

## The shadow of the trickster: the art of deviation in Assia Djébar's texts

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### Abstract

The present paper attempts to conceptualize Djébar's progressive struggle and dissatisfaction with the notion of language, identity, and gender. It appropriates the tradition of the "Trickster's techniques of deviating discourses". In *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1980), *So Vast the Prison* (1995), and *Woman Without Sepulcher* (2002), elements of a deviating stance are displayed, hence offering a subversive and conspirational account at the very heart of the oppressive authorities. It will be suggested that Djébar's works implicitly juxtapose comparable models of "Intellectual Trickster" resistance to all kinds of tyrannies.

**Key words:** Discursive strategies, reversal, deviation, conspiracies.

### *L'ombre du trickster: l'art de l'illusion dans les textes d'Assia Djébar*

### Résumé

A travers le présent article, nous mettons en perspective la notion de lutte dans les écrits d'Assia Djébar. Ces derniers s'inscrivent dans une démarche évolutive dans le sens de la résistance contre le patriarcat et les autres formes de domination. La langue, l'identité et le genre sont utilisés par l'auteure comme outils et formes littéraires pour combattre l'oppression et le discours arrière-gardiste. Dans *Les femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980), *Vaste est la prison* (1995) et *La femme sans sépulture* (2002), Djébar développe un discours indirect et un style subversif comme moyen de déviation. Ces procédés puisent leur originalité dans la tradition orale africaine et de «l'intellectuel espiègle» qui oppose une résistance à toutes formes de tyrannie.

**Mots-clés:** Discours indirect, style subversif, déplacement, déviation.

### ظل المحتال: فن الانحراف في نص آسيا جبار

### ملخص

نهدف من هذا المقال إلى ضبط مفهوم المقاومة في كتابات آسيا جبار المندرجة ضمن مسعى تطوري، لوضع تصور للمقاومة ضد نظام الأبوة وضد أساليب الهيمنة الأخرى. تستعمل الأدبية اللغة والهوية والجنس باعتبارها أدوات وأشكالاً أدبية لمواجهة القمع والخطابات الرجعية. ففي مؤلفاتها « نساء الجزائر العاصمة في شققهن » (1980)، « واسع هو السجن » (1995)، و« المرأة بدون قبر » (2002) طوّرت آسيا جبار خطاباً غير مباشر وأسلوباً تفكيكياً انزياحياً عن الأساليب السائدة. تكتسب تلك الأساليب أصالتها من التقاليد الشفوية الأفريقية، ومن «المتقف الكيس» المعارض لكل أشكال الاستبداد.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** خطاب غير مباشر، أسلوب تفكيكي، نقل، انزياح.

## Introduction:

Assia Djébar's many-sided literary output has been and still lends itself to many theoretical approaches. Therefore, it becomes more and more difficult to theorize and limit her complex oeuvre to any single and clear-cut framework because many theoretical models of analysis and interpretations have been tried out and have been thrown into confrontation with one another.

Assia Djébar's affiliation to the Western literary tradition, influences, and categories of thought is undeniable, but her texts also resonate with her engagement with references to colonial history and oral forms from African, Arab, Berber sources, and from the realities she has been part of. Priscilla Ringrose is to the point in maintaining that Djébar's reworking of philosophical concepts, together with her questioning of identity of the post-colonial Algerian society help to test and challenge the notions of her position.

Djébar's journey, adds the literary reviewer, combines multiple affiliations with a sense of skepticism and discomfort with categorization and positioning. Her slippage between philosophical reflection and political argument make issues of gender dissolve into that of culture and representation while economic factors become masked by discussions of the "interminable whispering of discourse"<sup>(1)</sup>.

The present article contributes to that stream of critical consciousness. It reinterprets traditions and adds another model of analysis and a way of interpretation. Its conceptual framework is derived from the African Trickster tradition. It conceptualizes the author's progressive struggles and denunciation of oppressive and repressive power by means of some discursive and textual strategies of 'Deviation', 'Reversal', 'Displacement', and 'Subversion'. Most importantly, it suggests that Djébar's *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1980), *So Vast the Prison* (1995), and *Woman Without Sepulcher* (2002) implicitly juxtapose comparable models provided by the trickster's struggle, negotiation, and resistance against tyranny.

Far from fiery and confident, Djébar's reflexive, less polemical, ambivalent thinking and style will be paralleled to the African trickster's tactics of resistance, negotiation, and transgression. The examination proceeds from formal analysis of the three narratives to a consideration of the ways the writer's textual and discursive strategies might accomplish in functional terms as a kind of ambivalent discourse which serves to deepen and strengthen resistance. Such resistance takes place on a largely semiotic level as its significance and its representation, can never be said to be completed; it is rather an ongoing and continuous renegotiable process. How the trickster's tactics and practices engender many forms of opposition in Djébar's texts is, to our knowledge, an approach that is not considered by scholars.

Yet, before turning to the fabric of the texts to underscore how each of the author's discursive and formal strategies correspond to a specific Trickster principle meant to escape all forms of cruelty and domination, it seems useful, at the outset, to enumerate the different tactics, which it seems to us, are relevant to the three selected novels.

A trickster is a multicultural, multiform, and indefinite figure. To define it, maintains William. J. Hynes, is to draw borders and tricksters are amazingly resistant to such a capture and confinement. He/she/it appears on the edge or just beyond existing borders, classifications, and categories. They are notorious border breakers in moving swiftly and impulsively back and forth across all limits. No border and no

limit are sacrosanct for a trickster, be it religious, social, political, cultural, linguistic, epistemological or metaphysical. Doty G. William and William. J. Hynes add that: “The trickster figure is a symbol of indeterminacy and dons different personas. He is linked to a shared sense of moral righteousness, which leads him to become a force of retribution that unsentimentally punishes the purveyors of greed and cruelty. He epitomises faith, goodness, and resistance against corruption and all kind of power abuses. He is and remains a visitor everywhere and seems to dwell in no single place as he is in continual transit through all realms and spaces. Therefore, the scholars who focus primarily upon the distinctiveness of specific tricksters within particular belief systems may underline the impossibility of any perfect cross-context or common content”, conclude the two theorists<sup>(2)</sup>.

Among the main features of a trickster, according to Robert Pelton, are the representation of human race individually and communally by seizing the fragments of an experience and discovering in them an order sacred by its very wholeness. The trickster discloses the radically human character of the whole cosmos while showing the holiness of ordinary life and causing reflection upon the boundaries, the nature of the social order he represents, and offers a kind of “meta-social commentary”.

A trickster pulverizes the univocality and symbolizes the multivalence of life with its various shape shifting, disguises, and its frequent association with situation inversion. More than any human being, his ability to overturn any person, place and belief, no matter how prestigious it is, remains uncontested. He is tricky and the trick played is to transcend ordinary reality by violating it in such a way through subtlety and reversal. He is also a cultural transformer, taboo breaker, a satirist par excellence, and a situation inverter using trenchant wit to point out the flaws in people’s haughty ambitions<sup>(3)</sup>.

The above features appear, first and foremost, in Djébar’s engagement and her gradual withdrawal from any possible identification with Algeria as a knowable point of reference. The notion of an Algerian identity remains elusive as it fades even more disturbingly in the chosen texts. The novelist shifts through the contradictions and social constraints while her characters abstain from adhering to any single inheritance. She plays with fragments from different sources to contest confinement with a will to open up borders and new horizons. She uses a multiplicity of narrative strategies and themes to question all the hegemonic discourses, which become the target of her irony and critical reflection.

All the three selected novels are marked by a fragmented plotline in which contradictions and denunciations proliferate. The author’s interrogation is undertaken as an archeological and social project that not only re-traces the movements backward, but also re-inscribes the past to subvert the models proposed by colonial, official, and religious discourses. Her writing, as Jane Hiddleton writes, follows her country’s trajectory; it stands as a meaningful narrative of its battles against colonialism, and latterly, resurgent Islamism. Her language glosses over the multiple, intricate Arab and Berber tones of her cultural history, of her personal sense of exclusion from her culture, and her quest for a new history of Algeria hoping to chart the development of women’s roles<sup>(4)</sup>.

More specifically, Djébar, as James Martel suggests, is able to convey the existence and experience of the myriad “side communities” that are formed in and around the

grand narratives (be they historical, Berber, French, Islamic, issuing from the contemporary Algerian state or from other, myriad sources) that are in turn promulgated, destabilized, and contested in the Algerian context<sup>(5)</sup>.

However, though the three selected novels engage with relations of power, whether in the context of the colonial period, with the post-independence political structures, patriarchal social norms, familial relations or religious authority, her criticism of the asymmetries of political structures, social and family gender inequalities are implicit rather than explicit. Djébar's work does not advocate direct political action nor does it explicitly address the material needs of her contemporaries. So, the question which imposes itself is where examples or instances of trickster's deviations, subversion, and displacement surface in each of the selected narratives.

### **1-The Art of Deviation *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*:**

In *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, Djébar offers a diversity of fragmented, uncertain and anxious voices, which have lost any sense of direction and purpose to explore the diverse facets of the female condition. She tells stories of women, who are: « *Doublement emprisonnée dans cette immense prison, la femme n'a plus droit qu'à un espace se restreignant comme une peau de chagrin* »<sup>(6)</sup>.

The description of women's hardships and what she calls the "unspeakable horror" express the author's dissatisfaction with the oppressive conventions of the colonial misrepresentation of women with its established stereotypes. Throughout the novel, Djébar reverses the colonial gaze by allowing the woman to look back into the "spying eye" of the oppressor to re-work the colonial history of Algeria and its colonialist discourse by reference and giving voice to repressed voices of women whose cries have been stifled for a very long time. In exploring the tensions between what postcolonial theorists call the "center" and the "periphery", she challenges the primacy of Western culture and targets its unidirectional and monolithic discourse.

The first technique akin to the trickster which appears in *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* is reversal which makes women's stories become a crucial instrument of Algerian collective memory that bears witness to the past. Djébar proposes another vision of woman missed from or dropped of Delacroix's painting and introduces new viewing positions on the pictures by listening to and recording historically repressed voices; she then engages in an unfamiliar and uncomfortable dialogue that resituates the painting of Delacroix.

In this sense, narrative writing becomes a form of resistance against the attempt of cultural deformation that turns against the static images of the French painter and turns them into a history of art that bears meaning to women of Algiers, a manner to regain their respect. Djébar contributes to the redefinition and decolonization of her culture as she defies, erodes, and supplants the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge. She makes it clear that Delacroix's painting is an "uncured injury" as it stands not only for the long years of French colonial presence bearing within it the various distorting effects on Algerian society, but also as the expression of colonial euphoria just as much as Orientalist painting was.

The common place of Delacroix's painting, as a product of Western imagination, fixes upon the woman's body. Women are made up, covered with gold to be infinitely beautiful, desirable, dreamy, distant, and submissive. Their ridiculous poses without movements call to mind the bodies that are painted up, prepared, and erotized to be

then offered to any or all comers from a clientele motivated by the unequivocal desire of control and possession. The whole array of props, to paraphrase Mallek Alloula, carefully disposed by the painter around and upon his models can be regarded as a 'trompe l'oeil' furnishing, backdrops, jewelry; assorted objects indicate the superfluous without any touch of authentication<sup>(7)</sup>.

Therefore, such a misrepresentation and image disfiguration of the Algerian woman demands a reciprocal reorganization to debunk the colonial cultural supremacy and invert the relation of power. Like a trickster, Djebbar denies and defies the values of such a history and engages in fighting her battle, by creating an alternative language of discourse.

Such a discourse extricates Algerian women from the way in which they were imagined and represented. She does not content herself to take distance from the dubious representations of Algerian women, but she is also careful in the way of asserting defiance in the face of unspeakable adversity. Far from Delaroix's frozen representation, Djebbar becomes a kind of "voice recorder", in providing variable images of women, which have been lacking in the Frenchman's oeuvre that of women who struggle and bypass the various obstacles set by Algeria's latent socio-political reality.

*Women of Algiers in their Apartment* reflects women's main concerns and is openly committed as it is to portraying the daily struggle of women against inequality, all kinds of injustice, and oppression with their voices. Through such voices mixed with her own, Djebbar explores the many guises under which imperialism penetrated the Algerian and African world. She then extorts the right to self-representation by seizing the colonizer's tools of distortion by reorganizing the picture far from the Western designs of superficial reality, exotic rituals and costumes provided by the French painter. If the French wrest certain features of Algerian life from their indigenous context only to re-inscribe them within the framework that answers the political and psychological needs of the imperialist's appropriation of the Orient, Djebbar reverses the picture radically as she accepts no excuse for such an attitude of misunderstanding of woman's place and role in the society.

The most obvious of the writing strategies employed by the author is the reworking of the lost past order to provide a future vision, which not only restores the interrupted history, but also reorients it in terms that take into account the intervening developments of colonial penetration, revolution, and independence. The use of and the weight given to women voices, which emerge from the past in order to revise the present, are the basis to this project.

For Djebbar, the popular memory must be restored but not without radical reexamination of the cultural and political values that sustained the colonial enterprise in its attempted suppression of that memory through an enactment of its own fantasies of power. She addresses the reverse stakes of power and displaces the European script centrism; her choice of the "gendered space" suggests the various cultural, social, and political fronts, on which her discourse stands<sup>(8)</sup>.

But, can we limit and confine Djebbar's novel to a "writing back" to the colonialist discourse? Implicitly, Djebbar uses Delacroix's masterpiece not only to bypass the stereotyped images of Arab women who were icons of colonialist male centered views and interests. However, her critique is addressed, not only to the colonizer, but also to

the post independent successive governments for, the image of woman is not differently perceived by the gender-based post-colonial society; the following excerpt is an illustration: « *Depuis quelques décennies, au fur et à mesure que triomphe ça et la chaque nationalisme-on peut se rendre compte qu'à l'intérieur de cet Orient livré à lui-même, l'image de la femme n'est pas perçue autrement: par le père, par l'époux et, d'une façon plus trouble, par le frère et le fils* »<sup>(9)</sup>.

In this sense, Djebbar proposes a double task for the Algerian author, namely the debunking of colonial perception of the native accompanied by a critique of self-reflexive discourses elaborated by Arab societies. In a complex and nuanced way, the writer exposes the patriarchal injustice and the painful reality of day-to-day women's lives. She denounces the sexual stereotypes that oppress and challenge the aggressors of her country women, but that challenge necessitates an elaboration of the terms to be used in the confrontation that makes the text a virulent denunciation of the physical and psychological damage that women have suffered through the sexual stereotyping that confines and silences them.

The author's criticism is straightforwardly expressed when she states: « *Le culte du silence est une des plus grandes puissances de la société arabe* »<sup>(10)</sup>. Djebbar includes the role of the family, relations between sexes to provide a micro-cosmos of the complex and intricate relationships between individual characters and larger historical, political forces and dynamics. For instance, she evokes the heroines of Algerian history (Messaouda from the time of L'Emir Abdelkader, Kahina, the ancestral queen mother of the Berbers, Djamilia Bouhired from the Battle of Algiers)<sup>(11)</sup>.

She manages to question, negotiate, reconstruct the past within a contemporary frame of the post independence era which allows to think that the writer, like a trickster, uses Delacroix's painting as a kind of bait or an "appât", to illustrate that Arab women are still marginalized, affected and manipulated by the dominant patriarchal culture and its systems of thoughts that guarantee the supremacy of patriarchy and the subordination of woman.

The following passage better illustrates the point: « *Terrible substitution d'une parole à une autre, et qui de plus, ouvre la voie à la pratique illégale du mariage forcé. Parole déflorée, violente avant que n'intervienne l'autre défloration, l'autre violence* »<sup>(12)</sup>. Djebbar is equally suspicious and more critical of the tendency of the post independence official discourses for the limited role allowed to women in the aftermath of the war whose value to man and society come only from their productive and reproductive roles. It is in her discussion about woman's rights that the key to her commitment is to be found<sup>(13)</sup>.

The author also subtly denounces the status quo of women and targets men's denial of women's possibility to have access to institutions in which power is exercised and transmitted, reducing them to subjugated, silenced, and helpless victims: « *Tu ne peux exister dehors: la rue est à eux, le monde est à eux. Tu as le droit théorique d'égalité, mais « dedans », confinée, cantonnée. Incarcérée* »<sup>(14)</sup>.

It is a way of contesting the social conventions that imprison woman within the confines of marriage, family and social duties. As an illustration, the author bypasses the barriers of realism, mixes the voices of Fatima, Sarah, Ann, and others to foreground the grievances, disorientations, and alienation of a category of brave but muzzled women. She gives expression to the voice of dignified but subjugated women

who stand for all that had been said but never recorded. The floor is given to cloistered but lucid, veiled but proud, enslaved but dissenting to man or patriarchal domination. For Djébar, the position of woman in post-colonial Algeria remains the same because liberating women is not convenient for the male members of the country.

They are systematically conducted by patriarchal dominated culture with its precepts of polygamy, special inheritance laws, and male right to repudiate spouses. They are not allowed the opportunity to function and express themselves freely; they are controlled, dominated, and considered as male properties.

As a reaction, Djébar, like a trickster, uses the colonial painful heritage of Delacroix to call for a revision of her culture. To avoid the mistake of the past, she warns that the problem is with patterns of power that organize the relationship between sexes. If women in the colonial imagination were reduced to mere objects of desire whose function is to satisfy men's sexual instincts and desires, post-colonial governments were not effective enough to free women from the ruin of the colonial past and to offer them a better status. After independence, the relationship of man to woman is based neither on equality nor on mutual respect, but on dependency and subjugation. Therefore, the novel criticizes power structures in all forms from Western colonial enterprise and its institutions to patriarchy and official discourses.

By unveiling the colonial processes and questioning the discursive field in which it operates, the author incontestably corrects the stereotypic and frozen views about Algerian women and contributes to set and revalue the Algerian culture.

One of the revenge mechanisms is to provide a space and a voice to "the excluded" during the colonial period while subtly reproving the patterns of domination that guarantee the supremacy of male values as well as the subordination of women after independence.

As a modern story teller, Djébar stands for a resistant intellectual trickster who artfully tells stories against the tides of disfigurements, domination, and forgetting of woman's history. The author insists to know: « *Où êtes-vous les porteuses de bombes?... Où êtes-vous les porteuses de feu, vous, mes sœurs qui aurez dû libérer la ville...* »<sup>(15)</sup>. The reader's attention is fascinated by women characters' dissident attitudes in imposing themselves and in controlling the enemy's strategies and provoking controversies which shape the setting of the novel as a theatrical ground where closure, oppression, rebellion, resentment, and individual fighting are underlined as cases of bigotry in modern social conflicts and where cultural theft of identity, nation's enslavement and humiliation through the sequestration of woman are debated.

Djébar's return to the past and the traces of history is meant to re-assess the positive roles played by women in the nation's defense. Their actions contribute to a rebuilding of their identity and their collective memory<sup>(16)</sup>. Symbolically enough, the history of Delacroix is juxtaposed with the silencing, oppressions, right denials of woman after independence. If Djébar succeeds to unveil the obscene imposition of the colonial woman misrepresentation by forcing the reader to reconsider his or her perception of history and its hegemonic processes, she also seeks for recognition and fixes on personal and collective memories to restore the truth, to rescue woman from the burdens of the past surrounded by negligence, and to gain the battle against forgetting.

## 2-Uncovering the Buried Insubordinate Voices in *So Vast the Prison*:

Djebar presents the same reflection and carries on her historical revenge to dismantle and subvert the systems of power that shaped the formation of the male power in her *So Vast Prison*. Subversion becomes one of her discursive strategies through which she encompasses a reflection on personal and cultural memories of submissive and revolutionary women saying “no” to patriarchal laws and prohibitions when stating: « *Ma bouche ouverte expulse indéfiniment la souffrance des autres, des ensevelies avant moi* »<sup>(17)</sup>.

In questioning male power and authority, the novel is characterized by a revolutionary spirit which calls for the liberation of women from the supremacy of patriarchal culture and preserve the collective memory from the sorrows of past. *So Vast the Prison* also prolongs Djebar’s analytic reading of the past; it explores its different counter views provided in common with people’s memories to mark, therefore, another step of her commitment to issues of gender politics. It displays her incessant sympathy to the neglected, forgotten women’s stories whose voices are not given access to the Algerian historical record. She refers, for instance, to the bravery of Zoreida, the heroine of Don Quichotte by the Spanish author Cervantes; the writer narrates the way Zoreida liberates the captive slave, Don Miguel and insists on the manner, the princess frees her lover from prison while liberating herself from the oppressive authority of her own father<sup>(18)</sup>.

As an intellectual trickster who is writing from an uneasy position, Djebar maintains that Arab society is still governed by patriarchal systems of thought and ruined by a turbulent political environment. What follows tells more: « *Est-ce la loi, maintiens-tu au moins ton droit?...Hélas, où se trouve notre droit, les analphabètes et les instruites, toutes, nous, les femmes, aujourd’hui comme hier* »<sup>(19)</sup>. Women try to make their voice heard, but little if nothing is made to include them in history. To uncover the buried voices, Djebar focuses on testimonies kept out of history books to reconstruct and reproduce collective images and ideas of the past, endow them with new meanings, and relate them to the present.

The re-writing of individual and collective history, according to Debra Kelly, aims to restore the lost and erased history of woman. The stories also serve as a parallel to Djebar’s own prison. The personal and collective accounts symbolize the power structures that govern the relationship between man and woman. The histories are made emblematic of the cruel acts deep rooted in power structure. Therefore, the voices stand for the cries of women silently rebelling by mouth; Djebar’s writing awakens the voice and above all resurrects so many vanished women<sup>(20)</sup>.

Although the text does not adhere to a strict chronological linearity, as the narrative progresses, the reconstruction of the story becomes increasingly fragmented, taking on a cumulative structure, which subverts the progressive, linear style of traditional historical narrative. It is constructed like a puzzle, put together using a whole plethora of fragments taken from historical archives that are painstakingly pieced together as a structure of the novel.

Djebar, cunningly, selects her fragments to present two alternative versions of the same story, and the division within the chapters is revealed to be the dividing line between the diversity of images, each created to reveal a completely different picture of the past. Such a technique of fragmentation makes the novel the most appropriate



form with which Djebbar deviates, negotiates, and resists power, separation, and antagonism. Through the voices of her characters, she aptly foregrounds “the great and rebellious women” in history and grants a historical weight to what is told rather than to what has been written. In so doing, she creates a genealogy of kinship relations, and another of oppression and subjugation<sup>(21)</sup>.

Throughout the narrative, Djebbar uses the “gendered space” to put on view her political mode of reflection about the notion of freedom in all its variations; it is around this epicenter that all other types of imprisonment revolve; and it is also from the same epicenter that she tackles thorny issues daringly to question and contest certain prevailing traditions and the social established order. Her fragmented text becomes the most appropriate form with which she explores the collective and individual histories of women rebellions to immortalize memories of popular protest. It is with such a tool that she reveals that the pictures articulated through official and patriarchal discourses are merely inaccurate fictions which disfigure the reality of woman’s lives<sup>(22)</sup>. In order to invalidate such an incompatible representation, Djebbar engages thoughtfully with studying history as one of the best ways to cultivate self-reflexive open-mindedness.

More significantly, in a clever and subtle manner, the author shapes “the gendered space” as a moral epicenter from which she wages a war against dogmatism and oppressive ideals using the timeless experiences of woman as a tool for questioning and revising traditional modes of representation by presenting the oppressive nature of patriarchal culture. By the same token, the second part of the text questions the conventional writing of history and the validity of a historical discourse which excluded woman and let her remain on the margin.

As a story teller and without imposing her voice, Djebbar traces the stories of women seeking ways of survival, who struggle against what she calls ‘people in power’, “les gens de là-haut”, those who have the “Solta” (power).

In her attempt to reform thought about the writing of history, she overturns dominant male patterns of thought and social practices by constructing a female experience previously hidden and overlooked by tradition and religion. She refers to the exemplary models of mothers and grandmothers who incite their daughters to flee the prison of tradition and religion<sup>(23)</sup>. Such a discourse can be interpreted as a way for Djebbar not only to re-introduce woman into history, but also to retrieve their occulted words, rescue their legacies and reflect their values. A Bringing back into light of women’s heroic actions and their exemplary ways of fighting, which they deemed to be ways of expressing their faith, she inscribes a long tradition of women as combatants ranging from Tinhinan, Kahina, Zoraida, her grandmother to Yasmina whose throat was cut by four terrorists.

Djebbar reports that women have fought not only with arms but with words of their authentic language as well. To affirm their presence and defend their rights, women have distinguished themselves by their eloquent verbal as well as imaginative powers<sup>(24)</sup>.

To subvert the compulsive masculine force which denies the woman’s speech, the author does not only demystify the codes and constructs that have made woman invisible, absent, silent, and forgotten, but also reclaims the power to mane so that women themselves can determine their own identity<sup>(25)</sup>.

At the core of the text is a quest for freedom which ranges from the quest for independence, going along with contesting women's oppression in the name of tradition and religion. Djebbar's subtle approach to issue of gender opens her narrative which transcribes the reality of alienation. It starts with a conversation haunted by an underlying anxiety and uncertainty between two women about the 'enemy'. Djebbar uses the technique of reversal to transform a closed area into a space of freedom and of free expression. For instance, the confined space of the "Hammam"(public bath) becomes not only a refuge for women, but also an open space where women can express their anxieties, share their concerns and their feelings far from the 'vast prison' which stands for the bubble-like homes and oppressive society which they are closed in<sup>(26)</sup>.

However, it is by the end of the text that Djebbar's implied warning appears. The author warns that the path of "self-determination" is not easy to reach because there is not a single source of oppression to fight, but many. James. R. Martel is right to write that Djebbar juxtaposes Algerian fighting French occupation and woman fighting man<sup>(27)</sup>. Like a trickster, Djebbar astutely signifies that suffering is vast and cautions women about the coming traps. She urges them to negotiate a way of living, to take their destiny in their hands because colonialism is something that can be "lifted", tradition is something that can be changed, but religious obscurantism when combined with political dogmatism and its entanglements is not easy to go away, there is no perceptible delivery from them except, in Djebbar's own words, by making compromises to reach liberty, at least, "the liberty to breathe".

### **3-The Haunting Voice in *Woman Without Sepulcher*:**

In *Woman Without Sepulcher*, Djebbar continues to retrieve the shadows people had believed were dead in order to question the nature of women's contributions to the war and deepens the reflection on the impact of the conflict on their identity construction and social place after independence. The text with its contest form foregrounds its author's preoccupation with Algerian history of failures and disappointments. Throughout a fragmented narrative, Djebbar denounces the absence of women in the history of the struggle against the colonial domination<sup>(28)</sup>.

In fear of the disappearance of the memory and in order not to forget the ones who have taken women's history of heroism to the graves, the novelist does not only make the women take the most active role in the struggle for liberation, but also makes their revolt take the form of a heroic attempt that instills in them a sense of pride and dignity. She depicts their uneasy struggle, their plight, and the oppression they suffered from during the colonial period and the failures and frustration that followed. The future offers not redemption but more of the same violence and oppression.

After the revolution ended, France withdrew, dissident voices were stifled and successive waves of violence erupted. Djebbar brings about female voices to portray the ordinary day-to-day elements of woman's lives, from a woman's point of view, emphasizing the woman's ability to survive, resist, and riposte against violence. Through an ideal and powerful representation and far from the traditional depiction of woman as victims, powerless, and voiceless, Djebbar, on the contrary, endows her female characters with the force to challenge, to accuse, and strike back. She does so in a way which is reminiscent of the trickster's attempt to survive against various odds.

A more complex but complementary series of deviations tactics emerge all along the narrative of Djébar's *Woman without Sepulcher* where the author creates situations of reversal with which she displaces the powerless onto powerful. The displacement is displayed in the main character's shift from victimization to reaction, from emotional disintegration to pride, and a transfer from individual martyrdom to collective engagement<sup>(29)</sup>. Ann Hadebache Reidinger notes that the fragment describing emotions of decency and indecency provoked by languages focuses on levels of interaction in war. Leitmotifs and complaints in dialogues, or monologues, consist to liberate in vocal expressions women's insights, resulting from their spiritual strength<sup>(30)</sup>.

More precisely however, the notions of displacement, transgression, and subversion of Djébar's literary project comes to sight in her portrayal of the main character, Zoulikha and the organization of the events deploys gradually around some selected facets of the mythical figure's story of struggle. Zoulikha carries within herself a touch of greatness; she is the symbolic motor and a powerful symbol of resistance to French oppression. She is endowed with power and courage, which excites astonishment and exhorts admiration through her indestructible will to liberate her country. Her story is a symbolic journey of displacement, reversal and revenge against oppressive laws and systems.

It is through this character that Djébar defies and reverses the traditional patterns of history limited to the concept of male achievements. The novelist goes beyond what is perceived in traditional terms as "the feminine side" by swinging between the character's roles of mother to that of an active actor during the Algerian War of Liberation. She glorifies her intelligence, underlines her courage and wit with which she defies oppression, torture, and death. She uses Zoulikha, the extraordinary heroine, as a device to prove how women during a crucial moment dared to work outside their domestic spheres to challenge the traditional conception of women. By using Zoulikha as a model of self-assurance and the way she handles her soldiers, Djébar draws attention to the fact that women during the Algerian Revolution were more accepted; they participated in the war side by side with men, contributed to end the colonial subjugation. But, after independence, they have been clamped down, their authority has been undermined, their achievements have been buried and forgotten because *Les fils et maris seront les plus prolixes dans les discours officiels*, reiterates the denouncing tone inherent in the narrator's speech<sup>(31)</sup>.

More significantly, however, the next technique with which we can link Djébar's *Woman without Sepulcher* to the trickster tradition is her appeal to collective memory of her people. She reactivates the past by harking back to the old myth of survival, the myth of "Anza" a haunting voice devoid of any referential marker. The "Anza" is believed to be a voice that no one knows exactly who it belongs to, who it is addressed to, and it cannot be precisely situated in time or place. Such a voice rises from nowhere and its echo can be heard everywhere. Despite the vacuum from which it emerges, the troubling and discomfiting voice manages to impose itself in causing anxiety and pain to its hearer. The unburied woman, Zoulikha does not cry, she is the cry of the past which haunts the present and demands change and revision. Her voice resembles the piercing cry of "Anza" which appears to herald and warn about the coming violence. The disturbing voice of Zoulikha is the voice of a ghost that permanently haunts the memory of her daughters, relatives, and her friends to remind

them of the colonial oppression and the oblivion that followed it<sup>(32)</sup>. Her disconcerting voice questions the national identity and targets the patriarchal structures, politico-social and cultural institutions for their oppression and repression, denial of progress, autonomy, and happiness for women “[Ces] femmes d’ombre, renversent la démarche”<sup>(33)</sup>.

The writer puts emphasis on Zoulikha’s energy and art as a powerful life force and regards her spark of poetic genius as a dangerous expression of rebellion targeting the patriarchal structure which not only denies and buries women’s contributions, relegates them to second class, but also completely forgets their achievements and therefore betrayed the true spirit of the Algerian revolution<sup>(34)</sup>. The voice of the main character goes backwards and then moves forward in time to be a cry that not only questions male authority but also challenges the torturer and charges the officials of excluding woman from the public world. It is the voice which takes powerful intensity and resonates deep into the heart of its hearer; it rises above to drown out the accusation of patriarchy<sup>(35)</sup>. The voice stands for all the victims, who have been, in Djébar’s words: «Effacées dans l’ombre, la confusion, l’épouvante»<sup>(36)</sup>.

To become that of the collective consciousness which blames women for their complicity that she avowedly denounces as follows: «Nous entretenons, à notre tour et à demeure, nos tortionnaires, nos gardes chiourmes, nos gens d’armes...»<sup>(37)</sup>.

The voice also symbolizes the transmitters of “la parole” who had traditionally a very circumscribed right to speak themselves. The voice incites that rule must be broken just as the normal regulation of woman’s status must be revised. It is Zoulikha who voices in the story both as character, narrator in order to display the link with oral tradition yet against the conventional tradition. By writing it down, women subvert the tradition defined by man as she, for instance, wonders if: “Ne faudrait-il pas saluer ces étrangers spectateurs, qui seuls peuvent témoigner que nos corps de femmes, en explosant sous la lumière, retrouve joie et salut dans cette mort chantée »<sup>(38)</sup>.

As a historian, she uses oral testimonies and archival information to uncover and recuperate the buried narratives to denounce and revise the present. For instance, Djébar revives Zoulika’s heroic story and reconsiders the country’s history and provides a counter version of the woman’s past of double oppression. The portrayal of the main character and the revival of her lost voice in historical books is a disruptive and subversive discourse targeting patriarchy and its political, cultural and conceptual systems and institutions which exclude woman from the discourse of the war.

Furthermore, Djébar’s use of different narrative voices is meant to displace the official discourse; it is a tactical strategy whereby the predicaments of woman are displayed. Accordingly, the narrative moves in a circular way, as does the quest for truth in oral stories; it reveals the torment, suffering, and anxiety of Mina as she tries to find her mother’s sepulcher. Through Zoulikha’s words, one could see a kind of confession from the part of Djébar. The two voices fuse into one whose deliverance can only be achieved by what is proper to a writer: writing through which she offers a critical revision of history written by man.

Therefore, Djébar, to paraphrase Jame.R.Martel, practices a recognized misrecognition. What she misrecognizes is not so much the Algerian Revolution per se (she tends to see it from a critical perspective, even as she portrays it with grace and sympathy), but the failure of the post independence governments to avoid replicating

those failures over and over again<sup>(39)</sup>.

### Conclusion:

To sum up, the trickster tradition that we have chosen to define the various literary strategies that Assia Djébar appeals to are meant to convey the author's fusion of the dual forces of patriarchy and feminism to display and foreground her egalitarian tendency while repressing its inner patriarchal structure.

The writer succeeds in creating polyphony of female voices which cunningly strike against oppressive authority. The same type of voices more often merge harmoniously with the voice of the trickster as well as with the reformist aspirations of Djébar herself. The transgression is, then three fold; it is literary, cultural, religious and political. She expresses the various constraints imposed on woman and it is from that angle that her role of writing in the process of liberation and revision can be understood. Her use of a passionate discourse through the dialogue of her characters, like that of the trickster, to move the reader to debunk the symbolic order and struggle against the myth constructed by the post independence officials and by patriarchal discourses.

Through language, Djébar creates new words, new meanings to unveil, denounce, and subvert the dominant tradition within the patriarchal society including all forms of oppression. By the same token, the author's interweaving of explicit and implicit strategies invites the reader for a self-assessment and the message that the three texts offer is an implicit project which suggests a discourse of liberation for women far from the flawed Western, customary, and religious conventions. Its basis was opposed to the thinking of post independent officials that underpinned the achievements of women.

It can also be deduced that the foundations of trickster are inherent in Djébar's thinking since the three selected texts can be linked to the trickster's struggle against all types of oppressive and patriarchal authorities. The writer offers an alternative model of history with a dynamic creativity which contributes in the shaping of women's own history to be added to that of heroic male figures whose stories erased theirs just as Western history did. Such strategies aim to bring out at least a projection and an open future for women.

Djébar claims for a new order with new reconfigurations, a world where man and woman cease to exert their power to oppress each other. She encourages an Algerian feminism deprived of resentment against men and reappraises suffering in connection to a political cause devoid of masculine and feminine relationships veiled by hate and resentment or a site of non-alliances. The multicultural and multiform aspects of three novels compel her readers and reviewers to avoid drawing borders since they are amazingly resistant to such a capture; they can only be put on the edge or just beyond existing borders, classifications, and categories. If tricksters are notorious border breakers in moving swiftly and impulsively back and forth across all limits, no border is sacrosanct for Djébar's narratives be it religious, cultural, political, and linguistic. As an intellectual trickster too, Djébar can be regarded as a visitor everywhere and seems to dwell in no single place as she is in continual transit through different world cultures. She seems to live: "*Partout et nulle part dans la maison de son père*"<sup>(40)</sup>.

Yet, what the three texts have in common is that they may be read as "women centered" and mainly concerned with representing women in empowering ways, with

attempting to redefine their identity. Djebbar struggles to overcome the traps of identity and history, of reformulating what it is in order to come to some new kind of understanding of self, society, and politics. Such a struggle cannot be limited to woman as it also concerns man. Therefore, the predicament today and, specifically in Algeria, is not limited to gender; it is rather a crucial problem of citizenship.

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