades in the armed revolution, is at the same time an imperative of the spirit of justice and equity, a demand dictated by the dialectic of progress and democracy (*Algérie Constitution du 22 Novembre 1976,* 1976).

The charter is based on discursive sequences which are mainly:

Islam is not responsible for the inferior status of women: it is the feudalistic ethic that is the cause of women's oppression.

The construction of socialism requires fighting against retrograde mentalities.

We can thus observe that among the four systems, Islamic, nationalist, socialist and feudal, which occupied the Algerian ideological field, only the feudal system is considered responsible for the domination of women by men. Natalya Vince explains that 'Under both Ben Bella and Boumedienne, the values of equality, freedom and justice were felicitously depicted as the true basis of both socialism and Islam' (2015, p.147).

It is worth noting that this pairing of a modern nation with commitment to Arab Islamic values was mainly inspired by an Egyptian model of socialism, primarily adopted by Gamal Abd al-Nasser (1956/1970). This way of thinking resonated heavily in Egyptian literature of the time, especially when it comes to women's representation. In the many books of Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz for instance, his heroines, just like Faïza and Mériem, are not denied their rights to work and education provided that they do not exaggerate. The word exaggerate in this sense means exceeding the limits of what is

socially considered to be necessary/enough for women's emancipation. Mahfouz calls for a 'socialist' society which alone for him can guarantee a better life. This for him must be achieved without transgressing the precepts of "morals" and "traditions". El Saadawi observes that 'It was inevitable that Naguib Mahfouz should fall prey to insoluble contradictions. He allows a woman to work and earn in society, and at the same time denies her individual freedom' (El Saadawi, 2015, p.334).

Similar to Mahfouz's model of womanhood, the heroines of Lemsine's 1976 and 1978 novels are emancipated from 'traditionalist' ways of living provided that they do not exceed certain limits. It is a matter of balancing progressive and traditional values. As we shall see in this chapter, this search for a cultural balance crosses themes relating to external aspects of women's lives such as dressing, cooking, and sometimes marital issues and gender roles in and outside the domestic sphere. Notwithstanding Khodja's purely sociological approach (1985), her section on women's 'moderated' emancipation is very instructive. Khodja considers the model of womanhood adopted in *La Chrysalide* representative of what she calls 'La Representation Modérée de l'Emancipation de la Femme Algérienne' (1985, p.100).

In the 1976 novel, we discover Khadidja, an intelligent and energetic young woman from the countryside. She is married to Si Mokrane, a wealthy peasant who loves her never mind the hostility of his neighbours and family. The young woman does not want to be like women around her whose whole lives consist of submission to the man, confinement to domestic life and procreation. Reading cursorily, it is true that Khadija, the female character who dominates the first part of *La Chrysalide*, seems to be the iconoclast of patriarchal society. She questions conservative conventions and rigid customs. According to Achour, 'On peut dire qu'à la fin du récit, Khadidja a réduit tous les obstacles: elle a réduit à néant les opposants à sa quête. Elle les a neutralisés' (Achour, 1978, p.43). One stance that underlines Khadidja's rebelliousness against 'traditionalist' forms of marriage is her rejection of Si Mokrane's project to have several wives.

One must stress however, that this rejection of polygamy is atypical of the Western feminism discussed in the previous chapter. Khadidja's position on the project of her

husband is not radical enough to go so far as to starkly oppose polygamy. Sterile after the birth of her only son, Khadidja accepts twice the remarriage of her husband. She does not accept the third one however, and she is symbolically rewarded for that: after her revolt against the third marriage, Akila finally manages to give a son to their husband. In a word, she neither rejects polygamy as a practice/custom per se as would a Western feminist, nor does she accept what could be described as groundless polygamy which is commonly practised in 'traditionalist' milieus. Groundless polygamy in this sense refers to the practice of marrying more than one wife to show virility of the polygamous husband. This is unlike polygamy in *La Chrysalide* where it is 'motivated' by the desire to have male heirs and excused by Khadidja's barrenness. This is in agreement with Khodja's observations on 'moderated' emancipation which she explains, is based on 'le rejet de tout ce qui est excessif dans les deux cultures, et marquant une adhésion pas trop visible à l'une ou à l'autre' (Khodja, 1985, p.102).

It is not simply the aforementioned set of events that supports this interpretation. The narrator of the story occasionally intervenes to soften the effects of polygamy on the lives of women. This is the case of the description given of the scene in which Khadidja and Akila get on very well under the same roof. They share Si Mokrane as a husband, and each of them uses her sexual assets to keep him happy and attracted:

> Elle aimait bien Akila. Mokrane s'amusait en lui-même de la complicité affectueuse unissant les deux femmes. Leur façon de s'épauler mutuellement avec des courtoisies affectées, qui auraient pu donner à penser qu'elles ne tenaient pas à afficher leur amitié, il n'en était pas dupe. Dès le premier jour de l'arrivée de Akila, les choses s'étaient passées normalement. Les tâches ménagères furent instituées démocratiquement dans la maison et dans leurs relations conjugales avec lui (Lemsine, 1976, pp.75-76).

The narrator, for instance, does not elaborate on the reaction of Khadidja to the second marriage of her husband. Instead, narration dwells long enough on the importance of having a male heir for the husband to perpetuate the clan. Whenever a rebellious attitude is expressed by Khadidja, the narrator intervenes to soften it. This is manifested in the

form of long explanatory, moral passages justifying the subordination of women. A metaphysical discourse relating to human nature is constantly advanced to excuse the conduct of women and the privileges of men.

In the same novel, Faïza is another representative of this ‘moderated’ form of emancipation. Reading hastily, it is true that this heroine voices the concerns of a postcolonial generation of women who wanted to free themselves from the condition in which tradition and patriarchy normally place them. She subverts the traditions and conventions that oppress women in her village. She leaves her family to settle in Algiers and have a career. Her brother Mouloud, Faïza’s model of progressivism, represents values pertaining to human realisation and women’s emancipation. This emancipation one must not forget, is completely denied to the women of their unnamed village.

This emancipation, however, does not exceed the limits prescribed by both her exemplary stepmother, Khadidja, and her half-brother Mouloud himself. Additionally, this limitation - on her individual emancipation specifically - is validated by the external narrator. A conversation between Mouloud and Faïza divulges an adherence to this project of ‘moderation’. We learn from Mouloud that a woman who has studied and acquired some higher education is doomed to failure if she fails to have a husband first. He urges his sister to not forget to conform with this traditional ideal. The ideal which demands that a “good” woman be the object of her male guardian’s protection:

> Tu sauras être l'épouse idéale. Tu es de celles qui sont authentiques! Même savante, tu te mettras naturellement à la portée de celui que tu aimeras si rustre soit-il ... Tu sauras être modeste et aimante pourvu qu'il t'apporte le rêve, car tu recherches l'intelligence du cœur bien plus que celle de l'esprit (Lemsine, 1976, p.120).

Commenting on a similar quote from the novel regarding the traditional, dependent kind of wife desired by the ‘revolutionary brother’, as he teaches his sister how a woman should behave, she states that ‘peut-on, dès lors, considérer l'émancipation de la femme algérienne comme une remise en question réelle par les deux partenaires de ce rapport de protecteur à protégé’ (Khodja, 1985, p.103). The progressive Mouloud also supposes that because his 15-year-old sister has grown up in an environment where the ultimate

fate of women is marriage and childbearing, she should naturally agree to get married to Si Tahar, 25 years her senior and whom she does not even know.

This idea is eloquently expressed in Lemsine's other novel, *Ciel de Porphyre (1978).* The mother of Mériem reminds her that now that she has participated in the liberation of her country, it is time for her to get married and stay at home. This view, despite it being expressed by the mother only, is in accordance with the general vision of the novel. Indeed, all the women who have participated in the War of Liberation or at least have a good reputation end up getting married after independence. This is the case of Fella and Amalia. This is juxtaposed with prostitutes in the novel who never manage to reach this 'privilege'.

This idea materialises as far as Fella is concerned. Directly involved in the War of Liberation, as she is a nurse curing freedom fighters, Fella is married straight after independence to Slimane who is obsessed with multiplying his sexual conquests during colonisation. Symbolically, this conveys the message that Fella has turned into a sexual object after independence. Fella's role as a housewife calls to mind FLN discourses on women at the time. Interestingly enough, Gadant evokes the content of a political text promulgated by president Boumedienne which calls on women to work only if this does not disrupt their roles as housewives in the first place:

> Qu'on regarde la Charte de 1976 du moderniste Boumedienne, alors au sommet de sa popularité nationale et internationale: les femmes n'y sont autorisées à travailler que si leur travail leur permet d'assumer leur rôle d'épouse et de mère. Ceci est toujours accompagné de mises en garde contre le féminisme. On ne va pas cesser de le leur répéter. Toute revendication à travers laquelle elles s'affirmeraient comme individus leur est interdite. En ce qui les concerne tout droit est conditionné par le mérite acquis au service de la communauté (Gadant, 1995, p.29).

Mouloud's ideas on the priority for his sister to find a husband also materialise. When Faïza meets her lover, all her unconventional discourses vanish. Although Faïza belongs to an educated class, she surrenders to her discovered love, to the charm of Fayçal, ignoring his reputation as a "ladies' man", a womaniser. Faïza now tangibly conforms with

what she has been programmed for by her brother, that whatever degree a woman may hold, whatever position she may reach, she is predestined to make sacrifices to the detriment of her personal achievements to find a husband as we read in this revealing passage: ‘la jeune fille savait que c'était lui qu'elle avait toujours attendu. Il arrivait sous les traits d'un Don juan ... Et elle acceptait d'avance tout ce qui pourrait lui arriver: pleurs et joies’ (Lemsine, 1976, p.219).

She admits that ‘dans une autre vie, Fayçal aurait été un seigneur, un fier guerrier régnant sur la civilisation méditerranéenne, car il en avait l'allure et le raffinement’ (Lemsine, 1976, p.220).This calls to mind Simone de Beauvoir’s observation that ‘Factories, offices, and universities are open to women, but marriage is still considered a more honourable career, exempting her from any other participation in collective life’ (Beauvoir, 2009, p.188). It is to this effect that Marianne Berenhaut ‘n’aime pas non plus lei, ni sa révolte parce qu’une révolte qui se fait récupérer par la famille et le village n’en est pas une pour moi’ (Berenhaut, 1977, p.97).

On this note, the reader may so rightly wonder why Faïza ends up choosing to live with a paramour instead of marrying him. It is true that Faïza is presented as having a premarital relationship with a man of her choice, from whom she even falls pregnant before marriage, something that she and her lover are not concerned about in the least. From this perspective, Faïza may seem to represent the free and rebellious woman, an emancipation advocated by authors discussed in chapter 2. One must not forget however, that at the last moment her unconventional relationship symbolically fails her. Her lover dies in a car accident on his way to come to the village to ask for her hand from her father. This could be read as a warning/caution for Algerian young women that taking a relationship to the extreme, that is to say, a bond other than marriage, may well have indelible ramifications.

Other aspects of women’s lives such as dressing and behaviour are also balanced. In *Ciel de Porphyre,* Mériem amazes Ali by wearing clothes that reflect this rapprochement of two different cultures to avoid excess in favour of the one or the other. Although she wears a scarf, Mériem is still dressed like a European woman:

> Grande, mince avec de longues jambes. Elle portait un pantalon noir, et un chemisier blanc. Elle se tenait d'un air fier. Ses cheveux ramassés sous un foulard blanc donnait à son visage une austérité un peu sévère (Lemsine, 1978, p.286).

This calls to mind Lama Abu Odeh's observations on women's veiling for the urban lower and middle classes during the 1970s in Arab societies generally. While she describes these women who were in their twenties and early thirties as liberal, fashion conscious, generous in their make-up, and wearing Western-like attires, characteristics of a certain model of womanhood discussed in the previous chapter, she interestingly observes that their mothers 'covered their hair with a scarf when they were in public, but only in a liberal rather than a rigid way (a good proportion of their hair showed underneath the scarf in contrast to the scarf of the fundamentalist dress which showed nothing)' (Abu Odeh, 1993, p.27). Abu Odeh explains that these women's relationship to their bodies was 'multilayered and highly complex'. She convincingly explains that:

> On the one hand the Western attire which covered their bodies carried with it the 'capitalist' construction of the female body: one that is sexualized objectified, thingified etc.… But because capitalism never really won the day in postcolonial societies, where it managed to cohabit successfully with pre-capitalist social formations (traditionalism), these women's bodies were also simultaneously constructed 'traditionally': 'chattelized', 'propertized' terrorized as trustees of family (sexual) honour (Abu Odeh, 1993, p.27).

Although she wears pants and a blouse, Mériem is mindful of her obligation to not completely break with traditions. For instance, in the presence of males, Mériem switches to her traditional dress: 'Plus tard, alors qu'ils étaient réunis autour du thé, Mériem avait revêtu une longue robe semblable à celle de sa mère' (Lemsine, 1978, p.288). On this note, Khodja observes that according to this model of emancipation, a woman: 'se livre alors à un amalgame ingénieux, et souvent stérile, des éléments empruntés aux deux modes de vie, et cela va jusqu'à la tenue vestimentaire, où la robe algérienne traditionnelle se trouve transformée en robe d'hôtesse' (1985, p.101).

Having examined the ways in which Lemsine deals with the issue of polygamy and veiling,

it is safe to say that she resolves such matters ‘with a sleight of hand’ to borrow Lazreg’s words (Lazreg, 1994, p.201). In agreement with Lazreg, Lemsine explores such taboo issues ‘superficially’ (1994). This means that instead of unravelling the way in which culture, religion, and politics are connected to orchestrated notions of femininity in the Algerian context, Lemsine, because her aim is simply to ‘reconcile’ cultures, contents herself with equating the modern with the Western and the often patriarchal traditional with Islam. Djebar, as we shall see in the next chapter however, resolves issues such as veiling by distinguishing between traditions which account for patriarchal values on the one hand, and authenticity which is comprised of culture in general, traditions and religion on the other.

This superficiality one must not forget, is paradigmatic of the FLN’s discourses on women during the 1970s which did not seek in-depth social reform. In Vince’s influential *Our Fighting Sisters*, we learn that:

> Boumedienne urged women not to concern themselves with what he considered to be superficial problems: polygamy, he argued, was effectively forbidden by the Qur'an because scripture stated that a man could not take more than one wife unless he was able to treat them all equally. The veil, he insisted, was not worthy of the attention that it had garnered in other Muslim societies: instead, women needed to go beyond this trivial issue and challenge outdated customs which were a deviation from Islam (Vince, 2015, p.144).

This challenge of outdated customs which were a deviation from Islam means that the FLN aspired to a progressive Islam. The first two decades after independence saw a growing consensus between the elite and the state to adapt religion to progress. This vision calls to mind Lemsine’s position in favour of the modernisation of religion. In the aforementioned introduction to her translated version of *La Chrysalide* (1993), she points out that:

> Religion must be an instrument of justice and equal opportunity offered to both sexes, not a dogma reducing us to slavery and hampering our emancipation. Islam, the religion of all Algerians, has never meant the denial of democracy; it has never

opposed nature, but has always adapted to it.

> It was to this effect that I wrote *The Chrysalis* and my subsequent books: as an ijtihad (effort in Islamic law to independently interpret a problem not precisely covered by the Qur'an). Keeping Islam alive is to prepare a more responsible and humane society, to cross the threshold into the twenty-first century. It is also to bear witness to a faith directed towards progress, justice and peace (Lemsine, 1993, x).

This idea of adjusting religion to progress was embodied in the political composition of the one-party state (1962/1988). Until the unprecedented riots of October 5th 1988, independent Algeria had been constituted as a one-party state. The duality (progressivism and Islam) was so closely held by the different governments after 1962 that one single party was enough to adopt such ‘opposing’ notions. To use the word opposing does not mean that Islam is equated with backwardness. This opposition is valid in the sense that the FLN did little to distinguish Islam from backward and patriarchal tradition. The party rotated the different components of power. Islamist opposition formed a faction within the party and the state managed to meet its demands to balance with the progressive left. The question of women provided a space to express this balancing politics.

The narrator of *La Chrysalide* brings religion to conform to the progressivism of Faïza. In one telling scene, the narrator draws the reader to a picture of what is regarded as a ‘perfect Muslim’ woman. A perfect Muslim woman in this sense is the one who believes that women’s natural place is the home, that silence in the presence of men is a virtue for women, and that housekeeping and reproductive roles are good women’s priority. Indeed, the way Faïza behaves in the presence of her brother’s guests shows how despite her knowledge, her modern traits and her several subversions, Faïza is expected to behave as a ‘Muslim’ as we shall see in the quoted passage below. The word Muslim is put between inverted commas to refer to Lemsine’s aforementioned superficial, FLN-like form of Islam. The Muslim Faïza in this scene is gladly assigned traditional roles. Khodja observes how Lemsine describes with great respect the behaviour of Faïza, who, attentive to the least desire of her guests, answering when spoken to, is representative of the woman who in public must remain silent:

> Faïza, attentive aux moindres désirs de ses invités, disposait des cendriers devant l'un, offrait des gâteaux à l'autre, répondant quand on s'adressait à elle, gardant son opinion discrètement. Elle était l'image de la parfaite femme musulmane recevant chez elle. Modeste, prévenante, silencieuse et présente à la fois. Elle ne récoltait que des regards de sympathie, même la capricieuse Nora daignait lui sourire pour la récompenser de savoir garder sa place dans l'ombre (Lemsine, 1976, p.196).

This favourable description of Faïza as attentive calls to mind Khodja's observations on this 'moderated' emancipation. She notes that 'En effet, il est généralement considéré, dans ce modèle, que pour être accomplie la femme doit d'abord avoir une bonne éducation ménagère' (Khodja, 1985, p.100). This can be seen in the conversation taking place between Faïza and her two mothers, Akila and Khadidja. Akila, traditional as she is, obligates her daughter to learn their commonly held habits such as women's work. At this point in the discussion, the French-friendly, seemingly anti-traditional, exemplary Khadidja intervenes to paradoxically further support Akila's position by calling on Faïza to obey the orders of her mother. Khadidja tells her that: 'Tu es une jeune fille maintenant et ton aide nous sera précieuse chez tante Aïcha car il y aura beaucoup de travail ... Tu verras c'est très intéressant, tu apprendras comment on fait une couverture au moins' (Lemsine, 1976, p.132).

A superficial modernisation of tradition

In her 1985 sociological work, Khodja argues that this 'moderated' model of emancipation 'doit se limiter aux apparences extérieures: façon de s'habiller, mode de préparation des repas, etc' (Khodja, 1985, p.100). This means that internal aspects of women's lives are unattained by this effort of modernising the traditional. The different aspects of women's representation that remain identical to the 'traditionalist' relate, among other things, to female sexuality. According to Achour, the representation of Khadidja's intimate relationship with Si Mokrane 'dément le discours de la narratrice sur l'émancipation de la

femme' (Achour, 1978, p.41).

Male domination when it comes to sexuality in *La Chrysalide* is reminiscent of representations of the feminine in male-authored texts in Arabic by the likes of Tewfik El Hakim, El Akkad, and Taha Hussein. The latter's views are, according to El Saadawi, always those of the conventional Arab, those of the condescending mercy of the superior and powerful male who looks down from his heights on the weaker and inferior female. She notes that Taha Hussein 'describes the sexual struggle between Amna and the engineer, the male fighting with all the weapons and power at his disposal against the female who is conquered and subjugated and broken in advance, a struggle which illustrates almost to perfection all the overtones of a sado-masochistic relationship' (El Saadawi, 2015, p.333).

Despite Khadidja's agency and imitation of the aforementioned French tastes and manners, she never seems to question the sexual objectification that she is subjected to by Si Mokrane. As we shall see shortly, the latter equates the worth of his wife with pleasure. Kant writes in his famous *Lectures on Ethics* that 'sexual love makes of the loved person an object of appetite; as soon as that appetite has been steeled the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon which has been sucked dry…' (Kant, 1797, p.254). We learn in the following passage that:

> Les relations entre les deux époux devenaient purement physiologiques. Mokrane éprouvait parfois la soif du corps de Khadidja. Il oubliait alors ses fantasmes pour ne plus s'émerveiller que de ce corps ... Le seul qui savait si bien reconnaître le sien ... Quand ses mains descendaient le long des jambes minces de Khadidja et, remontaient vers le ventre dur et plat que les grossesses n'avaient pas abîmé, il oubliait ses peurs. En son for intérieur, il préférait l'amour avec elle (Lemsine, 1976, p. 65).

Khadidja, whom the reader would expect to question this situation given her several subversions of 'external' ways of living, is rather driven by her desire for the warmth of her husband's bed. She cannot wait for the 'ultimate hour', the moment she is between the arms of Si Mokrane. This passion lures Khadidja into becoming a 'malleable' woman,

ready to obey her husband's desires and to deny her sexual subjectivity:

> Khadidja exécutait ses besognes, attendant la joie de l'ultime récompense de la fin de la journée: celle que lui apportera la nuit avec les caresses de son mari. Qu'importait la grisaille quotidienne! Qu'importait l'hostilité de tous, quand son corps flexible et complice se tendait vers Mokrane dans la chaleur de leur couche. Elle était l'argile humide sous les doigts impatients de l'homme, il réinventait tous les gestes de l'amour sur elle. Son jeune mari, étonné mais ébloui par toute cette sensualité à fleur de peau de Khadidja, tentait toutes les folies sur ce corps; Khadidja semblait n'être venue sur terre que pour mieux combler les désirs de Mokrane (Lemsine, 1976, pp.17-18).

Although it might be argued that the difficulties of daily life, as it says in the quoted passage, may explain her happiness when she finds her husband, this argument cannot stand given the workings of polygamy which are defended in the novel. Kant explains that in a polygamous relationship, woman, unlike man, offers her whole person. The whole person means both her body and herself (Kant, 1769). Si Mokrane is not committed to Khadidja exclusively, he does not as a result offer his person, since it is only through the body that he is attached to her.

It is worth observing that when it comes to sexuality in the novel, the modern and French-imitating Khadidja is indistinguishable from other females from whom she externally differs. Khadidja's co-wives, namely Warda and Akila, play passive sexual roles. Not much is revealed to the reader about Warda other than her physical beauty. Once married to Si Mokrane, the value of Warda is only measured by the husband's sexual pleasure: 'il était manifestement transformé par son bonheur tout neuf. A vrai dire, malgré les rondeurs excessives de sa jeune épouse, c'était là une nouvelle sensation assez plaisante pour lui. Il s'était trop habitué au corps sec et nerveux de la longue et brune Khadidja' (Lemsine, 1976, p.59). After her unexpected death, the representation of women as sexual objects persists. Akila, a flat and one-dimensional character, 'revenait du bain poncée, fraîche, parfumée et les yeux soigneusement soulignés de khôl. Mokrane aimait bien Akila. Il ressentait une tranquille affection pour sa docilité pleine de sagesse'

(Lemsine, 1976, p.76). Beauvoir argues that ‘Biological need, sexual desire and desire for posterity which makes the male dependent on the female has not liberated woman socially’ (Beauvoir, 2009, p. 29).

Another aspect of women’s representation that is not covered by the effort of modernising the traditional in Lemsine’s texts relates to reproduction. The term reproduction refers to a gendered division of labour in the sense that men’s activity is productive and they are paid for it, whereas women’s traditional activities are reproductive and they are not paid for them. Reproduction includes, for instance, housework, nurturing, childbearing and caring for children inside the domestic sphere. Vogel explains Della Costa’s notion of use value. She notes that ‘As housewives, working-class women find themselves excluded from capitalist production, isolated in routines of domestic labour that have the technological character of pre-capitalist labour-processes’ (Vogel, 2013, p.20).

Reminiscent of Boumedienne’s prioritisation of the domestic for wives, Khadidja and her co-wives, as well as most female characters in *Ciel de Porphyre,* especially those who have led by example in the War of Liberation, are not encouraged to be productive agents. This is the case of Mériem. The narrator questions her job among men after independence. This same narrator valorises Fella’s reproductive roles. Beauvoir explains that ‘Woman cannot be emancipated unless she takes part in production on a large social scale and is only incidentally bound to domestic work’ (Beauvoir, 2009, p.89).

Chapter 7 informs the reader of *La Chrysalide* of some historical realities to excuse the situation of women as reproductive agents. The colonial Algeria in which Khadidja and her co-wives live is described as a class-based society. This consists of the Europeans or colonisers with all their privileges, the friends or collaborators of the colonisers, and the third class is composed of the humble Muslims, the working class (the ‘obscure masses'). Given that any class-based society demands a succeeding generation of workers, there is a justification of the fact that Khadidja, Warda and Akila perform, as a priority, reproductive roles: childbearing most notably. This is to provide Si Mokrane, the landowner, with sons who will form his labour force, discursively reducing the wives to reproductive objects**:**

> Maintenant qu'il était le maître, rien n'avait changé. Il faisait corps avec ses hommes, propriétaire et fellahs unis dans la même ferveur de la terre.
>
> Allah avait été clément pour ses biens et non pour le ventre de ses femmes. Il s'effritait sous sa soif de fils (Lemsine, 1976, p.78).

‘Reconciliation’ from colonial Debèche to postcolonial Lemsine

As previously stated in the literature review, the tradition of ‘reconciling’ local tradition with French modernity was not introduced by Lemsine when it comes to fiction. As early as the 1920s, a movement of cultural and political assimilation emerged. In fairness to the movements which adopted assimilation, there was no political current that called for independence at this juncture. Demands consisted mainly of equality with colonial settlers, cultural assimilation, and naturalisation. This ideology of assimilation into the culture of the coloniser resonated heavily in novels published during the 1930s and 1940s. One could name Chukri Khodja’s *El-Euldj, captif des barbaresques* and Saad Ben Ali and René Pottier’s *La Tente noire, roman saharien.*

The year 1947 saw the publication of *Leïla, jeune fille d'Algérie* by Djamila Debèche. In this novel, Sheikh Ibrahim Ben Abdallah, to save his daughter Leïla from the jealousy of her stepmother and the backwardness of traditional life, decides to give her a French education. He is convinced that French education remains key for the success of girls. He sends her to study at the French Institut Marie in Algiers. Years after this, Leïla and her fiancé decide to settle in the South and spread the benefits of the education provided to them by the colonial school, starting with the fight against illiteracy and lack of hygiene. It is worth noting that the narrator's discourse in the novel is expressed in favour of colonial values. It amplifies the positive impact that French education (manners and tastes) have had on women’s lives.

The reader of the 1947 novel can notice among other things, the positive representation of colonisers as friendly. Leïla is not made to feel like a stranger among her French schoolmates, though she is different to them as an indigenous person. The narrator

advances a humanist morality to reinforce fraternal links between the Algerian and European communities. After the loss of both her parents, the desperate Leïla thinks about committing suicide to escape the evil plans of her stepmother and her uncle should help from her European friends in Bougie not arrive on time. Fortunately for her, the French Mr. Lormont comes to her rescue. Despite her uncle's tricks to prevent her from speaking in the presence of Mr. Lormont, Leïla manages to confide in the depraved man that is incarnated in Cheikh Ali. All in all, the colonial character is always presented as affectionate, considerate, and moral. Monsieur Lormont, for instance, accepts to become Leïla's new guardian. This friendliness is juxtaposed with Cheikh Ali's treatment of his niece as he accepts her departure, provided that she renounces her right to inheritance. In Bougie, the young Muslim woman, Leïla, is warmly received by the entire Lormont family. Loved and respected by all, she fulfils her juvenile dreams: to be useful in society as a woman as she is now both secretary and deputy director in Monsieur Lormont's factory.

The focus on representing Monsieur Lormont as good natured and affable reminds the reader of Monsieur Kimper in *Ciel de Porphyre*. The switch from the homo-diegetic narrator (the protagonist Ali) to an unknown and external narrator in *Ciel de Porphyre* is not without significance. It is worth noting that the hetero-diegetic narrator is generally resorted to when a work is dominated by a given ideological project. In *Ciel de Porphyre*, this switch serves among other things to stress the pleasant side of Monsieur Kimper, something that is not known to Ali at the beginning of the story:

> Monsieur Kimper était depuis si longtemps établi en Algérie, qu'il ne se rappelait plus la date. Il avait la sensation d'être né dans ce pays qu'il aimait tant. Autant, sans doute, que sa Bretagne natale, rude, renfermée, altière et généreuse à la fois. Il aurait pu mener une vie tranquille consacrée seulement à la musique et à la lecture, sous la complicité chaleureuse du soleil. Mais non, cet homme doux et affable avait, depuis longtemps déjà, choisi de lutter pour un idéal qu'il avait fait sien: la justice et le droit des hommes d'être libres sur leur terre. Depuis son veuvage, il avait adopté dans son cœur ces hommes aspirant à un renouveau de liberté et de dignité. N'ayant jamais eu d'enfants, il se sentait vraiment père à leurs côtés (Lemsine, 1978, p.45).

Similar to Debèche's 1947 work, *Ciel de Porphyre* idealises French women as we read in this passage: 'Je fus libéré grâce à l'intervention pressante d'une vieille dame européenne qui avait beaucoup d'affection pour ma famille, madame Lavigne' (Lemsine, 1978, p.28). Lemsine's other work, *La Chrysalide*, does also convey the idea that French women are worth imitating. Khadidja has a close relationship with the doctor's wife who is French. Khadija wants her to be the one to assist her during her childbirth. She refuses to have the local midwives anywhere near her. Although the appreciation of the coloniser attracted severe critiques to Lemsine's works, this was not the case for Debèche. This because the latter published her work in French Algeria and in a socio-political context dominated by this cultural ideology.

One must not forget however, that during the 1930s and 1940s Algerian intellectuals like Debèche who were mainly French educated found themselves torn between the obligation to stay faithful to their native culture on the one hand, and the obligation to return 'kindness' such as of the 'civilising' mission to their civilisers on the other. Zahia Smail Salhi describes the cultural specificities of this class. She chooses a set of novels to demonstrate how they are torn between two cultures. She argues that even though these intellectuals loved French culture and civilisation, they were also attached to their own religion. She describes their assimilation as 'only partial' (1999). Interestingly enough, Salhi examines Ferhat Abbas's declarations on this issue:

> It is French thought which is at the basis of the principles of our moral life. To the empiricism of the patrimony left to us by parents and tradition, the spirit of the French writers has added an explanation, a scientific, rational one if I may say so. And yet, Islam has remained our pure faith, the belief which gives a meaning to life, our spiritual homeland (Abbas, cited in Salhi, 1999, p.51).

Salhi's description of this ideology as 'partial assimilation' means that this class attempted at bringing French values and local traditions together. If this cultural project was doomed to failure after independence, given the aforementioned unprecedented riots of the 5th October 1988, how is it possible to put into practice such an unrealistic 'reconciliation' during colonisation? In other words, if assimilation proved to be an impossible mission

among Algerians themselves, how can it be realistic to reconcile the representatives of those ideas, namely colonisers and colonised? It is hardly surprising that the decade following the publication of *Leila* saw the War of Liberation, which is an answer in itself to the failure of such reforms.

It is nevertheless fascinating how Debèche works out this 'reconciliation'. In order to reconcile with Messaouda and Zohra, the young Leïla has given up her modern evening dress for dinner. She is adorned with a very decent evening dress, similar to the long indoor dress that Lalla Messaouda wears herself (Debèche, 1947). This is very reminiscent of Mériem in *Ciel de Porphyre* as we have seen previously. Concerning education, it is worth noting that although Sheikh Ibrahim Ben Abdallah sends his daughter to study in a French school, he does not forget to remind the headmaster of his desire to see Leïla remain attached to the principles of the Islamic religion. On this note, Zahia Smail Salhi quotes some telling lines from *Leïla*, *jeune fille d'algerie*: 'Leila resterait attachée aux principes de la religion Islamique; à chaque événement religieux, elle ne manquerait pas de se rendre chez une de ses cousines habitant la Casbah' (Débêche, 1947, cited in Salhi, 1999, p.52). Leïla is expected to learn both Arabic and French. Despite her attachment to Islamic teachings, Leila is influenced by several French writers such as Isabelle Eberhardt, Magali Boisnard and others (1947). Additionally, despite her education in Algiers away from her family, despite her life in Bougie with her French friends and later in the south with her fiancé, she eventually returns to her village. It is worth noting that the village is strongly representative of traditions and authenticity, especially at times of colonisation.

Faïza in *La Chrysalide* is indistinguishable. In a conversation with her cousin, Karim is baffled by the young girl's readings of Karl Marx. He informs her about the benefits of Marxism such as equality and the idea of a classless society which she appreciates. In the same conversation, however, she also expresses an unequivocal support of religion. She recoils at the idea of believing in men's knowledge instead of God. Faïza has another conversation on the same philosopher with Khadidja. The latter is impressed by the benefits of Marxism and its implementation in Russia, yet she does not fail to defend Islamic teachings: 'Instruisez-vous mes enfants mais ne rejetez pas votre religion, ni les

traditions et le respect des Saints …' (Lemsine, 1976, pp.142-143).

Faïza learns both Arabic and French. She reads her brother's books. Her French school teachers promise to send her books to read when they have left Algeria. Like the heroine of the 1947 work, Faïza reads Western works of literature such as *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Colomba Mérimee*. The position in favour of learning both Arabic and French is more clearly expressed in *Ciel de Porphyre*, though it concerns a male character, Ali: 'J'ai étudié l'arabe aussi quand j'étais plus jeune, car mon père y tenait beaucoup. Il me disait: «Il faut que tu saches parler et écrire notre langue correctement pour demain»' (Lemsine, 1978, p.29).

Additionally, similar to Leïla's symbolic return to Ouled-Djellal, as the story draws to an end in *La Chrysalide*, Faïza goes back to her village and decides to settle there. As previously stated, this denotes a return to tradition. This is corroborated by the passage where, lost in depression following her non-marital pregnancy and the unexpected death of Fayçal, Faïza meets the old taleb. Through this encounter, Faïza wants to symbolically reconcile with religion and tradition, since his figure is strongly representative of moral authority and taboo power. The project of 'reconciliation' with tradition through the leitmotif of the village, is also telling in the docile reaction of the traditional father to his daughter's status as a single mother.

Although both authors attempt at bringing French modernity and Islamic tradition together, one must not forget to note the differences. In Debèche's text for instance, the modern is advantaged over the traditional. This is unlike Lemsine's text where there is a discursive complicity with local traditions. In other words, the 1947 novel attempts to bring local culture to the colonial, whereas both *La Chrysalide* and *Ciel de Porphyre* soften the effects of Western values to adapt them to an Algerian reality. This because Debèche wrote at a time of colonisation and had therefore to express her gratitude to the colonial school/administration.

In *Leïla, jeune fille d'Algérie*, one instance where the European is advantaged over the traditional is with regards to women's clothing. As soon as Leïla arrives from Algiers, she is 'made' to replace her European costume with one of Zohra's harem pants by Lalla

Messaouda, her unwelcoming stepmother. Additionally, her uncle ‘orders’ her to start wearing the veil and the haik. These clothes are linked with spaces where Leïla is oppressed. When leaving Ouled-Djellal, however, Leïla and Monsieur Lormont stop at Bougie to admire the city and symbolically allow the young girl to change her long djellabah and embroidered slippers. She changes this outfit which is deemed impractical for travel. Leïla will be more soberly dressed in a dark-coloured dress and will wear white sandals instead (Debèche, 1947).

Lemsine’s texts, however, favour conservative values over modernity. This could be seen in the narrator’s frequent resort to morality and religion. This often serves to justify conservative ideas on women and to soften the effects of French and Western values to adapt them to an Algerian reality. Interestingly, this could be seen in the narrative structure of Lemsine’s texts. It is worth observing that leanings in favour of the traditional are completed on the level of discourse. In narratological terms, this is commonly known as ‘plot’ (see the methodology section). It is worth keeping in mind that ‘plot’ is the organisation of a story into a structured narrative. This means that the ways in which scenes describing women’s roles are **‘**edited, ordered, packaged, and presented’ to borrow Barry’s (2017) words discredit feminist and progressive narratives. For instance, the scene where Fayçal unexpectedly dies in a car accident comes straight before he wants to ask Si Mokrane for Faïza’s hand, and after Faïza realises that she is pregnant. This serves a conservative discourse that discourages relationships other than traditional forms of marriage. One could also think of polygamy in the 1976 novel. Although actual events, what is recognised in narratology as ‘story’, show Khadidja fighting polygamy, the narrator’s account of it does not completely reject the practice, creating an overall effect on readers. This is unlike *Leila* where the conservative is expressed on the level of ‘story’ (which is often a superficial description), giving way to the modern on the level of discourse.

Juxtaposing ‘story’ and ‘plot’, however, is of little interest to note in the case of novels selected for the previous two chapters. This because instead of expressing what may be considered as a tension of values as in Lemsine’s texts, the ideological projects of texts in chapters one and two are characterised by a singularity of vision either in favour of the

traditional or in favour of the modern respectively. This means that in Ben's text for instance, both 'story' and 'plot' go on the same direction to advocate a Western viewpoint on the situation of women, and the same applies to Ounissi's texts in favour of the 'traditionalist'.

Unrealism from colonial Debèche to postcolonial Lemsine

This attempt at 'reconciling' the 'unreconcilable' to borrow Nagy's word (2002) creates unrealistic situations. Nagy notes that in her novels Lemsine 'displays a defamiliarisation regarding Algerian life and codes of behaviour' (Nagy, 2002, p.8). It is worth clarifying what is meant here by defamiliarisation. The term is specifically used by formalists to refer to the act of making strange, of course, in what concerns creation and description for artists. This means that literary language is seen to have the effect to make the familiar world appear new to readers and thus to lay it open to reassessment. Barry explains that 'As with the concept of defamiliarisation, there is a careful distinction here between reality itself and its verbal representation in a work of literature, so that we are steered away from any notion that literature simply mirrors reality in a documentary way' (2017, p. 164). Although it is reasonable to argue that Lemsine's description of reconciliation between two opposing poles for women is a constructed literary image that has hardly anything to do with the lived reality of most women in Algeria, and thus emphasising the formalist shift between literature and life, it seems that this shift does not simply alienate readers from their lived reality. The 1976 novel contains a set of internal contradictions if one takes into account the purely 'traditionalist' life of the village as we learn in the novel itself. Indeed, had Lemsine created a setting that would match the description of Faïza's fate for instance, as we shall see shortly, one would have reasonably appreciated the novel as some sort of fantasy or imaginative fiction.

As previously noted, Faïza does not bother about her non-marital pregnancy. This is unrealistic given the strict and rigid customs of the village. The fate of single mothers in such a 'traditionalist' setting is never without severe ramifications. Not only does Faïza decide to keep her child with the utmost ease, but her father, the purely 'traditionalist' Si

Mokrane, accepts the situation with serenity. How can it be possible that the same people who criticise Khadija for her refusal of the village midwives, the people who want her to be repudiated on account of her sterility, accept Faïza the single mother? The subtitle of the 1976 novel, *Chroniques Algériennes,* has been nevertheless presented as a narration of facts, describing the reality of Algerian society. One could probably cite Nisbet who notes that 'le sous-titre, *Chroniques Algériennes*, inscrit la fiction dans l'histoire, donc dans les faits de culture' (Nisbet, 1982, p.85). Such an unrealistic acceptance of Faïza by 'traditionalist' people as we have just seen, however, refutes the subtitle, because a chronicle is a written account of factual and historical events.

It is safe to say that the plot of the novel has been devised to rather suit the aspirations of a bourgeois culture, an ideal as far as the vision of the novelist is concerned. This postcolonial bourgeoisie aspired to ways of living which were not adapted to the lived experiences of most Algerians. This class chasm is reminiscent of Debèche's novel and its context: of course, one must not forget that this postcolonial bourgeoisie was the main inheritor of partial assimilationist values - formerly adopted by the 'Young Algerians' like Debèche during colonisation. In the 1947 novel, the choice of the narratee - the audience addressed by Debèche: admittedly French women - is not without significance. We learn in the preface that:

> C'est en pensant à vous, femmes de France, que j'ai écrit ces pages.
>
> Dans la métropole, comme dans la France d'Outre-Mer, un magnifique effort est fait par l'élément féminin (...)
>
> En Algérie, bien des choses restent à faire dans le domaine culturel (...) Je souhaite qu'à la faveur de ces lignes puisse apparaître plus nettement la situation de la musulmane algérienne qui se trouve elle aussi à un tournant de sa destinée (Debèche, 1947, cited in Achour, 1991, p.24).

The receiver being French, Achour notes that the cultural references used by the author to describe a supposedly Algerian setting refer to French and European contexts instead. She (the author) thus displays defamiliarisation regarding Algerian ways of living, which

she nevertheless wants to represent:

> Tout cela montre que le *regard* que la narratrice porte sur la société algérienne reste un regard *extérieur ...* Si son discours se caractérise, tout comme l'histoire racontée, par une grande lisibilité et par une prévisibilité maximale c'est bien parce qu'il appartient au type de discours *exotique* qui ne débouche pas sur la connaissance d'autrui (Achour, 1991, p.25).

The description of colonisers as friendly and of French manners as examples to follow - which is also the view of Lemsine's narrators - allowed Achour to observe that:

> Ce discours qui défend les valeurs culturelles européennes semble pour le moins étrange lorsqu'on sait que le roman de Djamila Debèche paraît en 1947, c'est-à-dire dans une Algérie en effervescence où se précise de plus en plus le sentiment de conscience nationale (Achour, 1991, p.24).

It is worth contextualising the unrealistic cultural rapprochement defended by both Debèche and Lemsine. Under French colonisation, the indigenous Algerians were in their vast majority considered second-class citizens. Colonial authorities put this relegation down to Islam. This could best be seen in the referring of Algerians to a special court and laws such as *le Code de l'indigénat* and *le Statut personnel*. The latter regulates family relations, inheritance, marriage, and divorce. Both these Codes depend on shari'a (Islamic jurisprudence). As stated in the general introduction, this became the fundamental element that would give the indigenous an identity distinct from the French. It is in this sense that Islam constituted the cultural identity of the indigenous population.

What is noteworthy is that this sense of belonging does not tolerate, among other things, French values such as individualism. On the contrary, it perpetuates traditional and spiritual values such as the notion of brotherhood which defines constraints and prohibitions and gives the group control over the individual. This collectivisation was clear on women who were mainly invested with the role of guardians of tradition and identity. The indigenous women who applied for naturalisation, which necessarily meant abandoning the aforementioned religious Code as required by colonial law, were seen as

traitors.

As an attempt to weaken the War of Liberation, the French wanted to ‘emancipate’ indigenous women. It is thus France that would propose models of emancipation: ones that systematically devalue all forms of local and religious culture. This had to go through plans to modify the Personal Status Code. As a reaction to such colonial strategies, the National Liberation Front held tightly to Islam and the afore-mentioned Codes. An emancipated woman was more than any time before equated with a French woman. It is in this hostile environment that Djamila Debèche wanted to create an Algerian female character that reconciles cultural antagonisms regardless of the already-mentioned circumstances.

The upshot of such historical circumstances after the independence of the country was equally a challenge to realism in the postcolonial productions of Lemsine. The tight hold of the FLN to tradition and the aforementioned Codes for Muslims, as a result of colonial attempts to emancipate women, continued after independence. One could most probably think of the Nationality Code which is paradigmatic of this view. The Nationality Code defines an Algerian as one whose ancestors for at least two generations before independence were abiding by the aforementioned Personal Status code. Shari’a which forms the backbone of this Personal Status was institutionalised as Islam was inscribed in the Constitution as the religion of the state. As observed in the conclusion to chapter 1, women were prisoners of a representation of the nation which assumes their domination as a national virtue.

Although Lemsine’s aspirations - especially those relating to the imitation of colonial values - were paradigmatic of a bourgeois rhetoric which sought to champion some form of progressive Islam, these aspirations were conceived in isolation from the lived experiences of most Algerian women. Both Khadidja and Faïza are separated from reality and from themselves. They are almost completely separated from others in general and from women in particular. Throughout the story Faïza, discursively the representative of the new generation of women struggling against patriarchy, is described as claiming her otherness. At no time does she envisage, not even in her reflections, solidarity with other

women, a theme that would be deeply discussed in Djebar's works. She does not link her condition to that of women around her: her mother, Akila, and the other women of the village. Her relationship with women villagers is expressed in a mode of separation and strangeness. It cannot be otherwise since the young girl is alone: concretely and intellectually isolated.

Notes and observations on the textual and narrative construction

It is worth noting that Lemsine's texts belong to what may be regarded as the fictionalised essay: prose writing that is both informative as one normally expects from a nonfictional work, but simultaneously imaginative as one generally expects from a purely fictional piece of writing.

The ideological and informative aspect of her novels, which is manifested, among other things, through the omnipresence of the narrator's voice, takes precedence over the aesthetic project, which includes form, style and the system of representation.

Occupying a central place in the narrative construction of La *Chrysalide* and *Ciel de Porphyre*, the narrator constantly intervenes to systematically guide the reading of the work. The presentations of male and female characters, their behaviours as well as their assertions are constantly qualified, interpreted, evaluated, judged and oriented by the narrator whose function here is fundamentally normative. The characters are there only to illustrate a pre-existing discourse.

It is safe to say that unlike Ounissi's works, the female body is present in Lemsine's text though this mainly concerns the system of representation (the description of scenes and characters). However, the narrative system, the way the plot is devised, the voice and tone of the narrator and the discursive element that it entails remain in solidarity with masculine and patriarchal values when it comes to female sexuality.

This dominance of the narrator affects the style of writing. One could think of the syntax rules applied when it comes to women's representation. For instance, when evoking patriarchal practices, the narrator uses the past simple, thereby suggesting that this situation existed in the past but is now outdated at times of independence and socialism.

This serves to mask the ideals of Algerian socialism while prescribing them. This stresses among other things, the didactic aspect of Lemsine's texts as we shall see in the next point.

Lemsine's texts are nowhere near the aesthetic and literary quality of Djabali's and Djebar's writings. The novels of Lemsine are didactic. They set out to teach the reader among other things, the history of Algeria, having as their main objective moral instruction, of women most notably. One could think of chapter 7 in *La Chrysalide* which is a treatise: dealing formally with the question of women's place in the Algerian context. The didactic aspect of Lemsine's works could best be seen in *Ciel de Porphyre* where long passages are intended as a mere recall of historical facts:

> 21 octobre 1960: Le Général De Gaulle déclare: «La paix en Algérie est devant la porte».
>
> 1961: C'est le commencement des manifestations populaires en Algérie.
>
> A Tripoli, le C.N.R.A. réuni du 9 au 12 août élit un nouveau gouvernement provisoire.
>
> Il y eut les barricades O.A.S. et leur fin pitoyable.
>
> Il y eut les manifestations d'Algériens et de progressistes français à Paris.
>
> 7 mars 1962: Conférence sur le cessez-le-feu à Evian
>
> 15 mars 1962: Des fonctionnaires des centres sociaux, parmi lesquels l'écrivain Mouloud Féraoun et 3 Européens sont massacrés à El-Biar par l'O.A.S (Lemsine, 1978, p.261).

In her instructive article 'Tradition and Transgression in the Novels of Assia Djebar and Aicha Lemsine', Nagy observes that the 1976 novel 'is written in French and contains a few expressions in Arabic, explained in footnotes' (2002, p.8). This approach to writing which entails explaining Algerian codes caught the attention of Achour in Debeche's 1947 work. She observes that:

> La présence en texte du lecteur métropolitain est également sensible au niveau du travail de «traduction» de certains mots arabes qui désignent notamment des objets de décor ou des vêtements (6) ou de certains poèmes insérés au dernier chapitre et dont les auteurs, cités en bas des pages jouent le rôle de personnages référentiels (Achour, 1991, p.25).
>
> [(6) Sarouel: vêtement ample, tenant du pantalon p. 25. Meida: table basse et ronde p. 108.]

The translation of Algerian words allowed both Nagy and Achour to conclude that the intended readership for the 1976 and 1947 works respectively is other than the Algerian audience.

The absence of Colloquial Arabic and Berber in Lemsine's texts is reminiscent of the then prevailing nationalist rhetoric which sought to exclude such dialects and which only allowed mainstream literatures either in French or Modern Standard Arabic.

Conclusion

The representation of women's identity in the 1976 and 1978 novels is shaped by social, political, and historical factors such as French colonialism and precolonial values. The context of publication saw the governments of Ben Bella and Boumedienne not going beyond the relics of the named factors to address contemporary issues. The reconciliation of colonial and 'traditionalist' values took centre stage in their political discourses. The coexistence of such opposing ways of living inspired Lemsine to create a distinct model of womanhood.

This model, however, does not correlate with her claimed efforts for ijtihad, as she states in an above quoted passage. It is true that women are defended against patriarchal norms dictated by society and culture. However, this defence is carried from a reactionary point of view. Women are only defended when they serve as sexual objects to satisfy and to procreate. This reduction of women to a biological function is in accordance with

patriarchal and traditional ideology. Additionally, we have seen that the progressive and revolutionary ideology that *La Chrysalide* claims when it comes to the status of women is mainly expressed through Khadidja and Faïza. On a descriptive level, what is technically known as ‘story’, these are positive female characters. They symbolise revolt and the challenge of sexist and oppressive values. Narration, however, leaves their struggles systematically cut off from reality: the reader is occasionally given the impression that Faïza is deviating from the accepted course, thus devaluing her subversion.

This discursive ambivalence echoed the FLN’s rhetoric on what came to be known as the mujahidat model of womanhood. The word mujahidat in Arabic means female war veterans. Flood observes that:

> While the FLN loudly promoted its strong female figureheads internationally, among them Zohra Drif… A note taken by a senior member of the FLN, Captain Si Allal in Wilaya V, supposed to have been made in 1957, confirms this: 'in independent Algeria, a woman's freedom ends on the threshold of her door. Women will never be equal to men' (Harbi and Meynier, 2004, p. 607, cited in Flood, 2017, p.113).

The exemplary mujahidat in *Ciel de Porphyre*, namely Mériem and Fella who have actively participated in the War of Liberation are assigned, after independence, roles that were conducted according to the gendered politics of the FLN’s nationalist framework. As we have seen in this chapter, neither of them questions her post-independence status as a silent woman. Silence means, among other things, the ‘officially unpronounced’ exclusion from public affairs. In agreement with Flood, one could think of the UNFA, which was a branch of the FLN, and which epitomised such ambivalent ideas about women. This so-called feminist branch accepted the FLN’s legalisation of polygamy and instituted a controversial Personal Status, which in the eyes of many scholars reduced women to sub-beings.

This model of womanhood is incomplete. We have seen in chapter 1 that on account of reformist and ‘traditionalist’ values, Ounissi acknowledges to her female characters a purely gendered and secondary participation in the War. Unlike reformism, the FLN immortalised the women who served as nurses and bomb-carriers as an example of their

progressive gender agenda. In Lemsine's texts, Mériem and Fella are similarly not denied their active participation in the War. What is worth noting, however, is that given her bourgeois ideology, there may have been no representation of rural women. Both Mériem and Fella come from the city. Moghadam notes that 'the roles played by rural women, where they served not only as militants but also cooked, cleaned, and provided shelter for the moudjahidine, have been much less publicised'. Moghadam is critical of the FLN in this passage. She goes on to quote Lazreg who notes that 'the history of women's lives during the war will remain incomplete because it does not include the standpoint of rural women – prime targets of military action' (2008, p.169).

Based on what has been concluded, one should note the following. First, in fairness to Lemsine and her source of inspiration, namely the Algerian one-party state and the bourgeoisie that culturally underpins it, it is not only in Algeria that ijtihad was not and has still not been elaborated. In all Middle Eastern and North African countries, it is either a Family Code based on taqlid (the opposite of Ijtihad) that has been applied such as in Iran, Sudan, and Yemen, or a relatively Westernised Code such as in Lebanon and to a lesser extent Tunisia. Second, it is in response to this institutionalised notion of the feminine that women's movements were organised, for the first time in the history of independent Algeria. This was immediately after the death of Boumedienne, to address among other things, FLN codes and laws. These groups were generally supported by feminist movements from Europe and the United States and therefore sought to defend women's rights according to the Western agendas discussed in the previous chapter. Third, a minority of these feminist organisations formed close ties with Arab and Muslim organisations instead. These sought to counter the prevailing ideology of taqlid and promote ijtihad instead.

This means that such Islamic feminist organisations would fight sexist laws and practices without rejecting their cultural authenticity. Instead of superficially addressing the question of women as we have seen in this chapter with Lemsine and the FLN, these intellectuals traced the roots of Muslim women's oppression and carried an in-depth critique of patriarchy. This mainly consisted in examining and questioning the interplay of colonialism, nationalism, the complex tradition/religion relationship, local cultures, and

Islamism. This feminist approach was intellectually represented by the likes of the Egyptian Malak Hifni Nassef and especially the Moroccan Fatima Mernissi.

The interplay of such factors meant that Islamic feminism was itself homogenising given that every Arab/Muslim country has its own socio-political, historical and cultural specificities. The cultural and material impact of colonialism in countries like Algeria is not found in countries like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, for instance. Islamism had a significant effect on Algerian women unlike their neighbours from Morocco. One could also think of Berber and Colloquial Arabic which are spoken in countries of the Maghreb but not the Middle East and which shaped Algerian women's identity. One could name several cultural characteristics which make of women's lives in Algeria something different from their sisters in other Arab countries. Researcher and historian Assia Djebar seems to have presented through her works, especially those published since the mid-eighties, the complexity of Algerian women's struggle against patriarchy. Her works seem to represent a sample of an Algerian feminism. The next chapter will examine how original notions of the feminine and of feminist thought were reproduced in literary texts.

Chapter 4

Djebar and Algerian feminism

Introduction

Best known by her pen name Assia Djebar, Fatima-Zohra Imalayen was born on 30th June 1936 and died on the 6th of February 2015. She was arguably the most famous and eminent author postcolonial Algeria has produced. A novelist, Assia Djebar was also a film-maker and a translator. She started her long career as author with the publication of

La Soif in 1957, before even Algeria got its independence. Her numerous novels later on garnered the author some very important prizes such as The Franco-Arab Friendship prize in 1985, the Neustadt prize for literature in 1996, and four years later, she was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. These are some awards won by Assia Djebar among many other prizes which culminated in her nomination as a member of the Académie Française in the summer of 2005, a position held by very few women, and of course, an unprecedented achievement by an Algerian author. For fifty years, she approached different literary genres such as the novel, poetry, and drama to express her affirmation as a woman and her vision of life in Algeria.

The name of Assia Djebar is often associated with women's suffering in the Algerian context specifically. Mortimer notes that Djebar 'expresses the concerns of Algerian women who are struggling to break free from their traditional role as mute objects within a rigid patriarchy' (Mortimer, 1988, p.3). This goes without saying that her works are significantly analytical of Algerian women's condition in its cultural, political, and economic specificities. Originality meant that her name will forever be carved in the list of Algerian feminists and scholars. Originality in this sense, for instance, could be seen in that her vision on the situation of Algerian women which signals a systematic evolution, and which could be summed up in three main stages, focused on the socio-political context against which women in Algeria were struggling after independence. Indeed, the evolution from one work to another corresponds to a context that saw a gradual awakening to women's political, social and economic rights since 1962. For example, the dawn of independence saw the publication of *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* (1962) which shows that there is a 'new world' that is being born, whereas its heroines are not as yet. Then the title *Les Alouettes Naives* (1967) is an allusion to the young maquisardes whose dreams were betrayed after independence. Assia Djebar succeeds in conveying the message in those early novels that women are at a crossroads after independence: they know exactly what they do not want anymore but do not yet formulate very well what they want. It is the representation of women's positive aspirations that would distinguish her later works from such early novels. This means that Djebar's early works were mainly concerned with denouncing the status quo and did not reach a maturity that would make of it a literature of solutions for women, as is the case with her later works.

Between those two phases, early and recent productions, the successful career of the Cherchell born author saw a silence of about one and a half decades, at least in terms of novel writing. The main reasons behind this absence were that Djebar chose to be completely devoted to broadening her literary expression in Arabic. In addition, the author had during this interval a growing interest in the film industry. In fact, film gave Djebar (who did not fully master Arabic) the opportunity to capture the voices of Algerian women in the vernacular languages of Berber and Algerian Arabic. Commenting on this distinguished phase in Djebar's long career, Ford notes that 'After producing two experimental films, which documented the lives of rural Algerian women in their dialectal Arabic, she returned to writing with the highly original *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980)' (2021, p. 41). Likewise, Jane Hiddleston (2006) evokes Djebar's recent novels and notes that 'The pause in her writing career however is significant because it engenders an alternative approach to novel writing and a heightened self-consciousness' (Hiddleston, 2006, p.6).

Indeed, the mid-eighties saw the return of Assia Djebar with strong works to assert herself as one of the greatest writers of the Maghreb and Francophone worlds alike. On the one hand, the novels that signalled Djebar's return to the literary scene, namely *L'amour, la fantasia* (1985), *Ombre sultane* (1987), and *Loin de Médine* (1991), deepen the questioning/denouncing initiated with *La Soif* (1957) and *Les impatients* (1958) and which continued in her postcolonial production with *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* (1962) and *Les Alouettes naives* (1967). Of course, the questioning referred to here concerns Algerian women's socio-political and socio-cultural situation, as well as relations between women and men in a world in turmoil in a community shaped by the so-called past and traditions. Translated into English in 1993 under the title of *A Sister to Scheherazade*, which is highly symbolic, *Ombre sultane* (1987) signals a continuation with those early novels when it comes to criticising misogyny. In the same way as in the earlier novels, this work focuses on themes relating to the situation of women in Algeria. It questions the fate of women in a sexist setting and describes their relationship with both men and other women and their status in society. It deepens the questioning, however, in terms of criticising specifically 'traditionalist', that is to say, typical characteristics of an Algerian gender-based society, an awareness that is not necessarily present in her earlier works.

On the other hand, the main contribution compared to those earlier novels is that female characters have become more precise: they are Algerians, Muslims, rooted in a history, an identity, a culture, and on their way to other conquests of spaces forbidden by men and society. Such a reflection, such a development in Djebar's vision is important as far as the Algerianisation of the feminist project is concerned. The sufficiently discussed theme of solidarity among women for instance, is in many ways a response to the hitherto dominant Western feminist ideology of individualism as discussed in chapter 2.

It is important to determine both these processes, denouncing women's oppression on the one hand, and looking for ways to subvert patriarchy on the other. The following two sections will look at both these aspects in Djebar's post-pause writings respectively. The chosen subheadings, Saving from Boutefnouchet's 'modele traditionaliste' and Saved to the non-Western are abstracted from Lila Abu-Lughod's (2002) famous essay *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?* Interestingly enough, Abu-Lughod argues that Western forms of feminism save too: 'When you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something, you are also saving her to something' (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p.789). Saving from something here means rejecting, and obviously denouncing in the case of authors, patriarchal practices. Saving to something, however, refers to the point where women subvert patriarchy as they subscribe to 'new' ideas and ways of living that are deemed more desexualised.

The first section will argue that Djebar's *Ombre sultane* denounces gender oppression in ways that defy universalist definitions of what is women's oppression. This means that Djebar's feminism varies according to the cultural, moral, vernacular, and material conditions of the Algerian context where Boutefnouchet's 'traditionalist' model for women prevailed, and still does in interior regions of the country. Such an approach to feminism allows Djebar to avoid the prospect that feminism reshapes the world based on values belonging to Western cultures. This because Djebar's approach to feminism seeks to ascertain what is wrong instead of focusing on what is ideal for women.

The second section will argue that *L'amour, la fantasia*, *Ombre sultane* and *Loin de Médine* criticise women's oppression without prescribing imported understandings that

are based on culturally Western experience. On the contrary, as the section will argue, in these works Djebar stresses the importance of returning to an authentic culture to help women out of their situation. For instance, to help free her sisters from the shackles imposed by cultural traditions of non-religious origins that shape gender roles in Algeria, Djebar published *Loin de Médine* (1991). A few years were devoted to the writing of this novel, on account of its importance following the 1988 bloody riots which signalled the start of the 1990s Algerian civil war. Djebar was aware that women were the ones to pay most dearly for it, thus she decided to return to the source, to show how the prophetic message had been intentionally misused to serve misogynistic and personal interests. Nagy makes a remarkable observation when she declares that Djebar's 'writing is embedded in the (Islamic) tradition as an axis of religious and social identity' (Nagy, 2002, p.2). Interestingly enough, Nagy goes on to note that 'Seemingly, it is Lemsine who "respects" tradition more, but in reality, it is Djebar whose work nourishes from the vernacular, albeit the open rebellion of her characters against the domineering traits of patriarchy' (Nagy, 2002, p.2). The section will discuss this return to an authentic culture through three poles: the veil, sexuality, and the harem.

If Djebar seems to have sought to determine specific forms of gender oppression and to have been inspired by authentic strategies to address them, she also seems to celebrate Algerian women's cultural specificities. *L'amour, la fantasia*, arguably Djebar's most famous novel, was published in 1985. This date saw a rise of feminisms on an international level as previously indicated in the literature review. This rise one must stress, is also, and most notably, a project to advocate national, regional, and cultural specificities. One pole through which cultural specificity could be efficiently examined is language. To speak of language in the case of Algerian culture is no easy matter. Salhi paraphrases Sadiqi who observes that Algeria 'has always been a culturally and linguistically complex speech community' (Sadiqi, 2003, cited in Salhi, 2008, p.87). Thus, the overarching argument of the last section could be thought of as follows: although overtly Djebar writes in French, her language use expresses connotations that are deeply imbedded in an Algerian dialect. This helps Djebar reveal the complexity of women's experiences in Algeria. This complexity is embodied in the diversity of languages that constitute the Algerian dialect. The inclusion of Colloquial language for instance, frees

Djebar's *L'amour, la fantasia* (1985) from the traditional discourses expressed in Classical Arabic such as in Zhor Ounissi's novels (see chapter 1). It simultaneously extricates her text from the linguistic registers and literary canons with which French, the coloniser's language one must not forget, remains burdened.

Saving from Boutefnouchet's 'modele traditionaliste'

The fundamental discourse of Djebar's works, especially *Ombre sultane* (1987) consists in denouncing women's oppression within the specific framework of the Algerian 'traditionalist' society. One must stress that the alternating narrator of this novel for instance, holds sexist traditions, not traditions per se, responsible for the plight of Algerian women. While it may seem that the critique of sexist traditions in this sense is a critique of patriarchal tradition in different forms, sexual, marital, political, social and economic, it is also a critique of the constituent nucleus of the Algerian patriarchal unconscious. As previously discussed in chapter 1, this Algerian unconscious is clearly condensed in Boutefnouchet's 1982 sociological work, where he minutely demonstrates the principles of what came to be known as the 'traditionalist' model.

To justify and value the 'confinement' of women, Boutefnouchet explains that the life organisation of the 'ayla', the Arabic word for family, through some kind of labour division makes of the home an exclusive kingdom for women. Man only comes into this space to fulfil his biological needs, to eat and sleep, while the traditionalist woman makes of it a kingdom of her own, where she can dominate, work and make decisions. Man is excluded and woman must thus be happy to be locked up (1982). This perception, which as we have seen is supported by authors like Zhor Ounissi, is based on the principle of strict separation between the public and the private spheres. Barbé paraphrases a passage from Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*, to show that 'One of the cornerstones of Muslim social organization is the notion of hudud, in other words the "sacred frontier" that separates both men and women' (Mernissi, 1994, cited in Barbé, 2003, p.56). This separation between men and women however, developed through time to acquire a spatial dimension (interior/exterior) to serve sexist interests. Algerian women, similar to

their sisters across the Maghreb and Arab worlds, have been for centuries subjected to ‘confinement’ behind the high walls of the harem.

When it comes to the seclusion of Algerian women in particular, it is worth paying attention to the notion of sight, ‘le regard’. According to Boutefnouchet, one main reason why women have to be contented with reclusion is because they, from inside the house, can keep an eye on the outside world. A woman keeps an eye on the outside world out of screened windows or their garden hedges, which are enough to enable her to stay in touch with what is happening outside: ‘La femme, à l'intérieur de la maison, a un œil sur le monde extérieur; des fenêtres grillagées ou des haies de jardin lui permettent de suivre ce qui se passe à l'extérieur sans être vues’ (Boutefnouchet, 1982, p.74). *Ombre sultane*’s response to Boutefnouchet’s justification lies in that Hajila succeeds in redefining the function of sight as a physically liberating sense instead. She gradually develops her ‘regard’ while still recluse. One could probably think of the scene where Hajila, along with her mother, come to visit her marital house for the first time. The imposing height of the apartment offers a panorama overlooking the city from its lofty windows. This leaves her entranced by this brightness, which tempts her to explore the exterior. She immediately starts by distancing herself from her mother. Straight after this, she ventures out to the balcony. The balcony, a ‘border zone’, a place of in-betweenness’, between the private and the public space, allows her to sharpen her sense of sight:

> Tu t'étais aventurée sur le balcon. Le panorama te laissa émerveillée, par ses contrastes de lumière, surtout par l'exubérance des couleurs, comme sur le point pourtant de s'évaporer sous le Ciel immuable
>
> Toi, tu fixais toujours le paysage, les yeux aveuglés par cet éclat du jour inaltéré. Pour la première fois dominer la ville, ne plus se sentir un grain de poussière dans un des cachots du monde (Djebar, 1987, p.23).

This makes it possible for Hajila to discover the outside world as a first step towards physical emancipation. This because the light beaming inside the domestic feminine space would only entice her to physical excursion later on in the story. Here we find a significant divergence between Djebar’s and Boutefnouchet’s perceptions of sight.

Whereas Boutefnouchet holds that sight is enough for women to keep them at home (1982), Djebar (1987) looks at the senses including sight as a means of resistance. In other words, Djebar's female character seeks to recuperate the very notion which justifies this 'traditionalist' model.

The conceptualisation of sight in this sense is also a response to Boutefnouchet's spatial dichotomy. Boutefnouchet's traditional model of femininity is essentially theorised based on the spatial dichotomy private/public. Djebar's recognition of a 'border zone' however, a third space, is a challenge of this simultaneously imported and 'traditionalist' notion of private/public. Hajila's sight is developed in this space of 'in-betweenness', such as in the aforementioned scene taking place in the balcony. In the same novel, Isma, the man's first wife, recollects some telling memories from a bygone past. In one scene, we learn that one of her uncles decides to cover the patio, which eventually prompts all females inside the harem to show solidarity among each other so that they can stop the project. Most importantly, she recollects the sociability of the patio. This house, where many generations of women remained apparently 'imprisoned', is nevertheless perceived by the young Isma as a vast and open territory, 'Comme si la maison devenait la ville entière' (Djebar, 1987, p.86). On this note, it is worth observing that in Arabic, both Standard and Colloquial, there is no equivalent term for private and public. In addition, the interior, which is commonly known as the harem, is not necessarily the isolated space that Westerners and orientalists have so often mistakenly imagined. Nor is it the ideal and 'preserved' world proudly portrayed by 'traditionalists'. Djebar describes this world of women and rewrites women's roles providing an original description. Of course, as we shall see in the next section, the interior space in the Algerian context influences the exterior. For this to happen, however, there must first be an intermediary space.

The second principle of which Djebar is critical in Boutefnouchet's model is only partially developed in this section. It will also be fully developed in the next section. This concerns the 'traditionalist' function of the veil. Boutefnouchet's gendered notion of spatial division is inextricably linked with a certain form of veiling which is based on sex-segregation and which makes women invisible creatures in society. The traditional society that Boutefnouchet idealises in his work is one that is mainly based on what he calls the

‘physical integrity’ of women. This is a principle which according to him is important for the organisation of the Algerian society. This because ‘physical integrity’ is what guarantees the purity of the offspring. So that a ‘traditionalist’ family can be perpetuated, Boutefnouchet explains, it is necessary to make sure that its children are undoubtedly its own (1982). It is worth noting that this is one main difference between Boutefnouchet’s model of family organisation and Western forms of family organisation for instance. Indeed, only a child of paternal consanguinity can have the right to be the representative of the generation-to-generation ascendants. The family in this sense is identified first and foremost with the male founder. On his name the family evolves. On his name, it becomes a clan, and on his name, it becomes a tribe. He explains that: ‘Il n'y a pas de place dans la famille algérienne traditionnelle à l'enfant naturel, illégitime’ (Boutefnouchet, 1982, p.73). On this note, it is worth adding that this situation of non-acceptance into the traditional family as far as ‘illegitimate’ children are concerned is commonly denounced by both male and female Francophone authors in Algeria who support what is referred to as ‘universalist’ feminism in chapter 2. Denunciation however, does not simply aim at improving the miserable situation of abandoned children, which would have been humane in its own right. Denunciation in works generally targets the ‘backwardness’ of Algerian ‘traditionalist’ society which considers children born out of the bond of marriage as ‘illegitimate’. It demands that other forms of bonding such as concubinage be accepted by both family codes and society.

What is of interest to this section, however, is that Boutefnouchet justifies an already existing set of safeguards in the form of patriarchal behaviours, to protect ‘physical integrity’: ‘C’est pour assurer cette intégrité physique que de multiples précautions seront prises par la société: port du voile, mise à l'écart de la femme lors de la présence d'étrangers dans la ′ayla’' (Boutefnouchet, 1982, p.73). We can see that according to this perspective, veiling is closely associated with women’s seclusion (see chapter 1). This definition of veiling corresponds to the veil’s last stage of meaning in the history of Islamic tradition, in other words, the stage when the veil became a means to control women (see for instance, Mernissi’s *The Veil and The Male Elite*). In *Ombre sultane,* Hajila’s use of the veil as we shall see in the next section is deeply embedded in Islamic culture, and corresponds to the veil’s early stages of meaning instead.

Hajila's redefinition of veiling according to a desexualised interpretation of Islam deepens the questioning of sexist practices as it focuses on criticising specifically 'traditionalist' tradition, not veiling per se. This specificity in terms of what to criticise signals a development in Djebar's feminist vision. This means that her earlier works, remarkably similar to the 'universalist', not to say Westernised writings discussed in chapter 2, blur the line between veiling and women's seclusion and as a result reject the veil altogether. For instance, *La soif* (1957), Djebar's first novel, not only ignores the immediate political context which saw an unprecedented and historical war, but also follows the development of its heroine, Nadia, who struggles for her emancipation in ways that do not take into account the Algerian and Muslim cultural context. Nadia is presented as lacking consideration for both members of the community she lives in and for communal values and traditions. She seeks the attention of male admirers including the seduction of her friend's husband, Ali. Most importantly, the female protagonist does not accept to conform to the demands of Muslim heritage, as she prefers to celebrate European ways of clothing and appearance. This leaves her alienated and forces her to conform to traditions at the end of the story. Interestingly, Hiddleston concludes that 'At the end of the novel, Nadia's behaviour is in some ways as artificial or self-conscious as at the beginning, and the 'self' she seemed to be looking for remains as elusive, as singularly evasive, as ever' (2006, p.24). It is worth observing that in such earlier works as La Soif, Djebar's presentation of women's aspirations as inherently inauthentic for Algerian women does not necessarily mean endorsing a more conservative agenda. This because her more recent works focus on showcasing original strategies to subvert patriarchy. On this note, Nagy notes that 'In *Les impatients* women were accomplices to perpetuating patriarchy, but in *Ombre sultane* Djebar characterises female relationships in a different light…' (Nagy, 2002, p.6). Indeed, unlike Nadia, Hajila struggles for emancipation without rejecting her culture, as argued in the next section. This allows her an identity and her behaviour is not artificial.

The third pillar, which is at the centre of Algerian women's 'traditionalist' model and which Djebar aims at recuperating, is the theme of the hammam. Traditionally, the hammam, like Boutefnouchet's notion of sight, justifies the ever-lasting seclusion of women. It is worth revisiting chapter 7 in *La Chrysalide* where Lemsine, through a non-fictional style, accurately describes the daily experiences of traditional women. Like Boutefnouchet,

Lemsine is aware that the dowry paid to a bride is a valuable investment as it pays for her education to perform such duties as cooking, housework, knitting, and weaving. Like Boutefnouchet, Lemsine is also admiring of the whole domestic economy that is monopolised by women:

> Peut-on s'imaginer la somme de labeur consenti pour fabriquer ces objets folkloriques des souks: paniers, sacs en raphia, couvertures, coussins, tapis aux couleurs chatoyantes?
>
> Et les loisirs? De quoi sont-ils faits? Si la femme déshéritée peut aller dans les souks vendre le fruit de son travail, et par là même flâner à travers les dédales des ruelles pour proposer sa marchandise à celles qui vivent cloîtrées dans leur cour ... ces dernières au contraire après leurs tâches domestiques, s'inventent des loisirs dans la confection de pâtisseries, la couture ou les bavardages (Lemsine, 1976, p.71).

While this remains purely domestic-based, 'traditionalist' women's only way out of 'confinement' seems to be the hammam, where, according to Lemsine, 'elles se racontaient leurs soucis et leurs joies ... Faisant l'éloge ou la critique ... Les plus commères se spécialisant dans la destruction d'une réputation avec inévitablement des renseignements mystérieusement authentiques' (Lemsine, 1976, p.72). Such traditionally feminine practices, which help perpetuate traditional prejudices against their sex, are responded to in *Ombre sultane*. First, the theme of the hammam in the novel serves to liberate women, instead of further justifying 'confinement' as is generally the case in Algerian traditional society and as it is recurring in novels. One could most probably think of the symbolic scene where, meeting at the hammam, the co-wives wash each other's backs, and Isma hands Hajila an extra key to the apartment to leave her 'confinement' whenever she wants. However, what is not explicitly communicated in the novel is that, through the theme of the hammam, the female protagonist/narrator destabilises the sexual domination of women.

In accordance with the anti-patriarchal discourse expressed by the alternating narrator of the story, the way in which the plot itself is devised exposes the sexualised aspect of the theme in 'traditionalist' settings. Visiting the Turkish baths in the case of Hajila means

cleaning blood and performing ablutions, which are all results of that sex act. Readers can see that the themes of female sexuality and the hammam are closely related. The narrator denounces the subjugation of women, sexuality wise, in the sex act leading to Hajila's demand to visit the hammam. Narrator of this scene, Isma draws a picture of 'the man' as a sexual predator and this corresponds to his general description as only an embodiment and an illustration of the macho ideas and the phallocratic prejudices that he holds on women. This could be seen in this famous passage: 'Le viol, est-ce le viol? Les gens affirment qu'il est ton époux, la mère dit «ton maître, ton seigneur»' (Djebar, 1987, p.66). Arenberg observes that 'in this scene, the husband is always referred to as 'il', a stylistic aspect which underlines his role as the faceless savage aggressor' (Arenberg, 2008, p.358). In fact, this scene is described in such phrases as:

> Tu ne veux pas, mais c'est bien!… Faut-il céder?… Quand le phallus de l'homme te déchire… tu hurles dans le silence, dans ton silence: «non!… non!» Tu te bats, il te fouaille, tu tentes de revenir à la surface. «Laisse-toi faire!» susurre la voix à ta tempe. La déchirure s'étend… la brûlure s'avive, dans le noir qui tue en toi les images de défense… «Il voit mes jambes! Il voit mon sang! Il en a acheté le droit!…»… il est le maître depuis six mois (Djebar, 1987, p.67).

Straight after this scene, Hajila wants to clean the blood and perform ablutions by visiting the hammam, which could symbolically be read as a desire to eradicate the tradition of controlling women. It is worth observing that, as the man throws Hajila a towel that lies over her stained legs at the end of the sex act, she refuses to clean herself, as if to say an 'aggressor' cannot wipe blood to suddenly efface the traces of 'rape': 'Ton sang a une odeur; tu refuses de te laver' (Djebar, 1987, p.67). Next, Hajila demands to visit the hammam, targeting the phallocentric. She is aware that any restrictions to join the Turkish bath seriously targets the sexual potency of the man, 'Tu tamises un bref éclat de dérision: qu'il sache que, s'il refuse, tu ne te gêneras pas pour déclarer: «Lié, tu étais un homme lié, pauvre mâle!»' (Djebar, 1987, p.71). This questions the patriarchal order by destabilising the phallocentric that underpins it. In fact, the acknowledged subjectivity of Hajila for the first time in the story leaves this space, the hammam, paradigmatic of women's assertion in a different light.

Indeed, straight after the aforementioned scene where Hajila targets the husband's potency by wanting to visit the hammam, readers can notice a change in the passive roles of the female character. In the following passage for instance, we read: '«J'ai le droit au bain maure! J'irai au bain maure!» déclares-tu; tu te raidis face à lui, après avoir ouvert. J'irai au bain maure du quartier! répètes-tu plus haut, en le laissant entrer' (Djebar, 1987, p.71). The use of words such as 'défie' and 'dérision' signals a transformation in the attitude of Hajila towards the husband, which is also observed by the narrator as we can read in this passage: 'Ce lendemain du viol, tu ne le crains plus. Il te suffit de te rappeler tes déambulations, ton corps sans puanteur aux jambes, auréolé de la lumière solaire quand tu traversais les espaces de la ville' (Djebar, 1987, p.71).

Fourth, narration in *Ombre sultane* is critical of Boutefnouchet's 'traditionalist' model in terms of the roles played by mothers and old women in perpetuating patriarchal traditions to the detriment of young women. It is worth noting that the place of women in this 'traditionalist' model is also justified by the fact that if they (women) succeed in safeguarding their 'purity' as explained just above, they will be respected as mothers, and will even acquire patriarchal power, a phenomenon Boutefnouchet considers some sort of 'matriarchy':

> Il paraît étonnant, dans une société caractérisée par un rigide patriarcat, qu'il puisse à un moment ou à un autre de l'évolution et de l'organisation de la *'*ayla être question d'un certain matriarcat venant battre en brèche l'autorité du père.
>
> Toutefois, plus l'effacement de la femme est rigide, lorsque celle-ci est jeune, plus il s'assouplit au fur et à mesure que la femme a des enfants et qu'elle prend de l'âge.
>
> Aussi il arrive, dans cette évolution vers une plus grande souplesse à l'égard de la femme mère et âgée, que le respect qui lui est dû par les autres hommes de la famille, l'affection qui lui est portée par ses enfants devenus alors adultes et mariés, font que la vieille mère ait, en délégation d'honneur, une partie de l'autorité du *pater-familias* (Boutefnouchet, 1982, p.72).

It is worth drawing the line between *Ombre sultane's* critique of the patriarchal aspect that

is part of the mother-daughter relationship in the ‘traditionalist’ context on the one hand, and the ‘universalist’ conceptualisation of the relationship as one that should conform with Western models of family organisation on the other. In the set of novels discussed in chapter 2, for example, narration generally questions the mother-daughter relationship not to spot the patriarchal tradition that is part of such bonds so much as to reject the traditional extended family. Indeed, daughters are detached at some point in their lives from the parental family and especially the mother to support the notion of the nuclear family, which is exactly what the couple of Saber and Sabrina struggles to realise throughout the story. It is worth noting that historically, the nuclear family which refers to a household consisting of a father, a mother, and their children first existed in England. With the emergence of the industrial revolution and capitalism, the nuclear family was a financially viable social unit and gradually became widespread in all Western industrialised countries. Under such circumstances, young individuals were able to save money to form their own families. Sociologist Brigitte Berger (2002) explains that this family organisation was able to adapt and to respond to the mobile and unstable circumstances of the industrial world. Interestingly, Berger notes that under such circumstances, its members developed bourgeois and capitalist habits of work and saving (Berger, 2002). On this note, it is worth observing that the form of feminism discussed in chapter 2 would similarly defend capitalist values as individualism for women against the extended family where such filial relations are strong and important in perpetuating masculine domination.

Instead of rejecting the traditional mother-daughter relationship completely as would the heroines of the novels discussed in chapter two, the narrator of *Ombre sultane* emphasises the very passages where the mother perpetuates patriarchal values. The suffering, monotony, and unhappiness which Touma’s speech inflicts deep in Hajila are dramatised by the narrator: ‘Je sors chaque jour, je ne fais rien de mal dehors! protestes-tu… pleurniche Touma, la face baignée de larmes, les yeux fixés avec sévérité sur tes mains, sur ta robe’ (Djebar, 1987, p.53). Hajila evolves as an imprisoned object at the beginning of the story. Through the mother, tradition imposes its prescriptions on her clothing. The mother controls Hajila’s movement. She decides her marriage to help the family out of their difficult pecuniary situation. In her mother's eyes, she has reached the

age when she has to be locked up in her husband's apartment, because traditional society does not tolerate a young girl of marriageable age enjoying her freedom. The young woman is taught by her mother to accept the prohibitions and demands of the traditional milieu: 'Elle te fit la leçon une heure durant. Méthodique, la mère. Logique. Elle dévida haut son projet: … «...Ce gendre, ton maître, n'est-il pas le premier signe de la justice qui se réveille»' (Djebar, 1987, pp.53-54).

Irigaray (1981) is particularly critical of this relationship when she describes it as some sort of 'competition' of mothers and daughters among themselves for the same space, which in this sense means the attention of the father. This is at work in the text. The narrator likens Touma's reaction on her learning about Hajila's confessions, namely her secret outings, to her own frenzy when she remembers her departed husband every time she marks the anniversary of his death. In defending the man's right to 'confine' her daughter, the mother revives the same emotions to losing her own husband. The father, or the paternal masculine, becomes a common denominator in the equation of restraining Hajila to nothing more than a confined object. Touma admits her share in this space of objectivisation as she admits while still rebuking her daughter that they should be 'les mêmes doigts d'une seule main' (Djebar, 1987, p.53). The narrator's satirical position on the interference of the mother could be seen in stressing the inconsistencies of Touma's patriarchal discourse, as Hajila corrects Touma on the cause of her father's death. This is an indirect questioning of the discourse being communicated by the mother, as if the narrator wants to tell the reader Touma's discourse lacks credibility. Touma reinforces this idea of 'competing' for the same space of objectivisation when she emphasises the man's superiority over her daughter by claiming her right, too, to be socially protected by the man, on account of the latter being a relative to her as well: 'Lui, ton maître, il pourra… Je sais bien que lui aussi a honte de nous voir logés misérablement, nous sommes ses parents maintenant!' (Djebar, 1987, p.54).

However, Irigaray's critical view on the situation aims at changing this reality which sees the maternal 'sacrificed' in favour of the paternal. She counters this objectivisation of the maternal feminine on the level of the mother-daughter relationship as she introduces the concept 'fertility'. 'Fertility', whereby the mother should be fertile with her daughter, refers

to a mechanism of re-appropriating to women the difference of their gender which allows them an identity distinct from motherhood (1977). Ringrose quotes Whitford who explains that:

> it is a picture which allows women an identity *distinct* from motherhood … So *fertility* should be read … as a counter term to *sacrifice*, to indicate the possibility of a different mode of social organisation in which woman's difference is represented, symbolized, and codified.* (Whitford, 1991, cited in Ringrose, 2006, p.169).

The conversation that takes place during Touma's visit to see her daughter echoes Irigaray's idea of 'fertility'. As we have just seen, the objectification of Hajila is in many ways 'legitimated' and perpetuated by her mother. However, this conversation signals a transformation and a development in what could be seen as Hajila's quest of subjectivity. The narrator focuses on how Hajila refuses to participate in a process that should see her identify with her mother to relate to the man as objects: 'Tu regardes, sans écouter. La vision prend le dessus; tu interromps le son, tu coupes le cordon des lamentations. Touma te fascine par la danse avortée qu'elle amorce…' (Djebar, 1987, p.53). Although Hajila refuses to listen to her mother's 'preachings' and warnings against leaving the husband's home, she still wants to see her mother. Sight allows the young woman to relate to her mother as a separate subject. In this scene, watching the mother without listening to her aims at 'purifying' the relationship from the patriarchal ideology with which such relationships are burdened in 'traditionalist' settings. In this way, the narrator in 'tu' presents the mother-daughter relationship as allowing the coming into being of a female subjectivity. This is significant to the plot of the novel considering that the subsequent chapters recount the coming into being of a young woman's identity that subverts patriarchy. Of course, Hajila continues to stroll around the city and decides to try going out both veiled and unveiled to form her own opinion on the issue.

Saved to the non-Western

It is true that at this stage of the analysis, Djebar may seem to agree with Khodja in her

critique of Boutefnouchet's views on women. However, Khodja's strenuous critique, which as we have seen in chapter 2 is reproduced in texts by what could be seen as Algerian Westernised authors, is ideologically different to Djebar's. Khodja severely criticises the 'traditionalist' to justify her personal preference of Western lifestyles. Although choosing to support a Western model of womanhood is an absolutely indisputable right, her personal preference is noted here because a sociologist might reasonably be expected not to give their personal opinion on whatever phenomenon and must instead explain it in order not for them to be both judge and party. This is the same remark Khodja herself makes to Boutefnouchet.

At a time when Algerian women's emancipation seemed to be presented as a choice of being either Algerian or Western, Djebar took aim at this restricted definition most notably in her later novels. The critique of the specific as we have seen with some distinct traits of 'traditionalist' patriarchy in the previous section allows Djebar to determine the very practices that stand in the way of her sisters' emancipation, without expressing a radical rejection of all local traditions and ways of living. Additionally and most importantly, this enables Djebar to denounce women's oppression without necessarily justifying the celebration of Western and alien values. This is why in her 1991 work, there is a clear emphasis on the Islamic values that women need for their struggle against gender oppression. The values in question are mostly taken from the Prophet's biography and the ways in which the Prophet's wives and daughters exercised agency (see for instance, the next section). On a theoretical level, it is worth keeping in mind that the resort to an authentic culture to claim women's rights is commonly held by other 20th century Arab feminists. The Moroccan Fatima Mernissi for instance, is aware of the task of first freeing Islam from the orientalist imaginary and from Western stereotypes on women in Islam. She supports this position in her *Beyond the veil* by quoting the Egyptian Qasim Amin as she emphasises how he shows that women's seclusion and their exclusion from social affairs was due not to Islam but to secular customs 'which prevailed in nations conquered by Islam and did not disappear with Islam's teaching' (Amin, 1928, cited in Mernissi, 1975, p.22).

It is hardly possible to discuss Islamic feminist thought without evoking the theme of the

veil. As we have seen in chapters 1 and 2, Ounissi's conservative narrator celebrates veiling, whereas Ben's secular narrator rejects it respectively. They do so however, for the same concern: women's seclusion. This restricted definition one must observe, is not in agreement with veiling in Islam. In fairness to both these authors, it is true that along with veiling, women's 'confinement' to the domestic sphere is still a main characteristic of many Arab and Muslim societies. Boutefnouchet's 'traditionalist' model in Algeria is one example. However, one must not forget that many Muslim women are unveiled, and many veiled women are increasingly leaving their harems. Additionally, it is worth observing that these two practices, veiling and reclusion, existed long before the advent of Islam. Furthermore, the veil began to be used in Islam no less than five years after its advent fourteen centuries ago. Mernissi convincingly argues in arguably one of her most famous passages that the Prophet of Islam, during those five years, lived somewhere open to visitors. It was not until these latter began paying him untimely visits she explains, that he introduced veiling, and which one must observe, was intended as a curtain to protect the Prophet's family's privacy.

In *Ombre sultane*, the use of the veil by Hajila in her quest for freedom challenges the idea that Western ethnocentric values such as unveiling are the only way towards women's emancipation. The narrator in *Ombre sultane* unfolds the positive meaning of the veil by highlighting its liberating function. Throughout the narrative, the reader is made aware of Hajila's will to assert her acquisition of freedom, which is in this case her emancipation from her daily 'confinement' and oppression: the achievement of which the narrator associates to her veiling. Phillipe Barbé (2003) observes that 'If Hajila has managed to trespass the sacred frontier that separates her domestic space from the public sphere, it is primarily because she uses a veil' (Barbé, 2003, p.68).

This attitude showcases the original function of the veil which evolved historically and socially to lose its intended meaning, that of preservation of women from the gaze of males, to serve patriarchal purposes instead. Barbé goes on to convincingly argue that 'While the *hijab* evolved against the will of the prophet into a means of controlling Muslim women, it is important to note that the veil is now sometimes used by women as a practical tool of emancipation (Barbé, 2003, p.69). Interestingly enough, Barbé finds support to his

argument in Assia Djebar's collection of stories, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, where she notes, he adds, 'the only free women in the modern city are in fact the veiled cleaning ladies who leave their homes early in the morning to go to work' (Djebar, 1985, cited in Barbé, 2003, p.69).

On the level of narration, there is a valorisation of the respect that the veil earns Hajila among men when she is outside the domestic sphere. It is worth noting that public disrespect for women who rightfully choose to unveil - which must be condemned - is what perpetuates the existing patriarchal boundaries between masculine and feminine spaces in Maghrebi contexts such as Algeria. In the 1987 novel we read:

> Your despair is suddenly lifted as you laugh at the idea that every veiled woman has one father, one husband, but many, many sons! All these men, out in the street, 'All my sons!' You are surprised to find yourself searching for insults, obscenities, you who, only a few months before, condemned the coarse language of the women in your neighbourhood! (Djebar, 1993, p.34).

Similarly, it is because of respect that the use of the veil evolved in Islam. Indeed, originally intended as merely a curtain, the very first women to wear the veil in Islam were the wives of the Prophet. The main reason was to distinguish them from other women who did not believe in the prophecy of Mohammed. As the number of the Muslim population began to grow, women who converted to this religion emulated the wives of the Prophet, pretty much for the same reason. They wished to distinguish themselves from non-Muslim women. This because the non-Muslim population at the time lived in unprecedented ignorance where all sorts of barbaric practices were prevalent, including the sexual abuse of women, which eventually prompted Muslim women to protect themselves.

Djebar's awareness of the vital role that the veil could play in emancipating women is rooted in early 20th century feminist works by Arab women, mainly Egyptians. This, however, is not the case for the above quoted Qasim Amin who advocated unveiling for women in a similar fashion to Khodja. Malak Hifni Nassef (1962) who at the turn of the 20th century showed that a solution for women could still be found in Islam, had her views

silenced at least until the last decades of the century thanks in part to the emergence of Arab feminism which gave voice to such ideas. Leila Ahmed argues that Nassef's voice 'searched a way to articulate female subjectivity and affirmation within a native, vernacular, Islamic discourse' (Ahmed, 1992, p.174), and she goes on to observe her awareness of the hostile Egyptian society reserved for unveiled women.

It is for this same reason that a category of Algerian women preferred - and still do - to wear the veil. These are the women who represent what Souad Khodja (1985) prefers to call the 'purist Islamic' model in Algeria. According to the sociologist, these women were pioneers in tracing a path towards gender equality despite the patriarchal traditions around religion (1985). On this note, it is worth clarifying that these patriarchal traditions are mainly the result of a long process of male-centred interpretations of the Qur'an, what is known as shari'a. This is why these women advocate belief in purism. However, to return to the precepts of the Qur'an in which could be found all sorts of rights and duties for an organised society according to these women, there must first be a reinterpretation of the word of God from a desexualised perspective. Unlike patriarchal interpretations, which sought to control women by imposing a gendered division of spaces, the very notion of the veil as liberating for women from the conquering gaze of men corresponds to the views of such women. Souad Khodja has conducted a number of interviews with these women and has come up with the following declarations:

> Il est normal que les femmes qui se promènent dans la rue, le dos nu, les jupes courtes et maquillées se fassent agresser par les hommes, car ce sont elles qui les provoquent (Khodja, 1985, p.114).
>
> Toute femme qui dispose librement de son corps, en le parant, le fait délibérément, pour provoquer l'homme, et lorsqu'elle se fait agresser, elle n'obtient que ce qu'elle cherche (Khodja, 1985, pp.114-115).

While the function of the veil according to these women may express an original form of female agency, one must be cautious of the misogyny and anti-Western thoughts contained in such views. In the same way that Western universalisations of feminism are criticised in chapter 2, the idea that veiled women are worthy of respect whereas unveiled

women are not is objectionable. For these interviewed women, although the veil provides females with physical emancipation, instead of further questioning patriarchy by showing that some Algerian women may wish to unveil if the outside world was more welcoming, they end up questioning whether misogyny against unveiled women is really unnatural. Djebar's narrators however, reject this characterisation. Of course, while these views represent ordinary females who adhere to this model of womanhood, scholars whose views on women's emancipation are also rooted in Islamic culture do not simply seek to locate the source of a given practice to value or criticise it. One example of this tendency is the idea of attributing unveiling to Westernisation and thus rejecting it. Instead of adhering to such ideas, Islamic feminists and academics examine the effects that such a practice may have on Muslim women. While they do not systematically reject non-Muslim traditions such as Western ways of clothing, they also refuse to simply suggest that anti-traditional ways of clothing are the only expression of feminism. This is why along with the celebration of the veil's liberating function, Djebar's narrator also responds to 'traditionalists' as we can read in the below quoted passage. The passage also confirms our interpretation of 'traditionalist' thought being rooted in the Ulemas' teachings as argued in chapter 1. In Djebar's 1985 *L'amour, la fantasia* we read:

> A la ville, grâce à un mouvement nationaliste de «musulmans modernistes», se forgeait une jeunesse nouvelle, de culture arabe.
>
> Ces medersas ont pullulé depuis. Si j'avais fréquenté l'une d'elles (il aurait suffi que mon enfance se déroulât dans la cité d'origine), j'aurais trouvé naturel ensuite d'enturbanner ma tête, de cacher ma chevelure, de couvrir mes bras et mes mollets, bref de mouvoir mon corps au-dehors comme une nonne musulmane! (Djebar, 1985, p.206).

One should observe however, that Khodja's (1985) description of the model is not without judgment and personal bias. In a similar fashion to her presentation of Boutefnouchet's 'traditionalist' model, though less severely, Khodja considers this purist model 'rigid' and confined to a 'strict' interpretation of religion. How can this stand when in this same section Khodja recognises these women's openness to progressive and modern values? How

can this be regarded as a ‘strict’ and ‘orthodox’ reading of the teachings of Islam when she originally defines the model as not opposed to Western techniques and technology when required? The answer is simple when considering that Khodja expresses her views in favour of ‘universalist’ emancipation in her following section. Indeed, ‘universalism’ in this sense as discussed in chapter 2 consists mainly of borrowing Western values. This could be seen in her questioning of the basis upon which Algerian ‘purist’ women justify veiling as being a protection from the gaze of males. Her questioning shows the sociologist’s valorisation of the secular, given that according to her, faith should only be considered an individual matter. This substantiates her neglect of the nature of Algerian society which remains Muslim and fundamentally communal.

In addition to the veil, in *Ombre sultane* the denunciation of sexist oppression in matters relating to sexuality is also rooted in an Islamic culture. The narrator questions the sexual domination of Hajila by ‘the man’. Accordingly, whenever a submissive attitude implicating forced sex is expressed, the narrator, as a matter of course in the type of text in question, dramatises the scene and accentuates the unfair and inhumane acts performed by ‘the man’. This is manifested in the form of long explanatory passages to express Hajila’s pent up feelings, or even in moral sentences either questioning the attitudes of ‘the man’ or justifying the transgression of Hajila. A metaphysical discourse relating either to religious values or at least to human nature is constantly advanced to excuse the rebellious conduct of Hajila.

This narrative tone of denunciation with regards to the sexual domination of ‘the man’ is in agreement with Cheref’s passage on the notion of Tamkin in Djebar’s *Ombre sultane* which he defines as ‘the woman's obligation to comply with the sexual demands of her husband all the time and his 'divine' right to physically batter her if ever she refuses to comply’ (Cheref, 2010, p.96). He makes reference to Mai Yamani whose examination of Tamkin in the Qur'an leads her to note the differentiation between the ‘real meaning of the verse’ which entails reciprocity between husband and wife on the one hand, and the oppressive sexist interpretation on the other (Yamani, 1996, cited in Cheref, 2010, p.15). The narrator resorts to religion to support this justification of Hajila’s subversion of patriarchal traditions sexuality wise, which once again confirms the non-Western nature

of the feminist project in the novel.

In addition to the veil and sexuality, ‘other’ women’s agency is also present in what is generally described as purely masculine spaces in Maghrebi settings. Female agency in Djebar’s works is not necessarily modelled according to the Western. In chapter 2 for instance, we have seen that women play, or are at least expected to play, visible roles in the public sphere. In this process, Bouraoui and Ben provide a negative representation of Algerian women’s world inside the house. Djebar describes her sisters’ experiences in this internal world from a different perspective as we shall see shortly. This perspective one must not forget, is made possible thanks to the author’s biography.

Indeed, unlike the vast majority of boys and girls of her age, the indigenous Djebar was ushered into the coloniser’s world. Djebar so often describes the first time her father teacher took her to a French school. There she discovered a modern world that is so different to the maternal world she had known. This said, it is important to observe that she was not completely cut off from the maternal world. Little Djebar found herself growing in-between two civilisations. She is no longer the same as her traditional mother, nor is she completely transformed into a French girl. Interestingly enough, Professor Zahia Smail Salhi notes that this location of in-betweenness allowed Djebar ‘to look at her own culture, not as an outsider, but as someone who could look at the harem from a distance and be able to see what those who look from within could not see’ (Salhi, 2008, p. 80). It is worth adding to Salhi’s observation that it is not only those who look from within that could not see, but also those in the outside. This because while the former continue to ignore the mechanisms responsible for segregation against themselves, the latter, Western scholars most notably, cannot spot the merits of life inside the harem (see for example, Nelson, and also Rosemary Sayigh).

Placed in this location of in-betweenness, Djebar succeeds in evaluating the notion of power. The author/narrator of the 1985 semi-autobiographical work dwells on the active roles played by the female members of the family from inside the harem and how, most importantly, these roles contain a significant element of the social and the political. As far

as the latter is concerned, Djebar sheds light on how women from inside the harem shape male politics. Because this research uses a sociological lens, it is worth reminding that the Algerian society has for long centuries been basically communal. Women in different contexts, in the family as in neighbour communities for instance, constitute important forms of grouping for this communal society. In *L'amour, la fantasia* narration stresses roles played by women's inter-family groupings in shaping the different nationalist struggles since 1830. In fact, the novel narration regularly oscillates between recounting the history of Algeria under colonialism and of anti-colonial struggles on the one hand, and the day-to-day experiences lived by indigenous women on the other.

As far as the social is concerned, it is particularly worth observing the female agency described in a sub-chapter entitled *Trois Jeunes Filles Cloîtrées*. Through a narration of some telling experiences during her summer holidays, Djebar sheds light on how public life for instance, was significantly shaped by women from inside the harem:

> Cet été, les adolescentes me firent partager leur secret. Lourd, exceptionnel, étrange… Les jeunes filles cloîtrées écrivaient; écrivaient des lettres; des lettres à des hommes; à des hommes aux quatre coins du monde; du monde arabe naturellement (Djebar, 1985, p.20).

> —Jamais, jamais, je ne me laisserai marier un jour à un inconnu qui, en une nuit, aurait le droit de me toucher! C'est pour cela que j'écris! Quelqu'un viendra dans ce trou perdu pour me prendre: il sera un inconnu pour mon père ou mon frère, certainement pas pour moi! (Djebar, 1985, p.23).

This female agency, this influential connection with the outside world is unknown to the males of this society and remains untold in the texts studied in the previous three chapters. In the same sub-chapter, we learn that only the postman knew, though astonishingly, about these letters which poured into his post office from so far away. In similar ways to the imagination-based Western/orientalist observer, the postman has never actually seen these sisters and whom he only imagined to be princesses: 'Il devait

rêver aux «amis» des jeunes filles, aux «amoureux» pensait-il' (Djebar, 1985, p.21).

Like Lemsine's notion of the isolated harem in chapter 7 of *La Chrysalide*, the postman supposes that the girls never went out, except to go to the most chic Moorish bath in the neighbouring village.

Djebar and Islamic feminism

The promulgation of the 1984 *Family Code*, which turned out to be a turning point in the development and history of Algerian women, is universally considered as misogynistic and representative of the very problems facing Algerian women at the time. It is in many ways an institutionalisation of some basic elements in Boutefnouchet's model. Djebar's return to writing the following year seems to have looked to address the Code while celebrating an authentic identity for her female characters. Both the spotting of the very practices hindering gender justice in Algeria on the one hand, and the claiming of female agency within a religious framework on the other, respectively discussed in the last two sections, take centre stage in *Loin de Médine* (1991).

As noted in the literature review, religious fundamentalism is an international phenomenon, and any examination of Algerian women's situation according to it, regardless of the Algerian socio-religious and socio-political specificities, would only homogenise their experience. It is true that *Loin de Médine* is partly written against the fallacy that the rise of Islamists at the dawn of the 1980s would bring about social and gender justice. While this fallacy has been sustainably belied by the likes of Gadant (1995) who convincingly argued that it is based on unsound arguments, it is also true that the inferiorisation of women in Algeria was engrained in the highly controversial *Family Code* of 1984. What is of interest to note is that like religious fundamentalism, this code is based on a monolithic, masculine interpretation of the Qur'an.

After 1962, it is true that Algerian women obtained equal rights in political as well as in civil terms, which would theoretically equate them to Western and European women, or at least to Tunisian and Lebanese women in that respect. One could probably think of the

fact that as early as Algeria got its independence, women had an indisputable right to vote and stand for election. One could also think of the fact that the first National Assembly saw a higher female representation than in Britain at the same time. This was not the case, one must observe, when it came to women's personal status. Of all available documents on the status of women, the 1984 code seems to be the most representative of what could be seen as institutionalised patriarchy.

The resort of the novel to the biography of the Prophet is another way to respond to the *Family Code* in question. As we learn in Bennoune's instructive article, the code was described by the then Minister of Justice in the FLN's official newspaper *El Moudjahid* as being guided by 'the correct traditions of the prophet' (Bennoune, 1995, p.5). It is worth examining however, the very 'traditionalist', or at least the misogynistic principles upon which the Code is based, and how *Loin de Médine* directly responds to these specific and institutionalised norms.

First, article 8 legalises polygamy, which is also an indisputable right for males in Boutefnouchet's 'traditionalist' model. Narration in *Loin de Médine* dwells heavily on the experience of Fatima, daughter of the Prophet, and her struggle against this practice. Most importantly, narration focuses on the prophet's reluctance to Ali's second marriage, when Fatima is his first wife. There is a dramatisation of the scene in which the prophet Mohammed and Fatima learn about this. The repetition of certain passages, such as those on Fatima asserting herself and symbolically saying no, and her father's emphasis on his solidarity with his own daughter, accentuate the inhumane treatment and its repercussions on the feelings of the wife:

> Les fils de Hichem ibn Moghira sont venus me demander mon avis à propos du mariage de leur fille avec Ali ibn Abou Talib. Je le leur interdis!... Je ne permettrai pas ce mariage, du moins tant qu'Ali n'aura pas auparavant divorcé de ma fille! Alors seulement, il pourra épouser leur fille!... Car ma fille est une partie de moi-même. Ce qui lui fait mal me fait mal! Ce qui la bouleverse me bouleverse! (Djebar, 1991, p.74).

Second, article 11 neglects the wife's say on her potential marriage. The article reduces this alliance between two individuals to a mere contract that is exclusively decided

between the potential husband and the sponsor of the future wife. Symbolically, it is safe to say that a woman can only be married with, and is not allowed to 'marry', where 'marry' is an active verb, a typically ‘traditionalist’ tradition. A widow who is for instance approached for a second marriage may have her own son or grandson from her earlier marriage as her male sponsor.

The narrator of *Loin de Médine* questions the passive roles usually assigned to women as advised and stipulated in article 11. Accordingly, the narrator showcases Sawda’s active role to marry the Prophet: ‘Revenue veuve à La Mecque, elle y a épousé, alors qu'elle a déjà cinquante ans, le Prophète’ (Djebar, 1991, p.51). Sawda is alone responsible for her marriage, given that her parents are disbelievers in the Prophet. Revisiting the Prophet’s matrimonial experience with Sawda, the narrator seems to question the code’s status of women as minors, underage individuals whatever their age may be. The other example one could probably think of is of the unknown woman who comes to the Prophet and asks if she can marry him. The Prophet then apologises to the lady and informs her that he is not interested: ‘elle se dressa à ses côtés et dit tout haut: «Ô Envoyé de Dieu, je suis venue à toi pour me proposer comme épouse!»’ (Djebar, 1991, p.110).

Third, although article 12 seems to give women the right to choose their future husbands, it should be observed that this is only superficial. The final word remains still the exclusive prerogative of the father, unless the woman takes it to court to settle the dispute with her own parents, which is unrealistic given the traditional nature of the Algerian family. In an undeclared response to this article, the narrator of *Loin de Médine* resorts to the biography of the early followers of the Prophet. Hind, also known as Oum Salama, loves Abou Salama and decides to leave the parental home to join him in Medina. The narrator opens up the possibility that she may well have eloped. ‘elle finit ou par s'enfuir et suivre un groupe de convertis, ou par obtenir du clan familial l'accord pour son départ’ (Djebar, 1991, p.53). An answer to article 12 can also be found in Oum Salama’s experience since after the death of her beloved, she refuses a proposed marriage with Abou Bekr, the closest friend of the Prophet, and the first head of the Muslim community after the Prophet’s death.

Fourth, the other important axis through which the subversion of patriarchal tradition could be discerned in *Loin de Médine* is the question of inheritance. The family code in question stipulates that males have the right to inherit twice more the inherited value than an equal female family member, while ignoring the several instances where Muslim women can receive a bigger share than men. Instead of simply defending the right to equal shares as would 'universalists', Djebar's narrator defends women's rights to inheritance according to Islamic law. This could be seen in the positive description of Fatima's agency. Days after the death of her father, the Prophet of God, she was disinherited. In the process of claiming this legal right, Fatima confronts Abou Baker, not only the closest disciple, but also the head of believers:

> La révolution de l'Islam, pour les filles, pour les femmes, a été d'abord de les faire hériter, de leur donner la part qui leur revient de leur père! Cela a été instauré pour la première fois dans l'histoire des Arabes par l'intermédiaire de Mohammed! Or, Mohammed est-il à peine mort, que vous osez déshériter d'abord sa propre fille, la seule fille vivante du Prophète lui-même! (Djebar, 1991, p.79).

There is also a strenuous critique of the masculine, monolithic interpretation of the holy book and a valorisation of feminine perspectives. This is shown in the form of long descriptive and dialogic passages expressing Fatima's pent-up thoughts, but which she succeeds in expressing. Fatima's claim to her right of inheritance is accompanied by moral passages questioning the attitudes of the calife, as well as justifying the rebellion of Fatima.

Fifth, article 31 imposes other restrictions which are nevertheless not imposed on men. The article stipulates that an Algerian woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man, which does not apply to Algerian men who can marry whomever they want. This principle is also defended by traditionalist Ounissi, as stated in the introduction to chapter 1. Djebar however, through the valorisation of certain details in the life of Zeineb, daughter of the Prophet, writes back to such gender inequalities:

> Sa soeur aînée, Zeineb, resta longtemps sans s'islamiser, par amour du mari qu'elle préféra au père, tandis que ce dernier respectait cet amour. Elle devint ensuite

musulmane, mais protégea l'époux prisonnier, tout en promettant de ne plus avoir avec lui commerce (Djebar, 1991, p.61).

Other articles on matters relating to divorce and the personal status of women in Algeria generally are responded to in the novel. Other than divorce, issues such as groundless divorce, acceptance of domestic violence against wives, non-housing after divorce, marital obedience to husbands, are also critiqued and countered by alternative solutions other than those proposed by shari'a and traditions. A discourse relating either to religious values, or at least to human nature, is constantly advanced to free Muslim women. Djebar is interested in returning to the source, to a pure interpretation of Qur'an that does not serve personal and sexist interests.

Writing the feminine in the Algerian dialect

In *L'amour, la fantasia*, Djebar sought to set Algerian women's identity in a specific historical context providing an important window on Algerian culture. The date of the novel's publication, 1985, saw the emergence of feminisms all over the world as previously indicated. The emergence of different forms of feminism, what is also known as decolonial feminism, means in many ways the celebration of national and cultural specificities. Similarly, the celebration of Algerian women's cultural originality is central to Djebar's 1985 work. One important pole through which Djebar seems to have put forward Algerian women's culture and their agency is language. Language is all the more important to examine in this chapter considering that all interwar governments (1962/1991) chose to promote cultural projects (concerning language) which effaced the particularity of an Algerian female population. For instance, the one-party state which ruled the country for almost three decades acknowledged Modern Standard Arabic as the only official and authentic language.

This political project to favour Modern Standard Arabic was not merely a matter of making official a language, but of importing an alien, Middle Eastern culture in what is known as the Arabisation project. In this process, local languages: Colloquial Arabic and Berber

were completely marginalised. For instance, in 1980, the Bendjedid government used violence against peaceful demonstrators who claimed the recognition of Berber identity and language. Salhi is particularly critical of the Algerian governments after 1962 being responsible for what she considers a 'linguicide'. According to Salhi, this linguicide is planned against native languages, namely Colloquial Arabic and Berber, to serve an authoritarian project of Arabisation (see for instance, her article, *Between the languages of silence and the woman's word: gender and language in the work of Assia Djebar*).

Interestingly enough, Salhi notes that Djebar considers Classical Arabic symbolically violent: the prolific francophone author is critical of Classical Arabic, which she associates with political discourse, and which she most importantly observes, remains a masculine language. The imposition of Classical Arabic thus leads Salhi to note that Algerian women were left disempowered because not being able to write their own oral culture - which is mainly expressed in Colloquial Arabic as well as in Berber - means that these women have their active roles, as mostly recurring in the collective memory, effaced. It is in this sense that Salhi examines Djebar's project to rewrite women's silenced voices. Salhi particularly focuses on the revival of a cultural identity through folktales, proverbs, oral narratives etc.

The argument of this section as stated in the chapter introduction, however, is that through a certain use of language, Djebar expresses connotations that are deeply imbedded in an Algerian dialect. Indeed, although like Lemsine, Djebar was often reviled for writing in French, a significant distinction between the two authors should be noted. While the former's deployment of French shows a kind of exoticism such as the translation of Arabic words and expressions into French similar to works of literature produced by French settlers (see for instance chapter 3), the latter on the contrary, does not write in the language of the 'Other'. Djebar incorporates her typically Algerian sounds and rhythms. Cheref (2010) notes that 'Djebar's grappling with the language issue and her endeavour to give French an Arabic/Tamazight dimension is perceptible in her work' (Cheref, 2010, p.90).

The use of certain - and telling - words from Colloquial Arabic most notably is crucial to

the preservation of authenticity for many reasons, though this remains very complex. Djebar observes the complexity of translating the Colloquial word ‘hannouni’:

> Comment traduire ce «hannouni», par un «tendre», un «tendrelou» ? Ni «mon chéri», ni «mon cœur». Pour dire «mon cœur», nous, les femmes, nous préférons «mon petit foie», ou «pupille de mon œil»… Ce «tendrelou» semble un cœur de laitue caché et frais, vocable enrobé d’enfance, qui fleurit entre nous et que, pour ainsi dire, nous avalons (Djebar, 1985, p.95).

For Djebar the resort to authentic words and expressions is important mainly for two reasons. First, it revives Algerian culture. Second, it creates a bridge between uneducated readers as we shall see, and the author. This second reason could also be thought of as a project to promote communication among Algerians generally as we read in these telling passages:

> un seul mot, dans une confidence inopinée, a fait jaillir la rencontre : «hannouni».
>
> Le frère, resté adolescent par son sourire de biais — humour distrait, tendresse déguisée —, évoque devant moi le dialecte de nos montagnes d’enfance. Les vocables de tendresse, les diminutifs spécifiques au parler de notre tribu d’origine — à mi-chemin du berbère des crêtes et de l’arabe de la cité proche (antique capitale, ruinée puis repeuplée par l’exode andalou)
>
> — Il suffit qu’elle prononce «hannouni» à mi-voix, et tu te dis, sûr de ne pas te tromper : «Elle est donc de chez moi !»
>
> satiété : «mon foie… hannouni !», l’aïeule qui ne le dit qu’aux petits garçons, parce qu’elle n’aime pas les filles (sources de lourds soucis), qui (Djebar, 1985, pp.94-95).

It is worth observing that there are situations that are intensely lived and that cannot be expressed in any language other than in one’s mother tongue. This is the case of love

experience in *L'Amour, la fantasia,* where the narrator describes the ambiguity of her attitude towards French words in such a situation. This said, one must not forget that thanks to her father, French became the instrument of the author/narrator's first sentimental adventures, though these were forbidden by this same father due to qur'anic law. It is worth reminding that it is also thanks to her father that her mother learned French and thus dares call her husband by his name 'Tahar'. This is in itself a challenge to the Arab tradition of not naming the husband who is generally referred to as 'rajal', which means the man. In addition, this French education allows the mother to receive a postcard. From the father, sent to her own name. This affirmation of the wife's personality, thanks to her aptitude to name and to be named which is alien to Arab society, seems to be a liberation from tradition and an accepted appropriation of the language of the Other. Up to this point, French freed women from 'Arab patriarchy' as is the case with the women authored texts examined in Chapter 2. Djebar however, is aware that French, her infantile language, describes love experiences in defamiliarising, and at times in childish and ridiculous words and expressions.

On this note, one must not forget that Standard Arabic is not less problematic. Although it is rich enough – and adapted – to express love, this is forbidden to women who for centuries remained locked in taboos transmitted from generation to generation. Although this thesis covers primary sources that were published between 1962/1991, passages such as we read in Djebar's 1994 *Vaste est la prison* are important to observe. Under the weight of taboos that the author/narrator carries within her, she feels deserted and isolated from the songs of Arab love. She explains that Arabic conveys a non-love, which translates into expressions of war. This is the case of the word 'edou' by which city dwellers designate the husband and which literally means « the enemy ». The author/narrator of this autobiographical work feels immersed in a night of a lost language. She, who lives a love story, does not find in either of the two cultures that bathe her (Arab and French), the words to express it.

The description of women's situation through words that are both typically Algerian and feminine is a response to this exclusively bilingual word. This eliminates the traditional and patriarchal discourses of both Classical Arabic and French and as a result, paves the

way for new forms of expression. On this note, Djebar is convinced that it is only through a diversity of languages that she and her sisters can express themselves:

> nous disposons de quatre langues pour exprimer notre désir, avant d'ahaner : le français pour l'écriture secrète, l'arabe pour nos soupirs vers Dieu étouffés, le libyco-berbère quand nous imaginons retrouver les plus anciennes de nos idoles mères. La quatrième langue, pour toutes, jeunes ou vieilles, cloîtrées ou à demi émancipées, demeure celle du corps que le regard des voisins, des cousins, prétend rendre sourd et aveugle (Djebar, 1985, p. 203).

Djebar's recognition of multilingualism as far as Algerian women are concerned is also a direct response to the hitherto culture-oriented and class-based literatures of post-independence. Indeed, the Algerian novel was during the first three decades after independence written either in French or Modern Standard Arabic. The use of the afore-mentioned languages as quoted just above enabled Djebar to distance herself from the ideologies that burden mainstream literatures. The use of words in Standard Arabic, Colloquial dialect, and Berber is a decentering of knowledge and thus of power, most notably for women. Of course, the defamiliarising effect of writing in Classical Arabic and especially in French left the masses, which at the dawn of independence were largely uneducated and whose vast majority were women, isolated from the content of their country's emerging literatures. Access to women's social and cultural backgrounds on the level of the literary – and to some extent on the level of the media – remained thus for many years a privilege of the elite.

The cultural and intellectual content of mainstream literatures – both in French and in Classical Arabic – remained monopolised by French and Arabic educated minorities respectively. The disconnection of the masses at a macro level is mainly down to the Arabisation project, which was considered under the rule of president Boumedienne as a central component of Algerian nationalism. To borrow Daoudi's words, 'the struggle over power was disguised in different ways, such as presenting Arabisation as equal to Algerianisation' (Daoudi, 2018, p.466). Interestingly enough, Daoudi is critical of Classical

Arabic being considered an authentic language. Her examination of Sharabi's 1988 work enables her to situate a social, economic, political, and cultural rift between upper classes who master standard Arabic and the vast majority of the population who speak local languages and who as a result, remain marginalised.

Djebar's use of Colloquial Arabic is a means to address this superficiality of official languages and thus the exclusion of the Algerian public. In *L'amour, la fantasia* for instance, Djebar prefers to use words such as 'hannouni', 'el-djezair, 'l'oued', 'Djedda', 'djebel Chenoua', 'kanouns', 'medjnoun', 'chikhats' . In the same novel, Djebar, in addition to using colloquial expressions as we have just seen, adapts French to her own cultural, religious, and intellectual backgrounds. For instance, she uses the verb to read (lire) not to express its common and literal meaning which is to look at a written matter and comprehend its meaning, but to express the verb's dialectal meaning. She explains that '«Elle lit», c'est-à-dire, en langue arabe, «elle étudie». Maintenant je me dis que ce verbe «lire» ne fut pas par hasard l'ordre lancé par l'archange Gabriel, dans la grotte, pour la révélation coranique' (Djebar, 1985, p.203). This is in agreement with Salhi's assessment of language in Djebar's works. Indeed, regardless of the fact that she looks mainly at Djebar's film, *The Nouba of the women from Mont Chenoua* (1979), regardless of the fact that she studies Djebar's language in terms of silence and voice, she concludes that:

> The French language in Djebar's hands has become subject to many alterations, additions, cadences, and images unfamiliar to French language and culture. She skilfully weaves into the language turns of phrases and syntax that result in a stylistic signature that is typical of the Djebarian text. As such, Djebar is doing violence to the French language, in other words she is counter-colonising it and at the same time enriching it (Salhi, 2008, p.97).

As we have seen previously, Djebar's resort to an authentic Islamic culture to defend women against patriarchal oppression is a response to the 1984 *Family Code*, which is paradigmatic among other things, of the increasingly dominant Islamist ideology during the 1980s. It is also true however, that her use of Colloquial language is another direct response to religious fundamentalism. It is worth observing that Classical Arabic is not

only burdened by traditions, most notably patriarchal ones, but the position held by Classical Arabic in Algeria was directly perpetuated by Islamism. One should probably go back to the colonial era to trace this rapport of Arabisation/Islamisation. The Ulemas' famous motto of cultural nationalism: 'Arabic is our language, Islam is our religion, Algeria is our country' materialised after independence. Indeed, this nationalist ideology, albeit expressed on a cultural level during the colonial era, was openly expressed on the political level after 1962.

The educational policy undertaken after 1962 is a good example of the close relationship between Arabisation and Islam. The dawn of independence saw a stricken country on all levels, especially in matters relating to education, since the vast majority of the masses were both illiterate and literally uneducated. The successive governments of both Ben Bela (1962/1965) and Boumedienne (1965/1979) sought to tackle this issue, ignorance among the masses, by relying on an influx of Arab teachers recruited from neighbouring countries and especially the Middle East. One must observe however, that not only were these teachers often not qualified for teaching, but most importantly, they were essentially religious men. This means that the language they taught was not one that promotes progressive values, but one that is deeply embedded in traditionalist, religious, and patriarchal ideologies.

In her article entitled *Multilingualism in Algeria: between 'soft power', 'Arabisation', 'Islamisation', and 'globalisation'*, Daoudi is particularly critical of the Arabisation project being a means of soft power. The soft power in question is one that according to her is exerted by Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, on newly independent countries such as Algeria. Through the Arabisation project, Daoudi reveals the workings of Middle Eastern influences such as the rise of religious fundamentalism and its impact on women's Personal Status Law. We understand that the question of language is thus directly related to basic life details such as clothing. She interestingly notes that:

> The islamisation of the country was embodied in the appearance of a whole new mood dominating the public sphere which was fully occupied by bearded men wearing qamis and sirwal (such as worn in Afghanistan) while Islamist women wore

a plethora of new islamic veils (Hijab, niqab, jilbab, chador…) which were all alien to Algerian society (Daoudi, 2018, pp.468-469).

Djebar's use of Colloquial language helps revive authentic ways of clothing as far as Algerian women are concerned. Djebar's narrator in *L'amour, la fantasia* valorises certain clothes for women that are representative of an authentic Algerian culture. This is a challenge to the imported forms of veiling as in the above-quoted passage. In an autobiographical passage in her 1985 novel, Djebar describes the specific look of female musicians in her grandmother's town as 'Elles arrivaient dans leurs toges usées et leurs dentelles sous le haïk défraîchi, leurs tambours emmaillotés dans des foulards' (Djebar, 1985, p.163). Valorisation could be best seen in the narrator's emphasis on the haïk's liberating function such as through sight. The regard for women is a common theme in Djebar's novels. The composition of the said Algerian form of veiling is one that guarantees the subversion of the blindness that traditional society imposes on women: 'ces «voyeuses»… dissimulent leur face entière, sauf un œil ; leurs doigts sous le voile maintiennent un petit triangle ouvert étrangement… L'œil minuscule et libre des inconnues enveloppées de blanc tourne à droite, à gauche, scrute les bijoux des dames' (Djebar, 1985, p.229). Djebar's valorisation of the haïk's liberating function singles out historical and cultural specificities to help understand Algerian women's complex agency. Indeed, this Algerian form of veiling is a portable intermediary space.

It is worth observing that the relation between Colloquial language and Algerian ways of veiling is not merely one that revives a marginalised culture. Indeed, Colloquial Arabic constitutes one very function of the veil. Algerian dialectal Arabic inscribes in the language itself the risks incurred when violating this order (veiling) which was transmitted by the Prophet of Islam. In Colloquial Arabic, going out unveiled means going out 'naked'. This gives the impression that the veil is THE very covering garment. In *L'amour, la fantasia*, Djebar's narrator informs the reader that 'Le dévoilement, aussi contingent, devient, comme le souligne mon arabe dialectal du quotidien, vraiment «se mettre à nu»' (Djebar, 1985, p.178). Interestingly enough, Djebar exposes the workings of these cultural connotations on the level of language in her next novel, *Ombre sultane*. After several months of secret outings, Hajila's worst fears come true. On her way back from one of

her daily strolls, she finds her husband on the steps of their apartment. When he questions her, Hajila confesses that she has enjoyed walking through the city streets 'naked,' in other words, unveiled. The word 'naked' enrages Hajila's husband, who threatens to blind her with a piece of broken bottle: 'Je t'aveuglerai pour que tu ne voies pas! Pour qu'on ne te voie pas!' (Djebar, 1987, p.96).

It is in this sense that Djebar's language expresses personal experiences. Particular attention should be paid to the physical violence Hajila is subjected to at the hands of her husband who attempts to blind her with a broken whisky bottle, which is also a recurring incident in *Vaste est la prison* (1994), and which most importantly, is relevant to the author's own life as Djebar admits falling victim to such a violent act. Ringrose quotes Gracki who declares that 'Djebar courageously reveals and writes about her own wounds at the hands of her husband' (Gracki, 1996, cited in Ringrose, 2006, p.24). Thus identifying the narrator with Djebar means that her work proceeds from an autobiographical project. In the same way as in Assia Djebar's other works, in *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) and more particularly in *L'amour, la fantasia* (1985), certain aspects of the life of the narrator are close to the biography of the novelist. This allows for a literature of self-disclosure, the aim of which is to foreground Djebar's own experiences, which are a product of a particular cultural milieu.

In so doing, one must stress that bringing the French language to express a purely Algerian reality is not without linguistic complexities and alterations. Djebar's French, when it comes to passages expressing the authentic, no longer conforms to grammatical rules. It is worth observing that this unconventionality on the level of writing does not contradict her writing status as one of high literature. On the contrary, this adds to her novels being texts of great literary quality. The writings of Lemsine for instance, have no common measure with those of Djebar. The former uses simple and linear structures and plots, while the latter demonstrates a modernist approach as she usually commits to a poetic style. Miraglia (2005) explains that Djebar's writing is 'foncièrement poétique plutôt que didactique' (Miraglia, 2005, p.65). Miraglia's observation is very relevant to the point being made here especially as it is common for her to compare Djebar's and Lemsine's writings elsewhere in her work.

Djebar's unconventional style of writing – most notably on the grammatical level – unlike Lemsine's didactic one, enables access to taboo issues. In other words, unconventionality on the thematic level distorts conventional ways of writing. This is particularly telling when it comes to describing Algerian women's experiences. Indeed, such kinds of description require a mastery of linguistic codes that are associated with a specific community speech. Women's community speeches, at least before Djebar resumed writing during the 1980s, had been mainly expressed orally given the nature of Algerian popular culture. For Djebar to put the authentic oral into written French goes through a process of borrowing and especially adapting words and expressions from Berber (Tamazight) and colloquial Arabic. In *L'amour, la fantasia* for instance, we read: 'Ma sœur, y a-t-il eu, une fois, pour toi dommage?' (Djebar, 1985, p.226). The narrator of *L'amour, la fantasia* explains that this expression was used by colonised women to refer to rape by French soldiers in their colloquial community speech. The French that Djebar uses in this passage, to describe her sisters' specific experiences, remains remarkably characterised by spontaneity. It is worth noting spontaneity, because local languages Colloquial Arabic and Tamazight, especially the former since Tamazight was finally recognised as both a national and an official language according to the 2016 constitutional amendments, does not follow any syntactic or semantic rules. This is something that Djebar reproduces while writing in French.

Conclusion

To wrap up, Djebar's texts do not simply adopt a documentary approach to literature. If the other women authors that are discussed in this thesis wrote to mirror society, the aspirations of a given class and the ideals of a given school or people, Djebar's literary production since the mid-eighties does not set out simply to describe the outside world. Indeed, the texts selected for this thesis attest to the author's more critical approach. Her works contain both a critique of the social norms which are sexist as well as a formulation of values. Most importantly, this formulation consists in the quest for authentic values, the values of a genuine human community. One main aspect of this formulation is that

Djebar's texts propound the idea of an Algerian feminism, echoing the growing intellectual activism of Muslim feminists across the Arab and Muslim region. The common rise of Islamism, which for feminists meant the prospect of a world made solely for men, evoked strong but different reactions among both feminists and women authors. In her 1991 work most notably, Djebar claims an authority to interpret Islamic teachings and the holy book from a gender-just point of view.

In addition, the liberating but authentic lifestyle that she chooses for her heroines acknowledges the active warfare roles played by her sisters for the independence of their country as we learn in *L'amour, la fantasia*. This is in agreement with Frantz Fanon's recognition in *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* (1965) of the full contribution that Algerian women had made as militants and bomb carriers. In this sense, Djebar's 'reinvented' French divulges some very important experiences and contributions made by Algerian women during the War. Women's experiences include the violence and rape suffered at the hands of French soldiers, which the colonial state narrative never wanted to admit. Simultaneously, this recognition responds to the national narrative adopted by the post 1962 Algerian governments, which exported the ideal figure of the silent Algerian woman. In this sense, Djebar succeeded in rewriting the narratives of history and culture.

General Conclusion

The Algerian interwar era (1962/1991) saw the publication of a set of novels by women. These novels are generally subversive. They make the reader question the status quo and reflect on the socio-political order. As for Francophone women-authored texts, they have as their main objective the denunciation of women's oppression and the improvement of their condition. They deal with taboo issues such as 'marital rape', children born out of a conjugal bond, domestic violence, and female sexuality. Under the conservative autocracy of the one-party regime, many Algerian women authors had to publish their works abroad as a result, in France most notably. Additionally, under the growing menaces of Islamists during the 1980s, most of them had to flee the country for their lives. Much to their credit, Algerian women authors chose to pursue writing for the

collective well-being to the detriment of their personal interests.

Most importantly, the four analytical chapters of this research have shown that women's writings in Algeria are not simply aimed at the denunciation of sexist oppression from the - generally unquestioned and homogenising - universal feminist point of view. The diversity of feminisms defended in women's novels reflected the complexity of the Algerian interwar society. This is an important feature serving to distinguish women's interwar fiction from foreign literatures, colonial Algerian literatures, as well as Algerian male-authored texts published after 1962. Distinction from foreign literatures can be seen in that Lemsine and many of her fellow Algerian women authors responded to a particular situation of sexist oppression, which the specifically Algerian cultural context imposed on women, and which often remains unknown to women living elsewhere. As a result, Algerian women authors had to create relevant strategies and conceive of distinct feminist approaches to subvert hardships 'exclusively' encountered by Algerian women. In fact, each of the selected novels for this work contains a facet of the socio-political context that backgrounded women's situation in Algeria. The four chapters taken together show that interwar women's situation is multi-layered and has economic, political, historical, sexual, and religious dimensions.

We have seen that the latter in particular (the theme of religion) crosses all the texts selected for this thesis. This because the relationship of Algerian women to Islam is a very complex subject. Additionally, religion was - and still is - an influential pole that orchestrates notions of gender relations in Algeria. Lazreg notes that 'the study of women in Algeria, like that of women in the Middle East, generally takes place within a paradigm that gives religion a privileged explanatory power' (Lazreg, 1990, p.756). The place of women in the studied novels is in the case of Ounissi dictated by *taqlid* and religious teachings, in other cases, (francophone works), it is defined in relation to it: if Ounissi's notions on the place of women are unquestionably religious, some francophone authors espoused a radical Feminist viewpoint against religion, others a moderated one, others a religious though scholarly-informed and selective one.

Except for Djebar's texts, the works selected for this thesis blur the line between the

teachings of Qur'an on the one hand, and shari'a on the other. The former call for equality and gender justice, whereas the latter had been for long centuries the sole domain of male scholars and is in many ways considered to be sexualised. The radical, Westernised authors discussed in Chapter 2 blur the line between Islam as a spiritual religion and Islam in its political dimension and as a result rebuff Islam altogether. This Feminist rejection of religion - and often local cultures - does not necessarily improve women's lives as we have seen in Chapter 2. Interestingly enough, Lazreg observes that 'The Kemalist Revolution in Turkey (1924) banned religious law and replaced it with civil law. However, Turkish feminists have time and again documented the reproduction of gender inequality' (Lazreg, 1990, p.756). In more than one novel, Bouraoui warns against the danger of Islamists whom she occasionally refers to as the 'brothers of Khomeini'. Her ardent opposition to Islamism is expressed from a feminist point of view. What is of interest to note is that her texts take place during the 1970s, which is prior to the rise of religious fundamentalism in Algeria. Khomeini only came to power in 1979 and the perceived Iranian influence reached Algeria the following years. Interestingly enough, her female narrator, Fikria, refers to Islamists as 'les barbes brunes' (Bouraoui, 1991, p.73) which during the 1970s may possibly have described a religious Muslim man, but certainly not an Islamist. It shows how the two are indistinct in the eyes of the narrator. One main reason of this blurring, not to say external view, is the following: Bouraoui's frequent choice of the 1970s as a temporal setting for her characters may well have been the fact that this decade coincided with her childhood which must have marked her in one way or another. One must not forget however, that Bouraoui's childhood was spent away from Algeria, in several countries including Switzerland.

We are nevertheless provided with one important facet of Algerian women's situation and their relation to a country in increasing political turmoil. The rise of Islamist ideology in Algeria by the mid-eighties was meant as a struggle to maintain a certain national independence: it was meant as a safeguarding of a cultural and religious identity which was seen as threatened by Western economic powers. In agreement with Bouraoui, it is true that for women this meant that religious fundamentalism came to reinforce values of a pre-existing 'traditionalist' culture, not to say patriarchal society. Traditions such as veiling, polygamy, and domestic confinement became not only characteristics of a

‘traditionalist’ society but also symbols of cultural resistance. In this context, the secular feminism advocated by the post-Boumedienne women’s movements, backed by a category of Algerian women, and showcased by Ben and Bouraoui was considered a threat to the Arab-Muslim national identity. This threat was unequivocally warned against by Ounissi, not only as author but also as politician and in parliament. The cultural antagonism presented by both Ounissi and Bouraoui shows how their sisters were at the centre of an ideological confrontation between supporters and opponents of Islamist movements. The condition assigned to women on both sides constitutes a dividing line between reactionaries and progressives, between supporters of a reconstruction of society on identity values as based on religion on the one hand, and defenders of a democracy anchored in a ‘universal’ principle of gender equality on the other.

The relationship of Algerian women to Islam is too complex to be summed up in the Islamism/Feminism opposition, which reached its peak in the 1980s. As previously stated in the literature review, religious fundamentalism was - and still is - an international phenomenon, more so in Arab countries. To reduce the question of Algerian women to this factor is to overlook the specific socio-religious situation of Islam and Algerian women. In Algeria as in most Muslim countries, though in different ways and to different degrees, the religious is inextricably intertwined with the political. In his study of religion and modernity in Algeria, Addi points out that:

> the dominant political culture in Muslim societies is still characterised by religious methods of legitimation, which is to say that it is a political culture where political space is not differentiated and is not yet autonomous with respect to the religious sphere (Addi, 1992, p.81).

Prior to the rise of religious fundamentalism, the socialist governments of Ben Bella and Boumedienne sought to build a state based on principles of Islamic socialism. The one-party state which ruled the country for almost three decades was mainly formed of Islamic and socialist (leftist) factions whose normally conflictual ideas ‘harmoniously’ co-existed. This created a ‘new’ lifestyle and a cultural environment that inspired the way Algerians, especially the middle-class and upper working classes, went about their lives as Muslims

living in a newly decolonised setting.

Furthermore, the practice of Islam in Algeria results in a specific socio-religious situation that leaves religion and local traditions inextricably and distinctly associated. The texts covered in this thesis express well-defined and distinct strategies - not to say ideologies - to respond to this overlapping of religion and tradition. This overlapping has been discussed through certain themes like virginity, the harem, the veil, polygamy, and repudiation. With the exception of *Loin de Médine*, no novel deals with all these themes, though we find a consistent thread of criticism that runs through the literature and that crosses at least two or three themes.

As far as female virginity is concerned, one aspect of the aforementioned overlapping is that while sexual relations are only permitted within the framework of marriage as dictated by Islam, this prohibition is overemphasised by the notion of family honour in Maghrebi societies. A girl who loses her virginity out of marriage risks being punished, stoned, sometimes killed by her male guardian. Ben and Djabali differ in the ways they describe and criticise some practices relating to female virginity compared with Lemsine and Djebar. In *Sabrina* as in *Agave*, there is a critique of women's tradition - not to say obligation - of giving proof of their virginity: the commonly held tradition of showing the bloodied linen, proof of defloration for the female and of virility for the husband. This practice (showing the bloodied cloth), however, was common among some clans and families living in interior regions and the countryside. Additionally, this practice was most notably prevalent among the lower classes. Surprisingly enough, this is willingly practiced by well-off women such as Farida in *Agave* and is required in the city of Boufarik for Sabrina by a rich and bourgeois family in Ben's novel. This is reminiscent of Bouraoui's defamiliarising identification of bearded men with Islamists in the 1970s. Djebar's similar description of the sex-act in *Ombre sultane*, however, does not focus on criticising the tradition as such. Critique is rather directed against legalised rape, which is often women's plight in 'traditionalist' settings. Whereas Ben's and Djabali's narrators focus on rejecting the tradition per se, Djebar describes the scene more realistically with the aim of denouncing women's oppression, not to play down the symbolic of female virginity. Additionally, Djebar's description of the defloration act is realistic. Hajila as we have seen

is uneducated and comes from a poor background, unlike *Agave*'s Farida who is a doctor and who surprisingly wants to show the bloodied cloth.

The gendered division of spaces as we have seen is a commonly shared theme among Algerian Francophone women authors. For Bouraoui's female narrator as for most beur authors, the 'confinement' of girls starting from the age of puberty must be eradicated, knowingly or unknowingly ignoring that this aims at protecting women and family honour in Algerian patriarchal society. Likewise, veiling is considered by the narrators of *Sabrina* and *La voyeuse interdite* as one main aspect of sex segregation. However, Djebar succeeds in re-defining the function of veiling. In her works, including novels not covered in this thesis, the Algerian veil, whatever its form, be it the hijab, the black haik, the Kabyle coloured djellaba, or the east Algerian safsari, are represented and showcased for the positive roles they played in the lives of Algerian women. This attests to the author's awareness of gender relations in Algeria.

Indeed, during the mid and late eighties, when secular feminists in Algeria stressed their demands on women's unveiling, Djebar's 1991 publication of *Loin de Médine* served feminism without necessarily going through a referent of Western cultures and thus provoking a violence whose first victims would inevitably be women. Of course, many Algerian women were savagely murdered and beheaded during the 1990s. In so many such cases, women paid the price superficially for standing against sexist oppression, but genuinely, knowingly or unknowingly, for serving or fighting ideologies they did not necessarily choose to. So many media articles, research theses, and interviews confirm that the vast majority of women who were targeted and often killed following terrorist attacks during the 1990s were unveiled. Sinha stresses that 'the GIA attacked civilians, especially women who did not conform to the traditional roles of behaviour … The GIA also issued a statement in March 1994, in which all unveiled women were classified as 'military targets'' (Bennoune, 1995, cited in Sinha, 2013, p.38). (See also Moghadam, 2003). While violence against unveiled women is unacceptable under any circumstances, the veil was of use to women who chose to wear it in the 90s. The recognition that the

veil allowed Algerian women to walk freely in the street without being attacked, accompanied by the non-rejection of unveiling when this expresses women's preferences, equates feminism with fighting sexist oppression, not with a specific way of life. This was the viewpoint of Djebar whose notion of feminism as discussed in chapter 4 is grounded in a variety of sources. The publication of *Loin de Médine* was hugely important for the cause of Algerian women's liberation because such novels sought to respond to both 'traditionalists' and Islamists by invalidating the very justificatory argument that feminism is nothing more than an emulation of Western tradition and an example of Western cultural invasion. This could be seen in Djebar's use of Islamic feminist strategies since sacred texts are revisited in her works to substantiate women's equality with men. However, it is worth keeping in mind that Djebar does not commit herself to the idea that sacred texts are the only source of moral truth. Indeed, the subversion of sexist traditions in her texts is frequently grounded in both human rights and sociological/historical arguments. For instance, in addition to unveiling, one could probably think of defending women's rights to engage in activities that were traditionally solely performed by men and especially the positive description of active warfare roles for women in fighting colonial France. This eclectic approach to feminism mirrored the divergence of views on women's liberation, which dominated the socio-cultural context in Algeria at the time.

Another heated topic in Algeria that is covered by Lemsine's and Djebar's 1976 and 1991 works respectively is polygamy. Polygamy was, still is, and will always be, a very controversial subject. The Prophet Muhammad was monogamous until the death of his first wife. He subsequently had several wives simultaneously for a number of reasons relating to his prophetic message. Polygamy has been nevertheless justified by traditionalism to serve patriarchal interests and to answer the needs of pre-capitalist societies such as the kind of life led by Algerian men and women in the countryside. Polygamy in such settings is less problematic than repudiation. In Lemsine's *La Chrysalide*, repudiation is an even more destructive social phenomenon than polygamy. Polygamy gives the ageing woman some financial and familial security when her husband takes on a new wife, whereas repudiation causes shame and dismissal from the marital

home. The novels chosen for this thesis diverge in their critique of polygamy. Secular authors reject polygamy altogether, echoing the women's movements of the 1980s which ascribed polygamy to tradition and Islam and argued that it affects the psychological condition of men and women and causes high unemployment and housing shortages in cities. Bourgeois writings as discussed in Chapter 3 adopted a moderated stance in that they accepted polygamy as long as it is justified. Djebar gives voice in her 1991 work to the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, to shed the light on the Prophet's reluctance against this practice.

If the above concluded distinguishes Algerian women-authored novels on grounds pertaining to local culture, this feminist consciousness signals a significant progression compared with works by Algerian authors during colonisation. In the Algerian Novel that had been published prior to independence by both men and women, we find women hardly depicted other than as victims of a colonial and patriarchal society. One could most probably think of the famous set of novels published during the 1950s, (frequently and mistakenly considered to be the first Algerian novels). Although apart from Debeche's novel none of these works are examined in this thesis, we learn in Mortimer's *A Feminist Critique of the Algerian Novel of French Expression* that in:

> the works of Mohammed Dib, Mouloud Feraoun, Mouloud Mammeri, Marguérite Taos-Amrouche, Djamila Débèche, Assia Djebar, the reader finds that both the men and women writers share the same point of view. They depict the Maghrebian women, be she wife, mother, sister, or daughter, as a person locked into a repressive pattern. She is usually married off by her family in an economic transaction, then worn down through poverty and successive pregnancies, and is systematically prohibited from expressing herself (Mortimer, 1979, p.32).

After an examination of a set of early novels that illustrated this standard of female representation, Mortimer concludes her article on an interrogative tone. She considers that it is appropriate to 'end with a question, for Algeria is a nation in transition with many unanswered questions, puzzles, and contradictions' (Mortimer, 1979, p. 37). One main aspect of this transition is the question of identity which rose to the surface after the

departure of the French as noted in the thesis structure. Interestingly enough, commenting on the evolution of the Algerian woman's representation, she observes in the last two sentences of her article that 'The quest for identity which has continually preoccupied North African writers is her quest. When she is no longer perceived either as victim or as goddess, then she will have truly arrived' (Mortimer, 1979, p.12).

In response to this questioning, this research has demonstrated that subsequent works, precisely novels that were published after the 1950s, attest to a total reversal of this representation. We have seen that woman is no longer the effaced mother/wife/daughter whose ideas are merely a reflection of male members of the family, that is of male ideology as in works by the aforementioned authors in the 1950s. We have also seen that women's interwar fiction does not only defend women's emancipation, but is written from a point of view where women gradually acquired a fundamental dimension. This because, among other things, they now have characteristics determining who they are: nationalism and Islam, for instance. They are frequently defined in relation to more than one of such elements since female characters now form different views and judgments about their belonging and religion. In some cases, women's representation in the texts covered in this thesis is constructed by bringing together elements borrowed from Western, Arab-Berber and Islamic models of life.

We have seen that this identity formation was not the result of an abrupt change. During the first decade after independence, the 1960s, while most authors - including Djebar - were still consumed by the War, others began to quickly express views relating to women. M'rabet and Ounissi presented the two extremes: the former advocated a total emancipation for women that subverts all elements of cultural belonging, whereas the latter called for the unquestionable respect of the often sexist traditions. It is safe to say that the immediate years after independence saw the place of women in works of literature presented as a choice between the following alternatives: to be Algerian or Western. The two extremist views would strongly re-emerge in the 1980s following the failure of the reforms introduced by the FLN which, only sought moderation.

In so many postcolonial works, the young Algerian woman who subverts the fate reserved

to her sisters in traditional society looks for new images to construct her identity as an emancipated female and as a result makes extensive use of the available Western clichés: the exercise of a paid job, access to public spaces (generally considered male spaces), the personal choice of the future spouse, and clothing. Chapters three and four have shown that this was only a beginning in the process of questioning the roles and status assigned to women. Authors such as Lemsine, and especially Djebar in her later works, were creative enough to perceive of a new conception of femininity according to the functioning of the Algerian society. The models of womanhood created by these two authors show that the Algerian female character is no longer bound to the systematic imitation of Western women in order to be emancipated. All in all, women's interwar fiction offers four distinct types of womanhood in total.

Many factors are directly and indirectly responsible for this evolution. First, contact with the West and with a universal movement of ideas - now as independent women and authors since, under colonisation, this contact only resulted in a doubly oppressive anti-colonial situation/representation - affected women's lives and representation in a liberating though problematic way as discussed in Chapter 2. Second, class, the historical, the cultural, and the political have played a pivotal role in orchestrating perceptions of femininity in the Algerian Interwar Novel. Third, the texts covered in this thesis were written in time of peace, which allowed representations of the feminine to evolve. The Civil War during the 1990s caused authors to digress: after 1991, literature in Algeria became mainly testimonial, what is generally known as a '*littérature d'urgence'*. Stora and Mitsch note that from 1992 until 1997, 'thirty-five women, mostly Algerians, have brought out forty works about a conflict that has caused the death of almost 100,000 persons' (Stora and Mitsch, 1999, p.80). The priority being mainly to denounce a violence whose victims were mostly women, meant that the divergence of thoughts on women was consequently significantly reduced.

This digression is also perceptible on the level of writing. We have seen that each category of novels is characterised by a particular style of writing and narrative construction to possibly put a given model of femininity into text. For instance, Djebar's original conception of feminism demands a re-appropriation of French, a language that is

otherwise burdened with an alien and sometimes colonial ideology. Stora and Mitsch observe that in *Les Alouettes naives* (1967) and *L'amour, la fantasia* (1985), 'the Algerian novelist Assia Djebar has spoken of French as the 'langue adverse' 'adverse tongue' and the 'langue du conquerant a conquerir, a subvertir'' (Stora and Mitsch, 1999, p.80). This divergence as far as form is concerned is absent from the Novel of the 1990s. The novel of this decade was mostly informative, thus, the aesthetic aspect was often relegated to a secondary position. Since 1991, women's fiction played the role of the media in that it informed the international public of the deplorable socio-political situation which the state never wanted to export.

Similar to the aftermath of the War of Revolution, which saw a literature heavily influenced by war events, the immediate years after Bouteflika came to power in 1999 saw a literary production that was still consumed by the Civil War. The 2000s however, saw a gradual revival of ideological confrontations not only among authors, but also among journalists, politicians, and influential men and women figures especially in the social media. The novel in particular, reacted to the surreal environment that has been created by the state over the last decade. After fifteen years under the rule of Bouteflika, much to the surprise of the masses, it was announced that President Bouteflika would still be seeking a fourth term. Not only had the president elect reached power in all controversy and opacity, but he was clearly suffering from severe health issues. For many months, Algerians had hardly seen their president. The few pictures of him that circulated in the media dated long before 2014. There was also some fake filming of Bouteflika, using old pictures to make him look well enough to be a future president.

Such absurdities were not without meaning for women. In fact, the question of women has been used for political gain. For instance, it is not uncommon for all Bouteflika's governments to announce the percentage of female representation before even elections take place. Feminist figures such as Louisa Hanoune and especially Khalida Messaoudi, who had called for democracy and gender equality since the 1980s, were paradoxically, each in her own way, influential figures in the dictatorship of Bouteflika. Both Hanoune and Messaoudi are still in and out of prison for corruption and abuses of power. This is one of the main reasons why in Algeria today, there is a strong feeling of public distrust

of feminism and feminist organisations.

The response of Algerian authors to this chaotic political situation was also absurdist. Surreal circumstances have made it necessary to shift from realism to surrealism. Authors have started returning to fantasy-writing and other forms where the aesthetic takes precedence (see for instance, Mustapha Benfodil's 2007 *Archéologie du chaos* and Kamel Daoud's 2003 *La Fable du nain)*. One would be tempted to investigate the ways in which such a surrealist literature has impacted women's representation. Since the turn of the century, the four models of womanhood have so much developed, sometimes by mixing up, that new lifestyles for Algerian women, previously inconceivable, have been created. This is so complex a development that sociological research is needed in the first place, in order to examine the relationship of 21st century women with the dynamics of an Algerian society in constant progress. In parallel terms, women's literature has developed in form as well as in content. As far as form is concerned, interwar styles of writing, realism for instance, would only muddle the proliferating representations of the feminine. The current socio-political context is so complex that even surrealist literatures alone cannot meet the needs of a multilingual audience. The emergence of a purely Colloquial/Berber fiction is certainly a step towards what is often described as the democratisation of literature: one could probably think of Fadhila al-Farouq's *Mizaj Murahiqa* (2007). Women's representation in this genre seems to have considerably evolved. As for content, benefitting from past experiences, authors have formulated an authentic form of nationalism that would not hamper political and social developments, extricating women from the confinements of colonial and anti-colonial forms of nationalism. The social media, the foreign film industry, and the resurgent Berber culture seem to have significantly impacted women's representation. The rise to prominence of women authors such as the Arabophone Ahlem Mostaghanemi allowed a more direct interaction with Arab feminism.

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