

Women's Identities and Bodies in Algerian Feminist Literature: From Oppression to Self-Construction

هويات و أجساد النساء في الأدب النسوي الجزائري: من الاضطهاد إلى تطوير الذات

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Received: 10 /05 / 2021 Accepted: 29 /12 / 2021 Published: 05 /02 / 2022

Abstract:

In several ways, this article is about working out the historical injustice through which Algerian women have struggled over centuries of radical changes. The paper aims at exposing the important changes that affected women's existence in three crucial periods of the Algerian history from the pre-colonial times till the postcolonial foundation of an independent Algerian society. It delves into the notions of female oppression, otherness, body mistreatment, and identity, focusing on the different ways in which the female bodies as well as identities are broken and deconstructed. The study, then, addresses the act of female resistance and self-empowerment to fight for freedom and emancipation as it is shown in the Algerian feminist literature.

To this end, this paper analyses Assia Djebar's, Ahlem Mosteghanemi's, and Fadhila Al Farouq's texts through a feminist perspective to reveal their feminist intentions and continuous negotiation for gender equality through empowerment and identity-formation.

Keywords: Colonialism; Feminist Literature; Gender Inequality; Women's Bodies; Women's Emancipation; Women's Identities.

ملخص:

من نواح عديدة، يتناول هذا المقال موضوع الظلم و الاضطهاد ضد النساء في الجزائر على مر التاريخ خصوصا في الفترة الممتدة من ما قبل الاستعمار إلى ما بعد الاستقلال. يركز هذا البحث على التعمق في أقسى الطرق التي تم بها الاعتداء على هوية و جسد المرأة و هذا استنادا إلى ما ورد في الأدب النسوي الجزائري من وصف و سرد لمعانتهن بسبب القوانين المفروضة عليهن من طرف مجتمعهن الذكوري. و لهذا، يعمل هذا المقال على تحليل نصوص أسيا جبار، أحلام مستغانمي، و فضيلة الفاروق لما تجسده رواياتهن من نضال و دفاع من أجل حرية المرأة و استقلاليتها
الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب النسوي الجزائري، الاستعمار، أجساد النساء، تحرير النساء، هويات النساء، عدم المساواة بين الجنسين،

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I. INTRODUCTION

Tracing the historical evolution of the Algerian women's status is not an easy task to deal with. The unfamiliarity of the subject in the Algerian public sphere may suggest cultural misunderstanding and may be religious intolerance. It has always been irritating to observe the western challenge toward developing feminist consciousness through their writings and television programs to establish the ideal of equality. In contrast, the issue in Algeria is still at its beginnings. The aim of this article, hence, is to provide a coherent historical overview of women's conditions over centuries of cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, and gender differences. Therefore, it may suggest that feminist discourse has enhanced the rejection of women's labeling as socially passive subjects and brought a breath of fresh air to social structure and other lessons about women. This fact has also noted feminism as a transitory factor in the Algerian society, which promoted another meaning for being female.

A study about Algerian women requires exhaustive efforts to answer an endless list of raised questions about the shaping characteristics of women's lives before the colonial experience. Did colonialism affect their status in the Algerian society? To what extent had the feminist literature conveyed the complexity of their lives, and did feminist writers succeed in paving the way toward the evolution of women's status in Algeria? If yes, how does women's changed situation affect their family lives, what shaped their relationships with men in society? The coming lines of this research will function as an objective attempt to answer such vital questions on the one hand and to communicate a more intelligible image about the Algerian women's experiences throughout history.

II. Methods and Materials:

The practical objective of this study turns around exposing an authentic representation of the history of Algerian women from the years of radical oppression to self-construction in the light of colonial, national, and cultural ideologies. Its importance lies in its burden to investigate women's doubly subalternized status as well as their suffering to make their voice heard to break the patriarchal domination. In this regard, the article concludes that the Algerian feminist literature has an initial role in offering an idealized representation of the Algerian women through its successful focus on the female contribution in the war of independence and many other significant economic achievements. Ultimately, the formal method to accomplish writing about the subject is objectivity. According to Marnia Lazreg (2014), the appropriate way to let this category of women speak is through the description of "the games they played, the song they sang, the customs they practice" (p. 17). The scarcity of original reports about Algerian women's lives during the pre-colonial era is the only limitation of the present study. Women during the pre-colonial period had little access to writing and publishing while researchers too had little interest in writing about the subject. Therefore, the actual paper is accomplished through going back to books that provide chronicles, testimonies, men's accounts (European and Algerian) about Algeria, which may transmit the Algerian customs and practices before, during, and after the colonial experience such as Lazreg's book.

Each encounter of this article will straightforwardly understand the roots of feminist politics in Algerian society, which emerge due to patriarchal domination and violence against women. The coming of feminist movements and literature in Algeria has introduced the country to a significant step of female resistance as well as rebellion against patriarchal ideologies and thinking as well. One may not deny the difficulty to raise a feminist consciousness in a culture like ours where male and female minds are subjects from birth of anti-feminist backlash, which justifies the male superiority and supports female inferiority. Consequently, feminist theory is appropriate as a theoretical framework to analyze the most potent feminist messages echoed within the Algerian feminist literature. Simply put, its primarily interest is to raise awareness among the female community in particular and Algerian society in general. It brought into account a basic understanding of the way the male domination system functions to alert their

consciousness about their victimization and exploitation to change their attitudes and beliefs about themselves. Consequently, in other terms, this paper suggests the hostility of women's lives before the introduction of such a movement in Algeria.

The spread of information about Algerian women during the eighteenth century has not widely occurred. Still, contemporary writers have assumed that their lives were profoundly affected by the colonial invasion, which brought silence with all its shapes:

Silence as the absence of public voice is not synonymous with absence of talk or action. In fact, Algerian women acted throughout their history in ways that made their silence quite eloquent. Their silence was at times circumstantial, or the result of social, cultural or personal circumstances. (Lazreg, 2014, p. 18)

III. Algerian Women in Pre-colonial period

Eighteenth-century Algeria displayed progressive diversity in the socio-political, economic, intellectual, cultural, and religious life under the Ottoman protectorate. Algiers functioned as a thriving financial center for the Turks in North Africa. Despite the socio-cultural development, women's lives in the pre-colonial period remain poorly explored by researchers and writers in comparison with the colonial period, which occupies a large portion of many historical studies. The absence of written works made the gender relations that shaped the pre-colonial era unclearly identified in the few found accounts by French and English travelers, which described some of the Algerian culture and customs. Their descriptions were notably prejudices that showed their unfamiliarity with the Algerian traditions and more specifically, critical reviews against the Islam. Modern reconstructions of the pre-colonial life in Algeria are always incorporating the European anti-Islam and anti-Turkish prejudices. Marnia Lazreg (2014) insists that though these reconstructions settle their focus on Algiers, other cities as Bejaia, Wahran, and Quasantina had equal importance (p. 21).

Contemporary writings have also confirmed the integrality of Algerian women in the country's development and welfare. When the Algerian ships retuned into the Mediterranean, women of Algiers shared these significant moments with the Algerian men through greeting them from the terraces and loud ululations to express a profound sisterhood and solidarity. Furthermore, reports show that many Europeans were kept as captives by Algerian families who were using them to clean houses, take care of animals, and help their women in many other affairs. Though women were veiling themselves in front of men, they did not wear veils before these servants, because according to their understanding, these Christians were not able to see them (Lazreg, 2014, p. 22). Another interpretation of women's unveiling before their captives, is that their Islamic beliefs deny any possibility to have an affair with Christians, tracing by this a sense of superiority over Europeans.

Clothing has an undeniable role in depicting the Ottoman influence upon the daily lives of Algerian women of the time. The *Caftans* and *ghlila* of the Algéroise women went back to the long caftans worn by the Ottomans. Both men and women were wearing such costumes, but women's caftans had specific distinguishing characteristics by their richly decorative elements. The fashion of these garments carries distinctive motifs which indicate the social status of women. The elaborate embroidery stands as an expressive detail of their wealth and high social rank. In contrast, non-elite women possessed less richly adorned garments, conveying low economic and social status. Though wealthy women owned a surplus of luxurious cloths and jewelry, their lifestyle was similar to other women, reflecting no rigid class barriers. Regardless to which social class they belong, all women in the rural and urban cities were hard-workers in their families. All of them were cooking food, caring for children, cleaning houses, making bread and washing clothes, weaving veils, and making pillows and mattresses.

Actually, Algerian women's past brings the stereotyping images of women as unskilled into their end, especially those propagated in European and American literature. In pre-colonial Algeria, wealthy women had access to education and were taught to play musical instruments. A large portion of the Algerian education at the time based itself on Islam and Quran. Generally, girls stop attending school at nine to stay at home. Many women learned Quran by heart access to grammar, poetry, and other elements of the history of Islam. Marnia Lazreg (2014) assumes that Algerian women have been prohibited from having sex with European men on the one hand and attests that prostitution was legal on the other hand to satisfy the needs of the Turkish:

Prostitutes were recruited among free women from Algiers, Black (usually slave) women who left their employers and women brought in from rural areas. Prostitution was legal, and kept under control. Initially, meant satisfy the needs of the celibate corps of janissaries (or the Turkish troops that came to Algeria). (p. 23)

From the eighteenth century onwards, prostitution became an ever-growing problem all over the world. Nevertheless, it was legally practiced and proceeded through the chief of police. Prostitutes entertaining Turkish with sexual pleasure were freed from taxes and lived in private homes. According to Lazreg, they were classified according to their age and have been married to their steady customer, differentiating the eighteenth-century Algerian conception of prostitution from that of French during the colonial era.

Historically, the construction of prostitution did not only continue in the way it began, but provoked negative consequences and failure of the female virtue. In her book, *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth Century British Literature and Culture* (2006), Laura J. Rosenthal claims that:

Prostitution helped to produce new categories of gender, class, sexuality, and discipline, in the cultural realm prostitution also acquired another kind of rhetoric and tropological force – one that it has many ways retained – that uniquely expressed and obliquely confronted the predicament of negotiating identity and survival. (p. 4-5)

Such historical sources have not characterized this sexual practice with any kind of abortion. Ultimately, to avoid undesired pregnancies, prostitutes used natural contraceptives produced at home by female healers (Lazreg, 2014, p. 24). Prostitution was organized generally in urban cities, especially Algiers, while it was difficult in small towns and rural areas because of family and community bonds.

IV. French Colonialism and the Birth of Algerian Feminist Movements

The Ottoman power in Algeria was expelled by the French invasion in 1830, which introduced new and even more prevailing colonial forces. On May 16, 1830, a fleet of five hundred French ships, which came from Toulon, conquered Algeria (Stora, 2001, p. 3). On July 5, 1830, the surrender of Algerian authorities took place. After that, the Dey signed the act of submission, which paved the way for the French conquest. The deterioration of French-Algerian relations was not rightly determined. While the 'fly-whisk attack' on the French consul by the Dey of Algiers was the official pretext, the French government's actual plan to invade Algiers waited for three years before wiping away the insult (Stora, 2001, p. 4). According to Paul Kennedy in his book *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (1988):

The relative strengths of the leading nations in world affairs never remain constant, principally because of the uneven rate of growth among different societies and of the technological and organizational breakthroughs which bring a greater advantage to one society than to another. (p. xv)

The French's coming was not actually to liberate Algerian people from the Turkish oppression as France has justified its invasion. However, historical records suggest that the two main general reasons of French colonialism of Algeria were manifested in its search for additional colonial territories for economic gains and its fear of being eclipsed, especially after its loss of North American colonies as its influence in Egypt.

The French government's initial interest is to take over Algerian education, agriculture, religious and political systems to reinforce the French power in the country. However, when the French arrived in Algeria, they were surprised by the cultural differences between them and North Africa, which made their struggle to impose their culture upon the Algerian population almost impossible. Nevertheless, the French colonialism of Algeria was justified as a civilizing mission of the country's people, because the Algerian culture was regarded by the colonial gaze as backward and underdeveloped regarding its gendered treatment and ways of control towards women (Leonhardt, 2013, p. 44). The French put their focus much more on the category of Algerian women to affect the country's cultural and religious order, "the prominence of French colonial strategy placed on Algerian women as a method of destructing Algerian society" (Racco, 2014, p.81).

In the late nineteenth century, Algerian culture was an extension of the country's gendered religious beliefs. It was much more conservative and patriarchal than any other part of the world, which enhanced the French progressive arguments that "Algerian women were oppressed of the oppressed" (Leonhardt, 2013, p. 44) and subjects in need of rescue. Despite claiming the Algerian women's rights, French strategy toward them did not bring any evolution and made their lives from a bad situation to worst:

French policies towards Algerian women's rights were ambiguous and never significantly improved under colonization. 1945, when the war broke out, women were completely excluded from public life. Only 4,5% were literate, few had jobs or went to school and they had no voting rights. (Leonhardt, 2013, p. 45)

Colonialism was an influential factor that planted the gender inequality and helped the culture of masculinity, sexuality, and domesticity to flourish. Algerian women were often considered as agentless of the Algerian society, controlled by the idealized construct of gender. The gender differences in Algeria propagated during the colonial period by both the oppressive Algerian patriarchal traditions and the French colonial regime. Their social and political roles were initially perpetuated their image as passive servants of men's interests, with almost no tangible benefits for women themselves. In contemporary political discourse, mainly Western discourse, religious practices also play an initial role in maintaining women's inferiority through the act of veiling their bodies and faces under familial and social pressures. Body-Gendrot notes that "some Muslim women admit that they were a headscarf when they leave their neighborhood, so as not to be bothered"(qt. in Racco, 2014, p.84). The comment articulates women's lack of self-control and the absence of personal identity. Their existence does not refer to them as independent individuals, but as controlled and bothered by the endless set of rules.

The French occupier conducted a strategy that subjugated the Algerian people generally and women particularly. It had primarily transformed the meaning of Algerian daily life where the moral boundaries have been destabilized, Muslim traditions were transgressed, and illicit sexual relationships flourished. The colonial administration sought to dominate cultural signs of the Algerian people through the veil, following a precise political doctrine, which aimed at uncovering women in front of the European gaze: "But there is also in the European the crystallization of aggressiveness, the strain of a kind of violence before the Algerian women. Unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance,

making her available for adventure” (Fanon, 1959, p. 43). In his well-known essay, *Algeria unveiled* (1959), Fanon expresses anger and lamentation against the Algerian attitudes towards women, which legitimized the French mistreatment and helped them to find “a whole mass of judgments, appraisals, reasons, accumulated anecdotes and edifying examples, thus attempting to confine the Algerian within a circle of guilt” (p. 38) because “the behavior of the Algerian was very firmly denounced and described as medieval and barbaric. With infinite science, a blanket indictment against the ‘sadistic and vampirish’ Algerian attitude toward women was prepared and drawn up” (p. 38). Several sources attest to the extreme violence of the colonial forces in Algeria. Their policy in destructing and burning entire villages and then expropriating the Algerian lands was unbearable. Women and children after that have been captured to an unknown fate. In her article, Zahia Smail Salhi (2010) states that the French soldiers killed the villagers’ men and children while women were killed after being dishonored, that is to say raped in front of their parents and families (p. 114). Rape here is disseminated as a political practice to reveal the colonizer’s dominance over the colonized, not only as a punishment against women but also on men whose honor was wounded (Salhi, 2010, p. 114).

By transforming women’s bodies into arenas of sexual abuse and violence, the French were aware that this would injure the Algerian resistance. These facts lead to a deep horror in the male’s hearts, which resulted in ultimate seclusion of women from the public sphere. Consequently, women were forced to veiling and not allowed to work to avoid their contact with the French settlers to save the family honor. Through revisiting these historical actions, one might not deny that women were the victim number one of the colonizer on the one hand and the Algerian men on the other hand. Simply put, they became “the colonized of the colonized” (Salhi, 2010, p. 114).

One crucial dimension of social change in Algeria has been the rising of the “woman question”, which marked a significant rupture from the past of the marginalized and secluded Algerian women. Previous studies show that the woman question began to gain much interest by the Algerian National Parties, created between 1934 and 1947, such as the Party of the Algerian People (PPA), the Movement of Triumph of Democratic Freedoms (MTLD), and the Association of Muslim Women of Algeria. Though the foundation of such political parties helped the Algerian women to enter the political spheres, they were limited to follow the programs of these structures and not allowed to develop their feminist plans. The focus was mainly to transmit their feminist ideologies among the Algerian community, but did not believe in the priority of women question. They worked initially for the liberation of the whole of Algeria, which made their feminist intentions seem unclear.

As an ultimate result, the Union of Algerian Women was created in 1943 under the guidance of the Algerian Communist Party as “the sole Algerian political party to believe in the equality of the sexes” (Salhi, 2010, p. 15). It expressed strong disapproval against the miserable condition of Algerian women. In its first congress in 1944, it set up an agenda to raise women’s consciousness and suggest and suggest possible opportunities for education to offer a better future among rural and urban girls (Salhi, 2010, p. 115).

The massacres of 08 May, 1945, which followed the considerable protestations in which many Algerian women have participated, signaled a crucial turning point in the political parties’ vision toward the woman question. It was the first female participation in a political demonstration to express opposition against the colonial presence in Algeria. This fact encouraged the Party of Algerian people to work for improving the degree of awareness among Algerian women to fight for their nationalism. So, its first feminine branch was created in Algiers to maintain contact with prominent women.

Another women's organization was founded in 1947, which marked the beginning of the feminist movement in Algeria, appeared with the creation of Association of Muslim Algerian Women by Mamia Chentouf and Nafissa Hamoud (Salhi, 2010, p. 115). They worked to offer social, material, and psychological help for the families of the victims of the massacres, rescued low-income families through distributing food and cloths access to encouraging education among the ordinary people. It is also noteworthy to mention their undeniable role in spreading political consciousness.

Those mentioned above political and social engagements prepared women to challenge their traditional roles as home shadows to emerge as heroine in the arenas of battles in the war of independence.

V. Algerian Women and the War for Independence

While colonial powers seek to dominate cultural signs such as the veil, the resistance is also able to re-signify the meaning of the veil (or its absence); it is thus able to elude and oppose this domination in a kind of semiotic guerilla war against the colonizer. (Fanon, 1959, p. 42)

Despite the great ignorance from patriarchy, Algerian women have always been an integral part of effecting productive change in their society. During the Algerian war for independence, they showed no reluctance to fight side by side with men in the National Liberation Front (FLN). Women fighters such as Zohra Drif, the heroine of the Battle of Algiers from 1956 to 1957, Djamila Bouhired, Samia Lakhdari, and Djamila Boupacha, to name just a few, played significant roles in strategic operations against the French occupier. In many ways, the Algerians' braveness and fearlessness of the war's violence lead to Algeria's independence and introduced the whole society to a new historical experience of victory and evolution. All along the difficult times of fighting, these women believed to gain a similar integrality and equality in rights as the rest of all Algerians. Although the Algerian constitution of 1962 has made an initiative to ensure the same rights, compulsory education, and the right to vote for women, Algerians claimed their opposition under the slogan "Algerie Musulmane" (De Abes, 2011, p 201). This fact signaled an Islamic identity imposed on women, especially those who fought during the war. Consequently, the new national Algerian framework intended to kill women's demands for citizenship rights to bring them back to the "pre-war patriarchal patterns and roles" (De Abes, 2011, p. 202).

Aiming to re-establish the pre-war traditional and family-centered society after independence, Algeria launched an endless struggle to re-define its identity. The government's focus was put mainly on socialism and the growth of the population, and The Family Code, a constitution that set the fundamental status and rights of women, became law in 1984. It was primarily criticized as a real battleground over women's status and rights for its conservative provisions, which reflect the influence of Islamic principles and ethics on the one hand and patriarchal traditions on the other hand. The code essentially sets the family as the basic unit of society in which the husband is the head, and the wife is obedient under his control. The law provoked many of Algerian women, more specifically female members of the National People's Assembly, to express strong disapproval against the patriarchal law. Jasmine Zine comments: "there is no cohesive framework for feminism shared among the variously oriented Muslim women who operate from either secular or religious paradigms" qt. in Abes, 2011, p. 202).

VI. The Appeal for Women's Freedom in Algerian Feminist Literature

The spread of several forms of European ethnocentric views of Algeria as different and inferior is derived from their depictions of Islam religion, which they consider as inhuman and

backward. The European views are strengthened through unveiling the ways in which women were subjugated. In the late colonial period, Algerian feminist literature appeared as a responsive vehicle to offer more elaborate and sympathetic descriptions of Algerian women through the pages of feminist books. It functioned as a liberating discourse that aimed mainly at improving women's status on the social ground. In this context, Koudja B. (2019) contends that:

the female writer entered the world of literature to talk about her experience ...which cannot be well-expressed by man... continuing their struggle to face injustice, oppression and exclusion, regain control of their destiny and encourage themselves and other women to live, love, laugh and feel happy as women. (p. 119)

Though writes such as Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Feraoun, Mohamed Dib, Mouloud Mammeri approach a highly critical issue which is women's situation in the Algerian society, their pessimist representation enhanced the postcolonial marginalization of this category. It contributed to the reduction of their social status. Though these male writers provide a realistic representation of women, their literature is more dominated by their masculine perspectives through denouncing any capacity to fully articulate the coordinates of womanhood. Rachid Boudjedra's literature too highlights gender troubles, but never shows interest in women's cause and makes no attempt to give a voice for their subjugation. Furthermore, the 1980s also saw the emergence of some women voices, which conveyed a sense of discouragement and hopelessness about women's situation, such as *Le Printemps désespéré* by Fettouma Touati and *Sabrina, ils t'ont volé ta vie* by Myriam Ben. This kind of books deals with "the constraints women negotiate daily in the workplace, in the nuclear family, in marriage, and child-rearing arrangements" (Woodhull, 1993, p. 77). Their texts deliver critical views about the Algerian women and portray them as being negated by life with minimal opportunities to escape their confinement. Indeed, their descriptions are only concerned with demonstrating the negative situations of women with an absent endeavor to prose ways to affirm women's agency.

Woodhull (1993) suggests the leading position of Assia Djébar's writings in refreshing Algerian history "no woman writer has done more than Assia Djébar to give new life to her deracinated land through writing" (p. 79). Her novels remain a focus throughout Algerian feminist studies as a symbol of recognition of female voice within the male community. Even though she is widely perceived as a historian, Djébar's literary project begun during the Algerian war and the first years of independence when she started publishing fiction. Her novels reflect feminist thoughts and call the public attention to women's situation in Algerian society. *La Soif*, Djébar's first novel which she wrote in her twenties, "is a tentative study of the process by which a young woman achieves self-awareness and a sense of her position in relation to others" (Hiddleston, 2006, p. 23). The novel is associated with the emphasis on Nadia's journey toward self-knowledge in which Djébar concludes with a significant insight into the importance of one's relations with others "an acceptance of one's own limitations, and an ability to concede to the demands of social interactions as opposed to normativity, are necessary to prevent a descent into narcissism" (Hiddleston, 2006, p. 23).

Driven by the urge to recover women's lives and the complexity of their reality, her writing process was permanently severed by her native land. Various factors placed her to write within a continuous tension. Today, we may suggest that her works are genuinely summarizing the paths of feminist literature in Algeria. Her novels all set out to follow the line of Algerian women's trajectory dependently on the country's history. Her flourishing hopes to achieve women's liberation and social emancipation through meaningful narratives elude her in front of the country's Islamicised culture, which "disrupt the positioning of her narrative voice" (Hiddleston, 2006, p. 2). Throughout her journey to find out a new history of Algeria, and to

ensure the evolution of women's status, Djebbar surprisingly finds her native land strange to her and uneasy about settling her new searched paradigms. Hiddleston (2006) comments on contemporary Algeria as follows:

Algeria turns out to be plural, fractured, composed of multiple conflicting voices, and its contemporary society is ravaged both by the traumatic aftermath of colonialism, and by the recent emergence of Islamic terrorists seeking to reshape Algerian identity according to new oppressive ideals. (p. 2)

The quote suggests that Djebbar's intention to recreate a more emancipated status for women became difficult and almost impossible within traumatic society, especially with the emergence of the Islamic terrorists who aimed at destroying the female identity.

Djebbar's progressive struggle with the notion of Algerian womanhood is explicitly demonstrated through depicting women's selves as being divided between the knowledge of their situatedness and resistance to the tyranny of their surroundings (Hiddleston, 2006, p. 4). Her novels such as *Femmes d'Alger Dans Leur Appartement* and *l'Amour La Fantasia* display an ongoing preoccupation with the lost Algerian identity within which Djebbar implicates the female identity as an indispensable part. Both texts maintain a continuous struggle to recover the lost identity. Other works like *Vast est la Prison* and *Loin de Médine* are classified as feminist works par excellence. Written in the 1990s, the two novels speak about the outbreak of the civil war in Algeria in the 1990s, drawing attention to the suffering of women under the Islamic agency. Through her insistence to stress the female resistance against the newly emerged system and her attempt to recover women's lost voice, the writer admits the impossibility of her project, expressing disillusionment toward the possible redefinition of femininity.

Djebbar's approach to recreating the lives of Algerian women also encompasses her prizewinning film *La Noubia des Femmes du Mont Chenoua* in 1978, which was designed to be shown on Algerian television. However, the "work is looked upon less favorably by those who control the media" (Woodhull, 1993, p. 79) and considered as disrespectful of Algerian manhood because the only man appears in the film is depicted a handicap on wheelchair. In fact, Djebbar does not deny the Algerian insight toward her writings as paradoxical of the country's culture, religion, politics, and social traditions, so she explains that "if none of her novels has been translated into Arabic in Algeria, it is because, in the eyes of government officials, she is a 'Westernized' expatriate who writes feminist books in French that distort the supposed realities of the women in Algeria" (Woodhull, 1993, p. 79). In this context, we may suppose that Djebbar's feminist literature was hindered by all the previously mentioned factors, which made it fails to accomplish the writer's hope of female liberation. Nevertheless, her feminist thoughts show an exceeding power in challenging the socio-cultural obstacles. In each novel, she brings new hope for women through a constant focus on their question and continuous negotiation for their emancipation.

Unlike Djebbar, Ahlem Mosteghanemi approaches Algerian women's representation from a different angle. She illustrates the burden of her literature to struggling for women's issues through masculine voice as Anissa Daoudi (2017) explains in her article:

Mosteghanemi makes an argument for the language she uses in her trilogy, and in a voice of suffering, effectively castrated Algerian male narrator who stunted perception of Algerian women issues from masculinity that itself is stunted by the traumas of colonialism and failed nationalist revolution. (p. 8)

It is worth mentioning that she highlights the importance of Arabic language as a relevant tool to drive Algerian men and women alike toward freedom and emancipation. Accordingly, she "deems that for Algerian women's liberation to happen it should not be done at

the expense of Algerian men and Arabic language and that both men and women need to be freed" (Daoudi, 2017, p. 8). Undoubtedly, her views are derived from her father's encouragement to study Arabic and write as a free woman.

Mosteghanemi's thoughts are clearly revealed through her novel, *Dhakirat al Jasad* (*Memory in the Flesh*), in which the masculine voice takes the power of narrative, underlying her dual-gender outlook. Her choice of male to voice events from postcolonial Algeria is widely perceived as her device "to voice her opinion regarding the fate of women's emancipation anticipated after independence" (Fadel, 2016, p. 119). Her use of male narrator helps her neutral positioning while presenting and evaluating women's situation. Her emancipatory ideas encompass both male and female lives through proposing ways to move on. She explains that not only women are victimized by the traumatic past of Algeria, but men alike are haunted by memories from that past. Similar to Djébar, Mosteghanemi in *Faoudha al Hawas* (*Chaos of the Sense*) presents women's writing as a tool to face their memory of the past and to challenge their patriarchal present. However, writing became impossible with Algeria's black decade of 1990, which changed how feminist writers imagined leading the country to freedom and independence.

Fadhila Al Farouq's *Ta' al Khajal* goes back to narrate events from the 1990s, documenting Algerian women's bad conditions during the black decade. Through her novel, she develops a daring critic of women's rape and sexual abuse, which she labels as a war weapon. Furthermore, the novel is widely perceived as a powerful feminist work through which Al Farouq expresses her denial of the patriarchal rules, which weakened women's position in society and enhanced the persistence of their marginalization throughout history. She raises the question of women's otherness which is dated from their birth, family, college, and marriage.

Her metaphoric use of the Arabic letter 'taa marbota' or 'closed taa' stands to signify the feminine gender as a victim of closed societies such as the Algerian society where she lives. Her questioning of traditional norms and costumes of the Algerian society underlines her desire and inspiration to see Algerian women in better conditions. Nevertheless, her descriptions of female segregation from birth suggest her pessimistic views about the possibility of hope for change. Al Farouq's name remains one among a long list of feminist writers who held their pens to battle against the female mistreatment, such as Maïssa Bey, Malika Mokeddem, Leïla Sebbar, and Zahia Rahmani to name just a few. Alison Rice (2012) states that:

These women writers are not only of various generations, they are also of different ethnic and religious background, and their texts attest to otherness – to their own otherness and to their desire to know the other. They tell of multiple belonging, and they speak of losses, of estrangement from their family, from their native land... They testify of differences, and the pain it has brought to them and to so many in a colonial and postcolonial setting. (p. 4-5)

VII. Women's Bodies and Identities in Algerian Feminist Literature

Women's bodies and identities is a central theme in the Algerian feminist literature. They are always depicted as belonging to cultural minorities on which and through which social violence and moral systems are produced and reproduced. The writings of Djébar, Mosteghanemi, and Al Farouq are largely concerned with presenting the ravage of colonialism and patriarchy on the Algerian women. Their writings provide the reader with vivid images of the female body violation through creating a link between the colonized country and the raped female body. Female bodies are described as being imprisoned in the neo-colonial corrupted milieu. The narrator Khaled in Mosteghanemi's text says to Hayat "Cities as beautiful as

memory, as close as a tear, as painful as loss. Cities so like you” (p. 76). Furthermore, Khireddine A. (2021) claims that in her second novel, *Fawda al-Hawas* (Chaos of the Senses), Mosteghanemi uses the female body as a language to voice loud her womanhood through an apparent attempt “to transform the female body from a national symbol into a private erotic dominion” (p. 26).

Djebar stresses the shadowy existence of her female character and claim their marginalization and imprisonment. Her novels become the historical voice through which women’s experiences are heard. In her account with women’s oppression and victimization, Djebar focuses on “the veil”, presenting it as a religious and cultural obstacle hindering between women and their total freedom. She always suggests that if women want to break free from the rigid patriarchy, they have to throw off the veil as she writes in *Ombre Sultane* “Tu as roulé en boule ce chiffon...oui, ce chiffon” (p. 79). Consequently, she ends her texts with an unchangeable hope to free these enslaved bodies.

Mosteghanemi’s and Al Farouq’s texts are set in Constantine, investigating women’s situations in the postcolonial Algeria on the one hand and as a reaction to the Islamist extremist thoughts, as Al Faouq puts it “منذ العائلة...منذ المدرسة...منذ التقاليد...منذ الارهاب كل شيء عني كان تاء للخل” (p. 11). Both writers create revolutionary female characters who try to deconstruct the patriarchal culture, which prevents them from achieving self-knowledge. For this reason, the search for identity construction becomes crucial in the Algerian feminist literature. Along the novels, female characters are in a journey to build their identity and escape the oppressive gender relations. Through these brave characters, feminist writers succeed in giving voice to the Algerian silenced female category and provide readers with more positive and optimist representation of women.

VIII. The Status of Algerian Women Nowadays: Evolution

Though it is not widely acknowledged, Algerian feminist literature played an essential role in battling for women’s rights and the recognition of their identities as well as the freedom of their bodies. Women’s texts were present along with history to document the female suffering from within the war, under the shame of rape and the savage treatment of Islamic terrorists. As we have seen, Djebar’s literature has never escaped any of these bloody experiences regardless of her struggle with her native land’s culture and religious beliefs. Throughout feminist writings, Algerian women were and are still introduced to a new culture that teaches them significant ways for self-improvement and identity-reconstruction. Though it can be only read by intellectuals, this culture is spread via mass media and technology. The nature of Algerian society made feminist literature appear with less significance. It is a society that is governed by institutional rules and political constitutions rather than attempting to encourage writing and readership.

From 2005, women’s quest to gain more freedom and equality began to become possible with the amendment of the family code during the President Abdelaziz Bouteflika’s government. The new code paved the way for more positive changes, granting women more rights as divorce and housing. It reduces the traditional role of women to largely symbolic status. The amendment of the Algerian constitution in 2008 ensured women’s access to political affairs in addition to the penal code, which penalizes sexual harassment and ensures women’s security in public places. With such changes, the horror of the black decade started to disappear from Algerians’ memories.

At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, women’s education started to flourish in Algeria. It has achieved a universal primary education where enrolment was 100 percent thanks to free education. The 2008 changes also encompassed equality before the law and

nondiscrimination based on gender. Though some regarded women's access to justice as only strategy to win the female vote, others regarded it as a positive step that signals the government's commitment to advance women's emancipation. Women have become more educated than before. In 2018, 64,46% of female students have graduated from universities in Algeria. Nowadays, women are powerfully presenting themselves in the judiciary as lawyers and judges increasing their rights and liberties. In this context, they become day after day allowed to self-expression through their participation in street manifestations such as El Hirak on 22 February, 2019.

Algerian women's everyday life becomes more affected by the various cultural, political, and economic changes that occurred since 1962, which made their share of employment increase significantly in the last few years. Intellectual women occupy prominent positions in enterprises, universities, and hospitals, marking and apparent growth in female wage earners. However, it is widely attributed that the employment's impact on the quality of their lives is not clear. On the one hand, it is argued that their inclusion in the country's labor force contributes negatively to development of their lives through their exploitation for low wages, which enhanced the continuity of traditional divisions of labor in Algeria. On the other hand, women's workplace is more perceived as an environment where they can cultivate their skills and improve their confrontation with public life to increase their self-confidence and competencies.

Nevertheless, Algerian women are still facing many cultural and religious obstacles, which wound their free employment. Though the family code has been changed, women are still responsible for raising their children and taking care of their families. Cultural beliefs in women's weakness and inferiority are still circulating among some families, restricting their daughters' chance to work outside and travel opportunities. The public confrontation is yet seen as disrespectful for women, causing Algeria to appear among the countries with a low degree of female economic participation in the world. Tlemçani. R (2016) concludes that in modern Algeria, Algerian women's struggle to free themselves from all the obstacles mentioned above is a true challenge, so he argues that:

In modern Algeria, women are expected to return to the traditional roles of wife and mother; they are seen as guardians of Islamic and traditional values, as the family code, based on the shari'a (Islamic law), clearly stipulates. This law emphasizes patriarchal gender relations and women's subordinate position within the family. For example, shari'a considers the family, Kin ties, and women's reproductive capacities as fundamental natural and sacred elements of society. (p. 237)

IX. Conclusion

History displays a general change in Algerian women's status from pre-colonial times to nowadays. This is achieved through women's continuous fight against gender politics and male domination. They were active participants in the anti-colonial struggle and an integral part of the nation's decolonization. Yet, after independence, the government's program failed to ensure their needs. Here comes the role of feminist literature as an ultimate response to reinforce women's struggle for a better future and more elaborate status. The present article has made a valuable analysis of Djébar's, Mosteghanemi's, and Al Farouq's feminist contributions to break the silent female voices and call for their equal integration in social and economic spheres. Their hope to gain emancipation was not incorporated in the Algerian economic development.

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