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Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy* and Assia Djebar's  
*Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* and *So Vast the Prison***

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## **Dedications**

I dedicate this work to my mother, **Latifa**, the pillar of our family,

and to my sisters, Hanane, Sarah and Houda, who are also my mothers.

I also dedicate this work to my friends Jihad, Fadwa, Khedidja and Abir for offering me relentless support, and Ghalia for practically sponsoring this research.

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## **Abstract**

Women writers have long sought to reintroduce silenced women and their experiences to history and literature. This thesis, then, intends to link these women to history and literature by examining literary texts written by postcolonial women writers Assia Djébar and Toni Morrison, specifically *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade*, *So Vast the Prison*, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Djébar and Morrison, regardless of their different socio-cultural backgrounds, Algerian and African American, respectively, showcase an undeniable affinity by writing subaltern women who have been subjected to the cruelty of patriarchy, (post)colonialism and slavery. They attempt to present women and their histories with a final aim to challenge literary conventions and exclusionary history. Therefore, this thesis undertakes a thematic comparative analysis guided by a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework that takes intersectional theory and subaltern historiography as its main focus when exploring Algerian and African American women's experiences within their respective histories and literatures. We also address the authors' roles by examining the feminine quality of their writings. This study argues that although women are written off history, they still manage to preserve it within their bodies, confirming thus a resistance to their manifold oppressions, and providing women writers with the possibility to unearth their buried truths and voices, write and rewrite them into a revised version of history and literature called her/story. This thesis revealed that women's intersectionality has led to their manifold oppression and subalternity within literature and history. Nonetheless, we assert that women writers contend this by crafting a her/story that represents the several positions subaltern women occupy, mainly oppressed and agent positions. Djébar and Morrison, then, emerge as revisionists who write subaltern women's individual and collective experiences and her/stories in the feminine.

**Keywords:** Algerian women writers, African American women writers, intersectionality, her/story, subalternity, women's voices.

## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

**AIS** : L'Armée islamique du salut or The Islamic Salvation Army

**ALN** : L'Armée de libération nationale or The National Liberation Army

**FIS** : Front islamique du salut or The Islamic Salvation Front

**FLN** : Front de libération nationale or The National Liberation Front

**GIA** : Le Group islamique armé or The Armed Islamic Group

**GPRA**: Gouvernement provisoire de la République algérienne or the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic

**MIA** : Le mouvement islamique armé or The Armed Islamic Movement

**MTLD** : le Mouvement pour le triomphe des libertés démocratiques or The Movement for Triumph of Democratic Liberties

**RND** : Le Rassemblement national démocratique or The National Democratic Rally

**UNFA**: L'Union nationale des femmes algériennes or The National Union of Algerian Women

**WWI** : The First World War

**WWII** : The Second World War

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# **General Introduction**

## General Introduction

For an extended period of time, associating women, literature and history was restricted and not regarded as an urgent consideration, until women writers revolted against restricting structures and made women's issues urgent by documenting their predicaments.

Erkkila argues for historicizing women and their engagement with literature writing as they are often reduced to the same universal reality, and thus, dehistoricized within their racial, sexual, class-based and historical discursive boundaries (3). In fact, Erkkila calls it "trans-historicizing" (3), meaning that historical contexts and periods lose their unique features, leading to concepts and events becoming the same across them. So, in order to challenge the universality and dehistoricization of women and their experiences, women writers "reclaim women's literature and women's literary history as a site of dissension, contingency and ongoing struggle" (4).

Two of these authors are Assia Djébar and Toni Morrison, who come from Algerian and African American backgrounds, respectively. Indeed, Djébar and Morrison opt to write a literature that centers women's experiences and concerns within their oppressive historical and socio-cultural environments. In the case of Djébar, she writes *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* and *So Vast the Prison* in an effort to document Algerian history in relation to Algerian women. In this regard, she explores the violent French colonial rule, the post-colonial era and she delineates the contextual ideologies that ruled before and along these tumultuous changes in Algerian history. Along with the novels chosen in this research, most of her narratives span from before colonialism to the turmoil-ridden nineties of the country, showing her dedication towards forwarding the brutality of French colonialism, patriarchal norms and skewed nationalist ideals. Morrison, in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, also delves into a literature that best represents her community, particularly African American women. She

traces a line from the start of the Transatlantic Slave Trade to the Reconstruction Era, seeking to pinpoint the start and persistence of issues that continuously plague black women in America. In these particular novels, slavery is sanctioned as the primary offender in black women's lives, while in her other novels, other contextual ideologies are addressed.

Indeed, there exists a considerable body of studies and criticism on Djébar's and Morrison's literary texts. When it came to selecting the literary criticism for us to examine, we decided on studies that concern themselves with women, their bodies and histories as well as those that do not exclude the authors from their works. By doing so, the studies pertaining to Djébar's novels, particularly *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* and *So Vast the Prison*, prove to be as various and diverse as those conducted on Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. A Study by Jane Hiddleston, entitled *Out of Algeria*, is regarded as a seminal work that negotiates Djébarian literary explorations under a postcolonial and deconstructionist lens. She seeks to highlight the relationship that links Algeria with Djébar, explaining how the latter belongs to and is excluded from her native country. According to Hiddleston, this turbulent relation prompts Djébar to write an Algeria that is shattered by war and forever changed; filled with differences, divided and even ruined (1), while also motivating her to "recover her country's history" (1), conducting, in the meantime, a "quest for a meaningful Algerian history, and...an understanding of women's roles within that history" (7). With this, Hiddleston places Djébar under a colonial and postcolonial frame that looks at the Algerian identity in relation to "French philosophy...Algerian traditions and Anglo-American postcolonial theory" (2). In this light, Djébar's texts do not fall under one singular theory, but rather several theories that help readers fathom the representation of women's stories, histories and agency in addition to Djébar's position, or autobiography, within all. As far as theory goes, Hiddleston employs Bhabha's hybridity, ambivalence and in-betweenness concepts and Spivak's subaltern understanding in her book. She links Bhabha's

ideas to the Algerian identity, giving it a cultural definition. As for Spivak's understanding of a subaltern, or an inferior self, Hiddleston argues that her theories would help identify how the other becomes so vastly different from what the self considers as right and good. She also sees that from this perspective, the subaltern becomes an undefinable individual who resists and possesses an unpredictable identity. All things considered, she acknowledges that most of Djébar's writings look for the feminine Algerian identity, specifically women who are wronged by several ideologies throughout the course of history.

Hiddleston, and while analyzing the body of literary works Djébar had written, describes *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* as an interesting portrayal of relocation of one's identity in such a turbulent history, while she sees *So Vast the Prison* as a feminist novel that "seek[s] to uncover women's lost voices while admitting to the impossibility of that project" (5). The first is considered a mixture of Algerian women's voices and their resistance, because it presents colonial violence and at the same time shows the resistance of the war of independence and even tackles the author's childhood. Still, Hiddleston argues that despite all of these contrasts and events, there appears to be no progress or development recorded in the book. Meanwhile, the latter is categorized under the books that focus more on socio-cultural and linguistic issues. Hiddleston explains that this book is an individual and a collective rendition of Algerian women's stories, all while stressing its representation of feminine language. In effect, this study is quite important because it touches upon Algerian women, their history, their experiences with oppression and their resistance against it. In addition, it positions the author and her literary productions in postcoloniality, all while opening the door for other theories to be tested, and even forwards the notion of feminine language that encompasses all. However, despite the relevancy of this study, Hiddleston's understanding does not perceive Djébar's endeavors as influential or revolutionary to women's writing and history. Her view remains pessimistic and thus reduces any credit that

could be awarded to the author and her books. Moreover, because she undertakes analyzing every book Djébar has published, her analyses emerge as superficial and arbitrary.

Other than Hiddleston, essays such as Aletti's "Assia Djébar's L'Amour La Fantasia and the Historiographic Approach" and Orlando's "Assia Djébar's Vaste est la prison: Platform for a New Space of Agency and Feminine Enunciation in Algeria" have tackled *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* and *So Vast the Prison* separately. The first takes Linda Hutcheon's conceptualization of historiographic metafiction as a basis for her understanding of Djébar's text. In doing so, Aletti regards history from a postcolonial and gendered perspective. She also scrutinizes language usage and its effect on history writing. Orlando, on the other hand, declares her admiration for Djébar's women's history rewriting efforts, all while claiming that Djébar is also criticizing violence against women. She identifies Djébar's vision as one that "encompass[es] not only historical discourse, but also discourses of feminism, language, culture, as well as identities" (86). She shares the same view as Hiddleston when it comes to the existence and importance of a personal and collective women's history, whilst contending that, "it is not until women write *their own* history and stories, and thus establish agency, will they gain *their own* place in Algeria" (87 italicized in the original). Besides, she praises her breaking the conventional narrative order, challenging patriarchy and other oppressive systems by braving "autobiography, post-colonial and colonial historic revision, and her cinematographic journal" (88). Finally, writing is seen as an instrumental part of Djébar's journey, and unlike Hiddleston, her exile is received positively as it allows her to confront her and several other women's vast prison so as to reconstruct history and Algerian women's voices.

Regarding Morrison's narratives, Beaulieu advocates in her introduction to *The Toni Morrison Encyclopedia* for Morrison's bravery and bold discussion of black women. She sees that Morrison is politically and personally engaged with her writing and representation,

which Beaulieu perceives as significant to the representation of one's culture, society and history. She even touches upon Morrison's manipulation of language and the exhibition of ancestry, going even further by declaring Morrison as an ancestral figure, who enables her readers to gain a deeper understanding of the past that will help them appreciate and seize any opportunity in the future (viii). Having said that, Bloom in *Toni Morrison's Beloved* makes the bold statement that Morrison has become an uncompromising writer whose sole purpose is to push forward ideologies that speak of politics and invoke slave narratives and slavery victims. Although he claims that *Beloved* and its main female character are a "realistic and historical veracity" (2), he contradicts himself by claiming that, as a novel, it is unlikely for it to be positioned within an African American, feminist or Marxist framework. This view of his is narrow and neglectful of black female slaves, their history and oppression. Subsequently, Scholars such as Heinert, in *Narrative Conventions and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, challenge such ideas by asserting that, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of what Morrison is seeking to represent, her books warrant deconstructionist, Marxist, feminist, new historicist...etc. viewpoints (she personally pursues a Marxist and postcolonial understanding in her book, basing her study on Edward Said's theorizations on dominance, superiority and cultural hegemony). She further confirms that Morrison is concerned with aesthetics and politics as well as the reader's interpretation of the language. Heinert indicates that Morrison in *Beloved* utilizes writing techniques and narrative strategies with the intention to not only rewrite and edit the conventionality of literature, literature writing and history, but also to disrupt the pillar-like tenets of hegemonic culture, which appear to control the representation of race in literature and history. Despite the instructive quality of Heinert's study, she is unyielding in her description of Morrison's books as lacking resolution, outcome and influence, diminishing her writing efforts and shoving *Beloved* into an unsettled and undetermined dimension.

Another important point of view has been discussed by Ivory, who links Morrison to postcoloniality. Ivory declares that African American writers are also postcolonial writers. To him, the erection of the American nation is identical to settler and non-settler colonialism. In the case of America, it is achieved by means of the Middle Passage, slavery and the systematic elimination of Native Americans. He ultimately argues that postcolonial African American writers are descendants of the African diaspora and carriers of the legacy of slavery. His negotiation of Morrison's *Beloved*, particularly, is established on Bhabha's notions of home and unhomeliness as he claims that a woman's body is the first home she experiences exile from because of violence, thus becoming "the womb and the tomb" (32). Then again, while relying on Bhabha's views, he expects a process of reclamation of this colonized/enslaved body/home by forwarding two female characters where one is an enslaved body, Sethe, while the other is a transgressively freed body, Beloved (who is beyond death and living and is simultaneously the past and the present), all while questioning identity, historical experiences and agency. Ivory characterizes *Beloved* as a story about family, relationships, changing one's name, practicing culture and reclaiming memory. He concludes that Morrison is seeking to fill historical gaps because they are to serve as roadmaps for descendants to find their legacy, and that much of the brutal history of the middle passage is buried in the Atlantic Ocean, leaving many African Americans with no sense of home or history, so "it is in that tradition that Toni Morrison's work continues to be of interest to postcolonial studies" (33), leading to the belief that some of the major undefined spaces for African Americans are home and history, and that the horrific parts of the latter are yet to be fully uncovered and resolved. In essence, Ivory's postcolonial view emerges as pertinent with its focus on certain thematic concerns, and its interest in history and the enslaved body. Still, while focusing on postcolonial perspectives, he appears to be sidetracked by their views, forgoing women as a central focal point.

Additionally, we soon notice how Beaulieu, Bloom and Heinert do not tackle *A Mercy*. This is because the novel is one of the newer Morrison literary productions, which means that it is most likely not to be as appraised as the others on the one hand, while on the other hand, we discover that, even individually, studies on the book are not as abundant as they are on *Beloved*.

Other than the above-mentioned studies, we present two more that give priority to *Beloved* and *A Mercy* separately: Ropero's "Beating Back the Past: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* as Historiographic Metafiction" and Nawaz, Murtaza and Hassan's "Women in Toni Morrison's Novel *A Mercy*: An Analysis of Subaltern Voices in the American Melting Pot". Ropero's research is designed to link postcoloniality and history to postmodernism and thus explores Linda Hutcheon's metafictional historiography, which "points at historiography's refocusing on previously neglected or silenced objects of study such as women, homosexuals or racial minorities" (173). Ropero declares *Beloved* as a metafictional historiography wherein a real subaltern historical woman figure is reaffirmed into a literary discourse that blends with history. She also underscores Morrison's interest in presenting culture as a main part of her writing, especially since it solidifies the discursive nature of her characters and helps her reconstruct a world from scraps. By the end, Ropero settles on the idea that postcolonial and postmodern views should be "independent critical projects" as they prove to have "distinct agendas" (177), with one seeking to radicalize narration, while the other holds onto cultural and historical representation.

Regarding Nawaz, Murtaza and Hassan's study of *A Mercy*, they suggest a representation of different nations' episteme, or knowledge, as an operation that runs on difference, which, in turn, is made non-existent or inferior because of the dominant episteme. They base their study on Mignolo and Dipesh Chakravarty, who perceive subaltern history as an attempt to revive this devalued knowledge and history of marginalized nations.

Chakravarty, particularly, is interested in the idea that coloniality thrives by making others silenced, disavowed and racialized (52), which creates a linear and fixed version of history (51). Therefore, he recommends a “reverse historiography” (54) that disputes the categorization of people and the singularity of narratives. Based on these understandings, Nawaz, Murtaza and Hassan identify Morrison's novel as a reflection of all of the above, labeling it “a socio-historical understanding of colonialism” (52), further explaining how it emphasizes decolonization, resistance and plurality by presenting female characters and their contextualized female experience. They claim that their “critical reading gives an insight into the continuity of colonial relations of domination and oppression, and the dual colonization of women” (52). For the most part, their research is pertinent to the idea that Morrison is campaigning for plurality and multiplicity of voices and knowledge in order to create an alternative history of colonization and the representation of black women within it.

However, as this research is generally guided by a comparative framework, it regulates this study and allows for a comparison between Djébar's and Morrison's diverse literary texts (Tiegham in Wellek 15), which, in turn, limits the pool of literature and literary criticism to review. So, in order to gain deeper insights, it is important to inspect the comparative studies that precede this research. Indeed, looking for research that grouped Morrison and Djébar under a comparative umbrella that takes women, their bodies, history and literature as a focus proved to be quite challenging. We were able to pin down two relevant studies that compared *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade*, with *Beloved* and none that compared *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*. In fact, the latter did not seem to enjoy the same amount of criticism as the other two books, which further encourages our research and evidences its novelty and contribution.

The first is a paper entitled “The Quest for Identity through the Memory of Rape in Assia Djébar’s *Fantasia* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*” by Fuad Jadan. This paper argues that Djébar and Morrison restore sexual violence, rape, and their memory in their narratives. Jadan determines that, under the guise of colonial violence and racialization/enslavement, rape targets women because of their gender, race and class. On another note, he demonstrates how both authors seek retribution for women’s rape by altering rape on the one hand while appropriating language on the other. Jadan notes how Djébar and Morrison decide on unorthodox rape portrayals that destroy phallogocentrism, emphasizing the restrictive quality of language, and the possibility it has when wielded by women writers. At the end, he imparts that rape is a way of silencing and highlighting the resistance of women and that, “both texts are deemed a cultural site of the collective memory of rape under enslavement and colonization” (106). This study takes an extremely focused research area, narrowing the scope of research while also linking language to writing the silence and the resistance of women.

The other research is an Algerian PhD entitled “(De)construction of the Female Self in The Writings of Assia Djébar and Toni Morrison” by Bouharrou Karima. This one focuses on analyzing Djébar’s *l’Amour, la Fantasia* and *Femmes D’Alger dans leurs Appartement* and Morrison’s *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eye* under a comparative postcolonial feminist lens. Her interests lie within securing a thorough thematic analysis of Algerian and African American women’s ‘Self’ and its reconstruction in relation to history and culture. In fact, she even mentions the idea that these authors are in the process of restoring women’s history, where women's voices are heard through their struggle and resistance, and verified through their bodies. Be that as it may, the researcher adamantly overstresses her disinterest in comparing the authors and their work. She also observes that the authors are not writing against colonial, racist and patriarchal views, only rediscovering silent spaces and achieving

a guaranteed healing. The latter emerges as an inconsistency in this research's findings in view of the fact that it poses as an idealistic wish that does not appear to reflect the authors' endeavors. The claim that they are restoring history while negotiating women invalidates itself against the claim that the authors are not contesting the powers that necessitated the restoration of women's history to begin with. We also note how the authors' roles and endeavors are not as importantly regarded in this research, and that women are seen as similar and healed by the end of the research.

These studies address various interesting points; however, each single one of them appears to be missing a certain part to the equation that comprises of a comparative analysis of diverse women, their bodies, voiced and silenced contextual experiences and the writing and rewriting of these experiences into a version of history that accommodates them without blending them into one uniform category. Therefore, this current research intends to fill these gaps.

Because this is a doctoral thesis, it serves as an expendable platform that could allow for a lengthy and more thorough analysis of Djébar's and Morrison's literary texts, hence the analysis of two novels from each author. This choice also aims to cover several historical periods by analyzing these authors' most and least studied novels. Moreover, it will attempt to give a comparative postcolonial feminist reading of women, heeding their contexts and seeking to examine their interaction with and reinscription within their histories and literature.

Coming from different contextual backgrounds, Djébar and Morrison converge in the themes they address in their narratives. Despite their historical, cultural, geographical and linguistic differences, they take women, their voices, silence and histories into account, assuming a meticulous task of challenging women's lack of representation in literature and

history. Their grand project is to nullify embedded historical accounts by re-inserting women into them, especially since they have observed the male-dominated and Western-dictated reality of history. With this in mind, they understand that not only are women's victories systematically removed from the narrative, but also their experience with oppression and violence under several vicious ideologies working together. Thus, examining the relentlessness of these women writers and their reiteration of postcolonial women's issues could lead to a rewarding outcome, and has greatly influenced the choice of this topic, the authors and their books. Additionally, this research considers the translated versions of Djébar's books in order to go beyond linguistic boundaries of the French language to broaden and share our reading experience with a larger audience.

Given the above, both authors seem to be concerned with women as their main interest, in postcolonial spaces (colonial rule and postcoloniality for Djébar) and (slavery for Morrison). And even though it might appear as if their works could be well-situated within feminism and postcolonialism, the latter tend to fall short, failing to deliver on their expectations and objectives. To explain more, the need for postcolonial theorization rose because of the effects of imperialism and settler colonialism that were being exerted on third-world countries. In a parallel manner, the need for feminist theorization was necessitated because of patriarchal norms and old gender-discriminative teachings and foundations. In essence, postcolonial theorizations and literatures were the product of colonized nations' sufferings. In them, scholars, theorists and writers oppose colonial discourse that speaks of erasure, assimilation and acculturation, all while writing about the manner in which their subjectivity was stolen in order to create objects with no history or literary productions to represent. Likewise, feminist views originated from a time when women were excluded from the public sphere and forced into the private one to do their domestic roles of caretaking and childrearing. As these standpoints developed, one component seemed to be missing from

both: postcolonial women. In a postcolonial space, scholars and writers disregard the postcolonial woman because her existence appears to not contribute nor impede the overall understanding or bettering of the nation, while in mainstream feminism, sometimes called white feminism, the postcolonial woman is not as thoroughly regarded as a white woman. This means that the category of women has been limited to Western women who laid the foundations to the movement as well as the theory and literature.

In that sense, these postcolonial women become unheard, or silenced, in their respective socio-political, cultural and historical landscapes as well as reduced to just their gender so that they can fit within that mainstream feminism ideation. This disregard leads these women to be oppressed further and written off history. Consequently, this research's significance emerges in the need to forward these women, also known as subaltern women, as the main subjects in their experiences and history. Moreover, this research argues that even though those subaltern women are written off history because of their perpetuated silencing, they manage to preserve their history within themselves (their bodies), proving their ability to resist their marginalization, until women writers excavate these truths from different unconventional history records and rewrite them, revising on the way the history known to the world into a women's version, or a her/story.

So, by employing a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework pushed under a thematic comparative lens with a focus on several theories, Algerian and African American women's experiences are highlighted. These theories are identified as intersectionality, which looks at the many facets of postcolonial women's identities that brand them as more than their gender. Through this perspective, the oppression, marginality and even violence against these women becomes complex as it is catered to each individual woman and her different identities and identity markers. This leads to the necessity for the second theory, which is subaltern historiography. Once postcolonial Algerian and African American

women emerge as intersectional women, they become automatically affiliated with subalternity. Spivak, a leading theorist in subaltern studies, posits that subaltern women are no longer just oppressed; in fact, they are not represented within discourses, especially history, and thus silenced without the ability to speak. While exploring her ideations, several other scholars emerged to oppose her pessimistic outlook. However, this research aims to deploy her claims, particularly the one where she explains the indispensability of an itinerary of silence when dealing with the subaltern woman. It is said that tracing an itinerary of silencing for the subaltern permits the detection of the subaltern's buried voices. Certainly, Coronil contends that a subaltern woman is indeed silenced but also possesses the ability to resist oppression, leading her to certain points of agency during her life. Accordingly, Spivak determines that tracing subaltern women's silenced and voiced selves is best conducted by a postcolonial woman intellectual, in this case, postcolonial women writers such as Djébar and Morrison. Furthermore, this research aims to link Spivak's and Coronil's assumptions with Cixous' understanding of feminine writing in order to build a firmer ground of analysis. This is meant to highlight the authors' writing skills in accordance with their tackling of themes, implying that the writing and rewriting of her/story cannot survive with normal language usage. It needs a feminine writing that would solidify its presence and allow it to thrive. This makes up for a well-tailored approach seeking to provide a nuanced interpretation of postcolonial women, postcolonial women writers, literature and history.

As a result, guidelines to this study emerge in the form of postcolonial woman intellectuals, Djébar and Morrison, writing and rewriting the silencing and resistance of subaltern intersectional Algerian and African American women. This leads to the belief that intersectional subaltern women occupy several positions, oppressed and agent positions specifically. In addition, these women's experiences accumulate in a version of history that

is woman-centered, her/story, and written in the feminine, which encapsulates all of the above.

This research, therefore, attempts to answer the following questions:

(1) How do Djébar and Morrison represent the subalternity and silencing of women characters in all four of their narratives (*Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade*, *So Vast the Prison*, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*) in relation to these women's social, cultural and historical contexts?

(2) How do Djébar and Morrison write and rewrite history to underscore women characters' resistance and agent positions in *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade*, *So Vast the Prison*, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*?

(3) Is this revision executed by means of feminine writing? And if yes, what does that imply?

(4) Is the writing and rewriting of her/story achieved then in *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade*, *So Vast the Prison*, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*? And have the authors' trajectory of writing change from *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade* and *Beloved* to *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*?

(5) How does all of the above converge and diverge when compared and what does that entail?

Our current research aims, then, to contribute to the historical, literary and socio-cultural representation of intersectional subaltern women, specifically Algerian and African American women. Its significance lies in understanding that these women are silenced and ultimately excluded from history. However, they are also in resisting positions, so they manage to preserve history in different forms that would eventually guide women writers

into reconstructing a her/story that represents subaltern women. Finally, it dispels the blending of women's experiences by celebrating their individual and collective identities and histories, which is why her/story is spelled with a slash between her and story.

To this end, this present thesis is composed of four chapters. The first two chapters offer conceptual and theoretical foundations to the research. The first chapter, entitled *A Retrospect of the Postcolonial, the Feminist and the Contextual: Echoes of a Review* provides conceptual and contextual underpinnings to the research. It seeks to ground the chosen works of Djébar and Morrison by looking at postcolonial and feminist concepts that would allow us to obtain a guided perspective. To put it differently, an interaction with Djébar's and Morrison's narratives appears to necessitate an examination of the ideologies that lead to colonialism and its legacies and ongoing effects from postcoloniality to enslavement. Besides, since the chosen corpora and topic revolve around women, it becomes inevitable to seek feminist views. Due to their association with these concepts, Djébar and Morrison address the marginalization, alienation and oppression of a certain group of people by a dominant entity. They also tackle the displacement, the identity issues and the male domination that torment postcolonial subjects (Algerian and African American women). From this, it becomes easier and significant to trace, define and understand the historical and socio-cultural background of these women. This chapter also sets to ascertain that both postcolonial theory and postcolonial literature appear to overlook the representation of women and that feminism relies on one racial group's representation, hence, the final aim of this chapter is to evidence the diversity of women and the need for them to have a proper representation within established discourses.

The second chapter, entitled *Woman, Words, Voices and Her/story: A Framework of Representation* is a follow-up to the first chapter. Since the first one presented the conceptual premise, this one is to devise a theoretical framework that would regulate and ensure the

inclusion of all important components of this thesis; namely, the authors, women, postcolonialism, feminism, history, literature and writing. As a result, this chapter decides on a postcolonial feminist analysis based on the understanding that Algerian and African American women are doubly colonized and oppressed, but since this view is narrow and neglectful of the other components of this study, we rely on other different theories under postcolonial feminism, intersectional theory and subaltern historiography, which are rooted in Crenshaw's, Spivak's and Coronil's theories, and theories beyond it, like postcolonial theories, mainly those of Bhabha; as well as, feminist theories, mainly Cixous' *écriture féminine* that serve to emphasize the authors' roles and writing. With this in mind, this analytical venture is revealed as an inquiry into women's subalternity and agency and their relation to reconstructing history in the feminine. This chapter ends with short introductions to Algerian and African American women's literature as well as to Assia Djébar and Toni Morrison as writers.

The third and fourth chapters analyze our chosen literary corpora by means of the theories and concepts explored in the first and second chapters. The third chapter, *A Beloved Fantasia: Djébar's and Morrison's Feminine Pursuit of Her/story: Encompassing the Subaltern and Agent Positions of Algerian and African American Women in Fantasia and Beloved*, is a comparative thematic investigation of the silencing and resistance of women characters in *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* and *Beloved*, which is pursued in relation to the context of the novels; in the case of *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade*, colonial brutality, orientalist colonial discourse, postcolonial and patriarchal Algeria, and in the case of *Beloved*, Antebellum America and slavery. This brings forth certain common themes pertaining to both of these contexts, such as sexual violence, infanticide, defiance, storytelling, cultural practices... etc.

The fourth chapter, *A Merciful Prison: A Feminine Voicing of the Unheard and their Her/story by Djébar and Morrison: Oppressed and Resisting Subaltern Women Beyond Cultural/linguistic Heritage and Race in So Vast the Prison and A Mercy*, follows the same arrangement as the third chapter, only with different literary texts, *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, thus slightly different contexts. The characters in *So Vast the Prison* are concerned with the postcolonial state of Algeria, which is suffering from the remnants of colonial culture and language and the strong manifestation of patriarchy. This makes the book heavily influenced by cultural and linguistic heritage issues; whereas, in *A Mercy*, the timeline is extended back to the beginnings of slavery that are deemed as not yet racialized. This, again, yields a set of common themes, similar to and different from the previous chapter, notably, identity formation, motherhood, love and desire...etc.

**Chapter One: A Retrospect of the Postcolonial, the  
Feminist and the Contextual: Echoes of a Review**

## 1.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to build a conceptual framework and a contextual background that would anchor the comparative analysis of the literary texts of Assia Djébar and Toni Morrison. As Djébar and Morrison foreground Algerian women's and African American women's positions in Algerian and North American histories, they lead a venture of retrieving and representing women's voices that are lost to history. Moreover, they establish their works within certain theoretical underpinnings, mainly postcolonialism and feminism. While reviewing these approaches and the select concepts within them, we seek to gain an understanding of this research's literary corpora. This inspection will also facilitate the presentation of the contextual background of the latter, forwarding the authors' stance on Algerian and African American women's issues. For that, a familiarization with the ideologies that bred colonialism leading to postcolonialism is pursued. In addition, identity is considered in relation to postcoloniality by visiting the theorizations of several postcolonial scholars. In light of that, postcolonial literature is discerned and inspected for the gaps that necessitate its reliance on feminism. In this case, another delineation of feminism, its development and the diversity of women is also pursued. Then, an exploration of the novels' socio-political and historical contexts is sought. This will aid with the identification of the power structures that affect Algerian and African American women's experiences. And finally, a brief overview of the literature from the authors' origin countries is explored.

Although these postcolonial and feminist conceptions may appear different, they carry the same outcome of seeking to attain deeper insights into women's situations. They also provide a foundation for understanding the problematic of this study, which addresses African American and Algerian women's oppression and resistance and their role in the creation of a her/story.

## 1.2 The Postcoloniality of a World in Study

In a concerning display of whataboutism<sup>1</sup>, the argument, these days, for the hideous acts performed on exploited nations by absolute powers is that earlier civilizations also had colonies, meaning that they practiced colonialism in the form of a central power to a periphery. However, this argument is in itself akin to an unapologetic attitude of irresponsibility. European expansion is a recent history with recent consequences and trauma that requires a well-deserved head-to-head in order to hold those responsible accountable and not allow them to evade a brutal history only to guilt the brutalized into silence. Moreover, forming colonies at those times was different in the sense that the earlier colonies had no “structures of governance over native races” (Nayar 2).

It is, first, important to shed light on the concept of imperialism as it pertains to the understanding of colonialism. In fact, Edward Said establishes the definition of imperialism in contrast with colonialism as follows, “‘imperialism’ means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory; ‘colonialism’; which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 8). In other words, imperialism powers colonialism, and, in a way, even authorizes and justifies it. It is a political theory that posits the conquest of foreign territory and the political obtainment of power in furtherance of economic exploitation. This latter is exerted in forms of slavery, capitalism and restrictions on trade, all for the good of the European nations. It also condones conquest in the name of God, that is, for the purpose of reforming other cultures to a sole Christian belief; as well as forcing a political and military control.

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<sup>1</sup> A strategy used to evade defending against an accusation by responding with a counter-accusation.

The second half of the quotation discusses the actual action of settlement or settling in acquired foreign territories. Because another counterargument always confuses immigration with settling, there needs to be an emphasis on the scale of European colonial settlement and how it created a special version of imperialism where natives and their spaces were imprisoned, enslaved, destroyed and hybridized. Subsequently, it was never a mere innocent immigration.

It is safe to say that the above processes also operate through a system of ‘Othering’. Introduced by Said in his several seminal works, an ‘other’ is designated through cultural and racial differences. Hall expresses that “vis-à-vis the West... We belong to the marginal, the underdeveloped, the periphery, the ‘Other’. We are at the outer edge, the ‘rim’, of the metropolitan world – always ‘South’ to someone else’s *El Norte*” (Hall 228). In other words, when such central powers created the idea of race, they made it a major part of unequal forms of treatment of people. Wherever race, an approach of social Darwinism and the survival of the fittest fostered near and dear by Europeans, was shoved into a situation, racism, racial prejudice and justified race-related crimes existed. Race is used, then, as a factor to control the narrative which, in turn, results into binaries, and binaries carry the habit of putting two entities against one another in a situation where one of them is higher on the scale; most likely the one who first created the scale as they get to assign the superior from the inferior. This process happens through racial, ethnic and religious categorization, which further develops into a system of classification.

To further align the interests of this exploration with these notions, it can be said that discourse at this period of time suffered from, first, praise for or criticism of colonizer legacy. Second, racial exclusion through reinforcing prejudice in communities, and third, sexist exclusion of any entity other than “man” or “mankind,” showing an endless affinity for

patriarchy. Some of the discourse written before independence was also considered as colonial writing.

### **1.3 Postcolonialism and the Postcolonial**

The previously discussed context inspired writers to write and theorists to find perspective under what is called postcolonialism. The legacy of colonialism compels writers, theorists and analysts alike to address certain literatures that might allude to views prominent in such a sociopolitical context. Hiddleston claims, “Postcolonialism consists of the multiple political, economic, cultural and philosophical responses to colonialism. It is a broad term that is used to refer to effects following the beginning of colonial rule, and, although it covers all regions, is most commonly now associated with the aftermath of British and French colonialism,” (Hiddleston, *Understanding Postcolonialism* 24) which is why, an examination of postcolonial theory is required so as to gather information and facilitate the grasp of the corpora of this research, as well as, the texts’ and their authors’ possible motivations.

This particular field, postcolonialism, has become a colossal coalition of concepts pertaining to that which interests it: the postcolonial. This, inevitably, means that definitions are not going to be fixed, in the sense that there is a general idea that concerns several region-specific concepts pursued by various researchers (Iskarna 7). Without disregarding the close occurrence of European colonialism in history and the varying effects that it has on people of diverse descents, the scale of colonialism and the heterogeneity of the postcolonial is to be highlighted. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin clearly state in *The Empire Writes Back* that, “More than three-quarters of the people living of the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism” (1), explaining the reach and impact colonialism had, and, in a way, also the significance of the existence of the idea of postcolonialism.

Etymologically speaking, postcolonialism is the period preceding colonialism. To further clarify the term, it is important to explain the hyphenation. Post-colonialism with a hyphen is said to be, by Lazarus, “a periodising term” (2), which means, it is mainly a chronological and temporal label. A post-colonial period in Algeria, for instance, starts after 1962, or after the date of independence. Whereas, postcolonialism without a hyphen leans more on an ideological sociopolitical order, as it represents the effects of colonial rule since its initial impact on the colonized land. Therefore, postcolonialism depicts the effects of colonization on societies and cultures from the moment colonizers set foot on the soon-to-be taken land up until the negotiated independence and beyond it.

In actual fact, colonialism/imperialism are said to be still prominent in new forms in the supposedly independent countries. Even though such nations are described as independent, most of them are still unable to terminate this relationship of dominant/dominated as well as in terms of fulfilling their needs pertaining to economic systems, political politicization and even cultural practices. Hall sums up all of the above in what he calls “after colonization” and “beyond colonization”, and concurs that both are necessary to form a clear understanding and definition of the postcolonial (Hall 236-237 qtd. in Wallaschek 220). For the sake of an encompassing in-depth consideration of this field of study, this research opts to use postcolonialism without a hyphen in order to stress the impact colonization has, regardless of whether it is actively ruling or not.

By historians, the word postcolonialism was used after the Second World War (WWII), while in literature, it was used for the first time in the 1970s and 80s to depict a new literary school of thought, as Anthony D. King states that “what might be called modern history of postcolonial (literary) criticism... began seriously in the early 1980s” (543-44 qtd. in Lazarus 6). King is, later on, heavily criticized by Lazarus for assuming that postcolonialism needed “postcolonial intellectuals in the western academy” (Lazarus 7) to

gain prominence, stating that it dismisses the significance of its themes. The idea here is that whenever a new type of discourse is introduced, a need for it necessitates its emergence. This same need, which most likely started from and with those deeply in touch with their indigenous lands, urged its spread, hoping to touch upon the pillars of understanding, from history to philosophy to politics to literary criticism. Many famous scholars, such as Bhabha and Spivak, did not use this term until the 1990s, when it was gaining prominence and relevancy. This marks postcolonialism as interdisciplinary, further amassing the field into one that is worthy of study.

#### **1.4 Theorizing Postcolonialism and Its Leading Figures**

In the West's mission to hegemonize the globe, they were met with postcolonial criticism, which challenges the ideologies they attempt to entrench. Postcolonialism looks into and corrects the fabricated teachings pertaining to native cultures and societies, stressing the complexity of their communities that exceeds a mere third/first world binary (Bhabha 171-173).

Postcolonial theory has various objectives. It tends to study and criticize colonial practices, on the one hand, and colonial discourse, on the other. "At its core, postcolonialism is concerned with tracing the footsteps of colonialism and understanding how it has shaped the contemporary world" (8), Iskarna affirms, which means, all ideologies that favor a Eurocentric view are to be challenged for a more inclusive rendering of postcolonial societies. The dissection of all that forms hegemonic Western epistemology and power relations is also a part of this process, seeing as these practices entail oppressive actions that come with resistant reactions. This process is, in a disengaging way, endless, but this endlessness of it, provides growth nonetheless. Revising history, seeking epistemic agency and highlighting one's native identity are also some of the objectives sought by postcolonial theorists, along with asserting cultural integrity and reclaiming voices, spaces and places in

various cultural forms, especially literature. On this, Iskarna claims that the impact colonialism had on literature, language and politics...etc. continuously influences the organization of certain societies, thus, Iskarna concludes, postcolonialism “seeks to create a more just and equitable world for all” (8).

Postcolonialism was carried out by several theorists and their theories which helped grow the discipline and maintain it till this day. In the next section, some of these pivotal theories are going to be briefly discussed.

#### **1.4.1 Fanon and Césaire: Colonial Ethics and Political Critiques**

When Frantz Fanon started the postcolonial cry for resistance, he called it Decolonization. To further explain it, a clarification presented by Choksey is needed. She argues that:

The difference between decolonisation and decoloniality is significant here: whereas decolonisation involves the realm of public affairs, and takes place in law and government, decoloniality—or decolonial praxis—involves changing the realm of social organisation, or culture. The former involves regime change, the forging of new laws and the international recognition of new political leadership. The latter is based in the everyday practices that move the formerly colonised territory out of the oppressive policies under which its population laboured for hundreds of years, based on the management of gender, sexuality, racialisation and productivity. This might involve the re-inscription of pre-colonial forms of sociality and cultural practice, but also necessitates the creation of new ones. (214)

Simply put, she establishes a stark difference between “decolonisation” and “decoloniality”, relegating the former to the actualization of all that pertains to governance, and the latter to

the decentralization of prescribed colonial social structures and cultural patterns. It could be said that “decoloniality” operates in a more critical pattern than “decolonisation”, which is branded more in politics.

Verily, decolonization is seen as a radicalizing move that is, first and foremost, a strong reaction to colonialism, which Fanon described as a “greater violence” (Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth* 61). Before attempting this ‘greater violence’, he also advocated, in *Black Skins, White Masks*, for “self-assertion” in which the oppressed seeks to eliminate his inferiority complex and desire for the other race. When one is made to feel inferior, they are driven to adopt anything to make themselves feel adequate again. The black identity is related through reductive descriptions that serve more to mock and romanticize it rather than celebrate it. Fanon confirms this as he asserts that, “Ce qu’on appelle l’ame noire est une construction de Blanc” (Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* 13) [Translation: “what is often called the black soul is a white man’s artifact”]. Even when being black is flaunted around like a prize claimed, that part of a person is bound to also wear a white mask representing Western values and cultural practices. Fanon also shares his opinion on language use as he claims that using the colonizer’s language corrupts one’s sense of self, further reinforcing the white mask. And yet, in this context, using one’s native language meant choosing one’s inferior self, a conundrum at best. Be that as it may, demonizing using the colonizer’s language becomes questionable as it does not mean conforming and allowing hegemonic powers to solidify, more so, a means at certain times and an obligation at others.

The main idea here is an aggressive reclamation of the oppressed and appropriated self, as well as regaining control of one’s own subjectivity and land in the form of cultural nationalism. By aggressive, here, it does not mean the aimless sacrificing of native blood but more of a solid stance, a creative reach, an intention of steal and clearly identifying the

enemy as enemy and not as an all-dominant oppressor, all for the sake of siphoning anguish and deterrence from the dominated.

As a psychiatrist who encountered the atrocities of the Algerian war for independence, Fanon was compelled to write, focusing on the psychological harm he had to stand witness to. He is unfairly unaccredited for his initiation of postcolonial theory. His interest in the psyche of colonizer vs. colonized, his personal background as a black man born onto French Martinique and his trauma contributed to him theorizing race and the detrimental quality of colonialism “that turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it” (Fanon, *The Wretched of The Earth* 210). He saw colonialism, quite succinctly, as a “perverted logic” (*The Wretched of The Earth* 210). Fanon made use of political activism, vivid experiences and philosophical regeneration to plead his case. Fanon was greatly influenced by his former teacher, Aimé Césaire.

In the same vein, to legitimize a foreign entity in a place where it does not initially belong, one would break down that particular place’s habitants’ cultural markers, disease the roots of their practices and then banish them into a void; as a result, it would severely reshuffle and, at times, even, shatter what they stand for into silence. The response of the colonized is dependent on resistance through invalidating colonial ideologies and reclaiming one’s own culture. And so, Césaire, another thinker from French Martinique, confronts, in his seminal work *Discourse On Colonialism*, the excuse of ‘the Civilizing Mission’, questioning the whereabouts of “progress” and “diseases cured” and “improved standard of living” (42) with the reality of “societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out” (43). The notion of civilizing has proved to be a myth. The civilized world seems to be the holder of the most lack of civility and dehumanization. Civilized nations deliver a hypocritical performance

where violence is disguised as spreading the word of God. But, in fact, economic expansion, labor exploitation and the growth of market interest seem as leading motivations. Césaire criticizes colonizer powers for tearing into one another during the world wars, showing a barbarity that they cannot possibly deny when they set foot on colonized/native territories. To dehumanize has become tightly embedded in their codes of conduct. While Césaire's perception of the savagery of the dominant powers is true, most of their targets in the European setting were no more than marginalized individuals. The only difference here is the white privilege that excavates these marginalized Europeans from the aftermath of what has been done.

Colonization is instigated through nefarious intentions that are far from an innocent exploration and cross-culturality. Colonizing powers whitewash truths and appropriate knowledge. Indeed, this practice turned people into 'things' or what Césaire called "Thingification" (42) in an act that is best labeled as a self-serving hypocritical philanthropy. Césaire, then, calls for moving forward and achieving fraternization to power a proletarian revolution that would eventually collapse capitalist ownership and exploitation of bodies, labor...etc., especially since all complicit parties' drive for profits is harmful and expansionist. In light of this, colonizing powers were and are still in the process of dehumanizing themselves as well and that's why Fanon saw revolution as the solution.

Césaire observes that there exists a homogenizing agenda against black people. In said process, they are to be portrayed as harmfully as possible in order to barbarize them, and justify their enslavement or elimination. Césaire shares that Négritude<sup>2</sup> is to negate that. It is stated that there is a common thread among black people across the world. They are

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<sup>2</sup> A literary movement that opposed France's colonial rule and forced assimilation. It calls for returning to one's own African culture in order to not be affected by Western values, and it urges black people to regard the West with a critical eye.

linked by a unity that stems from centuries of mutual oppression by Europeans. It is supposed to bring them back to Africa, where their cultural pride is revived.

Fanon opposes such view because it overshadows the specific oppressive experiences the colonized live through. It is a mutual struggle, but it is also shaped differently and draped in a national character. He faults returning to a remote past that carries faded cultural aspects, and instead would better see national and cultural consciousness as working instruments against colonialism.

All in all, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon emphasizes that unity is a way for hegemony to thrive, and that one mustn't risk erasing their own historical experiences. As long as one is culturally conscious, they can resist colonialism and avoid becoming prisoners of distant and forgotten histories/cultures. The goal is to find a mutual ground of acknowledging one's own specificity in terms of individuality, situations, community and ways of fighting back. The uniting factor of struggle is present, but in its most substantial form, it appears different as it constructs a national affiliation. In fact, Bhabha also emphasized Fanon's understanding of the 'other' (both drawing from Lacanian theories) as a displaced subject that "slides" or slips in the signifier field, disabling binarism. But, it is to be noted here that they do clash in the idea of resisting or working on breaking imperialist thoughts from within. This will be explained more in the next section, which centers on Bhabha's conceptions.

In short, it becomes easy to surmise that "Césaire is charged with romanticizing an African past," (Abdel-Shehid and Kolia 176) and always looking inward, emphasizing the self's placement in all that is happening to it, while Fanon is seen as sometimes contradicting himself and always looking outward in his confrontational style (Abdel-Shehid and Kolia

186-7). Fanon and Césaire continue, in their many publications, their mission of theorizing, attempting to unravel the world after colonialism and the alienation of men and women alike.

#### **1.4.2 Said's Delineations and Identity in the Aftermath**

Several theoretical accounts pinpoint Edward Said's *Orientalism*, 1978, as the initiator of postcolonial studies. Mills shares that *Orientalism* "traced the similarities in rhetorical and informational structure of a wide range of seemingly objective writings about the Orient" (*Discourses of Difference* 2). Any representation of that which is not the West has either been remote or fallacious, which eventually created the Orient from the East. It is further believed that:

Western writers, especially since the eighteenth century, have constructed the Orient as the Other, and have, in doing so, attempted to contain and make powerless the inhabitants of colonised countries by fixing them in an object position, and hence retaining the subject, powerful position for westerners. (Mills, *Discourses of Difference* 48)

Mills ruminates over Said's thesis in *Orientalism* where he additionally criticizes the stereotypical representation of the Orient in contrast with the advanced Occident. Said, building upon Foucault's work, makes use of the word 'discourse' in this orientalist discourse. He is convinced that there is a calculated misrepresentation stemming from the concept of race that serves to boost political, economic and social dominance. The Orient is portrayed in a state which minimizes it. Middle Eastern and Asian cultures are often regarded as peculiar, which makes understanding them a process hindered by stereotypical thinking and a wrongly informed perspective. The culmination of these factors forms a homogenous mass of exploitation.

The process of observing an ‘other’ other than yourself is always difficult to comprehend. Mixing this complex encounter with a small amount of entitlement, and then coupling it with an approach to life that lacks humility, individuals are soon not seen as fellow humans, but rather as a difference, a competition and an opportunity. When imperialist powers did not understand such difference, they tended to alienate it in a corner steeped in imagination and offensive twisted fantasies. In this space of Orientalism, instances of Eurocentric thoughts are not as governed by Western conventions, which is a recipe for a wild exploration of what could be. Before long, this ‘could be’ manifested in the form of a series of exotification, objectification and romanticization of cultures from the other side of the world, and with that having the West construct the Orient.

There, definitely, is a gross dislocation between colonizing powers and the world. Indeed, there is a need to explore the question of why does one see their perspective as more valid than the others’. It is an endless cycle of my perspective is valid and your perspective is valid; however, where does that take us as individuals who are part of our communities, cultures and the world. Undoubtedly, there is a tension present when one deviates from another’s personal values (that could be broken down into different categories of values representing certain discourses) only to be subjected to a lifetime of discrimination and oppression.

Said believes that imperialism is the root of most of what occurred in the world. It came to his attention the politicized and dubious nature of Western scholarship. Along the lines of Césaire, Said also condemns the “civilizing” exercised by the West, which managed to package the East in tight boxes with different stereotypes tags on them to fuel their hypocritical and self-serving philanthropy. Said states that the West is either so blind to their biased practices or that they truly believe in their cultural superiority.

Orientalism, in its essence, entails Western patronization of other cultures, for their values that are anathema to the West. The creation of a dichotomy starts from baseless representations, which means if one wants to foreground a certain group to be known for certain aspects, all while censoring other aspects, they can easily manipulate the discourse to their advantage. In a way, they can obscure a portion of knowledge that is, otherwise, a liberation for the oppressed. As a result, the dissemination of power is hugely regulated by imperialist powers. In the same vein, colonialism relies on epistemic violence and all that is known about the Orient becomes the truth, which is purely forged by Western knowledge. Along these lines, the perception of the orient, which is claimed as objective, is invalid to begin with. In order to give an objective perspective, one must know the scope they are stepping into. This requires familiarization with its pillars and parameters. Only then can one remove oneself from the equation and be impartial to the previous subjective view. This is not adhered to; instead, France, Britain...etc. mass-produced Orientalist discourse.

By contrast, some writers did attempt to provide written pieces in travel literature where they supposedly tried to familiarize themselves with the place, but there is not much to be done to individuals who hold their 'self' higher than the 'other', as nefarious intentions are always at the helm of nefarious deeds. Hall called this the "dominant regimes of representation", including "the colonial discourse, the literatures of adventure and exploration, the romance of the exotic, the ethnographic and travelling eye..." (233), which further impose otherness. Overall, Said's work has become a touchstone to postcolonial studies. His work on notions from Poststructuralism to Marxism to Postmodernism would always be present in any postcolonial study and would go and inspire critics to write more in this field.

### **1.4.3 Identity: Point/s in Question**

As it is, one of the key tenets of colonialism is to basically reshuffle and change all that existed before it; the culture, the language and the emotional and physical spaces the natives have safely created for themselves prior to their contact with the ‘Civilizing Europeans’. These natives find themselves trying to resist in any shape or form, especially since, by now, it was evident that aggressive resistance is only one building block of the project of independence. People found themselves trying to scrape all that they could to preserve their identities. Even if it meant appropriating the colonizer’s language or trying to rework the art forms of colonizers, subverting discourse and its standards and allowing creative language use, which delivers authentic themes and allows them to thrive. Of course, this is sometimes seen as betrayal by some scholars, but desperate times required those willing to seek extreme measures, which would eventually put them up for questioning. Such questioning is also heavily conjured when identity debates are invoked.

Identity, in its isolated definition, could be described as these particular qualities and traits that distinguish one person from another. Identity “emerges at the individual level but each person has several social identities that have implications at the political (such as being colonized or belonging to a minority group) and cultural levels” (Ghosh, Abdi and Naseem 57). In other words, identity, in that sense, is nourished by experiences that are national, ethnic and cultural in addition to factors such as gender, class and race. These aforementioned factors attribute groups of people to categories that pertain to being dominant or dominated, further denoting that our identity identifies us. Taking that into account, it seems that the issue of identity is caught between binaries, emphasized and negotiated.

Asking, who am I? What do I stand for? What do I represent? Who do I surround myself with? Surpasses just ‘Me’. It becomes me, my land and the people around me. It also

becomes my religion, gender, ethnicity, race and nationality. All fall under the umbrella of cultural categories that make up a cultural identity. This aligns with Hall's perception of a cultural identity. He sees cultural identity as rooted in its collective/shared cultural heritage wherein people with shared experiences in the stretch of history have a set of clear-cut cultural customs. This provides them with "stable unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning" (Hall 224). Such identity is important as it provides a sense of belonging, particularly because "people's identity is always built in an assortment of relations with others in social and cultural context" (Xingyu 554). This brings about security, support and validation. It could be problematized, however, on the issue of excessive and baseless effacing homogeneity, and, here, Hall introduces the second position of cultural identity as having significant differences. People are born in the world where culture happens to exist; they are not born with it. It is "what we've become" (225) after we've encountered polarizing historical events. However, our identity is not just what the past has to offer us; it is our present and our future, or what Hall calls "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within, the narrative of the past" (225).

Hall also invokes an interesting line of thought where he insists on the positioning of identity in time, space, culture and history which leads to the belief that cultural identity is not fixed especially since evolving is part of the human cycle of living (this evolvement moves towards two different ways: reinforcement or tearing down). There is a beginning to humanity; however, identity knows no start line, for the fickle development of individuals. Some of them have never thought about having an identity, individual or collective, to begin with. So, within the frames that Hall defined as "similarity and continuity" (226) of our heritage and "difference and rupture" (226) where we experience "profound discontinuity" (227), identity is an accessible concept. Individuals live their lives with similar and continuous identities until they differ because of some sort of rupture (being colonized or

enslaved), becoming then discontinued and different versions of themselves and identities (forced to exile or migrate carrying a shifted identity). Moreover, the demonizing and blending of individuals who are still enjoying similarity and continuity is often attempted as a way to separate them from their history and identification. Difference, however, is inevitable as it “persists-in alongside continuity” (Hall 227). On this account, Hall and Bhabha can be briefly seen under the same thread of thinking that does not see fixed binaries as a final resolute to understanding identity (Bhabha; Hall; Ghosh, Abdi and Naseem).

Indeed, Homi Bhabha, an Indian-British theorist, had an interesting outlook on what Said presented to the field of postcolonial studies. While Bhabha did develop on what has been said, he makes it clear that the harsh binaries Said emphasized were way too pronounced for what truly transpires. He believes that the cultural hegemonic spreading of the West had a significant impact on the colonized subject, not only dictating power and superiority on his stolen land, but also, and especially, his identity.

While some resist by accepting acculturation, others find themselves manifesting hybrid identities. Bhabha finds that colonial homogeneous discourse is disintegrating. In fact, it was never concrete to begin with, which led to it to gradually unravel and fail. To him, this is proved by the emergence of heterogeneous concepts, such as hybridity, mimicry, third-space and ambivalence. Beginning with mimicry, as it is paramount to the unfolding of the rest of the concepts, it could be said that mimicry, as in to imitate, naturally suggests that imitation moves from one entity to another, in this case, colonized vs. colonizer. The colonized subject imitates or mimics the beacon of power, which is the white man, in terms of manners, cultural practices, language use and ideations. The idea here is that this mimicry is a copy that is not original, but rather a repetition with a difference. If you impose a certain culture on a certain subject, you are showing them that this superiority of yours is the only way for them to be recognized; as a result, they mimic that. They start performing an

idealized image in order to be seen by the colonizer. However, mimicry works in more than one way. It is not solely a way for the colonized subjects to adjust to their colonized subjectivity; it also works as resistance because when one is mimicking, they are also imitating. In that sense, it is not their true self. They are most likely covering their original identity. For the most part, that could mean that they don't want to bring the colonizer's attention back to them for more emphasis because that would lead to more aggressiveness, for the colonizers, in promoting their own ideas. Ultimately, it could be deduced that "colonial mimicry denotes a desire and an anxiety, simultaneously" (Ghasemi, Sasani and Nemati 36).

Even so, mimicry is not a clear solution since every action has a reaction, results and consequences. The creation of an ambivalent space where one's identity is no longer clear to them is one of these outcomes. First introduced in psychoanalysis, ambivalence is described as "a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite" (Yusroini 1), implying that there is a sense of instability in the one experiencing it. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin notice and apply the adaptability of this in the colonizer/colonized relationship. In that context, an ambivalent person experiences a "simultaneous attraction towards and repulsion from an object person or action" (Young 161 qtd. in Yusrioni 1). This indicates that the colonizer deems the colonized as both inferior and exotic, which causes repulsion and attraction for this lesser existence that is also so desirable, while the colonized views its colonizer as a deceitful and nefarious entity that is, in its own way, also desirable.

This further creates an open window where colonized subjects are not victims of accusations of being too aggressive in their resistance or too complicit in this matter. Ambivalence is, then, a small form of resistance. It starts at the level of the individual and then develops from fighting oneself to fighting the aggressors who caused it. Bhabha observes that this ambivalence adds complexity to the scene. In a dichotomous relationship

(or binary oppositions), it is a simple colonizer/colonized dynamic where a power balance is established and tipped over, but when ambivalence is present, that authority is rather reduced. Some of it is taken from dominators' hands and scattered on the colonized, further confirming ambivalence as "an unwelcomed aspect of colonial discourse" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies* 10).

Mimicry, in its abstract conception, is also a side effect that the colonizer did not welcome. On the mission of making one's culture the superior one, all while prompting the other to adapt to it and reproduce it, the colonial imperative becomes destabilized. Here, a shift ensues from being colonized subjects to ambivalent ones. There becomes a very fine line between what is considered mimicry and what is considered mockery. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin remark the fluctuation between mimicking and mocking that produces "an ambivalence that is fundamentally unsettling" (*Post-colonial Studies* 10).

On their way to civilizing other nations, colonial powers became oblivious to the ramifications penetrating the walls of their superiority. Thus, "mimicry is used as a means of interrogating colonialism and revealing the latter's weaknesses" (Nayar 49). There is an uncertainty inherent to the practice of colonialism that calls to demise as much as it calls to exploitation (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies* 11).

This is quite reminiscent of Hegel's master/slave narrative, or master/servant as the newer translations like to put it, where the dialectic convolutes and boils down to the master needing to be recognized and sustained by a subject, and the servant being able to sustain themselves and be independent but still need the recognition of the free subjectivity of the master. Only through this process that both can achieve self-consciousness. Because of the nowadays belief that slavery is dead, a master/slave perspective is said to be invalid. However, as the world progresses, the aftermath and notions of colonialism subtly persevere.

Theorists opt to draw from this lingering for a better understanding of the world as we know it now. In this regard, colonialism appears to fail with its not-so-absolute power and volatile occupation. The colonial ambivalent subjects find themselves resisting by acknowledging and rejecting the premade mold crafted for their constriction. This unsettling wave is identified as hybridity. The latter is the emergence of new practices, whether cultural or social, from the collision and merging of practices from two different spaces.

Mohanty claims that “resistance clearly accompanies all forms of domination. However, it is not always identifiable through organized movements” (“Cartographies of Struggle” 83), which purports that there is always a way to perforate hegemony. Whether it be physical resistance or slow hybridization, gaps are going to be sensed and filled. One might reasonably assume that to just be the human condition. The cycle of progression where even if strong resistance does not manifest, domination is bound to collapse itself as it undermines the efforts of those who strive and dedicate their lives to resistance and fighting back (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies*); those who pledge their life for the prospect of freedom. In a similar fashion, Ania Loomba regards hybridity mainly in its articulating version, questioning it becoming a colonial front covering and smoothing over transgressions. Loomba’s main issue with hybridity is its effectiveness in facing aggressive colonial advancements, declaring that “it is difficult to accept that any notion of hybridity will dilute the violence of the colonial encounter” (308).

Instead of halting at whether hybridity links itself with this side or that side, it should be more importantly noted that such space has been identified to begin with. Its identification provides people with a clarity they might have sought most of their lives. The question of whether hybridity actively engages with one side over the other disregards the malleability both sides have gone through throughout time. In addition to that, hybridity is not claimed to be a holy grail for all colonial ailments. It is rather a team worker. No matter the savagery

of erasure, natives still manage to preserve certain parts of their cultures and traditions and their native command and control circles. And even though these practices were shamed and challenged in order to solidify the native's lesser state, they survive through and into hybridity.

Lazuardi and Laksono note that "Hybridity is the result of ambivalence mimicry used to understand the colonizer's culture" (3), denoting that an imitation powered by a desire toward and aversion from the colonizer is employed in understanding his culture. This whole process is identified as hybridity, further assembling Bhabha's concepts and explaining their correspondence. Verily, Bhabha contends that colonial discourse is bound to be ambivalent. It creates new versions of culture. In a rather perplexing logic, colonizers wouldn't want exact replicas of themselves, but, at the same time, they want to push their principles, cultural habits and practices on the colonized in an attempt to force them to adopt their code of behavior. The distinct separation would be the ontological security colonizers possess along with their level of superiority that is usually un-mimicable as it would be too threatening for their organization where there would no longer be an inferior to their superior.

The colonial project is never successful in accomplishing its goal. To Bhabha, imperialism is self-destructive. There are flaws in it where partial reform and empty walking imitations are desired and yet so remote. Therefore, imperialism "is compelled to create an ambivalent situation that will disrupt its assumption of monolithic power" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies* 11). Young notes Bhabha's acuity in turning imperialist discourse on itself. As an ideology and power, it becomes bound to fail. This is not a solution, however. Ambivalence takes away the position of power formerly assumed by authority. And curiously enough, the colonizers become subjects of ambivalence as well. Without realizing it, those in positions of control are affected by hybridity. Trinh Minh-Ha shares this same conviction and adds, "what is at stake is not only the hegemony of western

cultures, but also their identities as unified cultures; in other words, the realization that there is a third world in every first world and vice versa” (*Woman* 23). From this, we can infer that hybridity manifests in both the colonized and the colonizer. That one united culture with the purpose of civilizing that the dominant world waves during its entrance into indigenous lands is soon deeply threatened. The colonizer’s identity is also dragged into hybridization through constant contact, where further discoveries are made: that the colonized could be better organized than the so-called civilizing mission. This shows the colonizer its true face, laden with economic exploitation and warmongering tendencies.

The hybridity of someone is a feature of their ambivalence. If someone is showing signs of mimicry and hybridity, it means that they are in an ambivalent space or also known as a third space. In-betweenness is mobilized and the harshness of binaries becomes not the right answer anymore. The idea of being pure-blood with a fixed identity is negated as in-betweenness or the space of liminality manifests. Having a hybrid identity helps “upset the discourse of imperialism” (Mizutani 30). In this sense, imperial dominance appears to always be in an ambivalent space, leading to its self-destruction.

Hybridity relates strongly to the identities of colonized subjects. Being a hybrid alludes to having two distinct parts constituting a newer one in a purely biological phenomenon. Being a Hybrid to Young is to be “a cross between two species” (10), but as humans are one singular species, this definition does not apply to them, even with the existence of “Victorian convictions that different races were other species” (Young 10). By the twentieth century, hybridity moved into a cultural identification realm. With a connection to postcolonialism and postcolonial literature, the ideation behind such a concept transports one to a space where they would question being forced to assimilate in a suppressing atmosphere of indoctrination. In such a space, they would soon recognize how their identities are bound to hybridize through constant drilling, consciously or unconsciously. In

this, identity is no longer fixed. Bhabha agrees, stating that we only need to acknowledge our state of incompleteness.

In literature, identity is also an important part of individuals' reality. Young states that "it is striking that many novelists not only of today but also of the past write almost obsessively about the uncertain crossing and invasion of identities: whether of class and gender [...] or culture and race" (2). Along the span of history and literature, identities have changed and been 'invaded', mostly because of the imperialist impact on one's identity components. Salman Rushdie invokes the thought of identity in his essay *Imaginary Homelands* where he notes that "our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between stools" (15). He implies that identity is as multiple as it is singular. This is sometimes felt because of the many cultures it is exposed to, willingly or by force, which plays further into its often edgeless disorientation, especially since one's identities will not be the same "as they were before entering the [Third] space" (Ghasemi, Sasani and Nemati 27).

Being a hybrid also has a negative connotation to it. It is the belief that being a crossbreed degrades the human species to mere animals. Besides, it implies that certain races' purity and civilizing ways are being corrupted. Hybridity, however, is part of resistance. It tampers with binaries and brings the subordinate one step closer to desired agency and reconstruction of power. As long as there exists an exchange between distinct established cultures, hybridity is bound to manifest in the liminal space, attempting to make sense of the happenings. Identity, thus, is placed in defining parameters that shape and reshape it in irreversible spaces.

## 1.5 Postcolonial Literature

Since literature tends to imitate real life, postcolonial literature writers emerge utilizing literature as a tool in representing societies, their codes and individual practices. Writers who oppose the existence of colonialist powers in the world through writing literary pieces are usually considered postcolonial authors and should be analyzed by means of postcolonial theories. Postcolonialism, in this sense, exceeds its temporal denotation to become a literature of negotiation and representation as well as the methodology and approach acquired and required to fully understand such literatures. It could be discerned that writing carried postcolonial attitudes even before colonialism ended in certain countries. It used to be dubbed as ‘anti-colonial’ writing, and yet its content would easily place it in what nowadays would be considered as postcolonial writing. Along these lines, postcolonial literature is:

An attempt at the retrieval of local, native, and particular histories freed- as much as it is possible- from Euro-American ‘versions of the same...postcolonial writing... a literature that critically engages with a history of oppression, colonialism (both external and internal), racism, and injustice, but *with a particular emphasis on issues of race and ethnicity*. It is a literature of emancipation, critique, and transformation. (Nayar xiii italicized in the original)

In other words, such literature is written for the purpose of provoking change through tackling otherwise considered difficult subjects (violence, racism, oppression...etc.), directly, and it is validated by uncovering native histories. In doing so, it inevitably upsets the dominant perspectives’ promoted realities. This makes it a needed literature.

The constant existence of colonial periods in most countries' histories is soon noticed. Since the world was ruled by several mighty empires such as the Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire, it might lead to the belief that the majority of the current literature is postcolonial; however, in modern discourse, such a label has been reserved for countries that were formerly colonized by European nations. While it might appear as though such specificity would reduce from the heterogeneity the postcolonial might possess, the postcolonial proves to be a heterogeneous body of communities. It includes diverse groups from the third world/other ethnic minorities, African Americans, Caribbean, South Americans...etc. Basically, all who have been dominated by the white civilizing man. Postcolonial writing stemming from these areas discusses similar and different themes with respect to the diverse quality of each colonized group's history. This makes postcolonial literatures one of the most fruitful grounds for exploration as well as comparative studies.

Any literature that sets itself apart from the rest tends to present novel thematic endeavors. In the case of postcolonial writing, the themes addressed are various, to say the least. National consciousness, place, displacement, culture and multiculturalism in relation to gender, race, ethnicity and language are mostly the themes found in postcolonial writing. As it carries all the concepts mentioned above, they happen to funnel into cultural identity. Owing to the fact that the colonial project has proved to be as much a cultural reformation as it is an economic project. Nayar holds that "postcolonial writers seek to present the destructive side of colonialism... they seek to demonstrate how colonialism left the native culture, identity, tradition, and even individual selves in tatters, destroyed through indoctrination, 'education' or outright negation" (45).

Such literature favors negotiating identity and its reflection in the protagonists that postcolonial writers write about. Salman Rushdie reaffirms the ambivalence and hybrid status that colonial subjects have since entered and stands for this idea as he states, "however

ambiguous and shifting this ground [identity] may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy” (Rushdie 15). This writer or writers find themselves striving to represent their identities in response to European assumptions, both in their native tongues and the colonizer’s language. Moreover, several postcolonial novels, before and after independence, explore history as indicated by Nayar:

Postcolonial writing, it appears, will always be obsessed with history and history-writing. Postcolonial literature’s central and continuing concerns are, therefore with modes of retrieving pre-colonial history, ‘correcting’ misrepresentations of their culture in European texts and, by extension, controlling the representation of their culture’s identity. (Nayar 66)

Postcolonial writers, then, tend to veer back to the importance of returning to historically well-informed native cultures. In such a case, the exploration of the history of the postcolonial probes natives’ realities before their subjugation in an effort to chase authenticity in light of the image-distortion they undergo under occupation. All with the intention of clinging to some agency over the way their identities are portrayed. After all, it is an arduous process of sifting through harrowing memories where the colonizer and his cruelty reside permanently. But it is also a compelling process of seeking historical records in native languages, which are mostly comprised of storytelling, folk songs...etc.

On the whole, postcolonial writers write about their stolen and marginalized identities and histories, representation, resistance, violence and social constructs, such as race and gender, the consequences of colonialism: migration, exile, diaspora and even slavery in order to make one’s voice heard. They attempt to speak the truth, condemn oppressive practices and react strongly to what has been done to them by imperialist powers and their literature.

## **1.6 Widening the Horizon: From Postcolonial to Feminist Insights**

Whether the literature is exclusively postcolonial or only carries hints of postcolonial/colonial themes, postcolonial theory makes it easy to gauge what postcolonial literature adds to understanding the postcolonial experience. The broadness and preciseness of postcolonial theory and its concepts, however, are polarizing in terms of their application to literary productions, which insinuates that such a pivotal theory promoting unprecedented perspectives has become unsuccessful at representing all of the perspectives it presides over. As rebuilding the nation became a challenging mission, certain groups, such as women, were exempt from assuming their essential positions in their societies. Women found their contaminated realities in a prolonged state, and any glimpse of freedom was still further away.

Although postcolonial theory justifies the exclusion of women by stating that its leading figures have been men, as have the resistance leaders, there were many women postcolonial theorists and writers whose contributions still serve as pillars to the theory, for instance, Spivak, hooks, Mohanty...etc. Theorization, in this instance, wavers between postcoloniality and feminism. Pursuing an exploration of feminism separately, to highlight a different perspective of perspectives and to spot its weaknesses and possible remedies, is first warranted.

### **1.6.1 Feminism as a Movement**

Defining feminism can either be an easy task or a challenging one. To give it a singular standard definition may accentuate some supposed missing parts of it, whereas extensively detailing it may confuse readers. For the sake of a general and encompassing definition, it can be said that it is a movement that began in the late eighteenth century, initially as a thought process not given the label of feminism yet. The term was first coined by French philosopher Charles Fourier in 1837 as “Féminisme”. Its original meaning

entailed feminine qualities or characters, but as the century came to an end, feminism became the demand for social, political, personal and economic equality between the sexes. bell hooks, in her seminal book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, offers the following definition of feminism: “simply put feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression” (hooks 1). This conveys that the idea that both genders must have equal rights and opportunities is the stem of this interdisciplinary field of study. It comprises of political and sociological theories and philosophies interested in gender issues, equality and women’s rights. It is fluent and dynamic as it crosses several fields, reshaping perspectives in many areas from politics to literature to law, calling for the rights of women.

Advocating for a particular group’s rights to equality technically raises questions about the reasons for the necessity of such advancements. The answer happens to be clear and simple. It is because one group’s gender became its common and sole denominator. This made it open to cruelty and oppression. Evidently, movements start when we ask what is happening and what ought to be done about it. The oppression of women is happening and feminists must seek ways in which these women are viewed and treated with equality and equity.

Women have been regarded as subordinates, discriminated against and oppressed for the sake of defending the argument that presents them as weak and irrational by nature (Tyson 85). This view is a shared sentiment toward women by patriarchal men. It is also reinforced to laymen by individuals who happen to be much more intellectually influential. Thomas Jefferson, for example, shared his distaste for women entering politics and public offices, affirming that women should reside in houses, not politics (Faderman). Darwin, too, emphasized the superior intellectuality of men over women. Influential literary texts are as dire as the above-named. Notably, *Things Fall Apart*, a well-known postcolonial literary text that depicts women as subsidiary and thus secondary to the plot. These ideas are, without

hesitation, challenged. Ironically, it is because of the initial gender-unrelated social, political and economic shift in the US and Europe that such ideas were challenged to support women, in a parallel manner, this grueling of the political ecosystem kick-started a significant all-inclusive change.

Women are seen as second-class citizens (Woolf), existing solely to bear/rear children and be good homemakers. The trauma stemming from such teachings prompted women to lead marches and write about different possible privileges which were denied to them, such as legal rights including voting rights, property owning and rights of contract, women's rights for bodily integrity and autonomy including birth control, abortion and the protection of women against, domestic violence, work related assault/sexual assault and misogyny, as well as other forms of gender inequality like the right of employment and education. Feminists even explored the beginnings of gender inequality and deconstructed the values that trapped women for ages, like ideal femininity and patriarchal thought<sup>3</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the label of feminism is still a pertinent issue and the word, feminism, in itself is not an all-around positive tag. Woolf, in "Three Guineas", has called for destroying this "old word, a vicious and corrupt word" (226), which clearly shows the negative connotation it carried and still does up to date. Those ready to attack it would call feminists man-haters without standing to understand what women's political activism and literary revolution entails. Being a feminist confused even other women as they did not know that they, and their principles, were exactly the essence of feminism, especially, Woolf and Rebecca West who states that "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is, I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute" (LeGates 2). West, without realizing it,

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<sup>3</sup> Or Patriarchy, is a social system where power is primarily in the hands of men.

framed feminism quite restrictively and fed into misogyny. Instead, being a feminist means not letting people/men treat you as an object that is either silent or sexual.

### **1.6.2 Situating Feminisms in History**

Feminism is historically divided into three waves, as reported by Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker. The first feminist wave occurred during the nineteenth century, extending to the early twentieth century, the second occurred between the 1960s and 1970s, while the third one is understood as a wave that started in the 1990s and is still present to this day.

Historically speaking, women have always taken their pens to advocate for their gender (Beauvoir) since before this supposed division. In the fifteenth century, Christine de Pizan wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love) against misogyny. Jane Anger wrote *Protection for Women* in 1589 using a theocentric approach to understand and theorize society, stating that Eve was better than Adam because her creation was from flesh and not from dust. Seventeenth-century feminist writers were, among others, Margaret Cavendish, Hannah Woolley and Anne Bradstreet. These writers utilized literature tacitly as an attempt to dismantle hierarchal systems, the coveting of economy and property and the unfair distribution of rights.

Then, the eighteenth century saw the emergence of the Enlightenment, where rationality became the center of thought. This paradigm shift encouraged secular reasoning and philosophical writing. Notably, Mary Wollstonecraft employed this rationality in order to extend the debate to women in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* of 1792. Men dictated women's image as illogical and unreasonable, claiming exclusive ownership of rationality. She argues that women are also humans with rational rights. Because they are denied education (Wollstonecraft; Spender), they are doomed to have no right or reason, and

thus removed from the discussion. She spoke of education as an important step in women's upbringing and sense of worth, against simply being an object of desire for men.

Next, the nineteenth century saw a division between the public and private/domestic sphere. Men were to occupy the public one, attending to labor and politics, while women were sequestered in the private one, donning a proper image of taking care of the house and children. Such Victorian feminine ideals, otherwise called The Cult of Domesticity sired and nurtured the "Angel in the House" notion, also known as a popular poem<sup>4</sup> at the time, that would decades later be opposed by Woolf when she calls for women to have a room of their own where they can have an actual private space where they can be whatever they want to be without having another invade their person. However, by this time, no political or social change was in order. The space for women was more and more restrictive and repressive.

Regarding legal protection, Caroline Norton is known for confronting the British law and appealing to Queen Victoria in an effort to have the right of custody of her children after suffering in her abusive marriage, especially since women were the property of men with no rights to divorce or to be custodians over their children. This appeal brought attention to these issues and later on resulted in an adjustment in the laws as several acts were passed and legislated to ensure the betterment of child custody, divorce and matrimonial situations, as well as; ownership of property for married women.

It is especially a demanding task to try and frame the first wave of feminism from the rest of its historical events, as it was not identified until after the second one emerged. And by the end of the nineteenth century, feminists were much more focused on gaining a political voice, pursued as the right to vote and a full citizenship. At that stage, suffrage was

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<sup>4</sup> "The Angel in the House" (1854-1862) was written by Coventry Patmore. It praised his first wife and set an idealistic image for women at the time

seen as a magical solution to women's troubles, especially in the UK and the US. Emancipation and equality sounded like the perfect pair. And so, several acts, through activism, were passed enfranchising women and signaling the disintegration of what is supposedly labeled as the first wave.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the call for politico-economic equality was also fueled by the world wars. During those times, women were needed in the war and outside of the conflict at the same time. They had to go and occupy working positions to feed their families after most of the men were drafted. This was eye-opening for women as they were, for the first time in a long time, aware of their rights and what was denied to them, especially after men returned from the war and assumed their roles, pushing women aside yet again and creating employment issues.

The second wave, then, became needed. The confirmation of women's political emancipation did not immediately result in equality, which motivated the emergence of this second wave. In other words, political equality failed to solve prevailing issues such as the social, economic, and educational ones. Women achieving a relatively perceived political equality paralleled, at the time, grave economic and educational inequalities. This emphasized the 'personal is political' slogan, and that this personal and cultural must be reflected upon too in terms of sexist social hierarchy.

Two groups laid the foundations for the second wave. One sect was liberal while the other was radical. The advocates of the former group strived to walk the same path as those of the first wave, only adding education and economical state...etc. to their demands. At this point in time, women were fed the false notion of happiness stemming from family life; however, they began to lose that sense of happiness that they were supposed to be filled with. To put it another way, they were no longer happy as mothers or as wives. Their existence

and prosperity depended on male figures in their lives; hence, the seeking of all-around equal opportunities, and, within that, seeking their truer selves. Meanwhile, the supporters of the latter group shifted the rationale from discrimination and inequality to oppression. Up until then, women were convinced that they were externally restricted, but the truth was that they were oppressed, or internally restricted, completing a vicious cycle of manipulation. Women were stuffed with altered versions of themselves; versions where their mindset is a one-way tunnel toward a perfectly tailored account of people, culture, traditions and beliefs. This novel stance called for theories and tools of explanation. The aim was to academically study feminism by means of theories to disconnect the many interwoven pieces of societal structures. Gender, sex, patriarchy...etc. were brought to the limelight in order to attempt an understanding of the situation of women.

Simone de Beauvoir, a French author and philosopher, was first a fiction writer before writing *The Second Sex* in 1949 (first translated to English in 1953), which is considered the trigger for the second wave of feminism. This book garnered its own share of criticism, considering how it was forbidden by the Vatican and how Albert Camus criticized it for making Frenchmen look ridiculous. Beauvoir provides a breakdown of the discrimination against women, thereby originating contemporary feminism. She remarks how women are seen as a degenerate abnormality, an other to the male norm. The argument that women are naturally different from men is debatable, seeing that, besides essential differences, there is nothing inherently different about a man and a woman as participating individuals in society. So, having scholars like Freud, who perceives women's bodies as a site of lack and maintains the idea that they are damaged men envious of men's power, or their penis, is simple-minded in its approach since existence precedes essence and women are made, not born (Beauvoir). This means that it is impossible to designate women as a defective gender when they have yet to come to their full potential as women. Indeed, being

drilled with the laborious task of maintaining the continuity of humankind dilutes women's essence to mere procreators. And although it grants them an honorable role, it is not the choice of every woman, for the mental and physical toll it takes on women's bodies. Beauvoir calls this a curse and an "absurd fertility" (97) where women are subjected to "the servitude of maternity" (56). To her, it takes a conditioned entity with no self-interest to feel pressured to serve in a position that is vacant; to assume a responsibility that must be held by two instead of one. Men striving for their normative independence became further enabled by society and some women; therefore, shirking their burdens on women who have no choice in the matter. With a sense of alienation from their body and shame for sexual desire, women get attached to these men who can guarantee them a financially stable life in return for a world seen only through what men allow. Men can exercise their 'authority' in a way that can go without surveillance. For women, this could result in either excessive passiveness, blind following or just deep-rooted resentment. Consequently, this motherhood that is sold to them becomes an outlet for releasing pent-up energy.

Children, traumatized ones, emerge from such living. Mothers would be way too controlling as a reflection of their lack of control over their own bodies and lives. Beauvoir believes that men sold motherhood to women in order to cloister them and hold absolute power over them. She draws attention to the idea that women not realizing that they are under a curse is a curse itself. Friedan also sees that women are fed the delusion that their sense of self is to be found only through children and husbands. Any identity that they could construct is lost to a family identity, and even after the world wars and with the betterment of household technologies, the role of a wife/women/female has become more and more unconsciously burrowed into women's existence.

Beauvoir reiterates herself by emphasizing that the otherness of women can be chased away by being financially autonomous and creatively productive. She sees that the

strength of women is in union, not in aspiring to be manly versions of themselves. Instead, they must move forward and stick together. It is to be noted; however, that Beauvoir seems excessive in her attacks of motherhood and marriage calling wedding nights an “ordeal” that “dooms a woman to frigidity” (526) especially since she had no children and was not married but had one lifelong open relationship that brought about many escapades along the journey.

It is safe to say that this second wave sought liberation from oppression by emphasizing the divergence existing in society. This divergence requires a revision of some of the presiding principles indoctrinated by men, as well as the consolation and celebration of women. Women, indeed, worked toward cultural and social areas where they discussed their reproductive rights, domestic violence and employment.

Last, but certainly not least, a third wave of feminism was necessitated. The essentiality of a reform signals the failure and/or the rejection of that which precedes it. There evidently were problems with the second wave’s *raison d’être*. The advocates of the second wave soon developed social agendas that favored white middle-class women, and since gendered oppression is not exclusive to this group, certain limitations needed to be addressed. The world houses different cultures, societies, races, ethnicities... etc., women, therefore, experience oppression under different contexts and yet they are cornered into a complying frame that does not represent them.

What the third wave adds next to oppression is: race, class and ethnicity and the effort of removing the white woman’s lens on reality. In fact, generalization in this case is a harmful feat that uses universal categories to satisfy a carefully crafted agenda, leading to the need for addressing the intersection of the above-mentioned factors. Moreover, Western culture, though unique to its society, is singular in its nature. This singularity shouldn’t be a parameter for analyzing the plurality and diversity of other cultures. Practices and traditions

differ, and the claim to save women from oppression in a certain culture without possessing an inkling of its inner structure is a relativist view of life.

Third wave feminism was a major success. It saw feminism branching out to merge with other domains for better coverage; namely, poststructuralist French feminism, which examines gender and sexuality, postmodern feminism, ecofeminism...etc., which appeared as new theories, and black feminism and postcolonial feminism, which also became prominent.

This allocation of representation and acknowledgment shouldn't be perceived as a dividing force among women. In truth, it is this conscious status of their differences that should unite them whilst they endeavor to remedy their issues and forge alliances to dull the pain and resentment lingering from their history.

### **1.6.3 Women as Similar but Different**

Women's experiences can be both compelling and beguiling as a topic of discussion. From a particular perspective, women do happen to have similar experiences as they tend to operate in a like manner because of their bodies, a physicality that links them during growth, bloom and beyond, and facilitates their marginalization. However, this similarity could be seen as a generalization that disregards the uniqueness of women. Hence, it is important to highlight the similarities as much as it is important not to dim the differences as well.

The only way to approach assessment of women's experiences is to go back to what is known as mainstream feminism or simply white feminism, as it is, after all, the instigator of thoughts and discussions in the field. Virginia Woolf's words, when she said "as a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world" ("Three Guineas" 234), serve as an unintentional condemnation of mainstream feminism. It is true that this statement could be read as an innocent universal overview and

affirmation of women, and yet, because of the nature of this research, the inevitable question arises over who exactly this woman would be. The evident answer would be: a white, well-educated middle-class woman. For Woolf to give such universal truths is nothing but the result of rampant white privilege. It shields its holders from certain discriminations, coddling them in a patriarchal space. The situation of these women does not improve, especially since some of them are able to acquire privilege just because they are a slightly better option than black or third-world women.

In terms of foregrounding white feminism, Lazreg explains that the superior quality and justifiability secured to it stems from its ability to transcend culture. She implies that any other forms of feminism (Third World feminism, for instance) are “under pressure to choose between their feminism and their ethnicity or culture” (*The Eloquence of Silence* 11). Women, therefore, are to be followed by polarization. They have to stand at a crossroad of their race, ethnicity, gender and sex. It is, in fact, far more than polarization oftentimes. All these aspects of themselves intersect subjectively, creating unique individuals who end up being targeted for what forms them contextually.

While Western women campaigned for women in colonized spaces, they found a political voice of their own, which would develop later on into women’s suffrage. It could be said that they found themselves while looking at others’ troubles like a mirror. Except, this spokesperson role deserves to be heavily debated, seeing that women have a consciousness of only their personally lived affairs. Lewis and Mills explain that it has become difficult for indigenous women to enter political spaces to represent their communities because those spaces have been occupied by white women for so long. They exemplify by mentioning feminist postcolonial theory and the labor it still goes through as a theory with interfering, exploring and engaging postcolonial women in the world (9). Issues like the Indian practice of the Sati, the spirituality of Africans and the Muslim veil are either

linked to traditions or religions. He who has not occupied such socio-cultural space (white European/American women) would feel the need to liberate indigenous women from such abusive practices when, in reality, they could be a symbol of resistance, nationalism and anti-colonialism and not merely a symbol of women's oppression.

The point of contention should rather be the investigation of women's omission from the major exchange. If a woman is at the center of a discussion, would it not only be fair that she is allowed to participate in what concerns her first and foremost. If the situation calls for indigenous representation of women, then why not consult the women concerned before taking any political action? Scholars answer this inquiry by reiterating the implicit racism and racial stereotyping white feminism appears to hold (hooks 3; Carby 119). The view white feminism framed blended women and overlooked their distinct causes. What white women would do under the guise of feminism is to push for a common cause that would yield different outcomes, as the non-white woman is treated like the average white woman. In fact, Rich disagrees with the often-used phrase "women have always..." arguing that it solidifies wanting maternity and conforming to patriarchy. She continues by positing that this always obscures reality. A reality where "women have not always", because who exactly are these women? What have they always done? When and where was this always? (31). Assuming, therefore, led many white feminists into a subtle dilemma that they never managed to leave unscathed. Trinh thoroughly comments on the ideas mentioned above in the following passage:

A conversation of "us" with "us" about "them" is a conversation in which "them" is silenced. "Them" always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. Subject of discussion, "them" is only admitted among "us," the discussing subjects, when accompanied or introduced by an "us," member, hence the dependency of "them" and its need

to acquire good manners for the membership standing. The privilege to sit at table with "us," however, proves both uplifting and demeaning. It impels "them" to partake in the reduction of itself and the appropriation of its otherness by a detached "us" discourse. The presence of a (grateful) witness serves to legalize such discourse, allowing it to mimic, whenever necessary, the voice of truth. (*Woman* 67)

Trinh confirms the notion of not being included or allowed to have an independent voice in the overall designed discourse. In addition to that, she considers the idea that such groups are turned from subjects to objects through this particular gaze and are only allowed in if they agree to reduce themselves and their identities in order to adopt the dominant group's rules and expectations, which are usually considered the rightful ones. Through that, the dominant group will be able to control the narrative and feign the act of representation despite their unfamiliarity with the rest. This is palpable in the theorizations of white women against black women, third-world women, Arab women...etc.

Mohanty, particularly, criticizes how some black women were added to predominantly white conventions only after facing criticism. This addition of select few black women in itself further nurtured stereotyping. Likewise, Trinh insists that "all admittance of 'them' among 'us' is a hoax; a false incorporation that leaves 'them' barer than ever, if 'them' allows itself to nibble at the bait of Lies" (*Woman* 67). Mohanty also blatantly denounces this practice for being akin to colonialism. In the end, it all accumulates to a struggle against patriarchy, racial discrimination, colonization and the lack of female solidarity.

And as few representatives are to be considered better than none, diversity is the backbone of certain non-Western nations as well as the core of conducting one's own

personal life. A well-informed approach towards change when it comes to these issues is still due. Mohanty encapsulates the possible harmful side to representation, stating that “the struggle over representation is always also a struggle over knowledge” (Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders* 189). In such a case, representation controls narratives, histories and realities of those represented. It may start innocent, but soon be manipulated enough to shape ‘knowledge’.

First-hand access to another’s experiences is uncommon and dependent on various factors. Having black, Arab and third-world women’s experiences be prototyped and celebrated mirrors white men’s fixed standards for measuring different aspects of life. It is, after all, complicity, one that drowns women’s essence so that only their gender is left to be seen.

This is crucial to theory and understanding, as a wedge is driven between women. They are set to no longer support one another; a daunting reality that patriarchy prefers to ignore. Patriarchy strives to open social power to women only through motherhood, in other words, sanctioned agency.

In order not to twist meaning, it should be explained that empathizing and identifying with someone entails understanding and appreciating their lived experiences. Lorde scrutinizes the interdependency that exists between women stating, first, that “interdependency between women is the only way to the freedom, which allows the ‘I’ and ‘be’, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative” (26), which epitomizes women’s ability to create art, not only be exploited for their anatomy. She continues and refutes, then, a “threatening interdependency” in the following:

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference between women is the grossest reformism. It is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our

lives. For difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways to actively 'be' in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. (26)

The above quote describes difference as an ally and a right. Distinctiveness is never a breach of unity. It, in and of itself, could firmly and fairly bind individuals, instead of the conventional archetypal enclave that is pushed upon people as the façade of power. Amor and Parmar reaffirm this by stating that being unable to identify and then acknowledge difference as a force to be reckoned with is a “failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson” (48).

Lorde proceeds to question how the need to speak for all women does not include the need to negotiate diversity and theory (26-27); likewise, Rich agrees when she asserts, “we are here because you were there” (38). The awareness that white educated women possess of women from other spaces is up for dispute. Non-Western women achieve milestones that are left unmentioned and unseen.

Moreover, it is worth noting, women of different backgrounds find themselves living in conditions where they have practiced resistance and independence more than anyone else. They had to independently resist their various oppressors, and more so, cultivate motivation, initiating actions and measures that continue to help them in rediscovering themselves anew. These women, as mentioned before, carry complex identities where their gender, race, class, religion, culture...etc. comprise who they actually are, multi-layered individuals with unfixed fluid identities. Nevertheless, they are regarded and handled according to their

gender and sex. The equilibrium of seeing a woman as a woman (her gender/sex) and a woman as a person with many identifying layers is tipped on its axis, more so, fiddled with according to certain aims. Foregrounding a “woman existence” with the intention to oppress and diminish is a ceaseless shadow of patriarchy, let alone recognizing the rest of that existence.

Adrienne Rich considers “white circumscribing” and the politicization of pronouns. In this context, she advocates for individual expression because “You cannot speak for me. I cannot speak for us” (37), meaning that an individual's unique perspective cannot be fully covered by group systems of expression (usually delineated by whiteness). However, she backtracks on her line of thought to highlight the wide spectrum of understanding group expression can generate. She offers us the dilemma of the ‘I’ and ‘We’ pronouns, referring back to that politicization of pronouns, and resolving, by the end, to the importance of preserving complex and diverse voices. One white woman cannot speak for a group of black women; likewise, one black woman cannot speak generally for black women (37).

Along these lines and regarding third-world women, Mohanty suggests that assuming women are completely similar is patriarchal in a disturbingly universal and cross-cultural manner. Moreover, she methodically and politically approaches feminism, criticizing it for using uncritical methodology to prove that women are identical. In fact, the lengths taken to prove such a point reached searching specifically for groups of oppressed non-Western women and then amplifying their personal troubles to form generalizations and stereotypes. She further suggests that Western feminist discourse has created this “average third-world woman” (“Under Western Eyes” 53) by designating Western women as the norm and third-world women as lacking. This is naturally interpreted as a homogenous oppression that demands demeaning others in order to spitefully self-construct (“Under Western Eyes”).

Additionally, Mohanty criticizes Beverly Lindsay, who, in turn, states that oppression connects third-world women based on their race, sex and class. Lindsay had had observed that oppression might be the sole manner of identification for third-world women. It is clear, by now, that such observations are tone-deaf and can even be perceived as microaggressions. This, on the other hand, suggests the clumping of third-world women under apoliticism<sup>5</sup>. Being an identified oppressed entity means, in this case, not having a subject status. When subjects are deprived of subjectivity, usually, they become objectified or not affected by institutions and systems. This warrants a well-deserved disagreement with this sort of expulsion of cultural and linguistic differences. Indeed, Mohanty expresses a strong aversion to grouping women according to their dependencies, weaknesses and even strengths as “discourses of representation are confused with material realities, and the distinction between "woman" and "women" is lost” (“Under Western Eyes” 65); therefore, discursive and nuanced outlooks are in order.

The literary corpora of this research necessitate the exposition of much of the above. In order to make the reader understand Algerian women (real, authors and fictional characters) and African American women (real, authors and fictional characters), he/she needs to reconcile oneself to the idea that popular theory did not start with these women of color<sup>6</sup> and consequently accept that generalizing feminism ought to be extinct. A white woman is different from a woman of color (Algerian/African American, in our case).

Therefore, in this research, the inspection of the writings of Assia Djebar’s (an Algerian writer) and Toni Morrison’s (an African American writer) novels is to consider all that has been discussed above. The primary trajectory would be to seek similarities between women, align their predicaments and then foreground the consequences and the healing that

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<sup>5</sup> To be politically insignificant, or not involved in politics.

<sup>6</sup> Women who are not white.

emanates after encountering certain issues. Doing so would signify a typical trajectory of analysis, which is an acceptable and adequate trajectory; however, it might dismiss the distinctness of what each author is trying to represent. Granted, the experiences represented could be similar, and yet a key consideration here is the uniqueness of differences and similarities. There need not be an exact copy of any event in two different lives/stories. And if there was, then that does not place a hurdle in the line of analysis, since the goal is not to imitate what white women posing as mainstream feminism accomplished.

For the sake of elaborating further, it is important to make clear that drawing a diversity line between white women and women of color does not automatically mean that all women of color form a homogenous group as well. Each group comes with its set of identifiers, whether it be race, ethnicity, culture, religion...etc., that break homogeneity for heterogeneity. The mindless grouping of individuals risks effacing identities and experiences, and if that one individual experience is not properly represented, then expecting a proper distribution of knowledge and understanding is not due. It is not that similarity and solidarity do not co-exist, of course not, but there still is a need to find a happy medium to accommodate similarity and difference. Tackling any subject should not hinge on overemphasizing it or underemphasizing it, as both sides should be celebrated. Diversity does not negate or over-complicate representation. The latter rather thrives in difference.

Both authors foreground the obscure and encourage the exposure of the unknown. This comparative research is not done in a competitive light; it is rather a learning process, as women learn from each others' experiences, that is, where solidarity resides. For this reason, more than postcolonialism or feminism, a marriage of these theories is much better suited for analysis. Before exploring postcolonial feminism as a theoretical framework in the next chapter, this chapter is to conclude by contextualizing this research by historically

inspecting the backgrounds and settings motivating women's stories told by Djébar and Morrison.

## **1.7 Contextual Overview**

This research is concerned with two different yet similar authors; their backgrounds appear to diverge greatly, but still carry enough similarities that can be rooted in comparison. Assia Djébar's and Toni Morrison's stories recount the experiences of women from their respective cultural backgrounds. They maintain a meaningful backdrop to their stories that foregrounds the troubles of the women they write about. Consequently, it becomes important to dive into the individual backgrounds that these authors chose to write about, which also act as settings in their novels. For Djébar, a review of what motivated the polyphonic melody of Algerian women's voices across Algerian history is to be considered, while for Morrison, an inspection of the African Americans', specifically women's, enslavement after their contact with the American land is to be presented.

### **1.7.1 The Exploitation of Man**

Slavery is the practice of one human owning another as property and depriving them of any rights. Slavery happens to be the earliest institutionalized form of hierarchal domination in human history, as many see it as an essential step towards economic advancement. Its origins stem from war times when the capture of the enemy was practiced as a means of punishment, blackmail or trade. In addition, slavery entailed being sold by family members, if not, even selling oneself to relieve it of debts, or to stop other family members from becoming victims of bondage themselves. In fact, for slavery to occur, there needs to be a food surplus, meaning that the slave masters are to have the means and capabilities to subdue potentially stubborn prisoners and slaves. Slave masters also have to be distinct, visually and conceptually, in order for them to dominate over the other.

The invention of slavery is a cruel one. It makes one human brutalize another and force them into labor against their will. It is a perverse mutation that drags the high of direct violent deaths into a slow process of savagery and brutality. Those enslaved are subjected to alienation in the society they were hauled to from their original communities. And because some are born into this alien state, they are never given the chance to learn what agency<sup>7</sup>, identity and rights mean.

### **1.7.1.1 The Dark Side of Exploration: Slavery, An Origin**

While escaping persecution in the old world, Europeans headed to the new world seeking to establish a City upon a Hill where they could enforce and practice their beliefs without fearing the reigning crown. In this new world, they established economic autonomy and religious freedom. Indeed, the North American land experienced visitors as early as the fifteenth century with Spanish, French, Dutch, English and more expeditions scouring the land and learning the space. However, it was not until the seventeenth century that the English chose to settle and occupy the land, or rather colonize it, in 1607 by founding Virginia. The settlers, often called the pilgrims, the Puritans, the founding fathers...etc., led the expansion to other colonies later on, establishing the famous thirteen colonies, which were diverse in economy, politics and socio-cultural infrastructures.

This seventeenth century also saw the introduction of slavery as a practice fashioned and brandished by Europeans. They planted race into its many folds, creating an exclusive slavery that America would become infamous for.

Once the southern colonies were established as cash crop lands, it became apparent that they required manual labor. The year is 1619, and an English ship brought its first batch of Africans as slaves to Jamestown, Virginia. This ship, or “The White Lion,” traded

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<sup>7</sup> To have agency means to be in control of one’s on life, choices, thoughts, behaviours...etc.

provisions with a Spanish Ship, “San Juan Bautista”, which had originally left Angola with a lot of kidnapped Africans. This operation could be seen as a portion of what was later dubbed as the Middle Passage, a trade that linked England, West Africa and the New World.

Whether Africans were captured or sold by their own brethren, young and strong Africans arrived and were dumped into agricultural labor where they worked hard and ceaselessly, losing, in effect, their basic human rights. They weren't allowed to learn to read, write or be. Exploitation was abundant, and the conditions were inhumane. Slave masters even encouraged procreation to increase cheap workforce, or to profit from selling young trainable slaves, all for the increase of wealth and power. Those enslaved, whether natives or Africans, weren't allowed to have independent identities, thoughts or values, and the system imposed on them dictated marginalization and the institutionalization of racism and supremacy.

After the American Revolution, colonists of the North started to see links between their oppressions and the African slaves’ oppression. This prompted a call for the abolition of slavery. Still, the latter persisted as a norm and slaves were, as this label makes them to be, objects. This controversial topic jeopardized the unity of a nation, which is why the Unionists of the North freed their slaves. Their main goal was, first and foremost, to preserve the union of the states. Some would say that abolishment was an afterthought and that since slaves were not as needed in the North like in the South, where plantations were plentiful. However, what is evident in history is that this process was influenced by British abolishment, The Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831, slave narratives and anti-slavery literature, resistance, the Civil War and lastly the Emancipation Proclamation.

In fact, slave rebellions have stayed constant throughout American history. During such incidents, white slave masters were murdered at the hands of their slaves, and that was not without consequences. These acts of returned violence were upheld by those who were for slavery, who, in turn, maintained that slaves were to remain enslaved and heavily disciplined; otherwise, their barbaric and inferior nature would manifest itself. This also escalated into them having absolutely no access to rest or even the right to assemble. That did not discourage the abolitionist movement activists, such as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, David Walker, Harriet Tubman...etc., from fighting for their cause from the 1830s until the 1870s. Thanks to them, slaves were bought out of bondage, and some freed black children were enrolled in schools. Though it must be noted that Hine and Thompson perceive these changes as not an abolitionist mindset, they rather see them as a way to make the dehumanization known at the time less severe.

When the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in 1862, it declared the enslaved, in the Confederate states only, as free, although that was not widely followed, nor was slavery ended as an institution. The ratification of the 13th Amendment, after the Civil War ended in 1865, attempted the latter, but regardless of the fact that the enslaved were amendment-freed, they were not guaranteed fairness or equal rights. Such laws were violated or ignored, resulting in the furtherance of African Americans' isolation from the economic scene. They were discriminated against and limited by laws called the Black Codes<sup>8</sup>. The 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments followed these codes by "ensuring equal rights for all citizens" in 1868 and giving African American men the right to vote in 1870. Years to come, white-supremacy-fueled racist organizations (like the Ku Klux Klan), racism and discrimination still linger, leading to more movements striving to achieve justice in its several shapes,

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<sup>8</sup> A series of Laws issued with the aim to restrict African Americans' reach.

namely, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Arts Movement, the Black Lives Matter Movement...etc.

Ultimately, it can be said that North America underwent several historical events concerning slavery and African Americans. These events have stained the latter's identities, particularly women's, which will be better represented in the next section.

#### **1.7.1.2 Black Women: A Tale of Slavery, Defiance and Hope**

Slavery is exclusively violent and considered as a lifelong impacting piece of African American women's history. It differentiates them from other women back in the day as well as nowadays. To describe this portion of their history and the manner in which they were treated contributes to their reconstruction of identity and historical timeline, which is fraught with violence and oppression.

African American women were dehumanized and never in control of their bodies, which were subjected to sexual and physical violence. They were considered inferior, a personal property, or Chattel, and simply not human, but rather an owned beast or object. This caused them distress as they had no identity to speak of or to be, whether in the North or in the South of America. When they were under slavery, they were objects, and when not, they became traumatized and damaged objects. All under the parallel and intersecting life lines called patriarchy and racism.

When black women first arrived in the New World, they were in poor health because of the conditions of the Middle Passage. Once they recovered, they were given new names and forced into church. They were doing housework as well as fieldwork, not to forget bearing children, and yet, still expecting imminent sexual violence. Simply put, they were profited from every facet possible. The white wives of the masters were as complicit as their husbands, since they wielded their whips against black women as well. Such cruelty

was nurtured by the presumed word of God, which dictates the need for black women to be these malleable and docile servants to their white sister-masters. Sometimes, they were allowed to marry their kin only to bear more slaves. These marriages were not considered legal since slave masters officiated them most of the time. This also meant that the couplings were, after all, under the masters' scrutiny. While other times, these enslaved women were totally separated from men of their color. Along all of this, they still had no say when it came to their sexual and reproductive behavior. Especially with them being subjected to bearing what was called "part-people" (half-black, half-white children, a result of rape) who were, in turn, deemed slaves too because of the status of their mothers (Hine and Thompson 27).

Motherhood was like a curse because parents were not the final authority in their children's lives. In other words, their children were either enslaved or sold away by their white masters. And in some morbid situations, they were killed at birth by the hands of their own mothers. These mothers were to work while pregnant, which led to the death of many babies before and after their birth. If the children survived infancy, they were carried around by their mothers as they did their daily labor until they were old enough to labor or be sold elsewhere. On the occasion that black women were unable to bear children, they would be sold for cheap and forced to work the dirtiest, most debasing chores, since they already did not belong to the idea of womanhood.

As a matter of fact, slavery houses a cursed trinity of racism, sexism and classicism, instilling deep generational trauma that usually goes ignored by mainstream feminists. Since white feminists see gender issues as a prime concern, preceding even racial issues, this sold their movement as another façade of white supremacy, power and marginalization. Sojourner Truth observed in her speech, "Aint I a woman too?" in 1851, that the struggle with oppression was an attempt at solving the issues of white women first. She still poses as one of the most prominent figures of her time. She was not the only one

however; black women such as Maria Stewart and Jarena Lee chose to stand up for their people by speaking in public and demanding their rights. Another notable black woman to mention would be Harriet Tubman. She possessed the spirit of a revolutionary abolitionist and ensured that such passion would affect her people's perpetuated exploitation by engaging in a number of resistance activities. After escaping from slavery, she returned with the goal of freeing her loved ones by smuggling them through the Underground Railroad. She found a job as a conductor, carried firearms and lived by a philanthropy that guaranteed the persistence of black women in history.

In order to escape from their situation, several black women showed signs of personal resistance. It consisted of a taxing type of resistance where women resisted by refusing to work or sabotaging the shore, running away and, lastly, committing suicide in order to rid themselves of the horrors they were witnessing.

One of the main horrors black women were subjected to is rape. This issue is emphasized because of its instrumentalization in the taming of black women as well as instigating their resistance. Refusing sexual relations led to beatings, while surrendering to them prolonged the pain, especially if the woman got pregnant. In these cases, these women resisted by opting for abortions, and, in extreme cases, infanticides. For this reason, communities and families became important for African Americans. Nevertheless, black female slaves' issues were aggravated when they gave birth to daughters. Their mothers would, then, have to teach them how to either evade assault or deal with it.

The community was also stronger because of the efforts free African Americans made when they smuggled runaways through railroads or bought the freedom of their fellow African Americans. These practices were, yet again, challenged when George Washington passed the Fugitive Slave Act (1793-1850). This authorized the hunting of runaway slaves and required the aid of citizens, posing as another nightmare for African Americans on the

run. Yet with the Civil War raging, African Americans were affected regardless of their status.

In the case of the Civil War, black women had active and passive roles in the war. They worked as nurses, cooks, laundresses, spies; they helmed raids and even worked in propaganda, Hine and Thompson explain:

Black women knew that this was their war, the step toward freedom they had prayed and struggled for in the decades just past. It divided the country and killed almost an entire generation of young men. There was in it no sense and little righteousness. But it was a bloody opening in the insurmountable wall of oppression, and enslaved Americans walked through the horror to freedom.  
(175)

Simply put, black women seized any opportunity in order to reach their desired freedom, whether they ran to join the Union or engaged themselves in the war.

Once slavery became outlawed, several changes happened in black women's lives. They became able to, pursue civil rights, establish societies and associations (The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, among others), and explore art, like literature, oral literature and music freely. In fact, many black writers wrote slave narratives to record the experiences of black women as a form of artistic resistance. Authors that came after this made sure to record all of the above, factual or fictitious, in order to distinguish the history of black women; a history of cruelty and injustice and trigger the making of a culture.

Still, the freed black community did struggle to find its footing. At times it appeared as if the ordering of the community was copying the whites, which meant that black women had to step into the standards of femininity set by white women. If not, she would not be accepted as a free person, which doubles the concern for black women who were to be

accepted by the American society and by black men who needed to retrieve their masculinity. Poverty lingered, as did the whites' disgust with the changes. The white population of the South was determined to keep things just as they had always been. Nevertheless, black women continuously travelled around looking for their children, husbands and families. They adopted labor according to their conditions and populated schools for the sake of spreading literacy. What is clear is that black women pivoted their destinies by modifying slavery, even though harmful in its nature, into one of the many roots of resistance. Old, rotten and diseased as it may be, it still made the oppressed fight for themselves, their autonomy, agency and rights to find hope.

### **1.7.1.3 African American Literature: The Recounting of Blackness**

Literature, as a means of expression, has always been a space where different people exist. African American writers write to manifest their complex existence, seeing as African American literature is an unavoidable, and more so, an indelible part of American literature. With that, it can be said that African American literary compositions are written by Americans of African descent, who are black and identify with blackness<sup>9</sup>. Their writings mostly explore what it means to be an American citizen of African descent. Because of the history behind African Americans, their literature reflects their different point of views on their individualized experiences. Their instability persists in their literature as they tackle their position in their society, their culture, slavery's and racism's impact, and social equality. They were and still are incredible voices forged in estrangement.

During Antebellum America<sup>10</sup>, African Americans grappled with social equality, leading several black writers to focus on autobiographical works to prove the spirituality of

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<sup>9</sup> "The social and cultural identity and experience of Black people", retrieved from Merriam-Webster.

<sup>10</sup> It is a period in American history that led to the American Civil War. The latter was ignited over the legitimacy of slavery on US territory.

their presence; that they were not objects to be owned. Indeed, identity is important to the African American diaspora, considering that they came from various African countries with varied cultures and ways of adapting and assimilating. This is evidenced in their literature as well.

With that being said, African American literature started appearing by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Phyllis Wheatley is recognized for publishing her poems written in a mastered language that led to her having to stand in court and defend her craft. During those times, no matter how educated slaves were, if the writing appeared to be skillfully crafted, it was automatically assumed to be done by the White. Jupiter Hammon, was another notable writer of the time. He wrote the poem “An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ with Penitential Cries” in 1761. He is considered to be the first published African American poet in North America. He saw emancipation as the downfall of slavery, even though he himself was a slave until his death.

By the late eighteenth century, Olaudah Equiano wrote his autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, The African* in 1789. It narrates his enslavement and his, then, journey to finding himself and freedom by studying the bible. He, along with Wheatley, are seen as pioneers of African literature in English. In fact, his autobiography is considered to be the launch of slave narratives. These narratives are told from the personally lived experiences of slaves and ex-slaves during and after slavery. They detail the lows of such existence and the aftermath of being slaves then becoming freed, and how most of the time abolishment was not a finite answer to their issues and fight for equality and right of identity formation and expression was constant. Succinctly said, Slave narratives were autobiographical compositions containing themes of slavery, racism, freedom and social equality. Certainly, Frederick Douglass, a self-taught writer, recounted how the lack of freedom and the quest for literacy, and what both education and

independence mean to ex-slaves. He also wrote of never reaching complete freedom and independence, even when he reached the supposed 'free states'. While, on the other hand, Harriet Jacobs presented an important veiled issue in her autobiography, *Incidents in The Life of a Slave Girl* of 1861, which is the sexual abuse of black women stating in her work, "when they told me my newborn-babe was a girl, my heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men, but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, *they* have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own" (119 italicized in the original), which means that slavery was, for the most part, doubly brutal to black women. She, along with others, such as Sojourner Truth, showed black women's fearless rhetoric. Slave Narratives were and still are a fundamental portion of African American literature. The stories recounted paths towards religion, struggle towards abolition and life in the aftermath of that.

After the American Civil War, African American writers continued writing about the state of freed African Americans in the United States. W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the most influential figures of this time. He is famous for publishing *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* in 1903. He engaged with the issue of race relentlessly, expressing that education and unity are the better options when it comes to wrestling against racism, hostility and discrimination in the South. He coined the well-known concept of double-consciousness<sup>11</sup> and reaffirmed that dilemmas in the US are tethered to a color line or a veil.

Shifting to the beginning to mid twentieth century, African American Literature flowed on the current of the Harlem Renaissance. A movement developed by African American artists where they grappled with their experiences and identities (exclusively the racial one) in the North and the South. Authors such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale

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<sup>11</sup> A person experiencing having two identities or as if they are behaving like a different person; thus, they start observing oneself from others' perspective.

Hurston, among others, became famous during this time. This movement became a landmark for African American literature, seeing as the latter finally starts to be accepted and considered as a part of American literature.

Moving ahead to the mid to late twentieth century, literature, culture and politics were changing considerably. A literature that is African American came to be recognized, which led to it being analyzed and negotiated. During these times, several events were co-occurring. First, the end of segregation was issued under the Civil Rights movement. This was addressed by writers such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, who wrote *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *Native Son* and *Invisible Man* respectively, which all tackled different aspects and degrees of acceptance of black men in the American society.

Second, since African Americans were still fighting for a sense of freedom and still combating racial and sexual violence and discrimination, their narratives attempted to adapt to that as they morphed into what has been called Neo-slave narratives. Coined by Ishmael Reed and pursued by writers such as Alex Harley, Octavia E. Butler, Toni Morrison, Colson Whitehead, who wrote *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), *Kindred* (1979), *Beloved* (1987) and *The Underground Railroad* (2016) respectively, it is a sub-genre seeking to re-build history and its aftereffects. Its emergence carries a purpose of stressing the need to go back to historiography. It also engages with the manner in which the modern world still suffers from the scars slavery left on the black community. These fictional retellings represent, upon careful consideration, past historical events with new perspectives to the postmodern world.

Third, the aforementioned change admitted black women into the writing scene. In that space, they are present and recognized separately, telling their experiences and traditions. Writers such as Morrison undertook female friendships, abuse, history,

spirituality and literary tradition as themes, and even wrote male protagonists, while those such as Alice Walker tackled controversial topics, in particular, rape, incest and queer love. The list of black women writers does not stop at those mentioned above; it expands to include Octavia E. Butler, Jamaica Kincaid, Audrey Lord, Maya Angelou...etc. Many black women writers' heroines were abused and mistreated by their masters, husbands and fathers and then ostracized by/from society. By narrating their voices, that obscured space is negotiated, the literary canon is reshaped and the forgotten is resurrected. To put it concisely, black women writers were two groups, one that resisted the sexist racist world and demanded their equal rights and another that tried to inspect their innermost parts including their history, collective and personal, aiming to salvage their dignity and what was lost to them, to, both, men and colonialism.

African American literature, in recent history, enjoys marriages with other genres of fiction adopting fantasy, science fiction and even horror. This amalgamation allows it to enter other paths of interest and markets even. It still however stands on its own as well; it still carries the same message of African Americans belonging and not belonging to America.

### **1.7.2 Algeria Transformed: A Tale of Domination and Freedom**

Algeria has witnessed the unraveling of several events on its soil. It has also stood witness to constant foreign governances (A. L. Smith 33). One of the main events in Algerian history is French colonization. The country's history, as a result, is for the most part divided to a before and after French colonial rule. Algeria was occupied by rulers from different empires and dynasties, namely, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Numidians, Byzantines, and Umayyads with the Muslim conquest that stretched and continued with the Abbasids, Idrisids, Rustamids, Fatimid, Almohads, Zayyanids, and then the Spaniards. When surrounding kingdoms were aggressively aiming to invade, the Ottoman Empire

intervened by establishing a province in Algeria in 1516. Three centuries later, France, or French colonialism, came to Algeria. During these times, injustice, oppression and more ruled. With the latest arrival and occupation, Algeria has become a hybrid of Arabo-Berber Muslims with French European remnants of culture and language.

When France came to Algeria, along with economic expansion, the goal of civilizing drove its course of action. France was overwhelmed with debts it failed to repay and war veterans it failed to employ; therefore, invasion was seen as a remedy. Forcibly overrunning Algerian lands and buildings, the French started, first, in Algiers and then spread out to the rest of the country through the span of more than a century of aggression and cultural staining.

The onset of colonialism was shifty as it was met with either victories or strong resistance that led to unforgettable massacres in Algerian history. The French captured Bejaïa, Oran and more, but faced a strong opposition from the famous Algerian resistance leader Emir Abd-el-Kader. The war waged against him by the French resulted in catastrophic massacres and his permanent exile to Syria.

As a European, mostly Catholic Christian country attempting to annex a Muslim Arabo-Berber country, France landed on Algerian soil ready to find barbaric practices that they could civilize. However, upon settling within Algeria, the French noticed how Algerians were devout in their faith and loyal to their culture, and how such conviction comprised a significant part of their identity. France resolved to utilize this discovery in the form of acculturating and assimilating Algerians. There was a determination to construct a new Algerian cultural identity that is hybridized beyond lines.

The fact that the French did not encounter any grievous customs rendered their civilizing mission inapplicable. Granted, there were some child marriages, instances of prostitution and deprivation of inheritance for women in some secluded areas; however, the

overall Algerian system of existence was based on Sharia Law<sup>12</sup>, which the previously mentioned practices do not belong to.

In spite of the above, France enacted some laws. One of them defined eighteen as the appropriate age for marriage. At the time, this was about the only mediation France could exact before pouring more effort into assimilation. The goal was to naturalize citizens, and to accomplish that, Naturalization laws were enacted in order to “systematically dismantle tribal structures and appropriate tribal lands” (A. L. Smith 36), and speed the settlement of French and non-French settlers. Naturalization dictated that people must denounce their Deen<sup>13</sup> and Sharia in order to obtain French Citizenship and the rights that come with it. This abrasive push forward from France did not work as these “laws consistently required the denunciations of applicants’ *statut personnel*, and thus the relinquishing of remaining aspects of their religious, and in this context, social and cultural identity” (A. L. Smith 41). This was a desperate and aggressive nudge towards assimilation that failed to deliver on its promises.

With the constant failure of assimilating the indigenous population, the colonizer resolved to schooling some Algerians, called the Young Algerians, with the purpose of advancing secularity. These individuals were meant to showcase the advantages assimilation can bring about to the Algerian existence. Later on, they were rejected by an Islamic movement led by the ‘Ulama (Ibn Badis and El Bachir El Ibrahimi), which, in turn, implemented Islamic ideologies as its inspiration; thus, prompting “a response to colonial intervention in Algerians’ legal system” (Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence* 88).

It has been known since the beginning that France designated Islam as its enemy. Coming to a country such as Algeria, where a cultural identity is anchored through a religious

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<sup>12</sup>The legal system of Islam stemming from the Quran and the Teachings of the Prophet Mohamed PBUH

<sup>13</sup> The religion of Islam

identity, is a miscalculation on their part. Such identity proves to be difficult to erase, no matter the continuous passing of assimilation policies. In fact, France metamorphosed Algerians' Muslim identity. For Algerians, it became more than just an organized religion that they follow. It evolved into a political identity as well. Lazreg called this a "dialectical relationship" ("Gender and Politics" 759). To explain more, Algeria is an ethnically diverse country housing Algerians with one common denominator: their religion, Islam. A dialectical relationship is, thus, born from this. The French colonization sees this common denominator as a reason for attacking Algerians, while the colonized Algerians consider this part of their identity as "a shield of resistance" that they must preserve (Lazreg, "Gender and Politics" 759).

France persisted in offering French citizenship to Algerian men in return for them renouncing Sharia Law. There were even several mediations in family laws as well as the need to modify in the Sharia law, which further secured Algerians into their religious identity. As cultural, economic and political matters became more and more disproportionately distributed by France, resistance, rooted in both secular and religious thought, arose.

Algerian land soon housed only one third of its native populace, French (military and settlers) and non-French settlers. Algerians were heavily persecuted, excluded from important public spaces, some were only offered primary education and none were favored for employment. The French further exhausted Algerians by enlisting them in their overseas wars which alerted Algerians to take steps towards their liberation.

Algerian liberation efforts fell under nationalism. After nationalist leaders, such as Messali El Hadj and Ferhat Abbas, pursued, first, non-violent resistance as well as demands for a betterment of treatment, the plan of action changed drastically. After WWII, France

began to witness its own collapse as many of its colonies started to actively seek their freedom. This, however, was not the case for Algeria, especially since any move made by Algerians was met by grievous aggression. After the massacre of protestors on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945, Algerian nationalists realized that violence is to be met with violence in order to achieve independence. The National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale or FLN) was the most know for pushing for the war for independence. The attempts at pacifying the situation by the French (through passing some laws that were not applied) were not as taken into consideration, almost manipulated, leading to the determination of the resistance.

According to Vince, “War is clearly a moment of identity consolidation, reformulation, and, perhaps particularly in the case of anticolonial struggles and wars of independence, of invention and transformation.” (448), in other words, once Algerians decided to pursue freedom, they did not just seek the ousting of foreigners off their lands but also the regaining of their identities, bettering one’s violated and misshapen self, and seeking a future where transformations are possible. And so, on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1954, the war for independence officially started, during which the resistance confronted colonizers domestically while also having backups abroad. The more the rebellion attacked, the more the French became involved. The number of casualties skyrocketed with no avail. The cause, however, was of even greater severity and direness when Morocco and Tunisia were granted independence so that France could focus on securing French Algeria again.

Once resistance persisted, the French began granting the full rights of French citizenship to Algerians. They also began to promise better infrastructure, medical care, employment...etc., which riled the settlers.

All of the above attempts were not successful as negotiations were seriously taking place over the future of the country. The French shirked their responsibility on many façades. Having generations of certain families completely disappear, destroying whole villages, and not declaring the real number of human casualties are all crimes that can never not be linked to them. In that sense, Algeria was granted its independence in July 1962 by means of a referendum. It all came after long negotiations and ceaseless bloodshed.

Independence, however, did not bring direct peace to the Algerian lands. Any post-colonial space passes by a period of turmoil; a period of trying to stabilize the country. Algeria experienced a division over the determination of leadership in the wake of its newfound independence. The GPRA (Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic), which was the government-in-exile of FLN at the time, witnessed a schism in its loyalties as one party supported the ascension of its leader at the time, Ben Khedda, while the other party, Ben Bella, who was an active overseas FLN member. Since the nation could not afford a civil war after a hundred and thirty-two years of hostility and assault, a strategic approach towards politics was employed, which resulted in Ben Bella's popularity and him becoming the first president of independent Algeria.

Ben Bella's rule was exceptionally unstable as he tried to secure his rule on one end while reigning in any rebellion on the other. This path of his made his own military forces abandon him and even remove him from authority. This military force was led by Colonel Houari Boumediène, who became the next president. He invested his efforts in making constitutional developments. The idea was to reintroduce education and employment to Algerians in a light that indicates that the nation is able to be rebuilt and maintained after colonialism left. More so, that the nation persevered in its preservation.

Boumediène sustained control through socialism, Islamic in its nature rather than his predecessor's secular leaning, which was in turn posited by means of an Agrarian Reform in 1971. With the aid of this reform, lands were redistributed so as to expand the food supply and navigate unemployment. Boumediène also intended to nationalize all that he could and strip France of its authority over Algerian riches. To some, Boumediène's time was prosperous, while to others, it appeared dictatorial. This observation was aggravated by the one-party state (FLN) ruling that commanded the subduing of any possible opposition.

In 1979, Bendjedid assumed office as the next president of Algeria. He presided over a period of minimized control and dispersed power. The press became free and travel unrestrained. Despite that, petroleum prices fell which raised apprehensions within the Algerian energy industry particularly because it relies on it exceedingly. A crisis unfolded within the eighties of Algeria, and food, houses...etc. became long forgotten promises.

During the late eighties, the country had had accumulated foreign debt. Because of the severe climate, agriculture suffered, besides an increase in the demand for employment, medical care...etc., which were scarce, made Algerians upset, even fretful. The answer to all these social and economic issues was thought to reside in reforming the political climate. Thus, came about the thwarting of the FLN, leaning towards political plurality, and the abandoning of socialism. Now, political plurality was quite polarizing. On the one hand, other political parties were able to emerge and do their representative work, while on the other hand, this clearance led to the surfacing of some questionable political parties with questionable agendas. In 1989, the Islamic Salvation Front (or FIS) was formed by Abbassi Madani and Ali Belhadj with the objective of forming an Islamic state. They exploited the unrest Algerians felt at the time, all while offering their ideologies as the ultimate solution. Soon, they dominated councils and seized control, eventuating the resignation of the president.

Once the electoral victory of the FIS was invalidated, and “the government canceled the second electoral round in January 1992 and the military removed Chadli from power; a new High State Council took over headed by Mohamed Boudiaf” (Vince 896). The FIS leaders were arrested, and the party was dissolved. Boudiaf served a short presidency before his assassination by a FIS sympathizer. Any further elections were cancelled, and once Ali Kafi took office, Civil War or the Black Decade erupted.

The war was a series of clashes between the Algerian government and several insurgent Islamic groups (FIS, L’Armée Islamique de Salut or AIS, Le group Islamique Armé or GIA, Armed Islamic Movement or MIA...etc.). The Black Decade is considered one of the darkest times of Algerian history. Many lost their lives, including civilians, journalists, musicians, writers, military personnel... etc.

As General Liamine Zeroual won the elections of 1995, more people died. Their death was blamed on several guerrillas, like the GIA and the AIS. Promises of liberating economy and allowing private ownership were made along with a few changes in the constitution. These modifications were generally met with suspicion over manipulation.

Early 1997 saw the emergence of a new political party called RND (National Democratic Rally) who were supporters of Zeroual that ended up seizing a lot of power. The following year Zeroual abruptly resigned and by 1999, Bouteflika ran for president and won. The beginning of his rule was still attempting to shed the violence of the past years, but he vowed to change the situation and better govern political parties.

The Civil War ended by 2000, after costing Algerians more than 100,000 of their brethren. Bouteflika continued to rule for four more mandates. His time was spent on compensating the families of the deceased, establishing stability by creating more job opportunities, gaining favor with the Algerian population and basically abluting the land

from the bloodshed it stood witness to. In spite of that, during his third and fourth mandates, he had suffered a stroke and resumed presiding unwell, which led to the belief that he was not actually ruling. His government withstood the threat of the spread of the Arab Spring of 2011, until his demise in 2019. Once protests, called Hirak, started after he sought a fifth term, there was no more space for him or his corrupt government. His time, even though it achieved some semblance of peace, was riddled with stagnation in the economy and politics and embroiled in corruption. He was followed by an interim president until the current president Tebboune was elected on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019, and reelected for a second term on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

In a nutshell, it can be observed that Algeria has gone through a lot of changes but still managed to keep its identity. The history has been marked greatly two times by the French colonization and the black decade, two black spots in Algerian history that tend to bleed into Algerians' identity. The struggle for power stands and affects all individuals. In the following section, the focus shifts to Algerian women and how they were treated during these times.

### **1.7.2.1 Algerian Women: Ghosts and Heroines**

In the long span of the history of Algeria, or any other country for that matter, women's stories and lived realities are often not as prioritized as their male counterparts. Nonetheless, Algerian women are known from early times to be the pillars of their communities, even before the country gained its current name. As history is persistently constructed and reconstructed, certain phases appear as landmarks in women's lives. In an Algerian context, women's lives could be looked at from a pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial point of view. Chronicling the lives of women during these phases of the country's history helps build an idea about Algerian women, explaining how and from where

exactly one is to draw a line of progression and regression for them, and to eventually align that with this research.

Pre-colonial Algeria reflects a time fraught with occupations, invasions and native or Berber clashes with the foreign world. Algerian women could be regarded as one constant that moves across time, labels and nation to simply demonstrate their essence to the complicit world. Notable figures to be discerned during those obscure times are Tin Hinan and El Kahina. The first is known as the fourth century A.D. beautiful Tuareg Queen, who ruled over her people through wielding intelligence and wisdom. There are many varying accounts of her tale. One account recounts that after being forced by her family to marry a prince unknown to her, she left with her servants, crossing the desert and managing to survive enough to grow her kingdom anew, while some other accounts narrate that she ran, avoiding the Roman invasion at the time. In any case, she is seen as a leader who pursued freedom, preserved order and managed growth. She is also still regarded as a great motherly figure for many Berber tribes in the South of Algeria. Similarly, the latter, El Kahina is also known as a Berber queen of the Aurès Mountains who fought off the Arabic and Islamic conquest of the seventh century. She was considered courageous, free, and “in opposition to the stereotypical image of the ‘secluded’ Arab woman” (Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence* 21). Therefore, this pre-colonial period is chiefly identified by Berber kingdoms and their struggle for existence against the relentless intrusion into their lands.

During Ottoman Algeria, or the Regency of Algiers (1516-1831), Algerian women were already subjected to Orientalism along with the rest of Arab/Arabized countries. The imagination of writers and travelers at the time ruled the fantasy and demonized religion and any other practice that seemed remotely far from the foreign geographers’ and chroniclers’ beliefs at the time. An image of a sensual, kohl eye-rimmed, veiled and cloistered woman who sat about leisurely waiting to be summoned by her male masters was the epitome of the

exotic and erotic picture assailants craved to believe and find. The reality could not be further from that. Algerian women during this time were either Turkish or Arabo-Berber, whose social status depended on their husbands'. Naturally, the Turks held the highest social status, followed by the offspring of Turkish Algerian unions, then came Algerian women, followed by Black women whom some of were servants, while others were regular wives to Algerian men.

Culturally, all women wore their veils, except in some villages where women did not, such as Zemmora (Western Algeria) and Sétif (Eastern Algeria). This indicates that women were expected to be demure and chaste, and yet some had more freedom in their meandering with men than others. In fact, women enjoyed the same lifestyle regardless of their ethnicity or status as long as they were a good housewife and a wife then all was well and the same. Of course, the wealthier the higher in status they became, but lifestyle wise, glaring similarities prevailed. This blurred class barriers and reshaped poverty in a non-stigmatizing light.

Despite wealthy urban women owning luxurious items like gold jewelry, velvet, silk and satin clothes, and having servants, both male and female, they orbited the same institutions as the less wealthy of women, mostly their homes, their extended families' homes, the hammam (or public bath) ...etc. Their status did not prevent them from assuming an active role in raising their children. Along with that, they excelled at certain arts like cooking and needlework. And in spite of the presupposed image of a poor rural woman being unclean or ungroomed, such women were as concerned with their hygiene as the wealthy were. They coveted their soaps, hair washing products (Ghassoul), hair remover, perfumes and cosmetics in the form of eyeliner or Kohl.

Besides culinary arts, textile arts and hygienic awareness, Algerian women dabbled in performance arts as well. They practiced their culture in the form of recounting tales (oral tradition). They danced and performed them. They also practiced more occult performances like exorcism ceremonies as they feasted. Although women were musically apt, especially in 'ud, their formal education was not focused on teaching the art; it was more on the scholastic side, based on the Quran and traditions, with other varying subjects such as poetry, grammar, and history of Islam. Be that as it may, it is said that Turkish authorities cut down on the budget of schools, so "one can surmise that under the Turkish government the education of women suffered as well" (Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence* 26).

The beginning of the nineteenth century marked the eventual colonization of Algeria by France, which was both devastating and life-altering. France transmuted the nation, women included. The initial contact with the population garnered different reactions. Some committed suicide, while others encouraged the men in their families to fight back. Moreover, a fraction of women prepared to retaliate over the deaths of their loved ones at the hands of the French.

As mentioned in the previous section, France did not find any ghastly practices that required quelling and saving the people from, including women. As it happens, the Sharia law guarantees inheritance, divorce, custody...etc. to women. Some women were cloistered in harems and colonialism allowed it as it served their agendas. Therefore, there was not much of a change for women at the beginning. However, later on, the French had to interfere somehow. They found legal loopholes where they could insert their ideologies. They opted to disrupt women's stabilities, economic and social, because "women were the weakest link in the chain of colonial domination. Even in cases where Muslim courts ruled in favor of women, colonial justice prevailed" (Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence* 44). Women who inherited lands found themselves facing the danger of having their lands seized from them

'legally'. As to social instability, tribes were driven out of their lands, forcibly displaced in foreign areas where they had to adapt anew.

In addition to the above, the French intruded on some cultural practices. Berber face-tattooing was prohibited since it disturbed the French's aesthetically built phantasm of Algerian women. A further fracture was to be made between Arabs and Berbers when the French started to segregate them according to who was purer and thus better at assimilation.

When it came to education, schools were shut down and people were encouraged to attend French schools, which natives never did as they feared their children's easing into a foreign lifestyle and principles. This resulted in rampant illiteracy both in French and Arabic. Nonetheless, this was never considered a hindrance for women and their history because they were known for having a great memory and a knack for recounting every detail in their lives. Algerian women extended their old practices of storytelling, where they, according to Lazreg:

They told stories about colonial invasion, relationships between husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, stepmothers and stepdaughters, about orphaned children, marital infidelity, unknowing incest and the anguish of living on the margin of power centers. All these themes were drawn from real life, and often rang true to those who heard them, although protagonists included fairies, jinns, ogres and ogresses. Generations of boys and girls were reared on these tales. (*The Eloquence of Silence* 101-102)

Succinctly, Algerian women dove into an orality that used imagination as an outlet for the brutal realities history carried, eternalizing time's many unknown corners.

Regardless of that, France wanted to reshape Algerian women to their liking, which consisted mostly of wearing a feminine sheer that is shapeable and French-serving. This constant meddling fueled a resistance that never died off, and women were a huge part of it. At first, women upheld a passive resistance until figures such as Lala Fatma N'Soumer saw fighting for one's freedom to be the proper solution. It soon became clear that Algeria needed a visceral reaction to colonialism.

The resistance was roiling with women. The Movement for Triumph of Democratic Liberties (or MTLD) recruited women and organized them in different positions. All worked for FLN or the ALN (The National Liberation Army). Some women were positioned in urban centers coordinating, while others were hidden in the mountains in rural areas where the battles occurred. There was also a third category of women who happened to be roped into the resistance just because they lived in rural areas and were naturally drawn to the locations of the clashes and hideouts.

The urban category of Modjahidat (women freedom fighters, plural form of Moudjahida) were Algerian women who were middle-class French-educated and most of the time French-passing. They engaged in both paramilitary and civilian activities where they hid and planted bombs, obscured weapons in their veils, or took off their veils in order to carry out dangerous missions. They were also tasked with fundraising, purchasing weapons, food and medical supplies while others held positions as nurses, cleaners, cooks...etc.

This whole structure was deemed life-threatening once more when the colonizers found out and retaliated. The result was heinous and yet not documented on both ends, the French's and the Algerian nationalist leaders'. What is known now has been handed down by the fighters themselves or by the telling of their stories by writers, usually women, seeking

the old Moudjahidat and documenting their testimonies. Once women were found to be related to the resistance, they were tortured, raped and killed. Besides that, unveiling became the newest practice adopted by the French, for its symbolisms: the country, its people, their religion and their purity.

In such a case, Algerian women entering the resistance was a sheer representation of will. It showed that they weren't objectified, nor were their thoughts and ideas nullified. They showed courage, sacrifice and responsibility. These women became responsible for helping and healing men whom they supposedly were to be cloistered away from. This gave Algerian women a sense of purpose, allowing them to leave yet another imprint in history and to forever have a special connection with other Algerian women who recognize what one another is capable of.

Having said that, once colonialism was chased after with bloodshed, women still stood at a crossroad between the colonizer and the male colonized, for even if the colonizer saw the colonized as an other, this othered colonized saw his female counterpart as a further othered colonized: a subaltern<sup>14</sup>.

The idea here is that women were recruited, but not without a constant drilling of nationalist ideas that protected and meant to preserve men's cultural identity above all. In retrospect, such a task ought to be difficult, as women were meant to be wives and daughters, and yet break free in order to do their noble missions (And they were noble missions issued, regardless of gender). The main issue is that they were kept as a dark undisclosed secret, and were told that being in the revolution meant that there were no issues in the patriarchal structure of the nation, which was not the case.

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<sup>14</sup> A marginalized or oppressed person. To be further explained in the next chapter.

The FLN failed women, too, by exempting them from political life and monopolizing authority. Women appeared to have traded one colonizer with another. When it came to celebrating the martyred women, they were cast aside and censored in the history they helped make. Suffice it to say, the atrocities they were submitted to appeared to have stained women, appearing to interfere with nationalists' shining and impeccable image. Vine describes, "that although the mujahidat were admired for their patriotism and courage, they also were perceived as different and not marriageable because they had frequented men" (893).

During the postcolonial period, the presidents of Algeria alternated in their handling of women. Some tried to integrate women; others took a secular approach, which was upsetting to some Islamic parties, while some others shrouded themselves in the modern open-minded façade, which is no more than a front for the world, while harboring extremist views. What is known for certain is that women in early postcolonial Algeria were stowed away, yet again.

In 1962, colonialism left Algeria laden with a much-needed rebuilding. The government approached the process in an innovative manner. Since the country's bank reserves were emptied; almost nonexistent, the president, Ben Bella, issued a measure in 1963 asking women to donate their gold and silver jewelry to replenish them. In a way, they were used as a stepping stone. And up until the writing of this research, it is unknown how much was collected or if it was used for what it was publicized for. This could be marked as the first apparent betrayal of women in independent and nationalist Algeria. Women equaled sacrifice, funding entities that were not expected to be active in the reorganization of a future to come, which further ousted them from the milieu. Gender stereotyping was much more solidified when those recognized in history as historic figures became only men. Subsequently, men made history while women sacrificed their lives for it.

Some charters were drafted, like The National Charter of 1976, which addressed women's roles, rights and their free citizen status, all except for providing solutions for their problems. In fact, it claimed that women should be responsible for solving their own problems, as it was not society's, culture's and economy's problems.

The central notion to be carefully considered here is the abstract quality of charters, codes, laws...etc. because when it came to rearranging the country up to certain preferred principles, that vagueness suddenly solidified. Laws had gender neutral men-serving wordings to them that were soon tossed away to clearly lean towards men. A manifestation of this was rethinking family laws, especially since the remnants of these laws were a motley of Sharia and French colonial ordinances. The Family Code was postponed many times because of the schism it created between people. Additionally, it showed how religiously leaning the president, Boumediène, at the time was.

The draft of 1981 called Personal Status dictated the obeisance and obedience required of wives towards their husbands, who distributed rights as they saw fit. Husbands were given the right to interfere in motherhood, like obliging breastfeeding and schooling the children. They even demanded their wives serve their in-laws' family. Polygamy was alluded to, and in matters of divorce, men were favored. If women were to insist on divorce, they had to pay. Work was according to the husband's authorization. Child custody and marriage to non-Muslims were copied from Sharia law. This draft was opposed greatly and not without efforts from different women's advocacy groups (UNFA or The National Union of Algerian Women), protests, and even former freedom fighters in Algeria, but to no avail.

The Family Code was finally officially passed in 1984 with content that provoked unrest instead of rest. It regulated marriage ages, gave women full custody of their children, did not force marriages and preserved women's possessions under their own names, but was

still operating under a patriarchal view of life. Algeria had changed by then, and the enactment of these out-of-date, non-religious rules proved to be a regression.

This code was regarded as a conservation method of one's country and culture, all while glossing over the underlying societal structural issues. Otherwise, it helped women realize their problems and grievances. The code was vaguely and ineffectively revised a few times in the following years. Violence against women was recognized and criminalized, which sparked tension between traditional values and social development in Algeria, and whether God's legislations would be tampered with for the sake of social and international progress.

As the Algerian constitution was repeatedly issued every few years, women's rights curiously stayed stagnant. Wording and drafting laws and charters became a gender-neutral art mastered by leaders and utilized to hide behind. As it happens, women were sacrificed in order to guard a tattered cultural identity.

As a result of women being expelled from the workforce, they engaged in unrecorded labor like sewing and embroidery, cooking and catering...etc., especially since the population increased and money became an essential part of living. Housing became an issue, as houses were small, leading to violence, sexual violence, incest, lack of water and hygiene, especially for women who menstruate. Moreover, women's lives became harder in Algeria when the civil war started.

The black decade was another jail for women. They were kidnapped and forced to do jobs against their will, or even become sex slaves. When the FIS' ideologies were spreading, women appeared as the main problem in need to be conquered. Women were forbidden from work and to be segregated in all spaces. Most of their ideologies were based on Sharia Law; however, some extremist groups commanded that unveiled women and girls

were to be killed and that temporary marriages were permitted. The nineties were difficult times for Algerian women to live as they were explicitly targeted and continuously disappearing.

Indisputably, Algerian women were not a part of any development plan for the country, even though they served as an irreplaceable interlocking piece in the war for independence. They were ousted; politically, they were shunned; economically, their needs were not integrated and domestically, laws were passed to underpin the command and control of men over them. Women were treated as a fighting plain between French and Algerian theologians, politicians, governors, group leaders and more, pawns in the bigger power play that served them not. Despite that, women's representation in Algeria improved by the 2000s. Since they became involved in the chase after their own rights, they are now capable of accessing many fields such as education, politics and economy. Generally, jobs are available, contraception is preferred and daughters are coveted. Admittedly, several parts of women's realities remain obscure since some households still adhere to their patriarchal views, while others simply do not. What is obvious is that Algerian women oscillated between being ghosts and heroines in their own histories.

### **1.7.2.2 Algerian Literature: Inked Narratives**

Algerian literature, then, emerges from a land that is marked by revolution, sacrifice and perseverance. In earlier periods, such literature was more reflective of the occupations or nations controlling the land at the time. Many writers depicted the Roman and Numidian eras. There were times when Epics were most famous (such as Banu Hilal's), in addition to various accounts of the Andalusian Civilization and Arabic poetry during the Ottoman regency era. However, this literature is not considered as Algerian, as it does not reflect the community and its most recent and transformative history. Thus, unlike African American literature, Algerian literature proves to be a tangled definition to reach. It mostly forces

researchers to seek certain parts of it (history, the writer and the language) so as to define them before actually reaching a conclusion that presents the core of Algerian literature.

The first part that indicates Algerian literature is the history. The eventful quality of it seeps into the literature that is imitating it. The literature becomes colored by the many settlements and periods Algerians witnessed, most notably the colonial and postcolonial eras. During and after these times, literature emerged as a replica of the history Algerians stood witness to. Those were times that carried a glaring pain personified in revolution and the realization of one's self and cultural identity.

Both the educated and the illiterate Algerian communities explored expression, whether in its written or oral form. Accordingly, the second part that defines Algerian literature is the writer. An Algerian writer is defined either too inclusively, like Jean Sénac, who describes the Algerian writer as any writer who chose Algeria as their nation regardless of timeline (Marx-Scouras 56), or like Henri Kréa, who set a singular criterion of Algerian writers being a generation that started from 1954, that is, a generation who, like Sénac chose to write for a revolutionary Algeria regardless of their former identity markers (Kréa qtd. in Leperlier 81-82). This is quite significant, to explain more, Algerian literature is written by the French Algerians or the Algerian French. Most Algerian authors who wrote in French found themselves to be no more than an extension of French literature. This, nonetheless, was not the biggest issue at the time; it was, in fact, that the *pieds-noir*<sup>15</sup> were automatically classified within Algerian literature when they did not and would never relate to an Algerian experience in its entirety. On the contrary, Mallek Haddad, a well-known Algerian writer, narrows the description to having a cultural and ethnic nuance. Leperlier, in his understanding of André Marissel and Haddad, reaches the following conclusion: "il ne suffit

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<sup>15</sup> Translates to Black Foot/Feet. Europeans (mostly French) who were born in Algeria from 1830 until 1962.

pas de vivre sur un territoire (« géographie ») pour avoir les qualités de ses autochtones (« histoire »). [It is not enough to live on a territory (Geography) to have the qualities of its indigenous people (History)]” (82 translation added), which implies that the latter definition is most accurate and nuanced.

The last part of identifying Algerian literature is the language it is written in. The matter of language is a longstanding concern for Algerians. Some writers favored writing in Arabic as it represented Algeria’s cultural identity as well as a symbol of revolution. Such productions were revolution and independence recounting short stories, poems, and novels written by Ahmed Ridha Houhou, Abd Elhamid Ben Hedougua, and Tahar Wetta. Others expressed themselves in French because of their education first, then learned the exposure, rights to publish and evasion of censorship it granted them, as Kateb Yacine famously said, “J’écris en français pour dire aux Français que je ne suis pas Français. [I write in French just to tell the French that I am not French]” (qtd. in Boudersa 633). Famous writers at the time were Mohamed Dib, Kateb Yacine, Mouloud Maameri, Mouloud Ferouan...among others. After WWII and the start of the War for Independence, there became a clear distinction between Algerian French writers and Algerian francophone writers. The first wrote for art’s sake and were not reactive to the political climate at the time, while the latter centralized their struggles before anything else. The remaining writers alternated, mostly wielding French then ditching it after independence in order to write for the Algerian people and their dislocated identities, like Malek Haddad. Therefore, we ascertain that Algerian literature is simply defined as literary works written by indigenous Algerian writers in Arabic or French, echoing their eventful history and persistent culture.

Algerian literature, as we know it these days, emerged and developed since the 1950s. During colonialism and the War for Independence, Algerian writers were split into two

groups, those who wrote short stories in Arabic about the events happening in Algeria like Ahmed Ridha Houhou, and those who favored writing for the cause (in magazines, newspapers and drafting resistance papers) like Kateb Yacine and Malek Haddad, who supported the FLN. Notable authors and their works to be mentioned are: Mouloud Feraoun, who tended to highlight the Berber life. He wrote three books, namely *Le Fils du Pauvre* in 1950 (*The Poor Man's Son*), *La Terre et Le Sang* in 1953 (*Earth and Blood*), *Les Chemins qui Montent* in 1957 (*the Upwards Roads*), each spoke of Berber men of different age ranges either dealing with poverty and self-bettering, immigration and honor as well as resistance and endurance, respectively. Mohamed Dib, who also wrote a trilogy (*La Grande Maison* or *The Big House* in 1952, *L'incendie* or *The Fire* in 1954, *Le Métier à Tisser* or *The Loom* in 1957), documenting Algerians' awakening to resistance. He wrote for the dispossessed, before and after independence, only he had faith in what united Algerians could do to improve themselves. Then, there was Malek Haddad, who dabbled in every literary genre. He is mostly known for writing *La Dernière Impression* in 1958 (*The Last Impression*) and *Le Quai aux Fleurs ne Répond Plus* in 1961 (*The Flower Quay No Longer Answers*) with themes of exile, homeland, happiness...etc.

After the independence, other writers appeared. In 1971, Ben Haddouga wrote *The Southern Wind*. It was the first Algerian novel written in Arabic and dealing with women's cultural restrictions and generational conflicts. Then, there were writers like Rachid Boudjedra and Tahar Djaout who criticized in their writings religious fanaticism, and Tahar Wettaf who wrote *Laz* (*The Ace* 1974) and *A-Zizel* (*The Earthquake* in 1976), all while attacking francophone Algerian writers and supporting Arabization. He saw Arabic and Berber language usage as the main identity markers of Algerians. Whether through Arabic or French, Algerian writers at this time discussed the process of independence and the nationalism and religious traditionalism that invaded the emptiness France left behind. In the

eighties, literature took on a different path where patriarchy, religious fundamentalism and hierarchal structures were tackled, while during the nineties, writers were either influenced by the terror that haunted this period like Ahlem Mostghanemi's literary works or some plain personal adventures, like Yasmina Khadra's. It is worth mentioning that the Algerian writers noted above had a definitive future ahead of them; they were either executed, exiled, assassinated or immigrated.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has proved that tracing postcolonial and feminist theorizations is beneficial for enriching the reading of the literary corpora of this research. While examining postcolonialism and its theorists, Fanon, Said, Césaire, Bhabha...etc., some scholars appeared to focus their criticism of colonial discourse on politics and economy, while others emphasized culture and cultural identity, which is not uniform and not inherent, as a basis for resistance. Other times, hybridity and hybrid identities seemed like the answer to help collapse power structures. What was evident, however, is postcolonial literature's avoidance of women. Therefore, through defining and historically delineating feminism, the distinctiveness and diversity of women emerge as a key finding. This is relevant to this research as it centers on women who, first, are not white, and second, are distinct in their non-whiteness. Thus, further helping the researcher comprehend that the women characters that are going to be analyzed and compared in this research do not fully adhere to white feminism, nor do they blend and fall under the same gender-related experience. Finally, this chapter explored the contexts of this research's literary texts. Slavery at the hands of white Europeans emerged as a major issue in black women's lives. It negated and veiled their experiences, leading to the creation of a literature that encompasses these troubles and more. Similarly, Algerian history offered patriarchy, colonization and the turmoil they beget as the main oppressors in Algerian women's lives. In the case of Algerian women, however, it was

discerned that their sacrifices for their country's freedom, and even before that, their day-to-day struggles went unnoticed and concealed. This resulted in the production of literatures that want to reinstate this Algerian woman into her history. Indeed, this chapter establishes patriarchal thought, colonialism/imperialism and their aftereffects (slavery) as the main oppressors in Algerian and African American women's lives. All of the above further advances the setting of a foundation for the development of a theoretical framework in the next chapter that heeds postcolonial and feminist approaches' shortcomings and takes into consideration the contextual background of the female characters written by Djébar and Morrison.

**Chapter Two: Woman, Words, Voices and  
Her/story: A Framework of Representation**

## **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is set to resume from the last one. After establishing the context of the novels to be analyzed and compared, and understanding that this comparison is not a competition nor is it meant to view women as a blendable entity, this chapter is going to build the conceptual framework that will enable the researcher to maneuver their analysis. The postcolonial and feminist venture from the last chapter is to merge and provide a postcolonial feminist framework that carries within it several concepts and theories that will assist with forming a relevant analysis and understanding of the literary corpora of this research.

This chapter, then, is concerned with explaining postcolonial feminist theory and the need for it. It also delves into the ideologies behind it and what they represent. Under the umbrella of postcolonial feminism, other theories will be inspected, such as intersectionality, when looking at non-white women, and also subaltern historiography, specifically that of Spivak. While inspecting this particular theory, we relate subalternity to women and history, with a focus on subaltern women's interaction with history.

In addition, this chapter will seek to draw a link between postcolonial feminist theories and feminine writing in an eclectic approach that might aid with garnering a better understanding of the authors' writing. Finally, an expository presentation of Algerian and African American literature, specifically women's literature, is to be presented, ending with an introduction to Assia Djebar and Toni Morrison.

## **2.2 Postcolonial Feminism: Building a Framework**

Postcolonial feminism is a multi-layered lens that seeks to primarily spot the marginalization of women in their diverse contexts. This marginalization is the bearer of the violation of different groups of women, particularly those of the third world or otherwise

known as women of color/postcolonial women. Postcolonial feminism is, as a result, eclectic as “it makes a radical contribution to literary studies by drawing together many disciplines, challenging Western ethnocentricity and restoring plural subjectivities to literary history” (Shital 284), in a way, it problematizes Eurocentric and homogeneous representation of women. This suggests that postcolonial feminism confronts the manifold offences committed against women. Patriarchy, generalization, stereotyping, unified subjectivity, colonialism and its ramifications are continuous aggressions performed against non-western women in person, literature, history and more; therefore, with the help of a postcolonial feminist eye, such byproducts of colonialism, sexism, racism, and economic exploitation can be thoroughly inspected, and contended against.

Lewis and Mills define postcolonial feminism as follows: “feminist postcolonial theory has engaged into a two-fold project: to racialise mainstream feminist theory and to insert feminist concerns into conceptualizations of colonialism and postcolonialism” (3), conveying that there is a cooperation on both ends. Feminism and postcolonialism, both seem to fill one another’s gaps.

As separate theories, feminism and postcolonialism are both concerned with representation and language, since both components are necessary to the formation of subjectivity and history and the construction of identity. In particular, language could be one of the most powerful tools in impairing patriarchal and imperial powers (the ideologies behind the necessity for postcolonialism and feminism). In the case of feminism, languages become a matter of separating from this ingrained version of language that is male-oriented to a more expressive and feminine way of communicating ideas, while on the postcolonial side, it becomes a task of appropriating dominant languages and combating the eradication

of native languages. Similarly, representation<sup>16</sup> is fundamental as it opens various possibilities for exploration. Representation is sought through rifling into silent spaces and making them loud again. These spaces could be cultural, societal, historical, political...etc. In such a case, postcolonial feminism shares some understanding of the formation, perception and differences of identity, and concerns itself with the manner in which colonial or dominant discourse tends to create the idea of a silenced postcolonial female subject. The combination of all of the above creates an accumulation of strategies and techniques that are similar to each other in dealing with certain issues, and in this case, it is gender, race and class issues at the core.

Moreover, there can be many similarities drawn between patriarchy and imperialism, as both tend to dominate over what they label as subordinate, women and the colonized. In fact, for women who were subjected to colonization, it becomes a much more pressing issue. Women's lives become politicised, seeing as their oppression extends beyond their gender to affect their national/racial identity under colonialism. Gender oppression and colonial oppression are, then, intertwined in their way of dictating the lives of these women. The latter are designated as weak, changing their dynamic of existence exponentially. What happens in such a process is that they are dubbed as subordinate, and with that, their self-assigned rights are seized from them, seeing that the dominating party, whether man, colonizer or both, believes that their rights hold more substance than women's. Subsequently, outside one's home/nation, where the oppressor resides and damages, inside, too, is a space where the oppressor is a brother, a father, a son and a husband. In this sense, patriarchy and imperialism tend to mirror one another; some would describe them as having the same hierarchal arrangement and hegemonic structure that tend to form the oppressive

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<sup>16</sup> In this research, representation is used in its literal meaning, to represent or portray different groups in different fields.

systems of life. Then again, patriarchy is often times viewed as the originator of all forms of domination (Rich 217). Therefore, it could be considered that no matter the timeframe and its events, solidarity has never been practiced between men and women under duress; instead, intimidating (coercive and controlling) behavior has been exercised on women by men.

Under such circumstances, in an inquiry seeking to pinpoint the cause and perpetuation of women of color's suffering, both men and colonialism emerge as the offenders. And for that, postcolonial feminism is the study, defense and representation of marginalized women's voices against dominating structures. Women, to some extent, appear to be at the heart of the oppression they desperately seek to subvert. They are discriminated against as women by their countrymen and as colonial subjects by foreign intruders. This leads their existence to hinge on 'Double Colonization'. First introduced by Peterson and Rutherford in their 1986 anthology titled *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Postcolonial Women's Writing*, this term was intended to discuss postcolonial women's difficult entry into the writing and literary world. The expression has since evolved to describe women who are subjected to ongoing oppression from both patriarchy and colonial power. In some cases, this oppression is believed to stretch beyond independence, taking the form of nationalism. For the most part, it could be deduced that postcolonial feminism attempts to fight back against patriarchal and colonial structures as well as postcolonial nationalism and their reality of entrenching domination and solidifying gender bias.

In addition to the above, mainstream feminism is as equally regarded as a participant in the subjugation of postcolonial women. Postcolonial feminist critics, namely, Mohanty, hooks, Spivak, Minh-ha, Moi and more reject the belief that women share the same identity because they are 'known' to share the same engendered experience of oppression. White women and their idea of oppression are not to be considered as the standard, which conveys

that this theory breaks away from that exclusivist view of women. Spivak criticizes, “western feminism for its failure to ‘dehegemonize’, even decolonize, its own guiding presuppositions” (Moore-Gilbert 455), implying that despite the various contributions western feminism offered to different fields, it still overflows with shortcomings when dealing with postcolonial feminist realities, such as; history, literature...etc. Mainstream feminists, while attempting to probe the walls of women-less spaces, had their process become addled by a lack of communication. In such a case, men, white women, and western feminism fail, not only the third world woman/(post)colonial woman, but also the black woman, who is one of the many aftereffects (slavery, diaspora, migration...etc.) of colonialism (Loomba 80). Carby, another postcolonial feminist critic whose works are more focused on black women, not only condemns mainstream feminism for rendering the rest “invisible” (46), but also identifies black women’s oppression as a “triple oppression of gender, race and class” (45). Even though mainstream feminism can be applied to black and third world women, it would never cover all of their discursively produced historical, socio-political and cultural spaces.

Going back to the point of women diverging in their experiences with oppression, one should consider how women lead lives that naturally contest likeness. However, the acknowledgement of their differences entails validating their integrality into the ‘general’ community and the world alike, which is why several oppressed communities’ differences are underscored as negative stereotypes. It should also be stressed that similar experiences are indeed easily pinpointed on the grander scheme. In that sense, there is an umbrella of occurrences under which experiences from patriarchal and colonial oppression can be resembled. Be that as it may, at the individual level, it is inevitable to find what sets each experience apart, and this, of course, takes place once enough patience is practiced in considering the contributing factors. Mohanty goes further and even addresses the

contagious hierarchy that could touch third world communities, calling for a “horizontal comradeship”<sup>17</sup> in which an “imagined community” is not cleaved by “biological or cultural” (*Feminism without Borders* 4) boundaries.

Postcolonial feminism, at this point, emerges to dare the ideologies that seek to scorn and derogate women, confront the ideation that white women are the standard model of womanhood, eliminate stereotypes that bind women to subjection and inferiority, and to resist the remnants of all of the above still existing nowadays.

Altogether, postcolonial feminism maintains that women of colour, or postcolonial women, face an oppression that is manifold. It varies from blatant violence to omission from history, and stems from discrimination based on race/ethnicity, class and gender. Postcolonial feminism comes to fill the historical gaps of those who were purposefully omitted from historical records. Such an approach aids with dislodging the canon, reinstituting, and restoring a space that belonged to women to begin with. Hence, this perspective emerges as an interdisciplinary sphere that is resourceful in its endeavors. Under and along postcolonial feminism, various concepts and theories are usually recognized and utilized. Intersectionality, subaltern studies and historiography and feminine writing are some of these theories that are also going to be explained further down this research in favor of studying women and their representations in different spaces where gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, nationality and more.

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<sup>17</sup>Mohanty bases her understanding on modern nationalist theorist Benedict Anderson who argues that a nation becomes an imagined community because of a horizontal comradeship based on the socio-culturally constructed experiences they share.

### **2.2.1 Intersectionality: A Prospective Prism**

Intersectionality was coined and popularized by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s. Her work started in the legal field where she urged, along several other black feminists, practitioners to abandon their limited outlook when carrying out their scholarship, and that they should “account for the differential experiences intersecting inequity creates” (Moffitt, Juang and Syed 2). When such a concept first circulated, it was an extension of black feminism touching upon the oppressions black women underwent at the hands of black men and white women because of their gender, race and class. Soon, the concept travelled to other communities that suffer oppression based on their multiple and intersectional identities, extending intersectionality to house other facets of someone’s identity (Religion, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity...etc.). The interaction of these facets influences people’s complex experience of the world, including oppression.

Intersectionality, as a theory of analysis, had its fair share of allegations against it. First, to some critics, its details seem ambiguous at times and even non-existent at other times. Patricia Hill Collins complains that intersectionality has a “definitional dilemma” (3), that despite being given several definitions, it still is enigmatic and inapplicable on the go. Second, this theory is criticized for catering to subjectivity when it comes to experiences and perspectives. However, such criticism appears defensive as the notion of people (in this case, women) having different and subjective experiences returns in this context to chide those who are used to generalizing the experiences that are not of color. This also becomes almost an agenda of presenting black feminist literature and criticism as a “clique driven” space which again diminishes the entire thesis (Savarimuttu 56).

In an effort to dispel some ambiguity around intersectional analysis, Cho, Crenshaw and McCall argue that an analysis is intersectional when it "adopt[s]... an intersectional way

of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power" (795 qtd. in Collins 11). In the same line of thought, Collins explains, intersectionality "references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (2), leading to the belief that intersectionality has an undertone of subversion of the usually perceived singular notions of identification. Collins indicates that the mutual and influential interaction between one's identity markers constructs complex disadvantages or oppressions that are habitually associated with each marker on its own; therefore, the intersection of two or more identity markers creates a new pattern of oppression that otherwise could be regarded as invisible seeing that it does not follow the usual pattern of operation. For that, intersectionality makes complex oppression intelligible and recognizable; moreover, it features and highlights individuals with unique identity markers combinations, bringing forward their otherwise obscured discriminations.

Crenshaw succinctly explains the need for having an intersectional view when she points that "intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and they create obstacles that often are not understood within conventional ways of thinking about antiracism or feminism or whatever social justice advocacy structures we have" ("Kimberlé Crenshaw: What Is Intersectionality?" 0:07). In that, intersectionality unravels the manner in which different forces in the average person's social life (or components of his identity) can create issues for them in the form of discrimination and even violence. In a literary context, it is used to examine the "range of identity factors, such as gender, race, nationality, class, sexuality, age, physical ability, corporeality, role, or setting," (Savarimuttu 56) that help

build characters on the one hand and to glean the violence, inequality, disadvantages and discriminations that results from such intersectionality on the other.

Most of the developmental research is done by white, male and heterosexual individuals, which serves only to solidify hegemonic grand narratives and efface diversity. Moffit, Juang and Syed state that “across continents, the work of intersectional scholars has interrogated normative ontology and epistemology, highlighting the often unquestioned acceptance of knowledge produced by those who are systemically privileged” (2-3), entailing that when the white, male and heterosexual individuals are tackling a subject for study, their approach is going to reflect their experiences accustoming them to the rest of the diverse world. This creates a stigma for the other, as their social categories would seem odd and non-pertinent. Intersectionality comes to carefully dismantle “essentialized norms of power and privilege” (Moffit, Juang and Syed 10). The idea goes back to highlighting “marginalizing systems, not marginalized individuals” (10), so the conversation would also center on deconstructing patriarchy, racism, sexism...etc. An identity is more than singular separate categories. Objectivity in the scrutiny of identities is a dubious concept since individuals are not isolated from their socio-cultural backgrounds. The categories individuals inhabit have a certain amount of physical touchable influence on their lives. They are not simple, rather heterogeneous and fluid, making their identities as such (Moffit, Juang and Syed 3).

Intersectionality, now, happens to be the modern-day buzzword. Everyone can be considered as intersectional nowadays, that is why most researchers resort to only mentioning the theory with no context, nor application; however, throughout this research, intersectionality is to be threaded in between the researcher’s understanding and later on analysis. It won't be isolated, more like a support system to the other theories, especially since Crenshaw confirms it to be “not so much a grand theory” but “a prism for

understanding kinds of problems” (“Kimberlé Crenshaw: What Is Intersectionality?” 0:30). It becomes the basis of comprehension and thinking. If one does not have an intersectional understanding of the world, their vision will fall short indeed.

### **2.2.2 Subalternity: Exploring Histories from the Margin**

The subaltern could be defined as individuals or groups afflicted by marginalization and oppression, especially in a socioeconomic frame, due to domination in its various forms (colonialism, imperialism...etc.). The term was first penned by Antonio Gramsci. From his Marxist view, he presented the issues ongoing between peasants/workers, that is, subalterns, and the hegemony overpowering them in Italy at the time<sup>18</sup>. The word ‘subaltern’ managed to persist by traveling to postcolonial theory. The concept was further matured with the help of the Subaltern Studies Group<sup>19</sup>, which was helmed by Ranajit Guha, a historian who was interested in post-colonial and post-imperial societies, looking at history from below and melding it to subaltern studies.

Meanwhile, to be a subaltern entails being forced to the periphery of society and deprived of political influence and the means to acquire wealth or social status. Such systemic expulsion strips individuals of choices, decisions and quite succinctly agency, leading to an abrasive silencing of these groups. Undoubtedly, with complex and intersectional identities comes an attempt at restraining them. The narratives and histories of the subaltern are, then, dismissed in order to minimize resistance. The latter is another important characteristic of the subaltern, as, regardless of their disadvantaged position, they, as groups, involve themselves in any form of resistance available. The notions of preserving identities, claiming rights, and exercising agency are all entwined with the subaltern, who is

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<sup>18</sup>During Gramsci’s imprisonment from 1926 till 1937, he wrote a series of essays criticizing the Italian Fascist Regime. His most notable collection is *The Prison Notebooks*.

<sup>19</sup>A group of academics from South Asia, mostly India, who focused their studies on postcolonial communities.

sometimes treated as an unconventional historical record. Therefore, it is crucial to have a historical perspective while dealing with the subaltern; the historically marginalized/misrepresented; the defier of established and grand narratives.

### **2.2.2.1 The Historiographic Existence of the Subaltern**

As dealing with the subaltern requires some intensive knowledge of their situation, it becomes inevitable to recognize their profound connection to history. In fact, such research of subalternity started in the field of history more than four decades ago when Guha released a series of volumes considering, primarily, the situation of post-imperial Indian history and society. Later on, researchers began to perceive the relation subaltern studies have with historiography. While historiography is the general study of the writers, the techniques they use and the circumstances behind their composition of history, subaltern studies build up to inspect specific experiences and struggles that compose historical narratives indicating a narrower focus on the obscure history of postcolonial communities, a history that, “evolves through struggles of the oppressed” (Lekesizalin 206).

As far as the study of such unconventional history goes, Spivak stresses that “a historian confronts a text of counterinsurgency or gendering where the subaltern has been represented. He unravels the text to assign a new subject-position to the subaltern, gendered or otherwise.” (“In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics” 241). She tags the texts that gender and misrepresents the subaltern as “counterinsurgent” or simply put, texts that are designed to prevent subversion. She reasons the obligation that prompts historians to confront and rectify these framing tendencies in order to restore subjectivity and prevent any further distortion.

Accordingly, due to some groups, such as the subaltern, not finding their histories in the grand one, history emerges as not infallible. On that account and while investigating

modernism and postmodernism, Linda Hutcheon, in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, problematized history (88). On the one hand, she faults historiography's arrangement of narratives for creating historical facts (92), while on the other, she questions the "narrativization" (93) of history and whether that lowers the value of the knowledge the world knows. It could be deduced that Hutcheon does not deny the factuality of history/past, only "*how* can we know that past today—and *what* can we know of it" (93 italicized in the original). These questions, offered by Hutcheon, establish the basis of the emergence of historiographic metafiction in the late 1980s as a literary concept and genre that regards fiction and history as not distinct from one another. Hutcheon further explains that:

Historiographic metafiction self-consciously reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning. And, even more basically, we only know of those past events through their discursive inscription, through their traces in the present. (97)

In the above quote, Hutcheon invokes the significance of historiographic metafiction when it comes to detecting the discursive interpretable quality of history. She reiterates that although history occurs and is empirically collected, such action is directed by choices made by those in authority, essentially turning history into reality by dictating where and when to put what and who. This historiographic metafictional perspective is also significant in providing alternatives, from authors blending history and fiction to them utilizing innovative techniques and tools to illustrate their perspectives such as parody, irony, intertextuality...etc., to the paradoxical and destabilizing employment of either "multiple points of view... or an overtly controlling narrator" (117). Only having various perspectives or just the one is seen as Hutcheon's way of elucidating the difficulty of finding "a subject

confident of his/her ability to know the past with any certainty” (117). Such a notion could also be related to Hutcheon’s attempt at supporting the issue of documenting unstable and lost subjectivities in history and fiction writing.

When thinking of history as knowledge of the past, as presented through Hutcheon’s scrutinizing lens, having concerns over it becomes substantial. These concerns boil down to “problems of the narrative or inscriptive nature of all knowledge, of legitimization and situatedness, the contingency of disciplinary boundaries, a sense of political crisis, and the absence of consensus and shared narratives [which] all led to a questioning of history as the repository of truth” (Tejero 85), to rephrase, a variety of factors impact the understanding and interpretation of knowledge of the past as ‘truth’; for instance, the manner in which historical narratives are documented, recounted, rightly contextualized, officialized, and distributed into different categories of life (e.g. politics) as factual knowledge becomes questionable.

The above leads to questions arising over whether history is to be trusted to deliver past truths or not, and warns that one must be aware of such concerns when attempting to learn about the history of the world. Butler, in his Book *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* claims that history is “just another form of narrative and ... [Is] just well known fictional plots without any realist claim.” (32-33). Similarly, Trinh Minh-Ha questions “*did it really happen? is it a true story?*” (*Woman* 120 italicized in the original). These questions are asked after she debates factual history and what she calls ‘primitive’ storytelling history. She links history, story and literature so tightly together, claiming them to be inextricable. Once story and literature are ripped from history, it resolves to facts, or as she notes, “it thought it could” (119), further implying the uncertainty of history.

Trinh emphasizes ‘the story’ and ‘story-telling’ in their different forms, “to tell us not only what might have happened, but also what is happening at an unspecified time and place” (*Woman* 120), concurring with the notion of instability and subjectivity of narratives. Even though fiction and history might appear to not be told in the same way, nor following the same principles, they both exist outside of facts and rely on the way one’s own society decides to determine as truth, a truth that comprises of all truths but itself (Cha in Trinh, *Woman* 121).

Circling back to subalternity, it is important to note that, Chakrabarty claims that subaltern studies “lost its way when it came into contact with Said’s Orientalism, Spivak’s deconstruction, or Bhabha’s colonial discourse” (498 qtd. in Tejero 86), which means, he believes that their contributions might have strayed subaltern studies away from its original historical goals and objectives of addressing the silence of many, and that postcolonial theory had done nothing to dispel modern world history and universalism. He also argues that Eurocentrism and historicism happen to be the fountain of despotism, given that “the struggle is displaced onto the level of discourse” (89). In retrospect, his issue with historicism and historiography is that it serves the West much more than it serves subaltern groups, and that this fact has allowed Europeans to dominate the world with what they dictate as history. Hegemonic historical narratives being forced on subaltern groups is not unknown; it is rather the ignorance of them being repellent to such ideation, because of their diverse identities/histories/cultures, that creates frustrations. Moreover, there is no huge difference between the subaltern world and the “civilized” world. It’s only that the latter creates this artificial distinction that sets rules serving the wanted different narrative (Trinh, *Woman* 125). In a sense, this returns to the idea of authenticating history and fighting the epistemic violence practiced on third world subjects and their histories, cultures and more.

Hutcheon, while theorizing historiographic metafiction, discusses the un-silencing of marginalized voices as an indispensable pillar of rewriting the history that was constructed and made into a signifying system (157). Looking at history differently would help write a fiction where “we get the histories of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and [...] of women as well as men” (Hutcheon 66 qtd. in Muneer 145). Literature, as a result, becomes a powerful instrument that debates and questions the general understanding of historical events. Indeed, Tejero observes that “literature is often seen as a privileged site where the determinism of history is disputed, questioned or opened” (85), or simply put, literary texts have acquired the ability to challenge what history has recorded as predetermined or fixed. This makes alterations doable and possibilities achievable.

Then, it can be said that authors do go through recognizable steps, beginning with conducting their respective own historical analysis, addressing the aforementioned concerns, and then producing a revised literature where their respective subaltern groups become active participators in their own narratives/histories (Tejero 87). They had to scrutinize history seeing that there was a silencing of memory as a consequence of epistemic violence practiced in the form of imperialistic historicism, which, in turn, automatically erases certain presences from history and politics, and when subjects are not politically or historically recognized; when they are not allowed within the public sphere, they subsequently cannot speak (Chakravorty, Milevska and Barlow 72-73). Therefore, such authors expose that part of history by pushing its limits; by filling its empty crevices and creating cracks in the already congealed lies. This action is a form of resistance that is the trademark of being a subaltern writer/subject.

### 2.2.2.2 Spivak and the Unmasking of Women's Subalternity

One of the firsts to link subalternity to women, in particular and not just postcolonial subjects in general, is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who gives her own definition of the term subaltern in the following quotation, a subaltern is “the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat” (“Can the Subaltern Speak ?” 78). In this passage, she explains the subaltern, giving many examples of the groups, as those who reside in the periphery of society, while, in all fact, they remain an unheard centric entity in the dominant discourse.

Colonialism and women's subjectivity assemble women as subalterns. A dominant entity needs an oppressed subjected lesser entity to survive; therefore, the woman, even in the postcolonial era, was perceived as a carefully crafted socio-cultural construct shaped to sustain the tipped power dynamics between colonizer and colonized (R. C. Davis 40).

For women, Spivak blatantly declared the inability of the subaltern to have control over their agency, to speak, or to have their voice be retrieved. Controversial, this statement was at the time. She was reprimanded for affirming “an expression of terminal epistemological and political pessimism” (Lowe, Rosenthal and Silliman 83 qtd. in Coronil, “The Poetics of Neocolonial States” 647). She worried scholars with her representation of the subaltern “as a mute object positioned outside of agency” (Coronil, “The Poetics of Neocolonial States” 648). She was even accused of disregarding the position of the subaltern woman, to which she addressed later on in an interview with Howard Winant where she clarified her assertion, saying that she was misunderstood. She sought to detach the subaltern from a space where they could be romanticized instead of at the center of political subjectivity, and that “all the complications of ‘subject production’” (Spivak 90 qtd. in Tejero 91) are applied to the subaltern woman. Her “philosophy grew out of an investigation

into the socially constructed logic of sati<sup>20</sup>, the widow-sacrifice practiced in colonial India” (Chowdhury and Ahmad 4). She analyzed how the British practiced their civilizing ways on India (Kapoor qtd. in Chowdhury and Ahmad 4) by banning such practice against the fundamentalist teachings of the Hindu society, which, in turn, defended the sacrifice by alleging that the widows willingly chose self-immolation (4). One side claims to act on a philanthropic initiative, which is rescuing these women from their own men, while the other depicts it as an honorable, almost virtuous endeavor. The widow, however, in this case, is disregarded. As both sides speak, they exclude her voice, leading to her gradual deletion of opinion by the patriarchy and imperialism (Spivak; Chowdhury and Ahmad). In this light, Coronil attempts to comprehend Spivak’s train of thought by stating:

If I read her correctly, I take her to mean that the subaltern is mute by definition; subalternity cannot include such active agents as the “organized resister” or “me” (since, like Spivak, I can ‘speak’ literally and metaphorically). Yet if one views subalternity as a heterogeneous social field populated by subaltern subjects differently subjected to interrelated power hierarchies, making the subaltern ‘disappear as a name’ entails the endless process of creating a democratic Society—A society without dominance and subalternity, a process that presupposes the recognition of the subaltern as an agent of historical transformation not just despite, but because of, its subalternity at this time. (“Postcolonial Studies and the Neocolonial” 43)

In other words, Coronil understands how Spivak was able to link silencing with the subaltern. That is because subalternity has been fed to people as a notion that is muffled by patriarchal culture and harbors no individuality nor resisters. However, it is widely known

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<sup>20</sup>The act or custom of a Hindu widow burning herself to death or being burned to death on the funeral pyre of her husband. Retrieved from Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

that any particular person is able to, in fact, physically speak, which entails the particularity of the subaltern. Coronil, here, introduces his own take on the subaltern. Heterogeneity, he calls it. A diverse group of people exposed to different power structures. They are socially and identity-wise different but can still find a point of similarity in politics (Coronil, "Postcolonial Studies and the Neocolonial" 40). He sees this to be the first step into erasing the label "subaltern," which would result in a democratic society wherein people's experience of oppression is received as an active agency, catered toward change because of subalternity and not despite of it.

On that account, Spivak emphasized that any subaltern analysis must contain the idea of not being able to speak and why such an action is unattainable by providing the precise positions from which the subaltern speaks, but "cannot be heard or read" (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 104). By way of explanation, it is a necessary step in the process of considering the silenced subaltern. Further, she explains how these groups exhibit complex and fragmented traits that are not without their own challenges, instead of the Orientalized "dead" sovereign subject (Katrak 50) that Deleuze and Foucault deconstructed and constructed. A subaltern is the maker of their fate as their sole reality (No negotiation of subalternity, history, gender...etc.). Spivak asserts that this ignorance of dimensions in third world women is silencing, more so, she sees it as a controlled voice, or what is dubbed as ventriloquism. With the influence of Western-made history and ideology, a pure position is difficult to discern (R. C. Davis 39). With that in mind, it is important to recognize that some postcolonial scholars and even national writers were passive to the notion of subalternity (specially in women), like Said who preferred to inspect colonizers' agency and their dominant discourse and controlling nature, while others either held an objective stance to all parties involved or played into the misrepresentation, "ironically they write a subject who

never had subjectivity” (Senft 278), their disinterest and inaccuracy are dubious considering the theorization available.

As for the impact Foucault has on postcolonial theory, he did indeed participate and try to approach several notions of matter in order to acquaint the world with the intricacies of his thought process. In spite of that, he ended up providing a certain vision that revealed him as a disinterested onlooker; sometimes even a remote one, seeing that he belongs outside of the central margin. Radhakrishnan affirms this and furthers:

Foucault does not include ‘the historical realities’ of subjugated knowledges that after all, did exist in history but ‘in the domain of theory they have been written out of effective existence’ (32). They exist as ‘absences’ and hence when recuperated such as in the case of colonized peoples’ histories, they assume an oppositional tone, vis-à-vis dominant history, and they are regarded as ‘transgressive and reactive.’ (Katrak 51)

By stating this, it is witnessed that Foucault proves to be yet another eraser of neither the global nor total histories of the oppressed. Radhakrishnan introduces the idea of history being events that happened. Even if the recorded version is tampered with, its original versions survive in different incarnations. In the field of theory, such specificities are ignored, merely gaps that, when addressed, are seen as a sign of violation, painting revisionists yet again in a negative light.

In that regard, the subaltern has become: not a woman, manufactured by colonial discourse, a critical crutch to the existence of colonialism, othered, and a temporal/spatial context-specific existence, aggressive and universal. Spivak, however, disagrees with most of the above, so she ensures the mentioning of the unseen/unheard, engendered, diverse and divided up to the Neo-colonial era (Chowdhury and Ahmad 5).

Accordingly, she exhibits an interest in the postcolonial subaltern subject and its agency. She considers the idea of epistemic agency<sup>21</sup> with regard to the subaltern's own agency, whether the subaltern is able or allowed to assume the responsibility of speaking/representing themselves or are to be forever subjected to identity distortion. In particular, stripping one of their voice and agency puts them in a capitalized position; a vulnerable position where they are most likely approached by the 'concerned other' or 'the genius intellectual' who is 'unaware' of the direct effects of colonialism.

Subsequently, she foregrounds the importance of finding the roots of the silencing of the subaltern; she dubbed it the itinerary of silencing. A path that must be traced and searched for the various structures organized to silence colonially and postcolonially marginalized voices. Mainly, these structures are examined in their misrepresentation of the subaltern. The following table arranges some of these structures and describes how they impact the silencing of the subaltern:

<b>Linguistic and cultural hegemony</b>	<b>Economic exploitation</b>	<b>Political oppression</b>	<b>Educational regulation</b>	<b>History and other discourses</b>
- <b>The manner in which colonists enforce their languages and cultural</b>	- Extortion of native resources, all while making it impossible for them to	- The enactment of political and legal actions that purposefully antagonize	- The dictation and censorship of curricula in educational facilities (modifying/er	- Edit history to exclude subaltern voices. - Inscribing native

<sup>21</sup> The ability or capacity to act or exert power through episteme, or knowledge.

<b>beliefs on natives, which leads to the effacement of native languages, cultural traditions and the already established knowledge systems</b>	access any capital.	subaltern groups' rights. - Disallowing political autonomy and representation	adulating native beliefs and scholarship while advancing predominant colonial philosophy) - Limiting access to education for natives.	stereotypes in narratives. - Manipulating all types of discourse.
<b>All as a means of silencing and with the result of more silencing</b>				

**Table 1** Itinerary of Silencing (adapted from Spivak; Katrak)

Spivak does not shy away from criticizing the manner in which the above structures are wielded by Western intellect, who might present as supporters of subaltern agency in dominant discourse, and yet contribute to the construction of that same subaltern as a subjected subject. With such observation, it is difficult not to question subalternity and its relation to one's identity. Is subalternity part of a person's identities and identity markers, or does it highlight their core identities and identity markers? A better question would be, does being cast in a subaltern light bring more attention to one's identities and identity markers? Or is the intersectional quality of the subaltern enough to drive them straight to the bottom of class formation? To that avail, Tejero declares that "subalternity defines not the being of

a subject, but a subjected state of being,” (94) which essentially means that subalternity is exacted on the colonized, for example, by outside forces, in this case the colonizer, and is not an inherent part of their essence as people. This view, however, sees subalternity from one angle only, while subalternity is not absolute and is definitely context-dependent, meaning that not “everyone is a subaltern in the same way” (Tejero 94); likewise, subalternity is “emphatically not meant to suggest that all oppressions (or resistances) are equal” (Tejero 94). The process by which one reacts to oppression and the challenges society throws at them, and how that is resisted, also defines the subaltern. A subaltern black woman has a different contextual experience and approach to social and political concerns than a postcolonial subaltern Algerian woman, because being a subaltern, again, demands acknowledging diversity and broadness. For that, oppression varies; it could be layered, combined and expanded. Subalternity, therefore, is a position rather than a self-identifying characteristic; “the position of the ‘subaltern,’ or the oppressed” (R. C. Davis 36), a position that has these distinctive constraining social spheres with specific forms of subjugation. Davis labels it a “woman in history” as a “[divided and compromised subject]” (36).

This requires a nuanced understanding, especially in literary analysis, as varied perspectives come to be regarded anew, surpassing the binary view postcolonial scholars (especially Spivak and Said) often create (Tejero; Coronil). In literature, words are powerful, and through them, silenced groups find their voices, which is why this building of conception proves to be important. With awareness of there being a gendered perspective to subalternity as well, power, culture and gender work in a complicated collaborative manner, making power structures and cultural norms inextricably linked in their impact on gendered lives.

The aforementioned impact is often depicted in the misrepresentation of women, and in the gravest of circumstances, the lack of any representation. Young explains this as follows:

The critic can point to the place of women's disappearance as an *aporia*, a blind spot where understanding and knowledge is blocked. complicating the assumption that the gendered subaltern is a homogeneous entity whose voice can be retrieved, Spivak demonstrates the paradoxical contradictions of the discourses which produce such *aporia* in the place of subject – positions... (Young 64 qtd. in Coronil, "The Poetics of Neocolonial States" 647)

Simply put, marginalized women are subjected to a certain amount of deliberate obliviousness; in addition, their voices appear to be tuned out. When women are discussed, generally, contradictions arise, and in this particular case, it manifests in the idea that women are similar, which is regressive and creates more confusion for the subaltern.

On the other hand, Coronil faults the lone pursuit of the itinerary of silencing when he claims:

Although I sympathize with Spivak's efforts to counter the conceit that intellectuals can directly represent subaltern voices or consciousness, I believe that reducing the analysis of subalternity to charting muted subject positions continues a history of silencing. Engaging with subaltern subjects entails responding to their presence within silenced histories, listening for voices and to silences within the cracks of dominant histories, if only to widen them. ("Postcolonial Studies and the Neocolonial" 54)

He sees "mute subject positions" ("The Poetics of Neocolonial States" 657) as insufficient and that it should be supported by a hunt for women's presence in history, their voices and even silences. This, in the long run, creates a space for women to be heard and seen beyond the dominant discourse.

Such claims underline, yet again, history as one of the many grounds of resistance. Any engagement with the representation of agency requires an in-depth inspection of history (Lekeşizalin 206). Subsequently, Spivak reaches the conclusion that, “when the subaltern ‘speaks’ in order to be heard and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance, he or she is or is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual” (Spivak xxvi qtd. in Katrak xxi); thus, the subaltern is to be best represented by “the post-colonial feminist intellectual” who is “the female intellectual...” with “... a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish” (Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 104). This claim is contextualized by the Indian academic woman who is to face the remnants of colonialism daily, all while not holding on strongly to the ruins of her past; she moves on. She contends that a woman, not practicing this organic intelligence, is ‘gendering complicity’ (Katrak xii). Spivak also looks for “postcolonial women writers cognizant of the aporias or ethico-historical dilemmas in women’s decolonization” (xxvi qtd. in Katrak xxi). This could be applied to any subaltern woman writer, including the ones in this research. So, this intellectual woman is to find the position of marginalization, make it visible and fight her own battle some more.

Spivak, then, developed strategic essentialism in the same essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. She drew from the marginalized subaltern groups who possess inherently complex and often unacknowledged traits. This is a concept that was built on all of the above theories (postcolonial, feminist, subaltern...etc.), all for the sake of empowering subaltern groups and protecting them from expunction and misrepresentation. With the poststructuralist view at the time, the subject was deconstructed away from the fixed state that was known to the world. The idea that subjectivity is fragmented and multiple, and that it is a social construct, border-lined on the questioning of the existence of a subject to begin with, and that made Spivak respond with the possibility of using a strategically positivist essentialism.

Strategic essentialism, introduced in the 1980s, could be defined as the use of a simplified version, or essence, of the subaltern identity for sociopolitical purposes (Wolff 619). Essentialism, on its own, means to simplify complex identities to only one of their main traits; that is, if the subject in question is a well-educated postcolonial Algerian woman, she'd be reduced to being only a woman for a certain purpose. Indeed, such identities are evidently complex and exclusive, but are temporarily essentialized in order to make a visible, coordinated and powerful front. It is important to note that it is a calculated and mindful decision where the experiences and identities of the marginalized are shared and emphasized as a means of raising awareness for their plight. Coronil, however, thought of this response from Spivak as unsatisfactory for representation and that the issue with subjects, ultimately, is the polarization they are torn in between: a structuralist view that sees them in complete control and agency (oversimplifies their struggles) and a poststructuralist one that sees their fragmentation and instability (reduces them to passive victims). He states that there needs to be a more informed and nuanced in-look to avoid shadowing the role of subjects in history and society (Coronil, "Postcolonial Studies and the Neocolonial" 44). Spivak later on notes that she now completely repudiates the idea of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak, *Other Asias* 260). She sees "the concept evolving into a means for promoting essentialism rather than as a means of analysis" (Spivak, *Other Asias* 619). And for women, any "normative ideologies of femininity, womanhood and heterosexual identity are seen to cement the hegemonic exploration of women across cultures and borders" (Mohanty 97 qtd. in Mirza 5), so it is best to maintain subaltern women as intersectional entities that survive on their own keeping of history.

### **2.2.2.3 Subaltern Women: The Keepers of History**

Women, specifically subaltern women, tend to preserve history in several distinct ways. Before engaging into the explanation of these ways, it is important to first establish

that women are closely related to their bodies, or that “women have traditionally been defined as the body” (Baisnée 11). As it happens, subaltern postcolonial women become their bodies, physically and symbolically. Any type of power is first exercised on these women’s bodies. Such complex power is meant to reshape identities, resistance, and representation. They become a historical, cultural and often a political monument of either oppression or empowerment. Katrak, in her book *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*, argues that women’s bodies are sites of resistance against “colonial education and local tradition” (8). Thus, to a large extent, keeping history is also part of that resistance. To stay relevant, they have to safeguard their uprooted histories for them to be inscribed into history and literature once more. She also addresses the idea of ‘politics of the female body’, stating that it entails the delineation of a female body that is dependent, censored and sanctioned. The likelihood of it being located is to be determined, especially since it is divided between socio-culturality and physicality, especially in postcolonial areas (Katrak 8).

So, any keeping of history done by women is done primarily through their bodies, because a woman’s body is not a separate entity to her person; besides, she should not expel her body from herself or what Trinh calls self-exile and self-censorship (*Woman* 20), and Katrak labels as bodily exile (6). Indeed, a body is what Baisée defines as a “as a space, registering and representing various social and discursive relations” (12), which means it is capable of holding and conveying information.

Moreover, women’s bodies are “texts of culture” (Katrak 8). As culture encompasses the shared multiple aspects of a particular group of people, it could be said that women’s bodies are both physical and nonphysical entities that contain and convey meaning (McCaw 40), even if it does not move “according to its needs and interests” (McCaw 41). In this case, the meaning is a cultural one, and since location is an inextricable part of what makes a

culture that specific place's culture, a body is significantly different from one location to another. The answers to the following questions differ according to the culture or society of the woman: What is a woman? What is she expected to do? In fact, these answers would be contextual to the cultural codes of those societies. Without forgetting the possibility and the inability of some of these women's bodies to produce knowledge, in other words, being silenced or marginalized. Eventually, a woman's body must be viewed from a socio-cultural perspective in order for her to be completely understood (Bordo qtd. in Ruiz 8).

History is, first, preserved on women's bodies in the form of physical or bodily trauma. Subaltern women are usually living in their colonized or postcolonial regions, or are displaced African women slaves. This means they most likely suffered physically by, one, brute violence, including torture and beatings or flagging, two, sexual violence, predominantly in the form of rape. In fact, sexual exploitation is rampant against subaltern women as a different means for colonizers, military forces or dominant groups to exert their 'colonialism', and three, forced labor where subaltern women are forced into labor under involuntary servitude of the worst conditions. Some were obligated to work the land/factories or mere cruel housework. Another form of physical harm was the displacement and dispossession of some women by colonial or postcolonial systems. Some women were forcibly removed and relocated by colonizers to foreign lands where they were ensured the absence of any human rights. Dragged across the ocean, they became dehumanized homeless objects whose continuation of line and family tree would be cursed by the whiteness of the west, while other women were forced to remove themselves from their homelands by themselves, for the remnants of colonialism, nationalism and patriarchy that continuously haunt their existence. Truly, the physical trauma inflicted by all of the above leaves on them eternal bodily marks, long-term health consequences and chronic illnesses passed from generation to the next generation like a blight.

Second, because of the firsthand experienced or observed traumatic events mentioned above, psychological troubles are bound to appear in different forms. Some women become silent shells of what they used to be, while others either manifest physical signs in the form of maladies, or mental ones in the form of depression, anxiety, stress disorders, or suicidal behaviors. And even then, such manifestations happen in order for them to cope with the trauma experienced and contain it to themselves. Only that is not possible with the appearance of intergenerational trauma; a trauma that is internalized and passed on to other women in the family, typically daughters who inherit the torment of their mothers.

Third, history stays alive in the way subaltern women keep tradition alive, especially cultural traditions, by continuously, and sometimes secretly, practicing their cultural heritage, rituals and all that defines their groups' cultural identity. Sometimes even by insisting on wearing one's own traditional attires and jewelry imbued by their historical and cultural connection. It must be noted that some cultural practices stem from patriarchal teaching, which means not only the pride-stirring traditions are preserved, but the ones that need negotiation and resistance are too. Which takes us to the next point, that is, challenging gender norms prescribed and tainted by patriarchy, and reinforced and weaponized by colonialism, such as motherhood and femininity...etc., which, again, links to the following point of history kept by resisting and surviving through activism and engaging into political/revolutionary movements.

Lastly, history is preserved on the subaltern's bodies by producing art. This one is complex, as art is manifold. Oral tradition and storytelling, as well as writing literature, can be considered as art productions. Women have been recounting histories for as long as they have been walking the earth. In fact, "the world's earliest archives or libraries were memories of women. Patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand" (Trinh,

*Woman* 122). Storytelling, in this case, is powerful enough to dictate the destruction, birthing, and nurturing of the inner folds of the world. Katrak remarks, “These oral forms provide alternative ways of thinking even about women’s position in third world societies, and about non-dominant ways of meaning-making” (7). That is, this form of art exerts a significant influence on shaping the world and our perception of it. Curiously enough, it could be why women are the first to be targeted in any form of aggression; ultimately, every harmed woman is a burned library and every dead woman is a dead library.

Women perform their art by either simply narrating stories in small circles, singing them or by giving a complete performance with specific body movements that convey the emotions of the stories (some might label this as rituals even). Sometimes symbolic adornments and cultural clothing are used, and the stories told are either national, regional or even personal stories of certain families. Through these ‘rituals’ and “within oral traditions, folk tales retained in memory by women...”, they find “...ways of sustaining the exiled female body. In oral testimonies the body speaks, and women find voice in narrating their lives.” (Katrak 6).

It is worth noting the sacred relationship that forms between women who engage in passing history among themselves. Bakhtin explains that, “another person can often see the meaning and value of what I do better than I myself” (McCaw 51). He insists that a body is quite meaningful from the outside. Now, anticipating, we stress the travelling of this sacred relationship from oral to written:

I memorize, recognize, and name my source(s), not to validate my voice through the voice of an authority (for we, women, have little authority in the History of Literature, and wise women never draw their powers from authority), but to evoke her and sing. The bond between women and word.

Among women themselves. To produce their full effect, words must, indeed, be chanted rhythmically, in cadences, off cadences. (Trinh, *Woman* 122)

In other words, Trinh, here, holds that she ensures to recall and identify the women involved in this practice in order to honor and celebrate them. This sentiment is sustained by the fact that women are estranged in literature; thus, she sees the importance of supporting women with the intention of empowering them to move from oral storytelling to the written one where their words are to be read aloud, for a final goal of leaving a lasting impact because “the transposition from oral to written provides a crucial way to challenge marginality of women’s voices” (Katrak 33).

With the medium of literature, subaltern intersectional women are able to reclaim their own histories, assigning a voice to their otherwise unheard experiences/cultural practices, silenced by patriarchal/colonial/postcolonial/racist dominant narratives. They “externalize the pain of bodily exile and marginality” (Katrak 7). Besides, it is seen as both a restoration of bypassed histories as well as a form of resistance since “speaking orally and writing or performing the stories... are significant acts of resistance” (Katrak 7). Each one of them is an archive seeking to make available the knowledge needed to fight their exclusion and to pursue healing.

When it comes to writing literature, one must go back to the idea that a woman is her body and the action of a her holding her metaphorical pen is the attempt at preserving history, as women do in fact write history as well, or at least they try to revise it and write from their perspective in the form of her/story.

### **2.3 Her/story as Her Story**

By now, history had been established as malleable and sporadic. And as an academic discipline, it proves to continuously evolve. The past, in its recorded form, emerges as not

fixed. Its interpretations and understanding are repeatedly shaped and reshaped by historians, literature writers, among others, through questioning and the appearance of new discursive evidence that leads to the varying of already existing perspectives and the surfacing of novel ones (Macpherson 23 qtd. in Lum 14). This constant exchange between the past and our present reinforces the idea that “There is no single, eternal, and immutable ‘truth’ about past events and their meaning” (Macpherson 23 qtd. in Lum 14). The world has been fed a standardized version of life events that most people do not identify nor associate with.

History, then, is a narrativized chain of facts. The latter would not be able to survive the unfurling of the world, nor properly convey it, unless they are recounted or narrated. Now, the opposite of this observation is as valid, in the sense that the events and plots of stories have the potential of being devised into historical facts that could be rearranged yet again into history-telling narratives. This process of making and remaking history proves to be cyclical and correctable instead of the fixed reality pushed on the world by the West. The following quotation of White summarizes all of the above-mentioned points:

Histories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles; and stories in turn are made chronicles by an operation which I have elsewhere called ‘emplotment’. And by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures [...]. (223)

In this, White restates and highlights the ideas already mentioned. He also identifies “emplotment” as the process of breaking down narratives into facts and turning facts into narratives, making histories with strong narrative structures and well-organized historical accounts effective.

The idea of history/historiography being male-centered and from the male point of view is a global truth that has been recognized since the second wave of feminism. Slany endorses Aldrige, who, in turn, deconstructed the word 'history' to 'his-story' and as a result announces history as "a narrative shaped by the experiences of man; or, simply 'his stories'" (302). The concept being conveyed here is that this male dominance in any writing or study of history has led to the belief that "The experiences of women... [Are] meaningless and not worth recording; especially from their personal perspectives" (302). Another interesting reformulation of this view is Bandyopadhyay, who perceives the events that happen in one's past not to be the history known to the world nowadays; instead, he sees them as what the historian wills them to be. Basically, Bandyopadhyay underscores the fallible quality of the historian who is unable to shed their own prejudices and opinions when tasked with reassembling history (64). However, it is worth mentioning that this scholar observes this from a position that leans more favorably towards women.

In fact, feminists have sought to unbalance the history-from-the-perspective-of-man doctrine by criticizing history writing and its conventionality. Robin Morgan has been most accredited for coining the term "herstory" in 1970. A concept where history is written from women's perspective/point of view that does not skim on portraying women's roles in their respective socio-cultural settings. Andro-centric narratives are, therefore, challenged by the creation of ones that encapsulate women's experiences and histories in several forms; for instance, personal testimonies, "or using a lens through which it is possible to view women's feelings, emotions, and experiences, and define a feminine mode of perceiving the world" (Slany 302), in the ultimate pursuit of a female-centric perspective that extends feminist literary canon (Showalter; Raza and Zubair n.p.). In light of this, "Herstory assigns significance to the invisible women who are the supporting pillars that keep the pantheon of reality and history erect with a sturdy formation" (Raza and Zubair n.p.). This entails that

such conceptualization makes relevant again the “invisible” woman whose necessity in building communities is but hidden behind a curtain which, when ripped by herstories, would provide a comprehensive portrayal of the world and its historical record.

As noticed above, scholars differ in the way they choose to write the word itself. This is due to its novelty and peculiarity. While some spell it “herstory” and others spell it “her story”. This research settled on “her/story”. This is done to emphasize the woman, the stories she carries, whether hers or other women’s, and her personal history at once.

### **2.3.1 Her/story Instead of Women’s History**

It is important to anticipate and answer the question marks most likely surfacing in the reader’s mind right now about the difference between ‘her/story’ and just calling it ‘women’s history’. In order to understand the slight difference, it should be noted that women’s history is the study of the parts of history that women occupy. This encompasses the unearthing of overlooked achievements, the retrieval of stifled voices and the creation of a space of gender as a category of historical analysis. Bandyopadhyay provides a comprehensive definition with more details to be highlighted:

Women’s history seeks to enable the ‘majority find its past’. Women’s history not only aims to bring women into history but also challenges the analytical paradigms on which the discipline of history is founded. Women’s history has led to a reconceptualisation of history itself and a radical transformation of its foundational paradigms. Women’s history challenges the conventional chronology and periodisation of history predicated on changes in men’s lives, and the notions about what is significant to the historian and what is not. The burgeoning of women’s history has triggered a hunt for sources that often lie scattered away from the official archive – diaries, letters, notebooks, memoirs

and photographs of women, their creative writings, oral testimonies, folklore and other sources, thus redefining the notion of the archive and also the methods of historical research. Further, archival records and other conventional sources are revisited to uncover exclusions and silences, and more strategised readings undertaken to retrieve the lost voices of women.

(65)

Simply stated, because of the former historians' mishaps, history is to be rethought as a whole. Women no longer serve as the supporting characters in the unfolding of men's history. In fact, Bandyopadhyay, here, calls attention to the vivification the search for women in history has caused. All the materials that were usually considered insignificant were valorized as those diaries, letters, oral testimonies...etc. became the only creative history women managed to inhabit. Besides, this opened a trail of examination for the recovery of women's voices in history. Which takes one back to the above-mentioned idea of narrative history and the deconstruction of such being the most effective form of history.

Likewise, *her/story* explores these same points, and that is potentially puzzling as there seems to be no distinct difference between the two. And yet, there is a small connotative difference. When the term 'her/story' is presented, it exudes and embodies a feminist and revisionist aura that is otherwise antagonized these days, igniting an inherent offended state in people above all. This prospect makes one realize, yet again, how important terminology is, as women's history might be pushed aside in the line of importance while 'her/story' would be condemned for an extremeness that it did not have the chance to display to begin with. That being the case, it is important to underline and then underline again 'her/story' and make it known to the world. Its use would be fueled by two reasons: the first, to grab attention (the same attention that made it gain 'notoriety') and then to ablate the term from its notoriety and foreground it. While scouring the sources available to us, many books and

papers with 'her/story' as part of their titles were found; however, upon reading them, the content rarely focuses solely on the concept. It either ignores it and only uses it as an attention-grabbing title, or it still uses it as an attention-grabbing title with content that employs 'women's history' as its main brand throughout the text. This research will also attempt to grab attention but make sure to emphasize 'her/story' as a concept that mustn't incite admonishment, especially since 'her/story' coheres with revisionism/rewriting of history, which is still a disconcerting and grim venture (or trespassing) for the apparent and hidden sentinels of patriarchy, imperialism and white supremacy (Lum 14).

Similarly, some feminist critics are also heavily critical of the concept. According to Christina Hoff Sommers, her/story is merely propaganda meant to saturate knowledge with biased ideologies. She argues that such gendered feminism is radical, desperate and sectarian. It forces the notion of gender on society, negates the established history and disregards women historians from before the twentieth century (Sommers 97-98). It is reasonable to conceive that she dreads an unnatural inclusion followed by an imaginary distraction from an imaginary notable gesture that is yet to happen.

Despite this, the subaltern woman, in this context, has been previously, in this research, discerned as a subject that has been restricted and yet unable to be fully managed (Tejero 94), which means writing her/story is a means of resistance that is far from impossible. In literature, her/story is realized when authors choose to represent women's experiences and contributions in history in their narratives. These authors actively (re)write history in their literary works, or narrativize history by filling blank spaces. An inspection of these endeavors would entail considering the used perspectives, intersectional characters, themes/motifs/symbols, language, historical contexts and the subversion of dominant narratives.

### 2.3.2 Writing and (Re)writing Her: The Writing of History

As it was established previously, history lacks accuracy and operates on uncheckable truths. For the majority of its unfoldment, history appears to be missing certain voices that cannot have been absent in reality. The pursuit of these voices serves as lost puzzle pieces found again to complete one discourse or many, in this case, literary texts and stories (Bressler 214). The effort of digging up and filling empty crevices aligns with shape-shifting the literary canon and even fashioning alternatives to the canonical male-centric literature (Robinson 573), a literature that has been either ignoring female characters or stereotyping and exploiting them. The portrayal of their distinct personalities and subjectivity is tenuous at best, non-existent at worst, whilst their bodies are treated as a trophy to be paraded or as a battleground.

As societies, regardless of their cultures and traditions (with consideration of the extremeness of the latter), indoctrinate gender roles and femininity norms, critics such as Atwood encourage the female author to take the responsibility of rectifying the such. They are to be tasked with reconsidering and rooting female protagonists in historical accuracies, first to avoid attacks, and then to cement their never-before-addressed position in history.

Atwood implies that if silence is carefully listened to, muffled noises soon start to rise. In her book *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*, she refers to this silence as dead bodies. This could be read in two different ways: either that all that is left of women is their attesting and used dead bodies, or that women have been treated as dead in history. “What else might the dead want?” (162), Atwood asks. They want the resurrection of their voices, uninterrupted by men’s perspectives, which often requires the investigation and unearthing of dairies, journals, letters, newspapers...etc. of people who were experiencing their own individualized life events. When primary sources like this exist, they facilitate authors’ craft as well as case and argument. Other times when they do not exist, female

authors exercise a solid and open point of view on the interpretation of history. This was applied by Woolf, who generated Judith Shakespeare, the talented sister of William Shakespeare; overlooked because of her gender, used and abused and buried deep down where no one will ever know of her existence or talent. Some authors seek oral tradition, archives, or older women. And lastly, at times, even probe male accounts while writing their own counter-narratives that include spotlighted female characters who would speak and conquer possibilities. Atwood holds that this is a task all writers should accomplish because women “want to be recounted. They don’t want to be voiceless; they don’t want to be pushed aside, obliterated. They want us to know...” (163).

Women are to write and rewrite their literary and historical existence. Only through this action would they shift the authorial viewpoint and upturn the stereotyping vicious cycle that traps women characters, to show more complexity; women as moral agents, volitive, and ambivalent. That is, “rewriting histories from a community’s own perspective that recognizes changing historical conditions” (Amos and Parmer qtd. in Katrak 46) proves to be of great importance. In addition, there is also the notion of writing and rewriting real dead women who took their truths and stories with them. They would be researched by authors possessing a fresh eye and aiming for a tribute to those who brought them paramount achievements. Indeed, reflecting on the past urges progress to find us again in the future.

There weren’t many her/stories nor literature that focused on women because of the structures oppressing women. Patriarchy, the prototype of all forms of domination, intertwines itself with the systems of life and consequently societal views. That is, most of the time, reflected and imitated by literature. Patriarchal ideology arranges canonized literature and pre-defines men as the holders of pens, which works in accordance with their genitalia. Women writers take hold of that pen and have since been earnestly focused on writing and rewriting female-centered literature and history.

To epitomize, these writers combat marginalization and stereotyping to attempt a representation. As a previously mentioned idea, women do rebel against homogeneity, which adds to the specificity of writing women authors attempt. The keyword here is difference, to differ from male-centered writing as well as other universal truths sold by some women writers. Difference, on this account, is conducted through writing her/stories in literature, voicing the unheard and pointing to what made them unheard to begin with (with consideration to historical, social, political, and cultural contexts, while also recognizing the interplay of class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality) or writing in a feminine way that voices them in a concrete manner (through language), or by undertaking all of the above. Sandra Gilbert asserts that women writing is a “revisionary imperative”, a rite of passage that is meant to cure the marginalization and alienation of women in life and in literature (Benson 119).

### **2.3.3 Writing and (Re)writing Her: The Language of Writing**

As the description of how authors, specifically subaltern ones, write her/story continues, the link forming and pulling between writing, (re)writing and inscribing women in narrative histories becomes clearer. The idea of recording the woman and for her to be preferably written by herself or another woman is closely linked to Cixous’ 1976 call. Lum asserts that “post-structural feminists like Cixous (1976), Irigaray (1982) ... encourage women to rewrite feminine histories to reflect a woman’s thinking instead of ascribing to patriarchal norms about writing” (15). What is demonstrated in this is that they all agree on the significance of women writing and rewriting their patriarchy-infused realities in the form of *écriture féminine*. The overarching idea, here, is that power structures have prescribed a woman’s essence and managed to create an authorship that is exceedingly ‘man’, or what is called by Derrida Phallogocentrism. The latter is an amalgamation of phallogocentrism (prioritizing the male point of view because of his phallus, or power) and logocentrism (the necessity of language in order to convey meaning to the world). Phallogocentrism is, then,

writing that is deeply rooted in male-centered reason and rationality with upheld patriarchal hierarchies, controlled vocabulary, linearity and no space for the body. So, even if a woman understands her plight and multidimensionality in her own discursive reality, her entrance into the literary world would be either too conforming or non-existent.

As a matter of fact, the word “écriture” is French, and in the French language it means “writing”. In English, writing could simply mean literary writing; however, Barthes seeks to make a distinction between “écriture” and “literature”, especially since French fictitious narratives are very specific about their arrangement. Écriture, therefore, has more of a specialized meaning. It is beyond regular literature and different from the language used every day and the one used in literature, or as he puts it, “it represents an attempt...to go beyond literature by entrusting one’s fate to a sort of basic speech, equally far from living languages and from literary language proper” (Barthes 83). This might sound confusing to those who do not speak French, but écriture here is a distinct type of writing, based on sharing understanding and insight. It is applicable and found beyond the French language/culture. In other languages and cultures, écriture assimilates at the hands of writers, picking up the telling features of the space it is produced in. Regardless of how Banfield discerns écriture as being “divorced from the person and activity of its producer” (13), ‘feminine’ added to écriture stresses someone’s existence, in this case, a woman, in the text. It is, after all, the whole purpose of launching and supporting such writing: to exercise one’s existence in the written form. As a result, even though écriture feminine might sound very simple as a concept, it attempts to escape the traditional compositions with its distinct and specific approach to writing.

In her 1975 essay “The Laugh of Medusa”, Cixous posits that women must write to repossess their bodies, “the dark continent” (877), and regain their voices. She puts forth écriture feminine, feminine writing, as a distinct writing that focalizes on women’s bodies.

She maintains that a body doesn't exist in a vacuum; there is either a body that has power or one that doesn't. The male body is assigned such power while the rest is ousted from representation. Therefore, she, who writes *écriture féminine*, "physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies it with her body... She draws her story into history" (Cixous 881), which is the end goal yet again; to dig deeply into the ground to create a foundation solid enough to stay and woman enough that it scares the different men working to restrict women writers (Cixous 877). According to Mills, Cixous was reacting to Jacques Lacan's theories that "reserve...the 'I' position for men. Women, by gender lacking the phallus, the positive symbol of gender, self-possession and worldly authority around which language is organized, occupy a negative position in language" (Jones 83 qtd. in Mills, "The Gendered Sentence" 67-68). Cixous sees women as plentitudes that can write beyond the usual phallogentric system, and not a mere negative. The end goal would be to create a new literature that is feminine and written from the female body, not the mind that has been trained as a prisoner of patriarchal culture since childhood. This purports writing oneself and for oneself, not for men. In this particular context, it should be noted that she specifies women writers, "I write to woman: woman must write woman, and man, man" (Cixous 877). Seeing that, when one writes for men, they write what they expect them to write under their heavy inspection. This prevents women from being free, from being themselves. Irigaray, in fact, is on the same page as Cixous, only she insists on a new type of women's writing in order for women to write their fluid experiences better. She is against the assimilation and exile of women in writing spaces. She does not assign any purpose to women as she thinks that that is something every woman should think about and create herself, reclaiming her body and becoming fully human again. Handa expresses:

Irigaray terms this female writing 'parler femme' or 'womanspeak.' It evades male monopoly, threatens patriarchy and allows novel creativity in women.

Drawing a parallel between a woman's writing and her body, she asserts that women's writing is as diverse and diffused as her sexual experience- 'jouissance' unlike men's unitary, phallic pleasure. (162)

She originates the term "parlerfemme" or "womanspeak" for that unique women's writing meant to break through androcentric expression instilled with the help of patriarchal codes to give women a creative space. She also draws a connecting line between women's writing and their bodies, only she relies it more to women's sexual experience or what she calls "jouissance". To her, these women's sexual experience is varied and wide-ranging, and so is women's writing, unlike men's rigidity. In the same vein, Katrak sees the need to find links between "sexual desire" and "political power" because "female sexuality is repressed and silenced" (14), and since she is varied and reaching, it would be a form of power relations twisted in order to crown women and their women writers.

Language can be biased against women. Irigaray takes French and English as examples of the such where every word that has a powerful connotation behind it is inevitably masculine. She also highlights that use of 'I,' expressing that "the 'I' and the 'you' denote subjectivity and women must learn to fill these subject positions in language" (Handa 163). Elaine Showalter also describes *écriture féminine* as "...the inscription of the feminine body and female difference in language and text" (185), which is about the same conclusion as those before her, that writing is related to the body, which solidifies and underlines, once again, women writers and the importance of their writing coming from their bodies, in other words, themselves. It is seen that the lived her/stories and the witnessed ones live with and on women. These experiences are meant to be written in a form that allows them to thrive and be conceived fully (Rehman, Agrawl and Sharma).

One might contemplate what exactly distinguishes feminine writing from other writing and to address that, the following could be stated: because it is designed to fracture phallogocentrism, it delves into female subjectivity. Staying on the same idea of her/story, being a woman subject with subjectivity means being taken seriously in terms of one's experiences, as well as it means being humanized in one's society. That comes forth when women are written in a position that enables them to self-perceive their place as subjects with autonomous thoughts and strong valid feelings in the world. *Écriture féminine* is also a body-focused writing. On the one hand, it inscribes the body as a repertoire of history, while on the other, it presents the body as a free sexual entity formerly restricted by patriarchy and the forces of domination it spawned into the world (colonialism and racism).

When writers dabble in feminine writing, they know that there is a need to go against the current. The traditionally established literary conventions are to be twisted into unconventional narrative structures built together by breaking language norms like grammar and syntax...etc. "What I say has at least," Cixous declares, "two sides and two aims: to break, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project" (875). Such freedom becomes the best environment for growing women's multifacetedness, fluidity and adaptability, leading to a variety of readings and interpretations. In essence, this creates a fragmented reality; a mirror to life itself where women are not forced into a mold, instead allowed to be women's women (Irigaray qtd. in Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics* 143-144), and even chance some self-assigned silences. Seeing that women are made to be silent in texts; in their stories, women writers tend to mimic the exclusiveness of andro-centric writing in order to highlight it, which would be seen as deliberate silences designed to foster unvoiced messages (Irigaray qtd. in Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics*). The unfixed quality of feminine writing is also to be highlighted; hence, different authors can bring about other elements that, upon investigation, would appear as women's writing, disrupted, eccentric and alive.

## 2.4 A Complementary Process of Brandishing Expression

Écriture feminine, however, is ambiguous. Cixous advocated for a writing based on poetic expression of self and body, and yet provided no straightforward theoretical or analytical approach to her endeavors, meaning, no boundaries that critics can cling to so as to create clear perspectives. Additionally, in this theory, women's literary artistry and its detectable manifold signifiers seem paramount, which once more proves to be a challenge for anyone planning to map out her work or what she stands for in terms of theorizing (Aneja 25).

She was criticized for feeding into essentialism and binarity (feminine and masculine dichotomies overtly highlighted). Other critics, such as Moi, Spivak, Jones and Davis questioned the centralization of the body in her rhetoric and whether that's creating more biologism and essentialism (R. C. Davis 35; Aneja 18). It is evident that these critics saw her as someone who separated the body from the person, who made a woman's body greater than her existence (R.C. Davis 35), and yet she never implied this in her work. Aneja, relying heavily on Freeman, assesses, "the body lies not outside culture but is always implicated within it, and that the body appears not prior to the text but is textually enmeshed" (19). The body is always there, foreground or backdrop, as long as there is civilization in the world, the body is present. Susan Jarret perceives Cixous as a strategic writer who writes according to her time, place and end goals, not so much an essentialist (R. C. Davis).

In his comparison of Spivak's and Cixous' involvement in the representation of the subaltern, Davis reprimands Cixous for being apolitical and praises Spivak for being at the heart of politics. He agrees, however, that both work to "disarm, the patriarchal dimension of modern culture" (29). Another critique of Cixous' work was on the lack of accommodation of differences in women (Jones), and the use of high feminism (Spivak, *In Other Worlds*) that is not keen on women's heterogeneity and intersectionality. Indeed,

“Cixous’ writing focuses much more on the issue of how women [can] write rather than who can write, she seems to be well aware of those who cannot” (Aneja 23), meaning it is an issue of who can partake in writing, whether everyone is concerned and if ‘everyone’ includes third world women (Moi, “An Imaginary Utopia” 123). Spivak called this a privileged position that needs to be changed.

So, as critics condemn Cixous, they raise doubts over whether this feminine writing is able to subvert conventions. This suggests that they are treating the theory as unredeemable and unfixable, which is a stretch at best. If that were the case, it would not have survived nowadays. This particular theory is blendable because of its unfixed quality. Aneja labels this style as slippery, especially when she admonishes Davis for declaring the failure of Cixous. Davis has tried to confine political discourse and reject other discourses that might want to slip out of the patriarchal reach. Feminine writing, in its way, is trying to preserve some feminine attributes and not cast all of them in a negative light or accuse them of being an extension of power structures. In writing, such attributes come out as beneficial and reclaimed because, in the end, is the feminine facing permanent rejection? If that is the case, then that is the epitome of a male perspective/indoctrination and should urgently be written against. Cixous has been adamant in her pursuit of a discourse that does not entertain the Father by rejecting femininity and acquiring political power by adopting masculinity. Instead, female writers should be writing in their own voices, shaped around their own contextualized experiences and the ignored experiences of their ancestors. To draw everything together, it could be said that these critics are the ones assisting binarity and essentialism, and as long as “such internalized suppositions stay in place we will not be able to liberate ourselves from the phallogocentric retreat that wants to ‘operate cuts’ into our femininity and box at the slipperiness of our agile movements.” (Aneja 25). Hence, any usage of this theory would depend solely on the very definition provided by its originators

and developed by their successors, or the writing of the women authors, which would be handled as the apparent version of feminine writing.

Now, to address the issue of the distancing of third world women in this, it is interesting as this theory has been applied to these women's literatures and came out with decent results, which again tells us that it is usable and complementary. In this research, it will be used in a complementary light that would help advance the language/writing part of the research that is focused on the marginalization of women (their absence in history, trauma) and the resistance to that (re-inscription in history, telling history, female agency and subjectivity).

In the realm of fighting for expression, Spivak advocates for the representation of the subaltern woman; she dedicates the majority of her research, seeking to inspect that representation in socio-cultural, political and, in this instance, literary settings. Likewise, Cixous urges women to write themselves, be alive on paper, in language and within literary history. Although both go about their speculations and end goals differently, they do share some concerns that, if paralleled, they could be fairly amplified. In fact, a mirror is to be held to their works in order to reflect and focus on their complementary addition to one another when it comes to literary texts and their analyses.

In their attempts, Spivak and Cixous both concur that women/subaltern women are purposefully removed from dominant discourses. Even though their approach is dissimilar, where one seeks to trace silence, resistance and agency as well as addressing gaps in the narrative, while the other seeks resistance in writing by exerting one's diverse existence in a space of one's own and packing the gaping holes or wounds left by hierarchies, they both seem to embark on a journey of dismantling patriarchy, especially the patriarchal agenda that obscures women's voices in literature and history. The damage afflicted on the

prosperity of women's life and its representation is the product of long lasting ideologies that continuously exchange their malice that goes on to create more and more philosophical and ideological concepts trapping women either by reducing to and abusing them for their gender or by putting them in a universalist light that harms their diversity. This being so, questions would arise over the need for acknowledging this reduced entity in their mapped out version of history.

That can be explained as follows, a society has individuals who have a past, a present and a future regulated by a set of structures. The history of that society is based on its past events that are communicated through a language usually transcribed in various forms of art, one of which is literature. This equation suffers from the subtraction of certain individuals (women), when everything is built on the existence of all, not some. This is baffling because they (oppressive structures) have already put holes in their walls, so it must not come as a surprise that women are trying to either fill those holes, collapse the building and build their own, or simply move to the side and build a better establishment. To Spivak, this establishment or building is a subaltern woman's voice, more specifically her historical and political existence and resistance; whereas, for Cixous, it is a woman's body and desire and the written production of that. To a layman, that would seem as two completely different buildings; nevertheless, a subaltern who is rummaging for subjectivity, resistance, agency, and social and historical impact is a woman. The conclusion that has been reiterated several times by now is that there is no foundation to the separation of a woman from her body. Calling for the writing and rewriting of the woman, her body and sexual desires, by Cixous, does not equal her being a hypersexual person with questionable virtue. She is not detached from herself nor even essentialized. Acknowledging that part of her does not make her dirty, only herself, with an extra dimension resurfacing. In this light, both scholars appear to have the same stance of a subaltern woman who dares to uncover all aspects of her identity and

identity formation. And with that, Spivak and Cixous urge women to write themselves in a way that stands for their discursive selves, and not to be afraid of dominant discourses.

Spivak is driven by a righteousness that demands justice and equality in society. Her goal was and still is representation as well as keeping the subaltern woman away from the stifling shadow, while Cixous pursues an in-depth self-discovery where the woman finds herself in her unconscious, which has been altered and meticulously modified throughout history to fit a singular narrative. She wants her to be free in that aspect, uncontrolled and able to unflinchingly lead her life trajectory. These two approaches are not distant as an individual is part of their community and society. Hence, with discovering oneself, individually and societally, comes continuity hereby harmony of application.

In addition to the above, Cixous' theory designates writing as her area of change; likewise, Spivak's delegates intellectual women to best represent their culture and lost history, which makes them both players on the same field. Undeniably, this exploration of women's resistance and agency-filled writing can become the new way or the new well-informed 'écriture féminine' for other women writers trying to write differently.

Eurocentric narratives, ideologies and colonialism thrive on violence exerted on subaltern women, which prompts the literary analysis of that perspective along with language brandishing. It becomes a great harmonization of voices, not only the multiple characters' but also the author's voice becomes heard as loudly. Characters become alive in their history and authors becomes alive in their characters and their history. Lastly, both theorists emphasize a textual practice and close reading.

The idea here is to explore compatibility and maximize outcomes. The sort of results that come from a detailed inspection and a holistic eye. Representation has always been an unanswered question mark for its diversity and recipience. As a result, both parties seek to

glean that silenced unheard voice of, in this research's context, the subaltern woman. Her experiences should be an amplifier to her voice and not the opposite of that. She is a woman with an intersectional identity and not separated from her body. Her voice and valid experiences that are rendered invisible and denied presence in their context, cultural, historical, literary...etc. are to be heard. She is a woman who resists and perseveres through her endeavors to connect literature, history and language use.

## 2.5 In Her Other Words: Women's Voices in Writing

Women's writing is a space in literature that delves into the experiences of women, varying from their existence as female others to being shown antagonism on the basis of their gender. By force of women leading separate yet intertwined manner of living from and with men, it is befitting to write literature that describes such circumstances where "Her" position is conscientiously explored. Trinh Minh-ha declares that "To write is to communicate, express, witness, impose, instruct, redeem, or save—to any rate to *mean and to send out an unambiguous message*" (*Woman* 16 italicized in the original), this suggests that there are several uses to writing which makes it a powerful instrument for transmitting a message. Writing involves the ability to disseminate a message effectively and with clarity. Women create their space in it in order to mark and analyze their status and sociopolitical place within their culture.

When Virginia Woolf perused her library and questioned the lack of great literature written by women, she proceeded to write about the issue herself by sharing her insights as a means of encouragement to other women, because "S/he who writes, writes. In uncertainty, in necessity. And does not ask whether s/he is given the permission to do so or not" (Trinh, *Woman* 8). Otherwise, rationality was never a man's virtue; it was always opportunity. Men's position in society could never suffer for the mere practice of writing, whereas women are primed to think of the dishonor they could bring to themselves and those close to them

by daring to seize fleeting opportunities. Spender affirms that “For women who had no rights, no individual existence or identity, the very act of writing – particularly for a public audience – was in essence an assertion of individuality and autonomy, and often an act of defiance” (3). In other rare cases where they chase their desires, they would be buried unknown, just like Judith Shakespeare (Woolf). And so, it was time to make visible the concealed literary graveyard of pioneering women writers: unbury them, present women writers: announce them and aspiring women writers: vitalize and embolden them.

According to Russ, women’s writing fought a battle of various strategies just for the mere reason to reduce the writing and creative capabilities of women. She argues that women’s writing has been treated through a system of accusations such as “what to do when a woman has written something? The first line of defense is to deny that she wrote it. Since women cannot write, someone else (a man) must have written it” (Russ 20 qtd. in Mills, *Discourses of Difference* 48). Such allegations have been directed towards some of the very few creatives that history managed to mention. In fact, Mary Shelly is only recently credited for writing the first science-fiction novel, *Frankenstein*, anonymously written in 1818, then associated with her name in 1823, on the consequences of misusing science. Before this, Shelly was seen as a “transparent medium through which passed the ideas of those around her” (Mills, *Discourses of Difference* 48), which is another strategy that attempted to strip women from their artistry and claim that this literature they wrote has managed to organize itself on its own (Russ 21 qtd. in Mills, *Discourses of Difference* 48). Albeit some say it is strictly Jules Verne who gave the genre its particular aspects with his writings, the same is said when describing *Frankenstein* as a horror and not the science fiction that is approved by androcentric principles. After all, who is to confine science fiction to a restrictive small unimaginative corner? Nowadays, the Sci-Fi genre houses and crosses with plenty of sub-genres. Before Shelly, Margaret Cavendish wrote *The Blazing World* in 1666. It is the

earliest example of the science-fiction/fantasy sub-genre, in it is a story of a Utopian kingdom accessed only through the North Pole. She was also accused of having her husband write her work since, apparently, no woman could access such imagination or intellect. Spender acknowledges such endeavors by observing, “It is salutary to see women in this seventeenth century context being anything but victims as they use their wits, and display their capacity for being very far from defenseless. What they say still has an authentic ring today and how they say it represents a new development for the time” (43). Women wrote contemplatively, even with a lacking education and a looming stigma.

Women writers had to either adopt gender-neutral names such as J.K. Rowling or adopt male nom-de-plumes to find publishers, such as the Bronte sisters under Curtis, Ellis and Acton Bell, Mary Ann Evans under George Elliot and Louisa M. Alcott under A.M. Barnard (Spender 3). The latter was revolutionary in the way she conducted her life. After divorcing her husband and handing him complete custody over their daughter, she embarks on writing about women and their rights. She was certainly ahead of her times, when she wrote *Herland* in 1915. In it, she imagines a utopian society where women give virgin births and live in a matriarchal order. Kate Chopin was also ahead of her time with liberating and defying works such *The Awakening* published in 1899 and *The Story of an Hour* published in 1894.

Sylvia Plath became the writer who struggled most with her depression, straight to her suicide. Most famous for the *Bell Jar*, Plath represented the tortured soul of an artist woman writer unable to cope with her trauma, which was magnified at the time for lack of understanding on the part of the world. Even this did not spare her from being discredited to “the man inside her” (Russ 22 qtd. in Mills, *Discourses of Difference* 48), who apparently wrote in her stead because such struggle and imagination could never come from a person and a woman at that.

During the seventies, women writers have scooted from peripheral to central with autobiographical writings such as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why Caged Bird Sings* of 1970. *The Color Purple*, published in 1982 by Alice Walker, also confronts trauma and sexuality in a jarring sequence of storytelling. Toni Morrison contributed to the black tradition by writing about race, rape, violence and motherhood. In fact, Toni Morrison explicitly stated that she writes for black people and the most vulnerable member of society: a female.

On another note, Arab Egyptian writer Nawal el Saadawi wrote about women's struggles in the Arab world, and viciously attacked genital mutilation practices against teenage girls and the trauma it transcends, while Assia Djebar wrote about the actions and experiences of women during the war, revising history at times and telling personal stories at other times. Djebar's writing sought a utopian space where transcultural and transnational identities are tolerated, which puts her at crossfire between her own identities and her stance on certain issues.

When women write history, they tend to accommodate and respect all women. Women writers from early on helped formulate the tradition (Granted, most of them were white middle-class, partially educated women, but an acknowledgment of this point of departure is due). Women writers from different cultures and racial backgrounds enter the sphere to shape and reshape it as they try to dissect the culture and the societal relationships behind it. This diversity of women could lead to unearthing a great amount of women's history that was swept under the rug; as well as, allow the ones who were in no position to write their personal and self-representative history to do so.

Women are attacked for advocating for their plights and seen as aggressive, all while occupying an area that is significantly smaller than what it should be, because women's writing converses with history, and that rarely happens. Them being from a position where

they had to survive somehow, they learnt to communicate with history, steal to its nooks and crannies, pick it apart, attempt to meet a broader perspective that would facilitate an interaction with fine details. In their stories, women live and enliven the rest.

Women's writing is indeed inclusive; however, undeniably, some literary works are more underscored than others. Some women writers experienced the anxiety of influence (Gilbert and Gubar) where writing a figure of the angel of the house was a rite of passage in order not to offend men and risk rejection, but as women continuously fight demons from their pasts, presents and possible futures, they realize more about themselves and their heterogeneous aspects that could support their claim for creative expression.

The compelling nature of women's writing imparts their emotional intelligence and complex chain of thought. They write fully developed characters and plots in order to present women in their societies with a touch of some domestic or extraordinary details of their lives. These complex thoughts and feelings of women attest to the conditioning they go through to deplete their minds, or the mistreatment and pain they go through fighting back their senses and instincts to be prisoners of their own domesticity.

### **2.5.1 Postcolonial Women Writers**

Within the many folds of writing, female writers find themselves etched onto postcoloniality, becoming postcolonial feminist writers. Postcoloniality has a large reach, influencing women writers to inhabit their space, which is more flexible than not. Women writers could be from a direct postcolonial background, meaning that their homelands have previously been occupied and are currently in a post-colonial reality. These particular writers would have either experienced colonialism and postcolonialism and are writing about it, or they haven't first-handly experienced it and only saw its aftermath in the form of postcoloniality/decolonization and reinforced nationalism. While other postcolonial women

writers immerse themselves in this area of writing by association, for instance, slavery is one of the many armaments and, at the same time, results of colonialism. This links the African American to the postcolonial as both destabilize one shape-shifting antagonist with many faces.

African American postcolonial women writers are products of displacement and radical reform. In the wake of this, they, postcolonial women writers, work on restoring their voices in the form of narratives, cultures and histories; namely, the authors tackled in this research, Assia Djebar and Toni Morrison.

Before diving into what constitutes these writers, the elements that make postcolonial writers identifiable should first be addressed. A postcolonial writer is concerned with capturing the native, whether it is in the form of a place, a cultural practice, a language, or a history. The first is quite important as locations/geography of colonized nations serve as the first site of aggression, or the most visible one. The second is shown by demystifying cultural aspects of the native that have been deemed barbaric or vulgar while showing their spiritual value. The third is where authors first come into direct contact with the colonizer. Indeed, oppressive powers have engaged in this specific aspect with one goal in mind: to make their language the norm. If native languages were written, then all facilities that supported them were to be destroyed, and if they weren't written, then all humans who maintained them were to be brutalized and eliminated. Some nations lost their native tongues forever, and have known only one language their whole life, while others found themselves seesawing between their own languages and the colonizers'. Postcolonial writers, then, use colonizers' language with an intriguing deviation. They appropriate it, modifying its syntax: words, grammar and overall arrangement. This process often mimics their native languages. It is a way of reviving a part of their identity whilst looking for exposure. Lastly, postcolonial writers negotiate history persistently. Katrak declares this engagement as responsibility and

a resistance, “postcolonial authors need, first to take authority in revisiting colonial versions of history, and in speaking back to the colonizer” (50), as in writing counter-narratives that purge inaccuracies and combat stereotypes. One who writes about their ancestors affronts colonial history with unflinching determination. It may well be argued that postcolonial writers write for their nations and communities by restoring their social, cultural and political identity value.

In the same vein, postcolonial feminist writers also happen to sport characteristics that make them recognizable. They come from a feminism that attempts to rectify the wrongs of its predecessors. One that addresses gender roles, the disturbances in the dynamics between the genders, difference, inequality and oppression in its several forms with the same amount of attention. They cover various issues in their writings; namely, representation of women’s quest for identity and selfhood, generational trauma and historical existence, engendered childhood, assimilation and migration, slavery, intersectionality, linguistic expression, writing itself...etc. They show several types of women: the traditional woman, the historical evidence, the storyteller, or the version many oppressive powers tried to negate; in addition, the new woman, a liberated version that defies coercion and domination. In fact, one of these freed women are the writers themselves, they endeavor to subvert the androcentric world of men writers using ‘literature as a weapon’ (Ba qtd. in Begum 67); a subversive existence of canonization, imperialism and sexism working to insert women back into history generally and literary history specifically. Begum, in her Article titled “Empowerment of Women in Postcolonial/Third World Women's Fiction: Some Perspectives” reached the following conclusion:

Their works are ‘spaces of strength’ as opined by Nfah-Abbenyi ... as they chronicle lives of empowered assertive women ... [Realising] a meaningful life on par with men. ‘Their works are weapons’ as opined by D’Almeida ...

to destroy the ideas that perpetuate subjugation and inequality. In their own way these writers have shown ‘There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women’. (69)

Simply put, these writers are empowered by writing; as much as they empower those they represent, crafting a ‘weapon’ for them to be wielded after years of subduing and neutralization, all while creating a testimony of their strength after decades of harassment.

Since this research is analyzing postcolonial writers of Algerian and African American descent, it is only appropriate to explore women writers from these spaces, and then specifically discuss Assia Djebar’s and Toni Morrison’s writing careers together with their works’ value, significance and contribution to the research world.

#### **2.5.1.1 Black Women’s Words**

The more women continuously assert their writing skills, the more they are met with incredulity at their attempts. Indeed, African American literature is advanced by both men and women. However, in this section, African American women writers are to be celebrated exclusively. Their efforts to remedy the inaccuracies posited by white women and men writers have earned them such exclusivity. These authors depicted black women stereotypically, forcing them into harmful molds which did not represent them by depicting them as the mammy, spitfire, aunt Jemima, house-keeper, mulatta... etc. As it happens, this depiction was not exclusive to white women authors who relegated black women to submissive, stereotypical and idealistic characters, such as Margaret Mitchell’s portrayal in *Gone with the Wind* and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s portrayal in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; black male authors also followed in this suit. Authors such as Richard Wright wrote women in relation to men, Chester Himes wrote women as comical, vulgar and excessive, while James

Baldwin wrote women in his stories as silent extras. They all narrated a black woman who was a slave of a slave.

The real black woman was not written. She is strong. She is an all-around able individual in her society. She, more than any other, faces such dire circumstances that will never be completely fathomed by certain groups because of their natural privilege. Racism, sexism, poverty and abuse are the four walls that constitute her prison of silence. No one gave her her voice back. Instead, she is separated and kept under control as a ploy to thwart her creative mind. But despite that, she still manages to be present in different artistic ways. 'She' is present in every black woman who was brave enough to preserve her native culture or brave enough to write a new one

The writing space in American literature is charged with black women writers from every time period. To give a timeline of these productions, it could be said that in the late eighteenth century, black women's writing was reliant on religious denotations and connotations. Phillis Wheatley wrote, in 1773, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, aiming to be accepted into the Christian community as well as in the writing community. Up until then, the black population was severely dehumanized in their enslavement by the excuse of them not being able to read or write or be rational, meaning, they were not intellectual enough to be human. Wheatley showed an exceptional manipulation of language and literary arrangements, excelling at her craft and winning a barren argument. To further this notion, black women even involved themselves in political activism, such as Maria W. Stewart, who wrote *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart* in 1835. In it, she urged her people to be more politically active. This is important as this was one of the outcomes of the 1831 Nat Turner Rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia. Another one of its effects is the popularization of slave autobiographical firsthand accounts that would go on to explain why such rebellions were a must. Jarena Lee, the first African American woman

preacher, wrote the first autobiographical account at that time, titled *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, in 1836.

The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the African American women's involvement in fiction writing. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper wrote *The Two Offers* a thought-provoking short story about women, marriage and life. On another note, Harriet Jacobs explored, in her pioneering work *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* of 1861, African American women's sexual exploitation under the guise of enslavement. She described her experiences as accurately as possible, appealing to the public's humanity, encouraging them to be more informed on the topic. In the same category, Sojourner Truth also worked on presenting the essence of the black woman and her necessity and unavoidable existence. These were times of poetry, autobiography and protest.

During the Civil War and the Reconstruction era, African Americans envisioned the emergence of a time marked by freedom and new possibilities. There were many writings that reflected that. Indeed, Frances Harper wrote *Sketches of Southern Life* in 1872 which attempted to humanize ex-slaves by using southern folk vernacular.

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a different form of complication that was mainly racial injustice-centered. Many women writers, at this time, opted to reinforce the idea of antislavery and remind the world about what slavery did, why it was abolished, and why it must not live on in different other forms. By the First World War (WWI), the New Negro movement was taking over political and social aspects of black lives, followed by the more cultural Harlem Renaissance movement. Writers at this time strived to critique canonized productions, plant a deep-seated content in the black expression generated and prompt a creative literary venture in their works. Zora Neal Hurston, one of the major Harlem Renaissance writers, published *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1937, a story of race,

voice and love. By the late 1940s, there were writers such as Ann Petry who endeavored to present dynamic protagonists with agency, especially in her novel *The Streets* of 1946.

The fifties and sixties were known for the persistence of the Civil Rights movement and the Black Arts movement. Literature was more focused on poetry and drama. There was a revival of the African American autobiography; namely, Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi* of 1968 and Angela Davis' *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* of 1974.

In 1966, Margaret Walker wrote *Jubilee*, a famous historical novel with a much more famous heroine 'Vyry Ware'. Walker in this pursued two notions, the first was to break the stereotype of the 'mammy' (An older overweight, black woman slave who is an obedient caregiver to her master's children), while the second was to confront writers at the time with their mistakes. To her, black women and black women writers redefined blackness more than what is let known.

As an accumulation of its preceding events, the seventies became a decade teeming with black women's literary renaissance. Due to the political, cultural and literary unrest of the fifties and the sixties, black women writers tended to emphasize black women's experiences as central. They certainly led the literary scene at the time. They wrote what they wanted to see be written; what they wanted to read themselves also; namely, Alice Walker, Octavia E. Butler, Gayl Jones, Jamaica Kincaid, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Maya Angelou, Rita Dove...etc.

These writers tackled various themes and newer perspectives to what society was used to at that time, especially the marginalization of black women, which was not a subject that would be explicitly addressed in writing. The mission was to articulate black women's voices and validate their experiences, like Walker, for instance, who made an audacious statement when she addressed sexual abuse, incest, homosexuality and sexism in *The Color*

*Purple*. Although she was criticized for simply transgressing an unspeakable subject, she is still one of the bravest writers to try and expose the veiled struggles of black women.

Indeed, when a group is receiving marginalization and oppression on different levels and from different angles, they are bound to also receive criticism for any artistic creation they produce, which is most of the time foreign and alien to the dominant viewer. Black female writers have been the target of criticism for their writings, which can often be damaging. When Walker was asked about her opinion on the shunning of black women writers in America, she answered that because the black woman writer was a woman first and foremost, she furthered, “critics seem unusually ill-equipped to intelligently discuss and analyze the works of black women. Generally, they do not even make the attempt; they prefer, rather, to talk about the lives of black women writers, not about what they write” (B. Smith 22). She also expressed how comments about black women writers “Tend to be cruel” (22), but has never been a setback for black women writers as they continue to give one another a voice.

Barbara Smith emphasizes the impact of “literature by women” (21) and how it “provides essential insights into female experience” (21). Women, in general, are a fascinating crowd to consider. They can be very visibly distinguished between, in terms of experiences as individuals. But at the same time, they can also be a uniform group that shares a deep bond. In view of this, women are in the process of inching towards the center with the help of other women who simply understand. So, the need for a consciousness of black women’s existence, experience and artistic expression is essential. One of the most famous black female writers of her time, and one of the writers to be tackled in this research, is Toni Morrison.

Toni Morrison was one of the greatest figures in black literary history. The laureate was born Chloe Ardelia Wofford in Lorain, Ohio. She took the last name Morrison when she married Harold Morrison. Growing up, Morrison's Parents made sure to cultivate her love of literature and culture by recounting old African Americans' traditional folktales and songs to her and encouraging her to read extensively, especially of authors such as Jane Austen. In 1953, she graduated with a B. A in English from Howard University and in 1955, she earned her Master's of Arts from Cornell University. She went from being a university teacher to an editor, after her divorce, at Random House, where she worked as a senior editor in the fiction department; in fact, she was the first black woman to take this position. She utilized this to introduce black literature to the public eye by endorsing young African American writers.

Her own Creative journey began way before when she first outlined the plot of her first novel *The Bluest Eye* during her time as a university student. She developed it into a full novel that centered around a young black girl conditioned into believing that beauty is fairness and blue eyes. Morrison, in this novel, addresses the harmful effects that white beauty standards can have on young troubled black girls. A protagonist who is poor, young, detached from the political activism of the time and easily repressed, made for a novel and thought-provoking, unique perspective. In 1973, Morrison wrote *Sula*, a story of the intricacies of female friendships, loyalty, betrayal, race and gender roles, which was, two years later, nominated for the National Book Award. She was, however, accused by Sara Blackburn in her review *Sula* for the New York Times Book Review of 1973 of writing a "beautiful but nevertheless distanced novel", and that she is "far too talented to remain only a marvelous recorder of the black side of provincial American life" (n.p.). Blackburn voiced her concerns over Morrison becoming classified solely as a "black woman writer", limited forever to the "black folk". These comments are extremely racist and domineering to any

aspiring black woman writer who wants to see herself on paper instead of documenting the disturbing and traumatizing actions of white men (B. Smith).

In 1977, Morrison braved her first male protagonist, Macon “Milkman” Dead III in *Song of Solomon*, which was the first to be a Book-of-the-Month Club main selection since *Invisible Man*. It won her a National Book Critics Circle Award. By the end of the decade, Morrison emerged as the most influential African American writer of her time. She welcomed the next decade by writing more influential novels, such as *Tar Baby* in 1981.

By 1983, she had quit her editing job to focus more on writing, and in the same year, she wrote her first and only short story *Recitatif*. She experimented with playwriting *Dreaming Emmett*, in 1986 while still teaching at universities. She published *Beloved* in 1987, which remains one of her most acclaimed novels, a fictional retelling of Margaret Garner, an enslaved African American woman. This was one of the times that Morrison has tackled a postcolonial setting, linking her to postcolonial feminist authorship. It was also connected to her later works, which were marked by their quality of digging into forgotten history. She, then, wrote *Jazz*, in 1992, which earned her a Nobel Prize in Literature the following year. The first black woman to win the prize, she accepted her prize with a powerful speech, stating that, "We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives," and that “Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created” (Morrison, “Nobel Lecture” n.p.).

In 1997, she wrote *Paradise*, all the while exploring other art forms such as classical music and librettos. She wrote *Love* in 2003 and *A Mercy* in 2008. The latter was a revisit of the theme of slavery and women. She wrote children’s books with her son Slade, who ended up dying of pancreatic cancer in 2010. She published *Home* two years later, dedicated to his memory. Her last novel, *God Help the Child*, was published in 2015. In it, she reacquainted

herself with themes that are familiar to her, such as beauty standards, motherhood, racism and child sexual abuse. She passed away on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019, from pneumonia complications. She was 88 years old, leaving the world after undertaking all forms of art available to her, short/long fiction, plays, poetry, and non-fiction.

### **2.5.1.2 Algerian Women's Voices**

Concerning Algerian women writers, they also tended to express themselves. They used their voices to speak against social and political injustices stemming from patriarchal, colonial and nationalist rhetorics in any means available to them. In fact, before they were writing in Arabic or French, they were established oral literature practitioners, which was also the most available type of literature for Algerian women, even before colonialism. This oral literature was mainly in Berber, and has existed since the dawn of civilization because of the indigenous population of North Africa. It was a type of manifestation for people who did not write their languages or histories but rather sang and narrated them.

Another variety of oral literature is called Buqalah. It emerged during the Ottoman Empire and is still prevalent nowadays. It is rooted in the desire to foretell events. Algerian women gather around seeking a glimpse into their future to abate some of the tension of the unknown. It is said that “men cannot participate since women, in the past, prevented their daughters from telling their fathers about this ritual. In other words, it used to be held secretly between women” (Hamane and Rahmani 1). Thus, it is considered the first form of feminine literature in Algeria.

Unfortunately, this art form finds itself undervalued because of its oral and dialectal nature that did not persist in a singular form, especially with the emergence of classical Arabic, and then the imposition of French on Algerians. Another reason to be mentioned is that “orality lead this form of art to decay because of women's illiteracy at that epoch as

illustrated by the French proverb, “‘spoken words vanish, written words remain’” (Hamane and Rahmani 2). However, contrary to belief, this practice has not died over time; it was an important part of the Algerian revolutionary war, it survives in the written literature of Algerian female authors, and it is still important to Algerian women’s gatherings these days.

During the Ottoman occupation, literature was in the form of short stories and poetry written in Arabic; having said that, it is difficult to find any women writers who shine as much as those well-known of that time. Moreover, the duration and brutality of the French colonial rule made that task much more challenging. Oukaci and Kourad share that, “‘looking at the Algerian literary scene before independence one would certainly realize that literary activity and the feminist writing movement were limited or narrow due to the social, economic and cultural circumstances Algeria was experiencing, which negatively affected the society in general and women in particular’” (522 translation added), which explains how the initiation or move towards any feminist written production was scarce. Regardless of how dire the situation was, Algerian women’s writing was covering the political conflict as well as the struggle for independence, without neglecting the themes relating to their personal lives’ interaction with male dominance and societal restrictions, as they were, indeed, looked down upon by patriarchy-fueled traditions and customs that saw them as troublesome and perverse.

Before diving into Algerian women writers’ works, it must be noted that there were Algerian women writers of European descent, namely Colette Grégoire whose poems were representative of the Algerian condition at the time. She wrote “Algérie, Capitale Alger” in 1963 and “Temps forts” in 1966.

Because of colonialism, writers adopted the French language in their writings. This was a result of their education and a way of cultivating exposure at the same time. This act

of writing did not come without its repercussions, as there were those who lost their lives for the cause. Safia Ketou was one. She committed suicide by jumping from a bridge. Djamila Zennir, another prominent Algerian writer, described her death as a “tragic death in a harshly worded letter of protest from a female writer who suffered oppression and social repression for no other reason than being accused of the sin of writing” (Oukaci and Kourad 525 translation added), while Zineb Laouedj provocatively expresses how this custom-ruled society walks on the dead bodies of innocent women (525). Consequently, many Algerian female writers utilized pen names to protect themselves and their craft from their families and harsh societal criticism.

Algerian female writers excelled in all literary genres. In poetry, there were Nadia Guendouz, who wrote “La Corde” in 1974, Safia Ketou, who wrote “Amie Cithare” in 1979, and Nadjet Rehma, who wrote “A l’Ombre D’un Vie” in 1980. They shared the theme of suffering and aspiring for a better Algeria, whose women’s voices are heard again. Concerning prose fiction, short stories were usually published in magazines, and Leila Sebbar was famous in this aspect. As far as Novels, Marie-Louise (Taaos) Amrouche was the first Algerian woman to publish a novel in 1947, titled *Jacinthe Noire* or *Black Hyacinth*, which spoke about norms and taboos. She was also very interested in Kabyle Berbers, their culture and oral tradition. In addition, Djamila Debbèche attempted to speak for women’s education and liberation as a pioneer feminist in North Africa. She penned *Leila* in 1947 and *Aziza* in 1955, which addressed oppressive societies and alienation. There were other authors who directed their writings to belonging and exile, specifically Leila Sebbar’s *Talk My Son, Talk to Your Mother* of 1984, a tale of immigrant generations and the lost dialogue between them.

After independence, several female authors surfaced, either already writing in Arabic or returning to Arabic. Prominent authors are Mabrouka Boussaha, who wrote poetry in

Algerian Arabic dialect. Zhou Ounissi wrote *al-Rasîf al-nâ'im* or *The Sleeping Sidewalk* in 1967, making it the first Algerian short story compilation to be published. Her compositions revolved around revolution and its outcomes on Algerians. Even though her works were mainly political and revolutionary, she did maintain a steady stance on social issues, particularly those that affect the Algerian woman, as to her colonialism might have ended, but traditions never do. She was also a novelist; she wrote *Min yawmiyât mudarrisa* or *From the Diary of a Female Teacher* in 1979. Other novelists worth mentioning are Ahlem Mostghanemi, Fatima Aggoun and more that shone further throughout the Black Decade of Algeria.

Oukaci and Kourad, in their research of Algerian women writers, reached the following conclusion:

And so did this creative woman express her personal issues and life with all its details and nuances. Feminist literary production suggests the existence of common issues and themes among female storytellers; betrayal, marriage, divorce, violence, the disavowal of other/man...etc. have frequently recurred in feminist narratives. The female Algerian novelists' interests were not limited to her personal issues, instead she tackled various topics in which she addressed multiple issues. She adopted national issues making this topic the central themes of most of her novels, and upon reading most of her works, the reader realizes at first glance that most of them remained strongly linked to the major national issues that Algeria has known; colonization, revolution/terrorism, making them prominent issues in the works of Algerian female novelists. (534 translation added)

In other words, being an Algerian female writer has always pertained to perpetuating and scrutinizing women's individual issues and identities as well as the national one in their writings, regardless of language and medium. One of the most famous writers of her time and one of the writers to be tackled in this research is Assia Djébar.

Assia Djébar was one of the most acclaimed authors in Algerian literary history. Born as Fatima Zohra Imalayen in 1936, Cherchell, she was of proud Kabyle descent. In her young years, she was educated in a Quranic school. She was also privileged enough to attend school, thanks to her father, who was a school teacher, where she was taught in French. Indeed, she received the majority of her education in the French language. She is a known supporter of the Algerian revolution and liberation from France. She was the first woman professor to teach history in an Algerian university after independence. Later on in her life, she worked as a lecturer in several universities abroad, mainly, America and France.

Her artistic journey began when she wrote *La Soif* in 1957, or *The Mischief* in 1958, before she was even twenty years old. Since then, she authored a multitude of novels, short story collections, poetry, essays, plays and even wrote and directed two critically acclaimed films, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, or *The Nouba [festival] of the Women of Mount Chenoua* in 1977, and two years later; *La Zerda ou les chants de l'oubli*, or *La Zerda: Songs of Oblivion*. In 1958, she published her second novel *Les Impatiens*, or *The Restless*, which presented the situation of Algerian women during colonialism. Then came *Les Enfants du Nouveau Monde* in 1962, or *Children of the New World* in 2005, and four years later, its sequel *Les Alouettes Naïves*, or *The Innocent Larks*, was published in 1967. Both novels conveyed the same themes of feminism in Algeria in the form of women's contribution to the War for Independence.

She then came back to her homeland after spending some time overseas. Upon returning, her aim was to write about the remnants of colonialism and the identity of those who stayed and those who left their country. This is apparent in her first film as well as in her novel *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* of 1980, or *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*. During the eighties and the nineties, she managed to publish eight different compositions, from them *L'Amour, la fantasia* in 1985, or *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* in 1993, *Ombre sultane* in 1987, or *A Sister to Scheherazade* in 1989 and *Vaste est la prison* in 1995, or *So Vast the Prison* in 1999. These were her dive into autobiographical writing and historical representation. In 1996, she published *Le Blanc de l'Algérie*, or *Algerian White*, in 2001, which is the most autobiographical of her works. It reflected the turmoil within Algeria during the Civil War. She continued to write well into the twenty-first century with *La Disparition de la langue française* in 2003, or *The disappearance of the French language*, and, her last work, *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* in 2007, or *Nowhere in My Father's House*.

Among the various awards she received, the Neustadt Prize for Contributions to World Literature in 1996 and the Marguerite Yourcenar Prize in 1997. For her first film, she received the International Critics Prize at the Venice Film Festival in the same year of its creation. She was often nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. In 2005, she was elected as a member of the French Academy.

Assia Djebar stormed the arena of writing emboldened by her braving of themes, such as marriage, traditions and the liberation of Algerian women. After the independence, she installed herself in literature that spoke of the revolution and national issues in relation to Algerian women. She explored all that was an Algerian woman, herself included. When she was asked in an interview with Figaro what symbol she represented, she responded, “I

am not a symbol. My only activity consists of writing...Like many writers, I use my culture and I collect several imaginary worlds.” (Souames 16 translation added). Therefore, while utilizing the French language, she assembled history, Algeria, women and writing. She passed away on February 6, 2015, with a legacy of more than fifty years.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter establishes the significance of pursuing a comparative analysis of this research’s selected novels under a postcolonial feminist framework. The ideologies behind this framework are highlighted as they appear to affect women who are not white. In view of this, women’s intersectionality and subalternity are perceived. This leads to the understanding that intersectional subaltern women are doubly oppressed and doubly colonized, further indicating their silencing. Another point to consider is that silenced intersectional subaltern women are excluded from history. While looking at women's exclusion from history, this chapter found out that history is debunked as an ultimate fact. Nevertheless, several postcolonial and postcolonial feminist theorists agreed that intersectional subaltern women are not fully silenced as they continuously resist their oppression and manage to preserve their history on and through their bodies. The relevance of this falls into understanding that subaltern women occupy and alternate between several positions, mainly the silenced position and the resisting one. Subsequently, postcolonial women authors’ roles become determined. They are to write and rewrite this preservation of history into a female version of history: a her/story. Although the latter is regarded as subjective, the significance of this observation is overruled by history’s questionability, as history appeared to move from an imperfect position to a non-factual one. As a result, these authors adopt a feminine style of writing that would fully convey the concerning themes, which are an amalgamation of women, their issues, their histories, their oppressions and their bodies.

Thus, this chapter provides a clear analytical roadmap for the researcher. It entails analyzing the intersectional subaltern woman's silenced and voiced/resisting positions in different aspects of her life, all while inspecting the authors' attempt at writing a her/story that encompasses all. This trajectory of analysis showcases a harmony between several theorists, mainly Spivak, Coronil and Cixous and their theories, further securing a connection between postcolonial female authors, subaltern women, her/story and literature.

The chapter concludes by offering a transitional exploration of Algerian and African American women writers as a way to anticipate the introduction of the authors tackled in this research, Assia Djébar and Toni Morrison.

**Chapter Three: A Beloved Fantasia:  
Djebar's and Morrison's Feminine Pursuit  
of Her/story: Encompassing the Subaltern  
and Agent Positions of Algerian and African  
American Women in *Fantasia, An Algerian  
Cavalcade and Beloved***

### 3.1 Introduction

In *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* and *Beloved*, Djébar and Morrison generate their novels in consideration of socio-cultural context, history and their own chosen manifestation of writing about these topics. In order to transmit the ideas they want to communicate, female voices, her/stories, silencing...etc., they undertake a task of rewriting established historical periods to re-insert the representations that were previously written off history. Women, in our case, Algerian and African American, tend to be disregarded in grand narratives. This shelving of their experiences not only applies to important milestones in their lives, but also to the abuse they face at the hands of several complicit ideologies.

First, Assia Djébar engages in a long and arduous inspection of Algerian women in history, specifically the French colonial era as well as the War for Independence era in *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade*. Djébar's process is rigorous in the way it turns history into a responsibility that needs to be rifled and ventured through in order to examine each corner, gap and silence. In her narrative, Djébar is so focused on showing different types of her/story through the multitudes of perspectives the readers are exposed to. She explores the French colonization of Algeria and the struggle for liberation while also injecting her personal history among the collective one, through an unnamed alter ego protagonist. She moves from semi-autobiographical snippets to the historical ones seamlessly, reminding her readers that, along with colonialism and its atrocities, male domination and traditional family regulations are also to blame.

*Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* is divided into three parts: The Capture of the City, The Cries of Fantasia and Voices from the Past. In the first part, Djébar explores in a non-linear account, the initial malicious step French soldiers took on Algerian land on 13 June 1830, the battle of Staouali of 19 June 1830 and the explosion of Fort of the Emperor on 4 July 1830. All of these events are written through the eyes of various witnesses, namely,

Aimable Matterer (first officer of ville de Marseille), Aimable Péliissier (a general in the French army), J.T. Merle (a theatre manager) and Baron Barchou de Penhoen (a French historian and politician). She interrupts the relaying of the first invasion by sharing pieces of autobiographical accounts that maintain the reader's full attention, ferrying him between the severity of these foreigners' views and the reality of a young girl's perspective on life in a transformed Algeria. The second part carries on describing the French expansion on Algerian land after the fall of Algiers. Djébar ensures the portrayal of the brutality that came with France's attacks. The latter caused an acquisition rooted in hierarchies and conformity. The third part is a recounting of testimonies collected by the narrator herself. Djébar delves into several Algerian women's firsthand accounts of colonialism and male domination. This part of the novel is essential as different views are offered over the aggressions Algerian women were subjected to. Some narrate the brutality of colonial rule while others openly resent their exclusion from their societies after independence, making Djébar's narrative a reliable account that supplies diverse and authentic experiences.

Morrison, on the other hand, prioritizes the revision of nineteenth-century American history, slavery and its legacy on African American women. Unlike Djébar, who probes different spaces in Algerian history looking for women, Morrison fictionalizes the real-life story of Margaret Garner into Sethe's story. She also weaves several other stories of women in her narrative, displaying their abuse as well as small triumphs. She packs *Beloved* with as many perspectives of women as she can, shedding light mainly on Sethe's family. She records Sethe's life as a slave in Sweet Home under a master with the name of schoolteacher. Married and already a mother to three children with the fourth one on the way, she escapes the life of violence she had experienced in Sweet Home for a better one, only to be haunted by that pain once again. In order to protect herself and her children from a life of abuse, she attempts to kill them all, but succeeds in murdering only one of them, the

oldest daughter. After committing such a crime, Sethe and her remaining daughter, Denver, live alienated from their community, suffering the consequences of daring to escape slavery.

Along with Sethe's, Denver's and a mysterious character's account, named Beloved, Morrison also weaves other stories in which she depicts the impact of slavery on both men and women; as well as, the issue of racism and discrimination and their roles in the violence perpetuated against African Americans, which, in turn, has caused infanticide, madness, shame, fear...etc. For these reasons, Morrison writes a story that stresses its recognition and impact.

This chapter is set to explore the several positions the subaltern Algerian and African American woman inhabits. This entails a deep investigation into the events that led to her becoming a subaltern who is both silenced and resisting. By means of this investigation, the process through which Djébar and Morrison write and rewrite the her/story preserved on these women's bodies becomes easily discernible. Consequently, the selected novels in this chapter seem to share themes that pertain to both positions of women and facilitate the understanding of the intersectional nature of their identities. Once these themes are analyzed, the recognition of the complex oppression on these women will be possible, which, in turn, would expose the complexity of their resistance and her/story. Through this, we will be able to better understand the subaltern woman and the necessity of retrieving her lost her/story by the authors. This is also an effort to agree and oppose Spivak's initial theorization of the subaltern woman. The goal is to reach the conclusion that the subaltern woman can occupy several positions as her/story spans over a long period of time, and it seems illogical that the subaltern woman would stay fixed and deemed voiceless forever. We also engage the authors' writing and rewriting of her/story and whether it takes a different trajectory in order to achieve a better representation.

Thus, this chapter can be seen as a three-part endeavor by the researcher. The first part explores the different silencing instances that many characters, such as Cherifa, Lla Zohra, Sethe, Baby Suggs...etc. endure. The second part presents the incorporation of history. In it, the rewriting of women's history in a her/story is demonstrated in the form of Algerian and African American women's subjectivity retrieval. This part also bridges the gap between these women's oppressed and resisting selves, confirming once more the dynamic nature of subaltern women. The last part is concerned with the aspect of writing and rewriting her/story. It examines the authors' thematic concerns and their reflection in the language they write *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade* and *Beloved* in. In other words, it inspects feminine writing and its relation to the recovery of women's histories.

In a study that groups *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade* and *Beloved*, the authors' interest in the repression of women's bodies, histories and resistance against hegemonic structures is soon noticed. All of this culminates in a process of reclaiming the past, depicting passiveness and rejecting it at the same time. They share some themes and explore history by reimagining it as well as walking through memories.

### **3.2 Silencing/Subalternity of Algerian and African American women in *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade* and *Beloved***

In her initial and controversial theorization, Spivak had chosen to designate silence as a characteristic of subalternity. And while she had since been attacked over such remarks, her observations do have a certain substance to them since they were fundamentally based on the general idea that a subaltern has no access to hegemonic power, and thus no subjectivity or spaces in representation. As for Spivak at the time, she had been reacting to Foucault's and Deleuze's claims that the subaltern has a voice. The issue here is that silence is looked at as a final self-determining part of the subaltern when it instead could be wielded to negate its initial purpose.

In this light, a differentiation is made between being oppressed and being subaltern. The first entails being discriminated against and unjustly treated because of one's political, social or economic status, having their rights suppressed and opportunities taken away, while the latter is considered as an already oppressed person who suffers also from a deprivation of linguistic, cultural, historical heritage, and, quite succinctly, agency. A subaltern is rooted in postcolonial theory and is at the lowest of classes, marginalized and forced under cultural imperialism. In light of this, the subaltern configures as an oppressed individual, while the oppressed is not necessarily a subaltern. Subalternity, then, becomes a debate of whether it is a part of one's identities, creating a gendered unvoiced subaltern, or is just a predicament. In the next sections, subalternity and silencing will be used interchangeably to indicate subalternity/silencing as being part of one's identities; unless there is a clear un-silencing which makes the subalternity a contestable predicament.

Both Assia Djebar and Toni Morrison provide their readers with a general glimpse into the subalternity of Algerians and African Americans in their novels. Our primary concern is to confirm the production of an amnesia-combating her/story through their novels by also writing the silence and not only the resistance. Trinh emphasizes that pinpointing and learning about the silence tends to amplify the voices:

Whether materially or immaterially manifested, the blank space remains alive with indefinite possibilities. It could be indicative of a profound determination not to forget, a means to leave evidence of repression, a tacit gesture to honor an absent presence, and hence, could serve as a constant reminder of both the censoring and the censored... ("The Image and the Void" 137 ellipsis in the original)

Indeed, silence emerges as a visible space. A common misconception would be that a blank space is neither noticed nor heard of; instead, this void becomes the loudest as an absence is certainly always detected. In cases like *Fantasia*<sup>22</sup> and *Beloved*, some of the silence speaks as well, indicating the reasons for and implications of this man-made amnesia.

In *Fantasia*, Djébar eagerly engages in the threefold silence blanketing colonized Algeria. She wastes no time in showing the violence of conquest and the orientalist/othering views of colonial powers on Algerian land and its people, all without forgetting to expose the patriarchal attitudes that had long invaded Algerian communities. In the first part of the book, Algerians' experience razed at the hands of French soldiers, which is depicted by Djébar. Algerians were immediately considered a band of barbarians and in need of control. However, these French soldiers soon realized their limited position, especially after several resistance groups emerged ready to clash with them on the treacherous and unfamiliar geographical landscape of Algeria. Indeed, Algerians had used this to their advantage, hiding and congregating in caves and mountains. They had the upper hand until the French redirected their attention towards practices that are easier to access, in other words, war crimes like pillaging and looting. Djébar exemplifies this in the following perspective of Pierre Bosquet<sup>23</sup>, "he recalls the anonymous woman whose foot had been hacked off, '*cut off for the sake of the khalkhal...*'" (56 *Fantasia* italicized/ellipsis in the original). The khalkhal is a bracelet-like jewelry worn by Algerian women around their ankles, otherwise known as an anklet. In this, the soldiers have resorted to mutilating women in order to steal their prized jewelry. Not only that, but they also robbed farms of cattle and houses of more gold in the first years of the invasion. This practice soon became widespread. In another French general's perspective, specifically, Pélissier, it is noticed that, "the soldiers start

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<sup>22</sup> For the sake of brevity, *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* will be shortened to *Fantasia*.

<sup>23</sup> A French Army general who served during the French conquest of Algeria from 1834 to 1853.

looting there and then: stripping corpses, making off with jewellery, burnouses<sup>24</sup>, yataghans<sup>25</sup>” (*Fantasia* 72), leading to the observation that even the forever silenced dead experienced double silencing by being robbed. Consequently, all of these instances paint a clear picture of the silencing Algerians underwent because of France. Djébar acknowledges that her writing is the embodiment of the times when Algerians were invalidated and removed from accounts and replaced by mutilated bodies and pilferage; she reiterates, “war is mute, undocumented, leaving no leisure for writing” (56). This quote might also suggest that Djébar could be having trouble rewriting a conqueror-leaning history while being fully aware of the rampant massacring of her people. That assumption, however, is quickly challenged as she mourns the empty spaces ready to stand in the midst of them utilizing their potential, for that, she declares, “but my sole ambition in writing is constantly to travel to fresh pastures and replenish my water skins with an inexhaustible silence” (63).

As it happens, Djébar does shift perspectives by showing the extremities of the perspectives of some prominent French figures. They appear to have no interest in the condition of Algerians, and some do not even mention them unless in the form of savages or corpses, specifically Pélissier. He had snuffed out the Berber uprising of 1845 by instructing the suffocation of many natives<sup>26</sup> and their cattle hiding in caves. Even Djébar exclaims at the seriousness of this operation, stating that, “words cannot describe the violence of the blaze” (69). Pélissier is depicted as a stoic figure who strictly adheres to his orders. He even wrote “a text book of military theory based on the observations he had made” (67) in the landing of Algiers, exhibiting utmost disregard for the tragedies he had brought upon many Algerian families.

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<sup>24</sup> “long, loose, woollen cloak, woven in one piece”, from the glossary of *Fantasia*.

<sup>25</sup> “(Turk.) sword, without guard, often doubleedged.”, from the glossary of *Fantasia*.

<sup>26</sup> The tribe of Ouled Riah who were allied with Chikh Boumaza, a famous Algerian resistance leader.

In addition to the above, Djébar considers the silencing of Algerian women in their communities. While on her way to the French school, she recalls her friends, specifically an old Quranic school classmate, the baker's daughter, who became an "incarcerated body" (*Fantasia* 183). This young girl's spaces have been circumscribed, which essentially entails that she was pulled out of school and deprived of spatial and intellectual mobility. Moreover, Djébar covers a different unusual silencing that happens not just between fathers and their daughters and wives but between women. She observes that not all veiled women are equal in their oppression. Maintaining that "they possess an inherent streak of inequality" (203). In women's spaces, matriarchs, regardless of their position in the family, are able to intimidate and order younger women around. Most of the time, women are confined together forming a power structure where the loud ordering women are too commanding of the voiceless ones. The author notes that once such overbearing women are permitted to do as they please, the other women will never escape, as she "who never speaks, who contents herself with sighing or lets herself be interrupted... her voice is permanently stifled" (203). Certainly, to be dispossessed of one's voice because of men is unavoidable and yet not as unsurprising as the dispossession that comes from fellow women (Kandiyoti 279).

On a different note, Djébar also mentions the time when she personally felt silenced, vividly experiencing the "Arab woman's shame" (*Fantasia* 179). She is able to distinguish the patriarchal calling that takes hold of her modern and open-minded father when he monitors and tears her letters apart. To him, these letters could escalate into sexual relations and an impending shame. In contrast, Djébar fears that this sudden patriarchal outburst is a foreshadowing of more belated silencing. In that case, if silencing was partial, fear of it still dominates the same. Furthermore, from a different not unusual angle, she mentions the silence of marriage. The latter is regarded as a reckless displacement wherein newer controlling figures are introduced. In exchange for the former patriarchs and matriarchs,

newer ones can be found. Djébar labels this transaction a movement “from prison to prison” (*Fantasia* 106) where hegemonic power is handed from one dominator to another at times, or doubled by adding an extra set of dominators to the already existing ones at other times.

Although Djébar’s body is liberated by means of Western education, she still experiences exclusion. Her national and cultural identities are dampened, causing her to feel like a stranger in her homeland. As a consequence of speaking the colonizer’s language, she reproaches her inability to state her intentions. On top of that, she finds that she, along with those similar to her, are severely displaced, suffering from unhomeliness in their indigenous cultures. And although hybridity is generally seen as a colonial project dismantling weapon, in Djébar’s case, it is not received well, especially since she represents that abstract silencing that transpires eloquently and without any resistance. Above all, the Algerians who were open to assimilation and strived to include their children in their endeavours were opposed by those who did not want intrusion and cultural imperialism in their midst.

Ultimately, Djébar succeeds at detecting the gaps in *Fantasia* from the general effects of colonialism to the smallest unit that is her. According to Tomlinson, in Djébar’s narratives, “Algeria’s unburied, those alienated from the scene of both political and philosophical representation” (Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria* 47) are accentuated.

Similarly, Morrison provides her readers with her own rendition and understanding of slavery and its effects on both men, women and their bodies with an implicit weaving of history. She recounts, through her characters, the effects of such brutality by “excavat[ing] a silenced and oppressed past that has been ingested and consumed by the master narrative of American history” (Hichri 197). The idea here is that African Americans were considered as not human and susceptible to racial, ethnic and class-motivated oppression, and in the case of African American women, racial, ethnic, class and gender motivated oppression.

Morrison tracks the abuse of African Americans from the infamous middle passage. She dedicates several chapters, depicting the atrocious conditions Africans were subjected to during their transportation. They were beaten, sexually abused and dehumanized by being forced to drink urine and entertain white men. This treatment is further retained in Africans' lives in America, especially in the South, where working hands for plantations were needed.

The reality of being a slave is reaffirmed throughout the novel to remind the reader of that which should not be forgotten. Morrison emphasizes that “those who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized” (*Beloved* 28). Usually paired with objects, these verbs are instead used on African American slaves, and when it came to punishment, the consequences were much dire. This is envisioned when Paul D, one of the many slaves in Sweet Home, is forced to wear the iron bit, a tool made of metal used to control horses by being lodged in the animal's mouth. The iron bit was frequently used on African Americans as either a form of punishment or a way to keep the slaves from chatting while doing their jobs. This is considered a torture instrument as it numbs the tongue, molds the mouth in an ironic smile and snips any hope of resistance or even straight thinking to begin with.

Morrison reinforces these claims by introducing schoolteacher, the new master in Sweet Home after Mr. Garner's death. He is cruel and harsh, unlike the Garners, who were softer in their approach to enslavement. He came to Sweet Home with a mission to learn more about the savages by writing a book and teaching his nephews about the animal side of the blacks. He carefully studies the slaves in Sweet Home, crafting charts and introducing strict rules and punishments for them. Schoolteacher exemplifies his indifference towards black lives when he burns a slave by the name of Sixo, deeming him no longer fit for work. He draws a clear line, which the Garners had blurred over the years, between slaver owner and slave, a dichotomy the residents of Sweet Home had been unknowing of. Schoolteacher

reminded them that, “definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined” (*Beloved* 225), which eventually prompted the slaves to decide to run.

At the surface level, Morrison introduces the tolerance the Garners showed to their slaves, which might cause some readers to question whether the enslavement of the Garners was better than that of schoolteacher. However, with an in-depth look, it appears that Morrison is trying to remind her readers that enslavement is enslavement regardless of the circumstances. The Garners could have been appeasing the slaves in order for them not to start perceiving their silenced position, rebel or escape. After all, the Garners were old and seasoned when it came to slave owning. This paradox goes unnoticed by all of the slaves besides Halle, Sethe’s husband. When Sethe points out that the Garners were nice to let Halle buy his mother out of bondage, he retorts that “it don’t matter, Sethe. What they say is the same. Loud or soft” (231). This is further implied when Denver enters the Bodwin’s house, a white family who were engaged in abolitionist activism and helped black people integrate into communities after running away, and sees a statue glorifying slavery. In this respect, regardless of the kindness some white people extended towards African American slaves during the nineteenth century, their tone-deaf and insensitive behavior and attitudes tended to materialize somehow.

In addition to the aforementioned forms of silencing, a fundamental point of muting is brought forward. Morrison reports that once Africans were dragged onto American land, their connection to their motherlands was irreparably severed. Any culture that they would have clung to was forgotten either due to the long and detrimental passage, the objectification of their person, or their separation from any support system, cultural or social. This resulted in them “forgetting their native history and culture, the weakening of their national consciousness and the loss of subjectivity” (Xu 101). The identities of African Americans suffered greatly because of colonial history. Sethe reminisces about her mother and her wet

nurse, Nan, while regretting having one's culture be silenced, "she remembered so little before Sweet Home" (*Beloved* 74), making the house an ironic representation of enslavement and cultural erasure. Sethe candidly shares that "what Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. the same language her ma'am spoke, and which would never comeback" (74). This confession is a cathartic awareness of African Americans' destroyed cultural and linguistic heritage that would have allowed them dignity and proved their subjectivity. Instead, brutal grand narratives are conceived on the ashes of forgotten and silenced histories.

All things considered, both authors endeavored to cover as many aspects of silencing as they could. The subjects they represent have been removed, suppressed and made subaltern, prompting the need to explore how their foundations have been shaken by power structures. Surprisingly enough, both employ the idea of masking the oppression by creating a side where this oppression is supposedly not that bad. This is clever since they anticipate any criticism that sees slave owners as merciful masters and identifies their aggressions as a reaction to the animalistic and barbaric behavior of slaves. In *Fantasia*, the narrator understands that some French people were nice and that her education was a priceless opportunity, but she also realizes that colonial power and ideologies are oppressive and that this education had cost her national, linguistic and cultural identities (Kershaw 57). She is so hybridized that she sometimes questions her identity and where her true self lies, which is also the case for the slaves, who were not aware of their status in Sweet Home. At the end, and in both cases, they were dominated, experimented on, abused and stripped of potentially rewarding lives. Yet, it must be noted, that Hichri, relying on Laub, sees that the characters in *Beloved* "speak mutely" (58), while Silmi announces that "Djebar's texts present no binary opposition between silence and voice; in the continuous search for the voices of colonized women, voice and silence are inextricably intertwined" (58), leading to the

realization that the silence of Algerian and African American women is perceivable whether in its small form or mixed with voices. Therefore, writing is a continuity of silence. It represents the root and potential of writing. In the next sections, other more specific instances of silencing that pertain to the novels specifically and her/story, generally, are discussed in detail.

### **3.2.1 Silencing the Subaltern Woman: Violence Against her Body**

Women's bodies pose as ripe sites for the exploration of silencing. Indeed, the disempowering of Algerian and African American women might have started with their bodies' violation by invasive powers. A woman's body has always been used in a way that is meant to catalyze her ruin. She is her body, and her body is a representation of her country, religion, culture...etc. The subduing of her body symbolizes the subduing and ruin of all. This ruin is often done by means of physical or sexual abuse in the form of torture and/or rape.

Certainly, Milkovitch-Rioux posits that the rape of Algerian women by French soldiers is a social violence (351), exerted under the guise of looking for information; however, it soon becomes apparent that it is utilized as a tool of moral destabilization instead (352). Such a heinous act is a prove of the vulnerability of the women who serve as the anchoring agent of their nation. Their humiliation is to reach their families as well as the rest of the Algerian population (352), affecting women's position and relation with the other sex negatively. Fanon describes the rape and "near-murder" of Algerian women as a "para-neurotic brutality and sadism" ("Algeria Unveiled" 46); thus, classifying colonial powers as sadistic and neurotic in their conduct and process of colonialism. In effect, a ruined Algerian woman is exiled from her body, identity, culture and nation.

The same goes for black women's rape by white masters. Their rape indicates, for the most part, white men's sadistic qualities. With a centered perception of the self, the objectification of the other is expected. White men profit from such deprived behavior by tapping into a perverse sexual gratification derived from debasing another race. It also profits them financially as procreation becomes inevitable. This violation creates a drift in the black community. Watson confirms that, "the rape of black women by the white phallus set[s] the stage for impotence in terms of physical and psychological development in the black community" (93). In other words, the entering of whiteness into black women exiles them from their bodies and communities. They grow to despise their anatomy and its wreckage. They eventually become imprisoned in their past, where their wails go unheard.

Assia Djebar and Toni Morrison pursue this form of silencing dissimilarly in their novels. In *Fantasia*, Djebar rewrites conventional history by presenting physical trauma in its different shapes and forms. She proceeds by representing taboo topics<sup>27</sup>, such as rape, torture...etc., and considering a variety of examples. In this way, she confirms the prevalence and detectable quality of such behaviors across a spectrum of levels.

Djebar sets the tone by establishing that becoming a victim of such sadistic sexual violence is a known fear-inducing casualty to Algerian women (Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled" 46). Many characters express their fear of having to witness or to be violated, especially since it affects more than a person's body. To further illustrate the gravity of this, Djebar paints this fear in female characters of different ages and from different times. Right by the time Algiers fell into the hands of the colonizer, women shouted at the assembled Algerians marching against the enemy that "it will be well if you are victorious, but if you are not, know that the Infidels will come to dishonour us!" (*Fantasia* 42). These women warn the

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<sup>27</sup>In Djebar's context rape is a taboo topic and any violence against women is not considered as such because of religious and cultural implications.

men of the consequences awaiting them if they fail to protect the country and its inhabitants. Their tone is not hopeful at all; instead, it appears threatening as they ask them to kill them first before they advance further. This could imply that these women are aware of their central position to their nation, and how their defilement by foreign brutal powers and structures could bring about the same destruction to the nation. This is referred to later on when a young captive girl, Cherifa, is intimidated by French soldiers inquiring about her virginity and marital status. On the one hand, they are looking for ways to other and reduce her to a fanatic Sharia Law-following thirteen-year-old Algerian Muslim girl, while on the other, they are exhibiting a deviant desire to know about the sexual habits of a thirteen-year-old Algerian Muslim girl.

Djebar, then, broadens the fear of rape by exposing the terror it causes older women. The elderly widow Lila Zohra expresses, “Can you imagine what would happen when they arrived at a house and found women alone?” (*Fantasia* 187). This dread stems from her fear for Algerian young girls, and, essentially, her possible inability to protect them as a matriarch, especially since there were several operations and plans that spoke of assimilation, acculturation and the complete razing of resistance areas at the time. Indeed, Mouloud Feraoun even reports on the frequency of such violence by relating one of these threatening operations known as the mass rape that had befallen Kabylia during Operation Challe<sup>28</sup> in the summer of 1959.

Moreover, Djebar chronicles the story of Cherifa. She is a young Algerian girl whose brothers are freedom fighters residing in the mountains. As she was hiding near a river during an ambush, like her brother instructed, French soldiers ended up discovering her. She is then forced to “submit” (202) to them. The description is fleeting. A slight almost unnoticeable

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<sup>28</sup> A French military operation led by General Maurice Challe during the Algerian War for Independence. The objective of this operation was to eliminate resistance and any potential political parties.

instance when first read, unless meticulously looked for. The author finds herself writing the details that come after, stressing their importance as well. It is described that “*once the soldiers have gone, once she was washed, tidied herself up, plated her hair and tied the scarlet ribbon, all these actions reflected in the brackish water of the wadi*<sup>29</sup>” (*Fantasia* 202 italicized in the original). This process of tidying oneself hurriedly is a setup for the next section of silencing, which is the fact that there existed no support system for those who have been violated. In this case, Cherifa is forced to avoid her trauma too, or as Djébar puts it, “prevent the chancre being opened in the tribal circle: the blind old man, the watchful matrons, the silent children with flies about their eyes, young lads already distrustful: ‘My daughter, has there been ‘damage’?’” (202). Consequently, Cherifa’s earlier colonization by French soldiers is further aggravated by the silencing imposed on her by her tribe. This is done through asking a question that is meant to incite shame and fear. Besides, such meetings and confrontations would illicit lying before anything, and that is the utmost form of silencing where one would shove their experiences in a shameful frame, blaming themselves in the process. Djébar uses this to also foreground “not only the oppressive forces of colonialism but also the patriarchal structures that exist within those societies” (Bartiza and Zrizi 24), so as to highlight the double colonization of Algerian women.

Then again, from another angle, the violation of Cherifa could also suggest that she is just another piece of Algeria to conquer. Indeed, Djébar likens this sexual assault to the invasion of Algerian lands by French troops when she employs expressions, such as impregnable city, penetrated, deflowered...etc. Djébar ironically uses a romanticized, powerful and compelling language in order to show how colonial rule is going to be the same

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<sup>29</sup> “River or dry river bed”, retrieved from the glossary of *Fantasia*

abusive figure, whether invading lands or traumatizing a young girl's body (Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria* 73).

It is of interest to note how Djébar, or her narrator alter ego, interjects into the narrative concerning the rape of Algerian women. She appears to be in a dilemma over relating and writing about their testimonies, hesitating to use the word rape and replacing it with dishonor, damage...etc. In a way, she is emulating these women's speech (Kershaw 61) and perception, while at the same time, she is tasked with challenging the ineffable (Ben Salem 73). Djébar labels her confliction as aphasia<sup>30</sup> because in order to prevent her narrative from becoming one with the colonizer's (in perpetuating silence and marginality), she needs to provide a proper representation; one that is not misguided or restrictive. This is done particularly because there are victims in the midst of this, in addition to the difficulty of contesting gendered cultural and social constructs.

In *Beloved*, Morrison also addresses bodily trauma, specifically in the form of sexual violence. In this light, African American women face violent sexual abuse, recalled by the author in detail. She even collects and recollects the consequences stemming from such trauma.

For a black woman brought and bred on American soil, the tracing of history is collected from her bruised and abused body and psyche. Verily, rape was weaponized by white slave owners in order to subdue female slaves, derogate them and exile them from their bodies and histories. Wilson explains how the rape of black women was done "for sexual pleasure and for economic purposes (reproducing children who could become slaves)" (122). These women served as, both, a well of profit and a space of sexual

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<sup>30</sup> A disorder that affect the ability of one's communication skills

perverseness. They were dirty objects, but not dirty enough or senseless enough to not be exploited by white men.

African American women's past, present and future are heavily impacted by the haunting existence of their abusers. Indeed, Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, labels her encounter with white men as "bad luck" (*Beloved* 105), ascribing any misfortunate events in the lives of black women to the presence of white men. The latter become a lingering presence in their lives, casting their reality in shadows for long periods of time till it loses meaning besides that which pertains to white men and their curse-like existence. The tragedy, that is the rape of enslaved black women, bears an insoluble despair and misfortune upon them and their communities. It feeds the black woman shame towards her sense of self and different identities, banishing any good qualities she might have valued about herself, until she starts believing that she is undeserving of life or absolution.

Since African American women are the personification of an objectified source of revenue, with white masters excusing the act because of how profitable it is, and justifying it by portraying the black woman slave as an "innately promiscuous and even predatory" animal (Wilson 124), in *Beloved*, Toni Morrison becomes adamant about detailing the absent accounts of the rape of black women. She delineates the manner in which they were made as objects, properties and subsequently subaltern rapeable women. As a postcolonial and feminist author, Morrison demonstrates a certain degree of spite as well as a diligence in confronting such subject in most of the black women characters she portrays in *Beloved*. One of these characters is Sethe, whose status as a married woman, mother and pregnant woman did not spare her from being trapped and ruthlessly violated by her new master's nephews. At first, the scene is described with only one sentence, "they took my milk" (*Beloved* 20), which led to the meaning being inferred from the rest of the events and Sethe's apparent distress over the situation. Nevertheless, the more the story develops; the more

details Morrison adds. She ensures that every vacant portion of history is occupied by the traumatized black enslaved women.

Morrison affirms that this rape is a form of silencing, ensuring that its depiction is translated as brutally as the act is. She writes the explicit scene of violation through Sethe's memory, "I am full god damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up" (*Beloved* 83). This passage conveys a set of disturbing and graphic descriptions of Sethe's rape. It appears that this type of derogatory act was catered for Sethe as a woman, a black person, and a slave, summarizing the complexity of her oppression. Sethe continuously remembers the mossy teeth that took her milk in an act of debasement and forsaking of one's own body. This is further aggravated by the dehumanization of having schoolteacher study and record what was happening. His inspection is so cold and scientific in its nature, but also so detrimental to the receiver of this humiliating treatment. In a sense, this is how power structures treat the other, through a calculated and self-proclaimed logical appraisal that serves more to raise the dominant one step above those they oppress.

We soon learn that Sethe's husband, Halle, also watched the rape unravel while hiding and had since lost his mind. Sethe is absolutely horrified by this revelation. She is not only violated but also watched throughout it and not defended. This revelation contributes greatly to the intensity of the violence she underwent. Because of this, Sethe wishes she had also gone crazy like Halle, as it is extremely difficult for her to fathom being subjected to both cruelty and betrayal, and the psychological aftereffects stemming from them. This was the case for many black women slaves; they either wished for death or insanity because continuing their type of life did not register to them as living. It is an endless rerun of those unsavory events, which signifies, as well, that the lives of many black women already ended when the boundaries of their peaceful existence were first breached by slavery.

Morrison, then, imitates the anxiety that arises from the constant recalling and unlocking of the memory of rape and the prospect of experiencing it once again. Sethe is constantly scared of being raped again. She experiences hallucinations, seeing white boys around, ready to pin her down once more. With this, the author argues that even when freed, a freedom that entails safety for African American women is still unreachable as long as the enactment of racist laws and social exclusion persist.

Additionally, she challenges the reader by diving into Sethe's memory and retrieving more shocking details. She recounts how the life-altering rape of Sethe was an assignment given by schoolteacher to one of his nephews. Schoolteacher's disregard for Sethe's being is not only destructive but also leads to the possibility of the permanence of her suffering, especially since the legacy of this suffering is carved on her body. Sethe has got a tree-like shape flagging on her back from reporting her rapists to her old mistress. Amy Denver, a white girl who helped her give birth to her youngest daughter, describes it as a chokecherry tree. Although Sethe cannot see it, it is forever marked on her body, which also works to denounce any refutation of her experience. Morrison introduces the idea that Sethe has never seen this tree, which could be read as her not realizing the extent of her psychological issues. Almost two decades later, Sethe ponders over the tree bearing cherries, insinuating that her trauma might have intensified over the years.

Morrison meticulously briefs us on the transformation of the black woman. She substantiates such a claim by depicting black women's silenced position because of violence through and through. Watson insists that, "For sethe, the rape and the stealing of her milk symbolized the taking of her self-hood, her inner being" (95), which hints that Sethe is changed by having specific oppressions sticking to specific parts of her identities altering her self-perception and silencing and fragmenting her along the way. It is declared within the text that, "a young colored woman drifting was drifting from ruin" (*Beloved* 62), showing

that some of these women's existence stems from ruin. The choice of the word drift implies the abstract state the black woman is left in after whiteness enters her. She becomes a memory of what she once was, stamped by the ineradicable physical evidence of violence.

Since the slave institution is erected on the brutal sexual assault of black women, the sanctioning of such events from history is questionable. Writing off a subaltern black woman, whose identity is deformed and body broken (Ben Salem 75) because of rape, relegates her farther to the margin and allows the possibility of more abuse and oppressions on her which is why Morrison is adamant on searching the silence, and writing the forgotten details of the subaltern black enslaved woman.

It is important to recognize that while Djébar cautiously approaches the topic of rape, Morrison has tried to be as explicit as the official records had never been. For Morrison, rape is a weapon that renders the black woman into an object, forsaken from anything that defines her. Djébar, however, perceives rape by French soldiers as a dreadful event that disconnects someone from their homeland. Both accentuate the psychological issues that manifest from rape, only Morrison shows the development of the suffering after a long time, while Djébar shows the immediate psychological manipulation that occurs to violated Algerian women. As far as writing this silence, Djébar favors inserting herself in the narrative while Morrison does not, which might suggest that Djébar is trying to remind the readers that she is also a character in the novel.

One thing to note is that Djébar's inattention to rape details leads to questions over her motivations. She might either be ashamed of such history, or actively imitating the silencing of women in her writing, in comparison to Morrison, who embraces writing the silence. Only Morrison ends up stumbling upon a self-silencing instance of Sethe, or what Wolfe called "self-violation" (266), where she offers her body for stone engraving. This

action imitates what had happened to her, which suggests that Sethe has been totally silenced.

In sum, the authors take different roads to achieve semi-similar ends. Their goal was to write the uncomfortable silence that drowns subaltern women which they both succeeded in achieving in different but similar manners.

### **3.2.2 The Ramifications of the Physical Violence of Patriarchy, Colonialism and Slavery on Algerian and African American Women's Stolen and Sullied Motherhoods**

The violence French colonial rule and slavery imposed on Algerian and African American women, respectively, primarily affected motherhood. Colonial powers tend to perceive the mother/woman as the foundation of the nation; therefore, taking violence against her as a chance to solidify their presence (Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled"). With the assistance of patriarchal norms, motherhood soon becomes a misfortune. Likewise, black motherhood has been forced and deformed by slavery because motherhood as a result of sexual assault was a tribulation.

The ruin of women's bodies continues, in *Beloved*, as rape is either followed by the delivery of the next generations of slaves, in other words, some female black slaves became pregnant birthing mixed babies who were automatically classified as objects because of their mother's class, or is done to already pregnant women, women in the immediate postpartum period, or those breastfeeding. The character Sethe is aware of how much that instance of rape has stained her motherhood. Sethe had been a proud mother to her, at the time, three children. She looked after them and breastfed them, clearly associating such rituals, breastfeeding specifically, with being a dutiful and diligent mother. She narrates, "Nobody will ever get my milk no more except my own children. I never had to give it to nobody

else—and the one time I did it was took from me—they held me down and took it. Milk that belonged to my baby” (*Beloved* 236). She almost pleads that she had and would never invite anyone else into this venerated space she shares with her babies. Resentment coats her words when she vehemently reiterates that her milk is for her children but was taken from her because of sexual assault.

Becoming a mother during those times was, indeed, a curse. Black women slaves were not allowed to follow their motherly instincts and forced back onto the fields to work and be sexualized, beaten and abused. Slave owners exhibited a strong intent to render their slaves into a state of no subjectivity; they instead wanted simple working profitable objects (Lorenz 4). Even Sethe acknowledged her inability to be a mother and a woman at first. She confesses that “there wasn’t nobody to talk to. Woman I mean” (*Beloved* 188). Black women did not practice their womanhood publicly for fear of persecution, so they repressed it into broken pieces. Still, Sethe had loved her children to a great degree, proving that witnessing motherhood is there only to help the already evident motherly instincts. Paul D, however, warns against loving your children so much as a slave girl. He states, “for a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love” (*Beloved* 54), because a black mother’s love is fierce enough to threaten both hers and her children’s lives.

Black women’s motherhood is further dissected by Morrison in the character of Baby Suggs. Baby Suggs criticizes how “people look down on her because she had eight children with different men” (*Beloved* 246), when she was only bearing the brunt of being a slave black woman. When it came to the children she gave birth to, she explains that it was unnecessary to remember their faces or give them names as they never stay, either getting sold or exchanged (Barclay 119). She also did not feel any emotions towards some of her children because they came from forced relations, so she could not love the product of that,

while for her other children, it was a choice not to love them because of the consequences that could emerge from that (Osaki 22). Nonetheless, Baby Suggs capitulates, by the end, as she recognizes how a son could be important, especially since her youngest, Halle, self-purchased her from Mr. Garner by working hard and saving the money.

In such a case, it is to be understood that Baby Suggs's choices were reduced by her anatomy. All of her children are presumed dead, and no man is pointed out as accountable for that, even when men's actions spurred this vicious cycle. Baby Suggs becomes the mother of dead forced-upon-her babies while Lla Zohra, in *Fantasia*, is the mother of partisans who left her behind for smudges of glory. Her sons left her to be demeaned and denied her autonomy, her sense of being a woman, and of being a mother. In a sense, she was left to mother ashes, as Baby Suggs was left to mother memories. Lla Zohra loses her children to the call for revolution. She is only their mother, voiceless, and left to the villagers to talk of the glory of her children. Her identity is ignored. She is Berber, a mother and a woman, in no particular order, expected to be proud, but her motherhood is challenged, and in her society, she is ostracized and othered for her ethnic background and most certainly not integrated. Her ethnicity, belonging and gender make her both seen for the wrong reasons and unseen in her community. Even though she participated in hiding partisans and was put in danger more than once, losing her property even, she was still disfavored, ridiculed and shunned "from her...participation in history" (Weltman-Aron qtd. in Salhi 57), Waterman believed that "after the war, the occupiers were no longer the immediate enemy, and women were expected to step back, silently, into the oppressive life they had always known... For women, the boundary between war and peace becomes distorted" (330). Lla Zohra relates to the narrator:

'My sons fought from here to the Tunisian border, while you remained hidden in caves and holes!' And it was true. And then, in front of all those townsfolk,

he started talking to me in Berber! Just to emphasize that I was a country-woman! I repeated in Arabic, with the correct accent: 'Give me my rights!' They didn't give me a thing ... You can see where I'm living now, I had to pay to occupy this hut. 'You pay or you don't put a foot inside!' they told me. All the men I used to depend on, all those men have gone! (*Fantasia* 200)

This plays into an ironic cycle as she is seen as a woman and a Berber, only in this case. Here, her Berber identity is attached to her female identity in a way that both markers demean her to a great extent. The main perpetrator is France and French colonialism, but the pain is delivered on fellow countrymen's hands, unlike with Baby Suggs, who was the subject of blatant abuse.

When it comes to sons, Baby Suggs was happy with at least one of them, even exclaiming, "a son? Well, now, that is somebody" (*Beloved* 27). However, regardless of how Lla Zohra was watched over by her sons, who "found people to look after me... The Brothers also took care of me. Thanks to them, I got better. But people still went on shutting their doors in the 'mad woman's' face. They were afraid: that's the truth; especially the people of the village. They said, 'What are those folk doing here? They bring bad luck!'" (*Fantasia* 162). From Lla Zohra's perspective, she existed at the end of a long chain of discrimination: France, some factions of the freedom fighters, normal Algerian citizens, and up to nationalist men in her society. Her loneliness was yet again the loneliness of Algeria. In this respect, the motherhood of Algerian and African American women thrived very little and was wounded a lot. What is for sure is that despite the pain, mothering remains a sacred site for both the authors and their contexts.

### 3.2.3 Uprooting the Next Generations: Infanticide

The idea of “civilizational” advancement tends to inform the structuring of colonialist powers (Rollo 60), and yet, these powers seem to solidify their hold on native lands by doing the opposite of civilizing in the form of eliminating and exterminating the younger generations. Both Djébar and Morrison delve into this notion with an unmistakably intense attitude. Their view of the aggressors and their actions is undistorted as they report on this type of silencing. In *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, they remove the muzzle that stifles subaltern communities in order to relate the tale of cursed motherhood from stolen subjectivities. As it turns out, the colonial violence depicted in *Fantasia* and the racially-motivated sexual violence depicted in *Beloved* also appear to participate in the ending of children’s lives.

Djébar dives into such topic by breaking it down into three cases where Algerian children were murdered while under colonialism. In one case, it is done directly at the hands of the colonizer, while the other two are perceived as remotely influenced by the colonizer. Cherifa narrates of the time French soldiers found her and other women hiding in the mountains among freedom fighters, “A child... had just got up and came tottering out first: a bullet hit him in the middle of the forehead and he fell down dead on the ground in front of me. Poor kid: one single step from sleep straight into death!” (*Fantasia* 132). This scene is represented in the utmost jarringly simplistic manner of having French soldiers just choose to shoot a child in front of everyone. Even the character relating this event exclaims at the easiness and exactness of such an act, suggesting a certain amount of intentionality and nonchalance in the measures taken by the colonizer. To elaborate further, there is an intentionality in the process of extermination of Algerians, and a nonchalance towards their subjectivity and identities, essentially objectifying them. The events after this are unknown to the reader because Cherifa, who was narrating at the time, ran away. She does, however,

note that the other women who were not dressed in escape-appropriate garments did not even attempt to escape, surrendering to a destiny where they will either be killed instantly, not having to live childless and suffering, or taken as a prisoner, tortured physically, mentally and emotionally.

Besides the above-mentioned French colonial overt and direct aggression, the author introduces the reader to a remote side of brutality. Djébar narrates the exile of several Algerian women to France because of their engagement in the challenging of French politics in Algeria. Meticulously, Djébar explores the notion of Algerian women giving birth to death in an account where the nameless protagonist is forced to board a steamship by French authorities, already pregnant. This soon-to-be mother is presented as worry-ridden about her condition. She is struck by the realization that she will have to have this baby in a foreign land/sea with no family to support her. This position she was put in by France causes her immense stress. Djébar carries forward, “The second night you feel death in your belly swallowing all hope. You curl up amidst the cousins, old, young, or not so young. These women enfold you in their damp veils, as if to bind you with their prayers, their whispers ... Without a cry, you give birth to the foetus” (*Fantasia* 189 ellipsis in the original). This fetus is her dead baby. It might appear as if the baby died because of the travelling conditions and the accompanying stress, but when one traces the origins behind this death, the colonizer is found to have caused these travelling conditions and stress. The woman is, then, surrounded and comforted by the rest of the women in the ship. They plead with her to bury the baby, but she responds with immense anxiety. She experiences an agony taking the form of cries of frustration over her situation. She has been heavily persecuted, expelled from her country and stripped of her sense of belonging. Her frustration mirrors every Algerian who has been forced out of their land and stripped of their sense of belonging, she yells, “our land is theirs! This sea is theirs! Where can I shelter my dead son? ...” (*Fantasia* 190), which leads to the

final belief that her distress is over her son's identity and belonging too. She appears to believe that one must lie in their homeland in order to be at peace, and in this case, that, too, has been seized by the colonizer. She is depicted falling asleep with the stillborn baby in her arms in an imagery of a mother's agony, giving her child a night of burial in his first homeland, his mother, before burying him in the sea.

Additionally, the author shows an interesting angle to the woman's anxiety over burying her son. She is troubled by casting her child into the Christians' sea. Along with identity, belonging and homeland, she is concerned about preserving the religion. The cultural and religious identity of the colonized emerges as an indispensability to their living. The woman abhors the conditions she has been subjected to, as she is portrayed as someone who strongly identifies with their national/cultural and religious identity. Viewed differently, this child of hers symbolizes her link to her country and his death means that France has succeeded in severing this last link. And while the colonizer's motivations and goals are not always evident, in this case, it can even be assumed that she could have been sent away so that her child would die en route or survive and grow up assimilated and hybridized beyond repair. At the end, all culminates in the purging of the next generations while indefinitely cursing their mothers.

Djebar, then, initiates us into the violence of infanticide<sup>31</sup>. Through the eyes and words of Baron Barchou de Penhoen, the following scene is detailed, "a woman had been fleeing with a child in her arms when a shot wounded her; she seized a stone and crushed the infant's head, to prevent it falling alive into our hands; the soldiers finished her off with their bayonets" (*Fantasia* 18). The mother resolves to a bloody murder of her child before he is taken or killed by French soldiers. She makes the choice to put an end to his life along

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<sup>31</sup> The act of killing a child, usually an offspring

with hers in an act that is depicted in a graphic and disturbing manner. Milkovitch-Rioux reports that this scene is copied from Jules Roy's *Les Cheveux du Soleil*. She describes his version of the events as a savage scene of infanticide written to desecrate the act more than to celebrate it (348). In Roy's account, the woman is depicted as a rabid animal. He writes, "she had to be pierced, like a she wolf, with bayonets, to prevent her from biting" (43 In Milkovitch-Rioux 348 translation added). In his version, there is an insinuation that the soldiers carry a great responsibility for saving their peers from her potential rabid biting; thus, in their eyes, killing her is an honorable mission. Through this, Djébar reminds us of the othering and silencing of Algerian women in orientalist accounts. They regard the other as a beast to be eliminated and the self as the superior actor. The infanticide committed is seen as far more obscene than the murder of the mother itself when all she did was protect her child from becoming a future version of herself.

In the same vein, in *Beloved*, women tended to resort to the more extreme measure, infanticide, because, to African American women, Morrison writes, "unless carefree, motherlove was a killer" (*Beloved* 155). Certainly, Morrison unburies a long forgotten and shunned past. She tackles the issue of infanticide almost as a main theme in her book. She prefaces the reader's encounter with such a topic by easing them in through briefly mentioning the experience of Sethe's mother with infanticide. In a way, she delineates the issue, gives reasons for it, and shows the abundance of such cases when it comes to black women. It is also a clever setup that is designed to not shock the reader as well as add substance to the process of this choice being made, and the fact that it is not an impulsive reaction, but a black-slave-women-related necessity.

Sethe was raised by a black wet nurse with the name of Nan. Nan has narrated a lot of what Sethe knows about her mother, as she was young and did not have many memories

of her. Nan recites the following sequence of them coming from their native lands to America on a ship:

Both were taken up many times by the crew. 'She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more white she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never. Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe'. (*Beloved* 74)

In this quote, Nan is once more revisiting the act of brutal rape and its consequences. The misery of the recurrence of such an act and its recurrent consequence, babies, made these women throw away what they had birthed. They were the results of non-consensual relations that are harmful in every manner; mainly, because these babies are born to forced relations, and so they serve as continuous evidence of that harm. In addition, the author makes sure to provide a stark distinction for clarity by presenting a consensual relationship Sethe's mother had with a black man, resulting in Sethe whom she kept. This could also be seen as a feeble attempt by Sethe's mother at preserving her self, identity and culture.

Morrison, then, delves into Sethe's delayed grasping of what Nan had told her at such a young age. She acknowledges that, at the time of hearing this story, she was unimpressed, but now, as an adult black woman with children of her own, she is angry. Sethe finally comprehends her mother, or rather what had compelled any black slave woman to commit such act, as she herself had resolved to doing the same, she was a "pretty little slavegirl [who] had recognized a hat, and split to the woodshed to kill her children" (*Fantasia* 186).

Sethe, along with the other slaves at Sweet Home, was determined to escape because the establishment had become unlivable. In it, she was enslaved, raped, beaten, and forced

to remember it all. Once she embarked on her escape journey, she was pregnant and had to deliver on the run. She operated on spite and the necessity of freedom from the powers that threatened to extinguish her existence. She was successful in living twenty-eight days of freedom in 124 with her children, two boys, a daughter, who was crawling, a newborn and a mother-in-law who was a pillar to the community. She had twenty-eight days of the life she wanted for herself and her children before the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 prompted slave owners to arrest and recapture their properties even in free states. This Act threatened officials' pockets, issued monetary penalization and ensured that slave states were to stay unthreatened. Sethe recognized schoolteacher's hat and suddenly she was able to foresee the future, a bleak and full of dreadful possibilities future for her children.

Sethe attempted to kill all of her children and succeeded in ending the life of only one of them, the oldest daughter. Not knowing how to be a mother became a long-forgotten notion. In an ironic and disturbing cognizance, Sethe becomes the greatest version of a mother, one who protects her children at any cost. She, to a degree, prevents herself from mothering abused shells. Her actions pause her status as a mother. She has chosen to be a mother to a forever two-year-old daughter instead of an abused young black woman. The violence she commits is an act of protection, whereas the violence that was committed against her was an act of aggression. The latter perpetuated and cornered Sethe in a space where she became silenced and un-silenced. She fluctuates in her ambivalence, where she is subdued and at the same time fighting back. She becomes a land from which black motherhood springs and is sullied by a string of colonialist decisions and their aftereffects, which happen to be better practiced on women's bodies and intersectional identities.

The depiction of infanticide is fleeting. Instead, there is more description provided for the scene after the killing has happened. Described like a disturbing painting, Sethe stands in the shed with two injured boys at her feet, one slaughtered child on her arm and

one baby hanging by foot from her hand. Schoolteacher describes her, in that moment, as a wild animal that has been overtly mistreated. He possesses a skewed sense of responsibility over her, alleviating himself to the position of a servant of God who is preventing savagery. He expresses, “see what happened when you overbeat creatures God has given you the responsibility of...you just can’t mishandle creatures and expect success” (*Beloved* 176). Schoolteacher, here, represents the detached, supremacist and religious outlook the slavery institution has on black people.

The author interjects once again by writing the rape scene from schoolteacher’s point of view. It is depicted the same way, meaning that Sethe’s account was truthful and that white men’s perception of the damage they had inflicted is lacking, especially since his point of view of the scene is devoid of Sethe’s distress and helplessness. This indicates white men’s unchanged view of black women. They have no interest in understanding black people as humans with anchored identities that go beyond their skin color. Consequently, that sacred place, black enslaved women’s bodies, which they share with their children, is ransacked and devalued without any ramifications.

Sethe, as a result of her decision, elicited varying reactions from those around her. Baby Suggs started feeling like a hypocrite. As a preacher and a supportive figure in her community, she wondered how she was unable to prevent such evil from overtaking her daughter-in-law. She even experiences a rage towards God, feeling abandoned yet again. Still, she shares with Stamp Paid that, “she could not approve or condemn Sethe’s rough choice” (*Beloved* 212), because as a black woman, who shares some identities, identity markers and experiences with women like Sethe, understanding is all that she can offer in this situation. However, Ella, another prominent part of the black community who, along with Stamp Paid, helps escapees adjust, does not approve of Sethe’s actions. She, too, had been subjected to rape by both father and son, and had a child that did not survive babyhood

because she did not nurse it. So, she “understood Sethe’s rage in the shed twenty years ago, but not her reaction to it” (*Beloved* 301-302). Ella seems to have a problem with, one, Sethe’s execution of the act, since she openly declares that “no friends take a handsaw to their children” (*Beloved* 221), and, two, the fact that Sethe killed her children who were fathered by a black man she chose to bed. Sethe is selfish and misguided in the eyes of Ella, who had no choice to begin with.

As it appears, both authors interact with the death of children in similar and different ways. They show the severity of infanticide as much as they celebrate the reasons behind it. Morrison focuses on infanticide being a common practice among black female slaves, where they murder their own children. For some, it is a freedom, while for others, it is a way to either preserve themselves or their motherhood. In order to cover the issue properly, she includes other black women’s opinions over the matter, in contrast to Djébar, who writes the several ways Algerian children die under colonial rule. At the end, Djébar and Morrison write another instance of silencing that is graver, affecting the next generations, the mothers and their communities.

### **3.2.4 Perpetuating the Silence: Men’s Disregard for Women’s Experiences**

Assia Djébar and Toni Morrison lend a substantial view to their process of tracing silence/subalternity by offering Algerian and African American men’s perspectives on women’s overall experiences under colonialism and slavery as well as these women’s particular targeted cases of silencing. The idea here is that these men participate in this silencing by being abhorrent towards their female counterparts.

Besides her venture into appropriating the accounts of various French men, Djébar does not impart any Algerian men’s point of views on Algerian women’s plight in her narrative. Instead, she allows the women to personally glean an understanding of their

situation. At times when women's agency and autonomy fail to attain recognition, Djébar opts for an independent and active grasp of one's own history. Every silencing we see in *Fantasia* is perceived as such by the woman herself. It follows that Spivak referred to such a situation in her several theorizations, mainly that of the subaltern woman. In them, the subaltern woman is spatially and socio-culturally dismissed due to her space being occupied by both her male counterparts and foreign violators.

Djébar demonstrates the above in a chapter where the narrator yearns to be her brother's helper and companion in his activist endeavors, but is rather shown grieving over him not being her "friend nor ally when [she] needed him" (*Fantasia* 80). She has witnessed several pivotal events in her life, and when she met her brother again, she realized how these events had gone unnoticed by him. The narrator feels a certain amount of disregard towards her lived hardships from her brother. She identifies this as she calls him a "friend who never joined [her] in [her] labyrinth" (*Fantasia* 81). The choice of words influences the comprehension of the reasons behind her frustration. The description of her sufferings as a labyrinth, or maze, suggests that she is yet to escape those impactful events in her life. The dispassion her brother walks back into her life with is a clear silencing instance. He offers no empathy and only tries to communicate on the level of cultural heritage. To him, his sister is naught but an assuring reminder of his Arabo-Berber identity marker. The narrator accepts this small allocated space to her as it brings her fond memories too. This could further be viewed as another instance of silencing, specifically, having to be assigned space from which you are allowed to have a voice within. Djébar underlines the siblings' position as strangers to signal the further wreckage of Algerian families by colonialist and patriarchal ideas.

Morrison, on the other hand, writes the direct perspective of black men on black women's experiences in *Beloved*, which is unsurprisingly silencing as well. Certainly, once Paul D and Sethe meet again and have intercourse, he notices the scars on her back. His

initial thoughts on them are that they are hideous. He even calls them, “a revolting clump of scars” (*Beloved* 25), implying his disinterest in the pain behind them. He is unable to see the tree that another white woman, Amy Denver, was able to see. This could be understood in two different ways. The first is that a white person is going to romanticize the pain of a black person, which means that Amy had seen beauty in Sethe’s painful past, while the second is that Paul D is undeceived by the harsh oppressions Sethe has gone through and can recognize the revolting nature of them without trying to beautify them. In either case, Paul D fails to exhibit empathy and a sense of community with his brash descriptions. Sethe recalls what Baby Suggs had always told her, “a man was nothing but a man... They encouraged you to put some of you weight in their hands and as soon as you felt how light and lovely that was, they studied your scars and tribulations” (*Beloved* 26), which is reminiscent of schoolteacher studying the slaves in Sweet Home, or learning that Halle, Sethe’s husband, had watched her be sexually assaulted, stood by and did nothing about it. Paul D’s disinterest is furthermore explored when he asks Sethe to get pregnant. After what she had experienced, Paul D asking her to reacquaint herself with her strained motherhood is traumatic and insensitive on his part. On top of that, his reaction to her decision to commit infanticide is admonishing, reprimanding and comparable with the abusers, and that is evident when he expresses, “you got two feet, not four” (*Beloved* 194). Sethe is not allowed to forget and live like Paul D. Even though his trauma is also valid, it is his own personal torture that lives within him, unlike with Sethe, who is forced to remember or “rememory” (*Beloved* 254). Her anatomy is made to work against her and a person like Paul D would never understand her trials and tribulations. He even leaves after learning of what she did, showing no solidarity and knowing that he himself did atrocious things to survive. On the contrary, Stamp Paid, who was judgmental of Sethe’s decision and engaged in the alienation of her and her daughter Denver from the rest, demonstrates a deep understanding of her situation by arguing with

Ella that, “she was trying to out-hurt the hurter” (*Beloved* 276). In fact, Stamp Paid had been in a position before where his wife was also violated, so he commiserates with the feeble necessity of reclaiming one’s identities. Stamp Paid, in this case, serves as Morrison’s effort to present a supportive male counterpart in contrast to Paul D’s apathetic disposition.

Continuing along these lines, Djébar also guarantees the portrayal of the manner in which Algerian men play an active role in demeaning their fellow countrywomen. Djébar tells us about Badra, or the Bride-to-be of Mazuna, a young woman who is humiliated and terrorized by the band of Chérif Bou Maza<sup>32</sup> because of her father’s position and decisions. Her father was Caid Ben Kadrouma, a Kurghuli<sup>33</sup> governor who held no loyalty to France or the resistance. He agreed to marry his daughter to Si M’hamed Agha’s son, who was in conflict with Bou Maza. During the wedding ceremony, Boumaza’s men attack by kidnapping and dragging the daughter in front of the rest of the captives to humiliate. Hiddleston asserts that Djébar often compares “Algeria to the bride that [awaits] her fate on her husband’s hands” (*Out of Algeria* 73), and in this case, Badra, the bride-never-to-be, becomes Algeria, a space of endless conflict and turmoil aggravated by the indifference of Algerian men. Men surround and reduce Badra to collateral damage. She is stripped almost naked of her clothes and jewelry as an act of asserting dominance. She emerges as the perfect scapegoat for her father’s decisions and the embodiment of gender-based violence.

In like manner, Morrison unveils a glimpse of Stamp Paid’s life. It appears that he had a wife with the name of Vashti. She was subjected to sexual assault by their white master every night. Stamp Paid almost admits to Paul D the detestation he grew to feel towards her over time. He even fantasized about breaking her neck to end this humiliation. Although he tried to notify the master’s wife in hopes of ending these nightly visits, they continued to

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<sup>32</sup> A resistance leader during the French colonialism of Algeria between 1845-1847

<sup>33</sup> A Kurghuli is the label given to those born of a Turkish father and an Algerian mother.

happen till Stamp Paid decided to run away. His misguided anger and guilt lead him to be upset with his wife instead of the abuser. He resorted to antagonizing her and then fleeing. He pays his guilt off by helping black slaves escape, but his guilt and the eternal silencing he reinforced on her will accompany him for a while.

Undoubtedly, both authors perceive male counterparts as one of the main contributors to Algerian and African American women's silencing. Djébar tends to display the moments of being silenced felt by Algerian women. It is to be noted, however, that the silencing Djébar informs us about is not strictly monotonous. There proves to be a whisper of a voice in the silence she represents with the subtlety of utilizing only female perspectives. In such an instance, the author's priorities manifest as a mission of mixing the spaces of silence with voices. Contrary to Djébar, Morrison strives to acknowledge the subjectivity of both male and female slaves. It is her agenda to have them be able to speak even if one of them is being offensive. With that, she defines the exact spaces of silencing narrated by the actual perpetrators. In sum, both Algerian and African American women find themselves imprisoned in a space where they may speak but are unheard because men's judgment, abandonment and disregard also prevail.

### **3.3 Her/story in *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* and *Beloved*: A Congruous Dance between Silences and Voices**

Within Assia Djébar's and Toni Morrison's works, voices are amplified by silence. As postcolonial feminist writers, the silences and silencing they write about foreground their attempts at showing voice and agency. The recording of such dichotomy imitates a version of history, known as her/story, that conveys all possible, usually erased perspectives. Djébar and Morrison write a her/story packed with silence, silencing, voice, agency and resistance with the purpose of subverting grand narratives and introducing the competencies that the subaltern had managed to cultivate over the years.

In this regard, both authors assure the negotiation of history in their novels. They tackle the re-insertion of lost history in the form of her/story through different techniques while distributing events and characters in accordance with their contexts. In *Fantasia*, Djébar accesses an intimate and a collective her/story through chronicling her autobiography, re-writing French figures' accounts and documenting Algerian women's wartime testimonies. While in *Beloved*, Morrison retells the real-life story of Margaret Garner, building a feminist take on neo-slave narratives and using magical realism to demonstrate the materialization of an unrecognized her/story in the text.

Before delving into the intricacies of both authors' approach to writing her/story in their novels, it is important to stress how they dissect and question the past through memory. The latter helps better the reconstruction of her/story and naturally contests grand narratives allocating subjectivity to the subaltern, who, besides realizing his new agent position stemming from validated memories, should now be able to interpret these memories as he sees fit (Hall qtd. in Xu 102). Lionnet argues that women "need to find their past, to trace lineages that will empower them to live the present, to rediscover the histories occluded by History" (25-26). Indeed, once the past is retold, the subaltern's identity becomes discernible in its complex glory, which further contrasts with the simple unified identity forced upon the subaltern by their oppressors. Even Bhabha related identity to memories, in *The Location of Culture*, reasoning that a disjointed past is put together in order for one to better understand their identity and its formation. When it comes to women, authors typically provide a range of memories in their narratives wherein resistance is presented in the form of "individual agents" within a "collective scheme" (Ben Salem 73), and thus achieving a her/story characterized by the contribution of memories to women's identity formation, self-fulfillment and management of trauma, which are usually severely deformed by women's omission from history (Ben Salem).

In *Fantasia*, Djébar speaks and creates a platform for other Algerian women to speak as well. She occupies her narrative with every possible path of destabilization of hegemonic truths as she “sets out to situate her female characters in relation to history” (Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria* 72). She rewrites the invasion of Algeria, appropriating detached French chroniclers’ accounts. She also narrates her personal and intimate history along with different Algerian women’s testimonies. Moving from the smallest unit, her, to the collective one, Algerian women, to eventually a venture into dismantling colonial views.

Since colonial history is exclusionary and monotonous (Silmi 70), Djébar works on decentering French records by displacing the center and the margin. French chroniclers’ accounts emerge as palimpsests for Djébar. With her imaginative power, she unravels the hidden traces of Algerians, especially women in these supposedly authentic archival materials (Bartiza and Zrizi 24). The dead can be seen as a negative space, and an absence that goes unnoticed, unaccounted for, and is, basically, easily forgotten. However, the dead are still considered witnesses present in Djébar’s narrative. They are manifested in the representation of oppression and death.

Djébar opens the several aloof and ice-toned perspectives of French chroniclers, in the form of official correspondence, private diaries and soldiers’ letters, to her readers. In them, the readers are able to recognize dead Algerian women and bear witness to their return to history. The descriptions some of them use in some of the scenes are shocking. They do not seem to perceive certain actions and events as vicious, but more of a necessary move for the advancement of their country and an honorable duty of following commands. This inscribes an erroneous colonial imagination of history. Particularly in Aimable Mattarer<sup>34</sup>’s perspective, there exists objectivity towards the invasion of Algerian lands that is soon

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<sup>34</sup> The first officier of the ville of Marseille

dissipated once Algeria is likened to a woman. This is problematic, and is shown by the author as so, because it implies that Algeria and women are weak and conquerable. Djebbar counters this by appearing in the midst of the text, drawing attention to her rewriting efforts and rejecting the absence imposed on her and her countrywomen by colonial hegemonic records. In addition to that, she introduces snippets of Algerian women's whereabouts during the invasion. Even she has wondered what they would have been doing, so she infers from her cultural context, presenting their possible whereabouts as if subtly answering Matterer's demeaning remarks, showing that the woman, who is not Algeria, has been going about her life peacefully before her space got occupied by foreign imposing powers.

In another rewriting effort and in one of the most significant sequences of the novel, the chapter "Women, Children, Oxen Dying in Caves", Djebbar relates the asphyxiation of several resisting tribes, mainly the Berber tribe of Ouled Riah, at the command of French generals. The author utilizes official correspondences of General Pélissier, Baron Barchou, and letters of lesser-known figures such as a doctor, a Spanish officer and an unknown soldier. The violence described in these chapters as a "cannibalistic scene" (*Fantasia* 70) is inconceivable. While threading through this disturbing piece of history, Djebbar manages to find inconsistencies in Pélissier's report as well as conscience-stricken reactions of some soldiers who were unable to fathom the violence and savagery they had to witness. Djebbar listens for the muffled cries of the dead in their troubled letters, and thanks to them, she was able to find other caves where other suffocating operations occurred but were not recorded. Through them, Djebbar chases memories "opening a register of the dead" (*Fantasia* 78). In his report, Pélissier had shown remorse, prompting Djebbar to dig deeper into the unseen. She had realized that that remorse comes from him realizing that he had helped silence a group of people, which made him sympathize with these people, as he too felt silenced by this burden. In this regard, a historiography that portrays Algerian women as defiant subjects

who protest their silencing by smearing mud, blood and excrement on their faces, and not recognizing the enemy's existence was required. Djébar extends Algerian women's voices by offering the following equivocal scene described by Baron Barchou and appropriated by her:

'Arab tribes are always accompanied by great numbers of women who had shown the greatest zeal in mutilating their victims. One of these women lay dead beside the corpse of a French soldier whose heart she had torn out! Another had been fleeing with a child in her arms when a shot wounded her; she seized a stone and crushed the infant's head, to prevent it falling alive into our hands; the soldiers finished her off with their bayonets.'

Thus these two Algerian women - the one in whom rigor mortis was already setting in, still holding in her bloody hands the heart of a dead Frenchman; the second, in a fit of desperate courage, splitting open the brain of her child, like a pomegranate in spring, before dying with her mind at peace - these two heroines enter into recent history.

I scrupulously record the image: two warrior women glimpsed from the back or from the side, in the midst of the tumult, by the keen eye of the ADC<sup>35</sup>.  
(*Fantasia* 18-19)

In the cold eyes of Barchou, Algerian women are a problematic existence. They relish in savagery, and so they should be eliminated, both physically and historically. Djébar places the scene describing such savagery right before her own interjection. She rewrites Barchou's descriptions, negating the heroism of the colonial text by replacing the orientalist discourse with a subversive one. Instead of a woman being a zealous mutilator of French men's bodies,

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<sup>35</sup> Aide-de-Camp or a Camp assistant to a high-ranking military commander.

she becomes an Algerian woman defending herself against invaders. Djébar uses the term “rigor mortis” while describing her body to show that this woman had died and gone through physical changes, humanizing her beyond the savagery she had been allocated. In addition, instead of a woman who is described as a feral child-murdering beast, she becomes a protector and a seeker of peace for herself and her child. Djébar then re-emphasizes all of the above by identifying these as heroines and warriors, entities inextricably marked within history. To her, decentralizing the colonizer and his accounts is the morally right thing to do as it allows her and her people to better mourn their erasure. In such a case, Algerian women’s voices are voices of defense and mourning and being able to write about them.

When Eugene Fromentin<sup>36</sup> “picks up out of the dust the severed hand of an anonymous Algerian woman,” then, “...throws it down again in his path” (*Fantasia* 226), Djébar retaliates by informing her readers that she will recollect this hand, known to her as a living hand, and use it as a guide in her memory and voice recuperation journey. This hand reconnecting with the *qalam* or pen will be able to speak the dead and the past into the present, editing in its way history as her/story. This is further manifested in Djébar’s transcription of Algerian women’s testimonies from their time during the Algerian War of Independence. She reminisces, “I enter the village houses where the muffled women retell their stories of cavalcades of a more recent past” (*Fantasia* 226). The fact that certain women have been so impactful to the recent past and yet remain anonymous or muffled is incentive enough for Djébar.

Subsequently, Djébar writes the third part of *Fantasia*, called “Voices from the Past”, packed with chapters entitled voices, murmurs, whispers...etc. In this part of the novel, she

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<sup>36</sup> A French painter and writer

pinpoints exactly where more instances of Algerian women's voices are to be expected in case the ones from the earlier parts go unnoticed.

Djebar introduces the readers to a Cherifa who narrates her own eventful history. Since her brothers are part of the liberating efforts hiding in the mountains, she joins them, working as a nurse and a cook. Her time in those mountains is described as a rewarding segment of her life when she was needed by those around her, and thus existed as an agent in her life. However, it is also described as a tumultuous time during which she had to be always on the run, at least until she was captured by French soldiers, imprisoned, interrogated and tortured:

'What's a young girl like you doing here, away from your parents?'

'The maquisards are my brothers and they're like parents to me too!'

Then, without waiting for them to ask me any more questions, I added, 'I don't recognize France! I've been brought up according to the Arab word! The "Brothers" are my brothers!'

[...]

One of the officers lost his temper and hit me twice across the face.

Then they brought a tommy-gun.

'Confess! Tell us what we want to know or we'll shoot!' 'Shoot!'

I said. 'It makes no difference to me! I'm a girl, I'm not a grown woman, but I'll leave men behind me! ... Each one of them will kill a hundred of yours! Kill me!'

They brought a whip. They beat me. They switched on the electricity for their machines. They tortured me.

'I don't recognize you!'

I didn't feel any fear: God made these Frenchmen seem like shadows in front of my eyes! And it was true, I would have preferred to die! (*Fantasia* 134-135)

Cherifa perseveres, showcasing a strong sense of resilience. She resists torture with the help of her strong faith and trust in her compatriots' mission. Throughout the whole interaction, Cherifa, through the personal pronoun "I", is present, exclaiming how little she thinks of the colonizer, and dismissing France's colonial rule over her. She ensures the colonizer that her national, religious and cultural identities are unbreakable and beyond any physical torture. She was ready to die for what she believed in.

Clearly, Cherifa is an enigmatic feature of Djébar's writing. She is seen as a historical record, a heroic figure and a personal writing quest for Djébar. The personal "I" that represents her is sometimes contrasted with a third-person narration where a thirteen-year-old version of her is laying her dead brother to rest by a stream. In such cases, Cherifa's name is written so clearly as if to reclaim the agency that faces the threat of being dimmed by the third-person perspective that is usually used to inscribe historical records. On other occasions, Djébar tells her readers that Cherifa herself is narrating her story. While doing so, she expresses a great desire to write Cherifa thoroughly doing her/story justice. Djébar refuses to be like Bosquet and the other French army generals who practiced writing Algerians off the records or in the form of casualties.

Djébar notably writes about her meeting with Cherifa. She is older, married and in poor health but her "voice embraces bygone days. Tracing fear, the defiance, the intoxication in that forgotten place" (*Fantasia* 141). Her words expose the suffering that ensued during the Algerian War of Independence; they set the forgotten history and herself free. Ben Salem

dubs it as the “new politics of remembering” wherein “oral testimony represents the vehicle through which memory operates outside and beyond the norms of writing” (71). To Djébar, one’s voice is not just a recounting instrument but rather an excavating tool. While traveling across the country, she uses these women’s voices to help guide her. Despite the daunting quality of the reality they share, it is their undisputable history.

On another note, *Fantasia* also houses the personal and intimate history of Djébar. This has consequently linked the work to labels such as semi-biography and autobiography. Indeed, the chapters of her alter ego narrator are adorned with the first person pronoun “I” awakening her consciousness in the text (J. Butler 149) and warranting her access to revisionist history and the potential to speak “from all positions” (J. Butler 150) as well as a connection to postcolonial gendered subaltern theory (Bartiza and Zrizi 24). Therefore, her chapters are not to be seen as separate stories but as the smallest unit of Algerian women’s collective history.

Djébar ignores the manner in which patriarchal norms tend to place women in anonymous positions (Loudiyi 211) by relishing in the liberation she feels from sending and receiving love letters or pursuing a formal education. And although she finds herself hovering in between her cultural, religious and linguistic heritage and her assimilated self, she tends to float back to her ancestors whose bodies are “bereft of voices” (*Fantasia* 156). While reading through her intimate history we learn of her relation to Lila Zohra who happens to be her grandmother’s sister, leading to the belief that even though Djébar’s autobiography maybe mixed with fiction, it is not only a narrative and discursive revision, but also a record of accusations against the wrongdoings of the colonial rule.

Between Assia Djébar’s past and Algeria’s obscure history, a dialogue is fostered where the intimate and the cultural are revived. Djébar uses her writing ability to be a defiant

instigator and a committed witness (Sadiqi, Nowaira and El Kholy 202) combining Algerian women's standpoint with historical records, her "contributions to the historiography project can be regarded as an acute critique of written history and hegemonic discourses that have rendered women's histories forbidden, forgotten and irrelevant" (Bartiza and Zrizi 24). These women face a lack of recognition for their various roles, even though they bolster Algerian history. Hence, as mentioned above, Djebbar is the smallest unit in this chain of her/story. From the documentation of the invasion to the oral accounts of the independence war to the common thread that is her. In a way, she, along with other contemporary Algerian women, stand as evidence of the existence of her/story. Indeed, if it is to be preserved on anyone's body, then it would be them.

By the same token, after leaving her job and experiencing freedom for the first time in a while, Toni Morrison opted to project this sentiment while writing her book *Beloved*. The newly found freedom of Morrison prompted her to reflect on how such a state/sentiment is difficult to achieve for women, particularly black slave women. In this regard, Morrison, after coming across a newspaper clipping of a runaway slave with the name of Margaret Garner, who "was arrested for killing one of her children (and trying to kill the others) rather than let them be returned to the owner's plantation" (Morrison, *Beloved* xi), attempts to write about black women, their history with oppression and the limits of their freedom. As a writer, Margaret Garner's story provides a foundation for the writing of a retelling. In it, she is able to flesh out a pliant literary narrative, or what she describes as a process where she "would invent her thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's 'place'" (*Fantasia* xi).

In spite of Morrison's implied disinterest in the hegemonic factual quality of history, her narrative is imbued with recovered details of African American women's history

(Kovács 161). Morrison is rather interested in reconstructing a past that uncovers, acknowledges and validates every aspect of African Americans' history, rendering their interaction with their present and future not as heavily impacted by that unresolved past as it usually is (Xu 101). As a descendant of such violent history, she writes a her/story that encircles various personal histories to also break the cycle of such brutality being carried out generationally.

*Beloved* as a revised history, developed from the tragic story of Margaret Garner. A pregnant Margaret Garner, often called "Peggy", escaped, along with her husband and three children, from her owner Archibald K. Gaines in January 1856 from Kentucky to Cincinnati by crossing the Ohio River. While hiding in the house of Margaret's uncle, awaiting their next safer escape via the Underground Railroad, slave catchers find them. After Margaret's husband shoots one officer and wounds him, he is tackled and overpowered. This causes Margaret to take an impulsive decision. She seizes a knife, wounding all her children in preparation for killing them and killing herself. She succeeds in finalizing only the killing of her two-year-old daughter, named Mary, before she is subdued (Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives* 39).

The thought of her children going back to slavery to be dehumanized and abused made Margaret realize that the mercy that could come from death would never be offered under slavery. Ironically, one of the darkest moments in her life becomes a position of agency as well. It is indeed unconventional and might appear as a self-sabotaging effort; however, it could also be seen as her wielding a prominent part of her identity against her subaltern position. In this case, Margaret's actions are an indication of a rebellion against silencing constraints as much as they are of empathy and dedication to her children.

Morrison mimics that outcome in her narrative as well. Sethe's violent response does not come randomly. The love she has for her children and her fierce and bold disposition displace her from the animal-like status schoolteacher had placed her in. She, like her archetype, achieves agency through a strong reaction to abuse. Not only that, but through her ability to remember grants her the ability to interpret events and their resulting consequences in her past, thus allowing her to chronicle her own her/story.

In addition to the above, Morrison envisions the life Sethe's dead daughter, named Beloved, might have experienced alive. In this resurrecting effort, Beloved has a body that permits her enough mobility to make Sethe and the rest of the community remember the past.

Accordingly, the more one reads, the more it becomes evident that Morrison is using Beloved, the character, as a manifestation of the lost her/story. Beloved, who is the materialization of the child Sethe murdered years ago, returns to Sethe's life demanding attention. There are instances of Beloved wanting to be touched and called by her name, seeking to be acknowledged. She has always been in the background of Sethe's life as a ghost haunting 124. To accomplish that, Morrison utilizes magical realism. It provides her with the flexibility to reconstruct black women's her/story. This flexibility is best demonstrated in the employment and retelling of Margaret Garner's real-life story. Dhakal confirms all of the above, and adds that the novel *Beloved*:

Stands for the historical past as a living presence. In a nutshell, the writer gives the past a different reading that represents ... a multi-leveled subjectivity from the time slavery. She does this by making use of the elements of fantastic genre and by rearticulating the concept of African American experience around the diversity of its historical forms. (42-43)

In this quote, the living presence is clearly Beloved. She is history personified. As she moves between the other characters in her omnipresent form, she becomes the opposite of silence. Beloved is the voice of appropriation for the obscured spatial and narrative landscapes of African Americans in history.

With that being said, Beloved's approach of Sethe could be seen as aggressive, seeing that she forces long forgotten memories out of her mother's abused psyche. This aggressiveness is shown from her perspective to be nothing but adoration for and resentment towards Sethe. As a matter of fact, Beloved's point of view is written as plural, convoluted and convulsive. In it, various testimonies of Africans being transported during the Middle Passage are recorded in a first-person account. It consists of phrases and half-sentences with unclear semantics and no punctuation marks. The pairing of broken English with a first-person narration explains that even without the mastery of language, "the 'I' assumes the totality of language" (J. Butler 149) and that, subsequently, these events are not going to disappear. In such a case, Beloved's role extends beyond ensuring that Sethe does not forget her daughter, to making certain that the black community and the rest of the world do not forget about her/story. Krumholz further explains Beloved's position in the following:

Beloved is both the pain and the Cure. As an embodiment of the repressed past, she acts as an unconscious imp, stealing away the volition of the characters, and as a cycle analytic urge, she pries open suppressed memories and emotions. In a sense she is like an analyst, the object of transference and cathexis<sup>37</sup> (emotional attachment of people that) that draws out the past, while at the same time she is the past. Countering traumatic repression, she

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<sup>37</sup> "Investment of mental or emotional energy in a person, object, or idea" retrieved from Merriam-Webster

makes the characters accept their past, their squelched memories, and their own hearts, as beloved. (114)

Beloved represents the duality of being the hurt and its remedy; the silence and the voice, a duality that should characterize history. On the one hand, she extorts buried memories while on the other, she offers a detailed and interpretive view of this buried past. Krumholz comes to the conclusion that Beloved is indeed the past, pointing out that the vicissitudes of history must be thoroughly embraced for a better recording of history.

Additionally, Morrison uses Beloved as a voiced her/story that necessitates confrontation for its survival. For the author, her/story extends beyond haunting the present to needing to be acknowledged too. For Morrison, in order to regain agency, black women's personal and collective painful history must be faced and defied. Morrison emphasizes confrontation between Beloved and the rest of the women as a means of challenging the established narrative, braving one's oppressions and fears while celebrating the small victories along the way. Beloved forces Sethe to remember all the great moments she shared with her children from her inferior position. She breastfed her children and wanted to mother them when she herself was not mothered. Through this reunification with Beloved, she reconnects with her motherhood. Hence, Beloved's and Sethe's confrontation becomes an important part of the healing of her/story, otherwise, one's suffering would forever be closely associated with ruin and damage seeping into the next generations.

At the same time, this position of Beloved calls attention to the various reactions she incites from different people. In that sense, Beloved is welcomed only by Sethe and Denver. The latter is Sethe's youngest daughter and her only remaining companion in 124, a dynamic and positive character who is eloquent and curious. Denver is characterized by her

willingness to listen to the stories her grandmother used to tell her. She is open to learning and the only one brave enough to leave 124 to ask for help. Morrison recounts:

Denver had taught herself to take pride in condemnation Negroes heaped on them; the assumption that the haunting was done by an evil thing looking for more. None of them knew the downright pleasure of enchantment, of not suspecting but *knowing* the things behind things. Her brothers had known, but it scared them; Grandma Baby knew, saddened her. None could appreciate the safety of ghost company. Even Seth didn't love it. She just took it for granted-- like a sudden change in the weather. (*Beloved* 45)

Denver, in this light, is not afraid of the ghost of her/story, *Beloved*. She welcomes her eagerness to learn and be surrounded by culture, history and family. Denver is employed by Morrison as a clear and distinguishable subjective voice that already possesses a semblance of agency and could eventually be louder in favor of her community's cause and history. After the exorcism of *Beloved*, Denver prevails, carrying out the preservation of her/story and retrieval of identities by telling and retelling stories. In this light, Denver can also be likened to Morrison herself, open to learning and narrating. She becomes what Rushdy declares as, "the daughter of history" (Rushdy, "Daughters Signifyin(g) History" 41).

In essence, Morrison guarantees the remembering of the past of slavery by writing this neo-slave narrative (Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives* 3) where a subaltern's memory regulates past events through an unmistakable first-person voice (Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives* 3). Morrison, in this regard, writes one entity that carries memory, one that carries the past and questions the present and one that can, potentially, carry the future. In this narrative, Morrison writes an homage-like story to the "sixty million and more" (*Beloved* n.p.); a story that should never be "pass[ed] on" (*Beloved* 323).

On that account, it could be observed that Djébar's and Morrison's approach to writing silence, voices and their relation to subalternity and her/story is distinct from one another. While Djébar takes an almost difficult to read undertaking of Algerian women's experiences, Morrison's work is a more accessible and implied with its tackling of African American women's experiences. Djébar utilizes every tool available to her from rewriting historical records to collecting testimonies, basically, showing her readers that she has attempted a corrective historiography, and how arduous and difficult of a task it is (Kershaw 53). Likewise, Morrison employs various materials from consulting article clippings to extensively researching the Middle Passage. Unlike in *Fantasia*, in *Beloved*, these materials and research efforts are implicitly interwoven within the text.

As one writes a neo-slave narrative while the other a semi-biography, both find themselves crossing into the realm of historiographic metafiction by questioning history and its different time periods, alluding to historical and literary texts and mixing narrative viewpoints. This is done in order to highlight the unreliability of history when it comes to women, stressing once again the need for their presence in their histories. *Fantasia* and *Beloved* are narratives that display diversity, irony and women's amplified voices, with an end goal of recording a new history where the past of escaping slavery or engaging in a war of liberation against the colonizer is a foundation for a present and a future of agency.

Moreover, as one continues reading *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, some characters start to blend with the authors. Since Djébar and Morrison share the same goal of passing a set of stories that must not be forgotten to their readers, their novels start to emit a certain level of passion that identifies them as descendants of the various women who fought for their freedom. Morrison particularly writes a main character, Sethe, who is the mother of two histories, a history that came for retribution (*Beloved*) and a history that is going to be written (*Denver*). Seen this way, Morrison and Denver are similar to one another in the same way

Djebar and her narrator alter ego are. Denver is the next generation's hope. She is going to learn and pass down the forgotten history, which is going to reach distant generations like Morrison.

Even though Djebar's and Morrison's approaches appear different, thematically, they are pursuing the same border-transcending concerns. In *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, there is silence within the voices, and there are voices within the silence. There is agency and a variety of identities that are conclusive to what makes a person themselves. Consequently, it could be said that there is a collective and an individual her/story that, in this case of comparison, makes Algerian and African American women similar but not an identical blended unit.

Since instances of voicing, resistance and agency are not limited to what has been mentioned above, in the next section, more instances of subversion and its sites are to be discussed in more detail.

### **3.3.1 Defying Gender Roles: Voices Restored**

An alternative approach to preserving her/story is presented by Djebar and Morrison in the form of challenging gender roles. In a context where patriarchy, imperialism, racism and more reside, women are expected to follow a set of expectations drawn out for them, that is, to be feminine, nurturing and intimidated. Djebar and Morrison write the exact positions from which Algerian and African American women challenge the norms by having a voice. As indicated by Mori, "Morrison, acutely aware of the place historically assigned to black women [...], refuses to be influenced by stereotypes but rather attempts to depict her female characters as subjects that emerge from an oppressed situation and who seek survival" (29). This statement stresses the already known notion of black women's historical position, the one where they are exploited and written off history because of their race,

gender, class...etc. Moreover, Mori emphasizes that African American authors are no strangers to such notions, which is why they, Morrison in this case, would rather write the subversion of that position. The idea conveyed here is to be able to move from a place of silence to a place with voice and agency by documenting the actions taken to achieve it. Silmi shares the same opinion when it comes to Djébar's writings. She even goes as far as to declare that, "Djébar's texts present no binary opposition between silence and voice; in the continuous search for the voices of colonized women, voice and silence are inextricably intertwined" (58). In effect, there is no voice to be heard without silence. Therefore, in the matter of representing subaltern Algerian and African American women, their exclusion from and contribution to the discourse is thoroughly recorded on the basis that such empowering and disempowering positions are identifiably marked on their bodies and thus ineradicable like their her/story.

### **3.3.2 Innate Defiance and Self-preservation**

The oppression that invaded Algerian and African American women's lives did not prevail without and before coming face to face with an innate defiance that erodes the usual rules of conduct. In the context of *Fantasia*, patriarchal and imperialist customs victimize women and obscure their positions; however, before this stage is arrived at, Djébar takes care to unearth a certain degree of inherent defiance that inhabits Algerian women.

Djébar leans towards representing the smaller details that establish an effective and buildable resistance. These details house both the narrator's personal history as well as other women characters' confrontation with the colonial rule. When it comes to grappling with patriarchy and its grasp of Algerian women, Djébar presents a younger version of the narrator who recalls wandering in the dusty lanes when she was not supposed to. This shows her love for freedom and connecting with nature. It also highlights her ventures as a rebellious act against gender constructs nurtured by patriarchal ideation. Moreover, she

recalls how her mother felt victorious among her peers when she received a postcard addressed to her by name from her husband. For a moment, her mother felt scared of what this event might lead to. This sentiment was soon dispelled once she felt the joy of pride, subverting the image of an Algerian woman who neither displayed nor properly felt her feelings. Furthermore, the author presents how some Algerian women in the harem<sup>38</sup> are dismayed at any association with the colonizer, especially when they learn that the narrator's mother is now friends with a French policeman's wife. Djébar writes their friendship in a way that enables her to demonstrate that acquainting oneself with the opposite side does not automatically entail abandoning one's culture and belonging. From a different perspective, it could be seen as Djébar's efforts at writing an Algerian woman who defies the indoctrination, grasping patriarchal women and scaring them into avoiding the unknown.

In the case of Algerian women being defiant towards the French colonial rule, Djébar reports on these women's instinctive opposition to it; mainly, their intuitive self-preserving reaction against the enemy. Within this context, Djébar depicts that:

Algerian women smear their faces with mud and excrement when they are paraded in front of the conqueror [...] this is not merely to protect themselves from the enemy, but also from the Christian, who is not just the conqueror, but also alien and taboo! They use the only mask at their disposal; they would use their own blood in the need arose...

Even when the native seems submissive, he is not vanquished. Does not raise his eyes to gaze on his vanquisher. Does not 'recognize' him. Does not name him. What is a victory if it is not named? (*Fantasia* 56)

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<sup>38</sup> "A secluded house or part of a house allotted to women in some Muslim households", retrieved from Marriam-Webster

Alternatively put, Algerian women have the ability to react quickly against imminent threatening danger, which Djébar hints at being physical and cultural/religious. In this passage, she underpins the position from which imperialistic powers lose their hold on their supposed subjects.

Likewise, Morrison presents us with the obliviousness of young slave women to the atrocities enslavement has in store for them. A young Sethe came to Sweet Home “already iron-eyed” (*Beloved* 12). She was, at the time, characterized by being brave and courageous in the face of challenging conditions. She was able to witness active abuse all around as a child and not absorb the fear it manifests in oneself. She even watched her mother be hanged, and still continued to grow as strong young lady who chose her husband and sewed her own wedding dress. Indeed, Sethe is perceived as a pillar-like woman by Paul D and as a “quiet, queenly woman” (*Beloved* 14) by Denver, further evidencing Sethe’s apparent natural female agency, which grants her the capacity to decide whether to act or not on her own behalf (Banaj 2). Although Sethe’s iron was later on “punched out” (*Beloved* 11) of her due to several violations, it counts as a small victory for young oblivious Sethe, and an encouraging moment later on in Sethe’s memory of her past.

In sum, both authors treat the subject of women being naturally defiant against the powers that seek to restrict them. Djébar explains how women rebel against patriarchal men and women as well as colonial rule, the same way that Morrison shows young Sethe’s ability to stand up against the effects of slavery. This, to a certain degree, puts into perspective the idea of having subalternity as part of the subaltern’s identity markers. This redirects the idea of the subaltern position as merely a position that the subaltern moves in and out of, making this position unstable, and thus the subaltern not a unit, not forever silenced and most importantly, constantly resisting.

### **3.3.3 Women Standing for/with one Another: Brief Encounters and Profound Bonds**

Another point to consider is the exploration of the relations that intertwine women with other women. Instead of the common stereotype of women harboring envious feelings towards one another, Djebbar and Morrison venture into the realm of comradeship, sometimes even friendship between women. This portrayal serves as a small act of resistance against the forces that oblige women to demonize one another. It is in these cases where women “nurtur[ing] each other is not pathological but redemptive...it is this real connection”, Lorde declares, that, “is so feared by a patriarchal world” (111 qtd. Rocca 133).

Djebbar takes on the mission of writing an Algerian woman who is united, supportive and cooperative despite her living circumstances. In the chapter entitled “Murmurs”, she presents the journey of an elderly woman (later on identified as Lla Zohra) after she flees from her house. This woman is known to be involved with the freedom fighters. She used to feed and shelter them in her house, which marked her in the eyes of the French as a traitorous rebel. All what this woman did was dedicate herself and means to a cause she believed in only to find herself fleeing from her house after French soldiers burned it and confiscated her cattle. From this point forward, Djebbar uncovers the manner in which some Algerian women protected their countrywomen. While escaping, Lla Zohra finds refuge in her niece’s, Jennet’s, house. Jennet, while hiding her aunt in her house, stands dutifully on guard, pretending to be doing her chores, and looking out for any threat (French soldiers) that might appear at any moment. During all of this, she starts contemplating her life, specifically her marital situation. Even though her husband had been gone for a year now, after being arrested by French soldiers, she bravely stands at her doors, guarding them. As she sits in front of her door, she considers not having a husband or children, which suggests that she has no fear of what is to come to her from hiding a rebel; she only fears what is to be made

of her aunt or any person foolish enough to tell on them. Djebbar details, “she must keep watch, she must keep guard, hour after hour, day after day. Until the fugitive's fears are allayed, till she regains her strength and can depart, veiled, protected, to face the terrors of the adventure ...” (*Fantasia* 152 ellipsis in the original). Jenet feels almost responsible for her aunt, and to that avail, she stands guard. She persists in this mission through prayers as she pounds herbs to mask the old woman’s groans. In the following quote, a description of this scene is provided:

The regular pounding of the pestle begins, crushing gloves of garlic, then fresh herbs. Despite its heavy beat Jenet can still hear the voice of the frightened Fugitive: ‘For three Days,’ she says to herself, ‘the poor creature had never stopped trembling; she's trying to keep off the ill winds that beset her’; and Jenet pounds with all her might, making the metal mortar ring...  
(*Fantasia* 152 ellipsis in the original)

In this, Jenet becomes a solace greater than just a sheltering house. She becomes someone who understands what needs to be done on a deeper level. Lila Zohra also displays great trust in her, contrary to the woman she had stayed with before, when she was running away with her daughter, and whom she did not trust easily. She recounts:

I came out. We were free. We started walking. Where could we go now, it was night! We walked and walked ... We found a *wali*<sup>39</sup>. We spent the night there, near the Saint's grave. We were ashamed to go and knock on people's doors. We stayed there until it was light. Only then did we knock at the lady's door, Sid Ahmed Tahar's daughter.

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<sup>39</sup> “(i) a saint; (ii) the saint's tomb, a sanctuary; (iii) a representative or 'prefect'” Retrieved from the glossary of *Fantasia*

'Where have you been, little mother?' she asked me.

'We've just arrived,' I replied.

I didn't want to tell her we'd spent the night in the open. I was afraid she'd laugh at us ... Because they do laugh! They laugh and laugh, those people that nothing happens to!

I didn't want to mention the fire. Perhaps they'd even be glad about it, those people who don't know what misfortune is! I told her again, 'We've been walking in the forest ... We've just arrived at your door!'

I must admit that she looked after us well. She made us some bread. We had as much to eat and drink as we needed. Then we left. We didn't stay the night with her. She didn't say anything and we just didn't stay. People don't like sheltering those, like ourselves, who bring 'France' behind them!

*(Fantasia 163)*

In this passage, Djébar does not hesitate to utilize Lila Zohra's story to reveal the price paid for supporting the freedom of one's country. In addition, she provides the spectrum that exists between women who offer a day's worth of help and expect you to be gone as soon as possible, fearing the retaliation of the colonizer, and those who would exert themselves while helping, believing strongly in the cause. This spectrum confirms the willingness of Algerian women to help each other.

Morrison, in comparison, explores the relationship that links black women with each other and with white women. First, with black women, Morrison depicts how certain female characters, who have undergone their own struggles, play an active role in helping other black women. Ella, for instance, takes the initiative to help other escapees coming from a background like hers. She and Stamp Paid built a system where one ferries the escapees

while the other helps them assimilate, find shelter, jobs...etc. Driven by their personal pain, they break through the dehumanization placed on them by their former slave owners.

Moreover, Morrison underlines the topic of postnatal care of new mothers. This is quite relevant as this adds substance to the black enslaved mother. It humanizes her and validates her resistance-motivated body. In this case, her anatomy, motherhood and recognition and care from other women become highly affirming for her female identity. Once Sethe is safe after her escape, Baby Suggs comes to help with the specific postnatal care as the most experienced mother in the community. The sequence is depicted by Morrison in the following:

She led Sethe to the keeping room and, by the light of spirit lamp, bathed her in sections, starting with her face. Then, while waiting for another pan of heated water, she said next to her and stitched gray cotton. Sethe dozed and woke to the washing of her hands and arms. After each bathing, Baby covered her with a quilt and put another pan on in the kitchen. Tearing sheets, stitching the gray cotton, she's supervised the woman in the bonnet who tended the baby and cried into her cooking. When Sethe's legs were done, Baby looked at her feet and wiped them lightly. She cleaned between Sethe's legs with two separate pans of hot water and then tied her stomach and vagina with sheets. Finally she attacked the unrecognizable feet. (*Beloved* 109)

Postnatal care for new mothers is a topic that most would avoid, and in the case of black enslaved mothers, it becomes a spurned issue. Morrison explicitly explains the meticulous process of washing women's bodies as survival of the mother was important to the survival of the child, and also because poor care led to the untimely perishing of many mothers. She also mentions the imagery of stitching gray cotton, which might suggest that with the help

of other women, black women can reconstruct and recover their identities. Indeed, through this, Morrison is seen “[glorifying] the concept of sisterhood along with motherhood” (Sengupta 207).

Second, with white women, Morrison portrays the partial trust that is shared between Amy Denver and Sethe. Sethe divulges to Amy that she is running away from enslavement. This portion of trust is presented from Sethe to Amy on the basis of their shared gender and low class. Amy is an indentured servant also running from her servitude seeking freedom, or velvet as she perceives it. Certainly, according to Quinn, “Both have been neglected and mistreated by white people, even though one woman is black and the other is white” (3). With that being said, Sethe does not tell Amy her real name because, after all, racially, they are still different. In that case, they do not belong to the same institution of oppression, and that is illustrated best through Amy’s constant use of derogatory terms towards Sethe.

In brief, both authors treat this topic with equal interest. They share the representation of women helping other women without risking their safety with Sid Ahmed Tahar's daughter in *Fantasia* and Ella in *Beloved*. These two characters are found to keep their support of other women brief, where they represent a transitional point in the lives of the women they shelter. On the other hand, they depict these other relations that are catered more towards their respective contexts. Djebbar, for instance, writes Jennet as a fearless woman ready to protect her runaway rebel aunt at any cost. Djebbar counters the brevity of those who are not willing to put themselves and their families at risk with writing Jennet. As for Morrison, postnatal care stands out as her unique way of adding agency to the stolen and muddled autonomy of African American women. However, Morrison introduces the issue of race between women as she writes the partial trust that exists between white and black women, leading to the belief that racial difference brings about a difference in women’s

possible friendships, especially since they are subjected to different oppressions resulting in them resisting from different positions.

### 3.3.4 The Significance of Calling Women by Their Names

Having a name has been known throughout history to mean having a discernible identity, agency and belonging (Cozma 748; Lyles-Scott 26). A name that represents one's person and culture means that they have not lost their origins and history. For this reason, in these postcolonial feminist narratives, both authors reconfirm the necessity for women to have a name to be called by.

Djebar and Morrison use names as indicators of independence, resistance and a witness to the disruption of stereotypes and domination. To have a name and to be called by it by others, publicly or privately, is the authors' approach to voicing women, that is, to ensure that women have names to be called by in order for them to be able to speak. In the cases of Baby Suggs and *Fantasia's* narrator's mother, both of their names are used in a way that resists their pre-determined dominated status in their respective contexts.

In *Fantasia*, the narrator's mother receives a letter addressed directly to her by name from her husband. Djebar narrates that, "my father had quite brazenly written his wife's name, in his own handwriting..." (*Fantasia* 37). This event astonishes the other women who had used verbal evasion most of their lives. They are extremely scandalized as they wonder how such a thing could happen. Undoubtedly, patriarchal repression under the guise of sanctity propels the traditional Algerian woman to question the occurrence of such unfamiliar incidents around her. The narrator then shares with the reader how much her mother loved this direct designation of her name by her husband, seeing as it was a definite social-traditions-transcending declaration of love between them and a liberating moment for her in front of her peers (Ivantcheva-Merjanska 62-63).

All the while, in *Beloved*, Morrison seeks to show her readers how even if enslaved women were deprived of their original names and given different ones, some were still able to preserve the names that they identified best with. Black enslaved women were stripped of their original names, christened and given and registered by Christian names, which further perpetuated their loss of identity and history. Certainly, it is shared with the reader that Baby Suggs was named Jenny Whitlow, a name given to her by white masters. It is written in her paperwork even though she had never been called by it. It is the name that Mr. Garner incessantly calls her by, even when she tells him over and over again that that was not the name she uses. It is implied that this relentlessness of Mr. Garner is pursued to further perpetuate her position as inferior, even if freed. He unsurprisingly exclaims that, “Mrs. Baby Suggs ain’t no name for a freed negro” (*Beloved* 167). However, as Lyles-Scott describes, Baby Suggs is “perhaps the most self-identified, self-aware, and self-possessed. In fact, Baby Suggs’s definitive ‘self’ is a direct result of her rejecting the name given to her by white patriarchy and accepting black patriarchy” (26). Baby Suggs proudly retains her husband’s name, Suggs, and the pet name he gave her, Baby, as a way of being part of her black community and of being a freewoman.

While in the setting of *Beloved*, Baby Suggs’ name or name calling is not as prominent or noticed by the other characters, in other words, no one questions it besides Mr. Garner, in *Fantasia*, it becomes a scandal which encourages the narrator to allocate a whole chapter to this incident, accentuating it by an enigmatic, “my father wrote to my mother - yes, to my mother!” (*Fantasia* 36). In this sense, her father is actively breaking gender roles and patriarchal thought by reaching out to her mother by name.

Briefly stated, both authors astonish with the similarity of the depiction of naming/name-calling in their characters. They write to show the un-silencing of women from patriarchy, colonialism and slavery, and yet utilize patriarchy to their advantage in an ironic

manner. This could be misread as a furtherance of silencing, but because these authors are rewriting history, they appear to have chosen to wield patriarchal practices all while designating them; colonialism and slavery as the greatest perpetrators.

### **3.3.5 Seclusion: Escaping Cloistering and Alienation**

Marked by isolation and confinement, cloistering had long been wielded against the freedom of women. Djébar and Morrison address this issue of isolation in majorly different ways. In *Fantasia*, Djébar dedicates several chapters to the narrator's cousins and friends who have been cloistered at a young age. Particularly, the shock the narrator experiences when she learns that a friend she used to play with is now cloistered with her two older sisters. They became prohibited from leaving their houses without male chaperoning and until they get married. Djébar suggests that this practice is viewed differently by men and women. For women, it is repressive and patriarchal, while for men, it appears as protection. That being the case, the narrator acknowledges her privileged position stating that, "it was understood among my female cousins that I was privileged to be my father's 'favourite' since he had unhesitatingly preserved me from cloistering" (*Fantasia* 214), but also recognizes that because of, their internalized patriarchy/sexism, some Algerian women do not perceive their stay-at-home status as cloistering, but a mere fear of what colonialism could inflict on them.

In contrast, in *Beloved*, the word cloistered does not exist and is not alluded to either; it is, instead, inferred from the text and recognized in Denver and Sethe, who are alienated from the rest of the community because of Sethe's crime. The community does not condone Sethe's actions, so they resort to isolating the entirety of 124. This turn of events is quite distressing for Denver, who stands witness to her family being set aside and not included in the culture and communal activities. She weeps, "I can't no more...I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes

by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't like me either" (*Beloved* 17). As it appears, Denver is very affected by this as she confirms that their situation is unlivable. According to Fanon, alienation is "a form of incarceration... a kind of amputation or imprisonment... a transcendental seizure and an arrest of what is possible" (Ndlovu 10-11), which is the intensity of the alienation that Denver feels at the beginning of the novel.

Djebar and Morrison, then, converge in the presentation and rationale behind their idea of seclusion. However, for Djebar, cloistering resides in the same space as silencing does, which ultimately casts an oppressive veil on Algerian women. Moreover, Steadman theorizes that Djebar presents cloistering with a clear intent to counter orientalist and patriarchal views. She rejects the voyeurism that continues to have a hold on Algerian women, and allows readers a glimpse of "female bodies as complex sites of oppression and potential liberation" (Steadman 191). In this regard, she creates a resisting harem that is complex in hierarchy and rich in practices, which, in turn, becomes Djebar's strategy of criticizing cloistering. By the same token, in *Beloved*, a metaphorical veil also shrouds Denver. Although born free, Denver is affected by the enslavement of her mother, Sethe. Sethe's crime, fueled by years of abuse under several oppressive systems, resulted in their alienation from the black community. To break free of this, Morrison writes Denver's liberation and integration into the community after she follows what her grandmother advised her to do, which is to "go on out the yard" (*Beloved* 288). It is clear that Djebar actively writes about cloistering in a critical manner and "complicates formulations of seclusion by emphasizing possibilities for resistance already practiced in the harem" (Steadman 193), while Morrison alludes to this issue in the character of Denver who ultimately escapes this situation by heeding her grandmother's words and following her passions. At the end, both authors record their characters' integration into their communities, becoming one of the key components of the writing of women's voiced her/story.

### 3.3.6 Education and Opportunities: The Uncompromising Subaltern Woman

Taking away women's right to pursue a formal education is considered one of the many steps that relegate a woman to the subaltern position (Spivak). In view of this, education becomes a vehicle for opportunities and a sign of agency, prompting Djébar and Morrison to ensure its presence in their novels. In *Fantasia*, Djébar sets out to explore education with regard to the narrator herself. She was given the opportunity to go to French school thanks to her teacher father, who was diligent about including her in his scholarly space by bringing her along with him while he was teaching.

Regardless of that, the younger version of the narrator is depicted as aware of the opportunity she has been given, which propels her to question the reasons behind having some girls her age be denied education. She sees them as jailed by people who want to keep them without voices. Djébar pleads that “written words can travel... the blue heaven is suddenly limitless” (*Fantasia* 3), which implies that once a young Algerian girl, during those times, is handed the chance to learn, she’ll be free of societal traditions and constructs. She will, however, have to protect herself, seeing as her community will not embrace her back if she’s to suffer from an unfortunate incident (rape, for example), they would even blame her for it because she wanted to leave the safety of her house in order to pursue an education.

In a similar fashion, Morrison shows interest in discussing the topic of education in *Beloved* as well. She remarks how even though Denver fears interacting with the community because of her mother’s past, she is still enamored by the idea of learning to read and write and be able to interact with other students. She was first introduced to spelling and counting through the help of Lady Jones, a mixed-race woman who enjoyed teaching young black children. Denver expresses that the two hours she used to spend at Lady Jones’ house were so precious to her, at least until someone mentioned her mother’s crime and ran Denver into hiding. While alienated and secluded, Denver continuously drifts back to those two hours of

learning as well as to her grandmother's stories, which were a great motivation for her to seek education once more. Another motivator was her father. He was also able to count and used this ability to buy his mother out of slavery. Denver strongly believes in her father's words, passed over to her by her grandmother, "If you can't count they can cheat you. If you can't read they can beat you" (*Beloved* 245).

In that sense, Djébar and Morrison highlight matriarchal and father figures behind these characters' motivation for education. This breaks the stereotype of women being repressed by male figures in their lives and works as a way for the authors to show change. While there is no pressure from the community to learn to read or not in *Beloved*, there appears to be one in *Fantasia*, which stresses the need for educating girls in the Algerian context because of the threat it can pose to restrictive powers. This is evident in the fact that in *Beloved*, learning leads to freedom and integration in the society, while in *Fantasia*, it could lead to a feeling of exile. Ghaderi announces that, "This educational experience is the first exile of Djébar from home, which was the only place she knew and associated her identity with" ("Écrire l'exil dans *L'amour, la fantasia*"<sup>40</sup> n.p. translation added). Ghaderi infers that Djébar experienced displacement because of the French school that estranged her from her original culture. Djébar admits to this:

I had spent my dreaming adolescence on its fringes, neither totally outside, nor in its heart; so I spoke and studied French, and my body, during this formative period, became Westernized in its way. At all the regular family gatherings, I had lost the knack of sitting cross-legged: this posture no longer indicated that I was one of all the women and shared their warmth - at the most it simply meant squatting uncomfortably. (*Fantasia* 126-127)

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<sup>40</sup> This is the title of the section from which this passage has been quoted since this source does not have page numbers.

Simply put, the further she stayed from her culture and in the French school, the worse her body acclimatized back to her country. This is where her ambivalence becomes noticeable. She becomes an individual who suffers from the inability to be like her peers in Algeria (who are conservative and traditional), as well as those in France (who are educated and liberated). She, thus, suffers from a duality (“Écrire l’exil dans *L’amour, la fantasia*”).

This is also a point in question in *Beloved*. Denver is said to be learning that “book stuff” (*Beloved* 314) and aspiring to join a white school. This summons all the horrible memories of schoolteacher for Paul D, seeing as schoolteacher was a brutal slave master, who ruined Sweet Home with his cruelty. Because of his negative introduction to studying, Paul D fears that Denver is going to be exposed to enslavement in this white school the same way he and the other slaves in Sweet Home were exposed to schoolteacher’s cold and calculative studying gaze.

Certainly, for a brief moment, one might question whether this education of Denver and the narrator in *Fantasia* would add to the epistemic violence against Algerian women and African American women in the long run, meaning that it would add to the oppressive powers’ ideologies building and serving their agendas instead of bettering the situation of the women in their original communities. However, both authors are really quick when it comes to countering this idea. Djébar informs her readers that her narrator happily attends Quranic school and that her mother is so proud of her because “‘she reads’, that is to say in Arabic, ‘she studies’” (*Fantasia* 179). She evokes the story of the angel Gabriel starting the revelation of the Quran to the Prophet PBUH<sup>41</sup> with ‘Read’ in order to explain how her quest for freedom, through her liberated body, is inspired and supported by her roots. This, further,

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<sup>41</sup> Peace be upon him.

enables her to move between cultures easily, portraying “both the oppression Algerian women experience and their subversive resistance” (Steadman 188).

Similarly, Morrison explains that Denver develops her sense of self or selfhood when she interacts with her community and attends school. She thinks to herself, “It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve” (*Beloved* 297). The realization that she is separate from her mother, sister and grandmother allows her to thrive and seek what she wants, which in this case, is to pursue education and relish in the pleasure it grants her.

Both authors diligently clarify that neither Denver nor the unnamed narrator forget what oppressive powers have done to their communities. This is clear when Denver takes notice of the slavery glorifying statue in Mr. Bodwin’s house, and when *Fantasia*’s narrator carefully observes the picture of the Virgin Mary above the French policeman’s house door. Regardless of how nice these men are to them, it does not erase the pain inflicted on generations of Algerian and African American women by white men and French men. This adds major substance to these characters’ learning trajectory as they are characterized by relentlessness when it comes to speaking their gender and history.

### **3.3.7 Small Delights: Escapes and Resistances**

The idea of delight, as an emotion, is to receive great pleasure from doing or reacting to a certain experience. With the addition of the modifier small, it becomes a privately sought-out emotion that helps individuals maintain their sanity. So, to experience small delights means that one possesses their own mechanism of regulation and thus agency. Both authors, Djébar and Morrison, aim to demonstrate the range of emotions women can have. As subaltern women, oppressive powers tend to loom over their positions and feelings; however, there proves to be these small victorious moments when they feel genuine pleasure and happiness. These feelings also signify resistance to the harsh environments that these

women typically live in. Such instances remain elusive in the history known to the world; therefore, it is paramount to record these occurrences as well.

Djebar excels at writing that special space where Algerian women feel both joy and discomfort. The narrator shares some of the instances she felt pure joy in her life. The narrator, as a young girl who is friendly with three sisters, soon learns of their private escapades in the form of writing love letters to men from different parts of the world. One of the sisters shares that, “I’ll never, never let them marry me off to a stranger who, in one night, will have the right to touch me! That’s why I write all those letters! One day, someone will come to this dead-and-alive hole to take me away: my father and brother won’t know him, but he won’t be a stranger to me!” (*Fantasia* 12). To these sisters, it is a rebellious act against the various social traditions in their communities that is meant to help them discover themselves (Kershaw 55). The narrator soon finds herself participating in this act as well. She, too, experiences love through writing, which plants a small feeling of freedom within her; this feeling, however, is hindered by the guilt she feels. The generational patriarchal hold on her and her ancestors haunts and restricts her emotions over time, but in the moment, the narrator and her friends felt the happiest they could ever be.

Morrison, likewise, highlights these defiant moments of freedom. Due to the events in the lives of Sethe, Denver and Beloved, joy seems very unlikely. In spite of that, Morrison places certain moments of merriness in *Beloved*, for instance, the three women’s ice-skating venture where laughter is more prominent than their horrid memories, “holding hands, bracing each other, they swirled over the ice... The girls, screaming with laughter, joined her [Sethe] on the ice. Sethe struggled to stand and discover not only that she could do a split, but that it hurt. Her bones surface and unexpected places and so did laughter” (*Beloved* 205). During this sequence of events, they appear to have briefly forgotten what had happened to them. In that small lapse of rememory, laughter takes over. They are haggard and secluded,

and yet, they appear to have found a way to relish in this situation, resisting the expected outcomes that spring from ruthless subduing.

It is worth noting that Morrison allocates many of the joyful scenes to Denver. This might lead to the argument that Denver had not experienced the true savagery of slavery (meaning that she is not as doubly colonized and traumatized), and so joy comes to her easily. However, she is as doubly traumatized, especially through her mother, who has reflected and passed down her trauma to her only offspring left, Denver. In this respect, Sethe becomes once more a reflection of slavery, unable to regulate her pain; she re-inflicts it on those surrounding her. Therefore, Denver does not allow herself to become plagued by despair like her mother and chooses to recover and mend herself, grasping any chance if offered (Sasa 92).

It is to be discerned that both authors chose to record the small delights that balance women's psyches. They do so through foregrounding the most unlikely of characters. It would have been objectively easier to sanction the women who have been directly victimized by oppressive systems and paint them in a joyful light. However, they both cleverly choose descendants of the abused. Even though Djébar's narrator and Denver have not been exposed to direct abuse, they have been exposed to it second-handly, which attests to the seriousness of patriarchy and slavery in subaltern women's lives. To show that there exists a shred of joy in these descendants' hearts is a cycle-breaking attempt from both authors, especially since where the emotion of delight resides, resistance and agency thrive.

### **3.3.8 Living through Art**

Using their bodies as vehicles for the production of art, Algerian and African American women reside and thrive in this corner of their her/stories. Indeed, Djébar and Morrison explore in their respective narratives the recording of her/story by means of art

production. In *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, both communities appear to practice art in the form of storytelling and music. In fact, oral tradition passed down from one generation to the next one is a key element to the survival of great portions of history. It is stories that are recollected from previously lived experiences, mostly retrieved through memories. Favreau declares that, “the spoken word, rather than writing, reclaims identity because it demands a different level of attention, engagement, and involvement from the individual. While one may choose to read a writing, one does not have that choice when stories are spoken aloud by others—stories demand listening” (6). Storytelling, then, becomes the gathering of oral histories that are more significant and believable than the already existing history. Likewise, music also becomes a tool that translates memories into a lyrical and graceful language. Words often fail to express the variety and intensity of emotions felt by some characters due to the oppressions practiced on them, which inspires the tapping into a transcending medium of expression.

### **3.3.8.1 Storytelling as an Unconventional Record of Time**

In *Fantasia*, Djebbar demonstrates the forms, purposes and peculiarities of the storytelling practiced by Algerian women. She writes several depictions of Algerian women being present at social gatherings with specific seating arrangements where the exchange of accounts occurs. Djebbar even provides details on the stories shared by adding:

The woman who is recounting her own experiences will end by expressing her resignation to Allah and the local saints. Sometimes the daughters take up their mother's story, elaborating it with their long-winded, whispered exegesis. Adding a vivid detail, a caustic comment, they fill in the picture of the calamity: the man coming home drunk and striking her, or, on the contrary, 'himself overtaken by ruin, sickness, involving endless tears, debts,

inexorable misery ... So these city ladies sit there and bear witness, as best they can, to the unfolding drama of their own lives. (*Fantasia* 154)

In this passage, she lists the types of stories Algerian women share in their private assemblies. They either recount their own experiences or their mother's experiences, and the main subject appears to be the male figures in their lives. They commiserate over the oppressive patriarchal systems affecting their livelihood while making sure to preserve and commemorate their experiences on other women's bodies as they narrate them. Steadman concurs that "women break their imposed silence to express suffering and find solidarity with other women" (192). In other words, this exchange becomes an interdependent and transactional process where one tells a story while the other memorizes and preserves it and vice versa. In addition to that, Djébar remarks that this tradition is not only done in the safety of social gatherings but also in the dark when the children are put to bed and grandmothers sit around with their daughters and daughters-in-law to recall the past. Through this observation, she identifies the duty of maintaining the portals to this load of history with elderly women or matriarchs. They assume this position once they are relocated from a childbearing entity to a storytelling one.

Alternatively, Djébar considers the distinctness of storytelling when it is merry. It takes the shape of, "understatement, proverbs, even riddles or traditional fables, handed down from generation to generation, the women dramatize their fate, or exorcize it, but never expose it directly" (*Fantasia* 155). In such an instance, a space exclusive to women is formed, and in order to maintain it, they create a version of it that only they can decode. In essence, they dramatize their stories so as to purge themselves of their misfortunes, but still, they ensure that the practice is kept feminine and generational. They are aware of the erasure that befalls women's histories and the scarce instances of joy in patriarchal societies. So, in

order to protect certain legacies (the stories, their contents and the storyteller), a secret conduct is founded.

Consequently, the purpose of storytelling culminates in authenticating history, preserving and passing it down to the next generations in order to heal past or active traumas. This is apparent when the narrator verifies the story of the Neylettes she had read in Fromentin's writings with Lla Zohra. This could also be noted as the author's resistance against orientalist accounts.

It is important to note that, while reading *Fantasia*, it becomes evident that the narrator is the main storyteller of the book. She carries out the task of recounting every character's story, including hers. One of the stories she documents is Cherifa's. *Fantasia* becomes a platform on which Cherifa's her/story is performed for the reader in a sequence of her joining her brothers in the mountains, becoming a resistance fighter, a nurse, and then a captive. In this telling of her/story, she is an agent of her experience and political choices. Moreover, the narrator interjects in her process of storytelling to share her troubled feelings regarding this mission she had taken. Still, what is for certain is that she does not romanticize storytelling, only sees the responsibility behind fulfilling it.

Likewise, in *Beloved*, most of Morrison's prose is an exemplification of storytelling. All the characters appear to tell or recall an event in their lives. They usually narrate it to the reader or the other characters. It appears that Morrison believes in the reaffirmation of black female history through the re-crafting of experiences. She tells McKay Nellie in an interview:

I am simply trying to recreate something out of an old artform in my books -  
- the something that defines what makes a book "black"... The stories are  
constantly being told, constantly being imagined within a framework. The

mutual understanding, and compassion that stems from common history, contributes to the feeling of a wholeness without which the formation of individual identity within the collective identity would not be achievable.

(Shilaja 97)

In this, Morrison links telling stories to history and identity. She reasons that the identities of African Americans are crucial to their understanding of themselves and ultimately the recollection of their history; therefore, substantiating once more the recounting of stories.

Baby Suggs, Sethe and Denver are all storytellers in this novel. They tell both similar and different stories. Their similarity is bracketed in their experience with slavery and its ramifications, without forgetting to show a sense of individuality in terms of personal life experiences. This could be perceived as the author's attempt to show that black subjects have both individual and communal identities that are to be respected and recognized. Baby Suggs is seen recounting stories to her community as well as her granddaughter. As the matriarch in her community, she does her job properly by passing down stories and inspiring her granddaughter, Denver, to practice the tradition further.

Sethe also actively engages in the practice of storytelling to different characters, mainly Paul D and Denver. Sethe's journey into her memories, however, is painful and distressing. Every time she confronts a piece of her personal, and yet very common history, she is further repelled from it. To her, the past does not simply come back in the form of old images; instead, she finds herself reliving those painful past memories. Regardless of that, Shijala, relying on psychologist Herman's theorizations, reaffirms the reclamation of one's own history when put "into words" (95). This is best represented when Beloved re-enters Sethe's life and makes her start to appreciate the art of storytelling, seeing as Beloved craves to know more and feels great satisfaction from it. In such a case, even though she finds it

difficult to confront her/story, the act of rememory proves helpful with reclaiming her/story as a first step into a self-healing process.

It should also be noted that, in *Beloved*, Denver emerges as the next main storyteller. She is seen recounting her birth story multiple times and to different recipients. She is so fascinated by her unconventional birthing story that she starts adding details to her mother's version, bringing it to life. In this process of revision, she unintentionally undertakes, Denver seems to find a certain amount of romance, which is reminiscent of the romanticized recording of oppressive accounts.

Denver proceeds as the sole dynamic character who is able to brave her family's situation and tell the story of 124 to the rest of the community. This decision proves to be helpful to their situation, ensuring once again that venturing out and sharing one's stories openly inspires a communal sense of existence and healing. Storytelling done by Denver, then, facilitates the unfolding of trauma, adds meaning to people's pain, fights isolation, and releases one from their self-imprisonment. And although this artistic expression of storytelling is a way to find healing, it is also a revision of history and a rewriting of silences. It is a way to "[preserve] historical data...cultural values and Afro-American...ideas" (Shilaja 98).

Djebar and Morrison pursue storytelling, as women's oral tradition, in a distinct manner. While Djebar represents the etiquette and contents that shape this practice, Morrison focuses on the painful reasons behind the need for storytelling the memories of African American women. In other words, storytelling in *Beloved* becomes a fight back against "invisibility" (Hichri 215) while in *Fantasia*, it becomes the existence of many women's voices ready to liberate their bodies and form a "solidarity between [them]" (Silmi 62). In fact, Morrison's characters are not aware that they are practicing storytelling. It comes

naturally to them, designating them as being inherently storytellers, or, plainly, history keepers. In contrast, Djébar highlights Algerian women's cognizance of the act of storytelling and their desperate need to protect it, seeing as it is a piece of their existence that celebrates them and condemns their sufferings. It should be noted that Djébar presents these sentiments solely through her characters, contrary to Morrison, who, by the end of *Beloved*, directly urges her readers to not forget about Beloved's story, an advice she herself is following with this retelling the story of Margaret Garner. It seems that this places Morrison in the same position as Djébar, or her alter ego narrator, as both authors, in this case, assume the role of the matriarchal storyteller.

### 3.3.8.2 A Medium for Coping: Music

Considering music, the authors also approach its utilization as a retrieving tool of voices and her/story, in their narratives differently. In *Fantasia*, Djébar denotes voice as music and as songs. According to Al-Ghadeer, "writing voice as a song in a musical context is a recurrent trope" (241) in Assia Djébar's texts. Curiously so, Djébar's interaction with music is found mainly in her fascination with musical forms. She employs this interest consistently through *Fantasia* as a way to talk of memory, history, words and sound. At first glance, the labels of the sections in the novel do draw one's attention to their peculiar resemblance to musical scores. She uses soliloquy, cries, whispers, clamour, murmurs, tzarl-rit<sup>42</sup>...etc. as section titles anticipating the knit relation her text will have with melody and rhythm. Indeed, this relation is instantly made obvious to the uninformed eye. However, her engagement in this sphere does not stay superficial, seeing that she implements musical terms and instrument names as well. In the epigraph of the third part of the novel (the part that explores women's testimonies), she mentions Beethoven's piano sonatas<sup>43</sup> number 1

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<sup>42</sup> Or zagharit a ululation done by North African and Middle Eastern women to express joy or pain.

<sup>43</sup> "A type of musical composition, usually for a solo instrument or a small instrumental ensemble."  
Retrieved from Britannica

and 2 of Opus number 27, called “Sonata quasi una fantasia” or “Sonata in the manner of fantasy”. The first sonata is known to be divided into four movements<sup>44</sup>, while the second one, otherwise known as the Moonlight Sonata, has three movements. Djébar is seen mimicking this formation in the third part of her novel. Blair<sup>45</sup> explains in her introduction to the book that this musical quest of Djébar is “a serious word-play on the double character of the work” and that it “[highlights] its strong musical associations of form and style” (*Fantasia* xix). Djébar writes a third part of her novel that consists of five movements and a finale. She breaks each movement into different parts. This could also be perceived as her own personal way of showing transgression towards the West. In each part, she sets the key and tempo of the story she relates, sometimes she chooses to narrate Algerian women’s experiences in a slow and lyrical manner, other times, in a fast and passionate way. Silmi further comments on Djébar imitating the varying intensity of the keys<sup>46</sup> sonatas use in their sections to the organization of the third part, claiming that, like a real sonata, this part of the book is arranged in an interrupted way that presents both silencing and resistance (71).

She, then, further juxtaposes that transgression of Western elements by presenting Eastern elements, namely, the Sistrum. It is an instrument used during ancient Egypt in worship rites, mainly that of the Goddess Isis. In the section of Sistrum, Djébar writes the voices and sounds of Algerian women in relation to images of sexuality. Al-Ghadeer observes that this is the author’s way of connecting Algerian women’s voices to the Egyptian Goddess (266).

In addition to the above, Djébar provides her readers with the other multifaceted aspects that come from employing music in her narrative. She stresses the presence of music

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<sup>44</sup> “Sections of a sonata. Each in a related key but with a unique musical character.” Retrieved from Britannica

<sup>45</sup> The Translator of *Fantasia*

<sup>46</sup> A set of notes in a musical piece that establish the overall sound and mood, whether bright, dark...etc.

and songs in Algerian women's gatherings, specifically female singers, or *chikhat*. Moreover, she links music to culture and religion. So, on the one hand she shows the readers her fascination with religious songs and their performances, namely Isaac's song to his father Abraham<sup>47</sup>, while on the other hand, she depicts the ritualistic singing that happens in her grandmother's gatherings.

Al-Ghadeer acknowledges the skewing of history in French and Nationalist accounts and the subversion of that by means of women's testimonies. She sees that the latter is written as music, which facilitates the retrieval of women's voices and her/stories (266-267). She essentially agrees with Djébar, who also saw the importance of Algerian women's musical traditions in both initiating young girls into the practice and rewriting her/story.

Similarly, Morrison's utilization of music and songs in different forms is also apparent in *Beloved*. She states that her writing is "aural literature ... because [She does] hear it" (Davis 230 qtd. in Morgan, "Introduction"<sup>48</sup> n.p.). She sees music as an outlet for memories and evidence of having a voice. Eckstein asserts that "for Morrison, African American writing fundamentally relies on the sounds and rhythms of black music" (272). This assertion separates black music from mainstream music. The former becomes an assortment of arrangements of the pain and suffering that is deeply-seated in African Americans. These different arrangements decide the "preserving" or the "transcending" of the pain (Eckstein 273).

Therefore, in *Beloved*, there are various types of songs presented in the text. First, there is the manifestation of wordless songs. Morrison presents the clearing as a place where the community of African Americans in *Beloved* gathers to sing and dance. So, because they are used to this religious ritual that they have adapted and forged to their liking, they were

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<sup>47</sup> In the Abrahamic religions, Abraham had a prophetic dream about sacrificing his son to god.

<sup>48</sup> This is the section from which the passage was retrieved as the original source does not have page numbers

ready to exorcise Beloved the second they learned about her existence. When the thirty or so women gathered in front of 124, it is said that, “in the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like” (*Beloved* 305). Stamp Paid observes that words were meaningless to them because they belonged to the white man who exercised this ability of wielding words to write about his experiments, justifying his cruelty towards the other in a recorded form (like schoolteacher). In that instance of exorcism, Sethe was in no need of words; she just needed these fellow women’s voices, in the form of a song, to ward off the ghosts of the past: enslavement, abuse, oppression, guilt, hate...etc. It is worth noting, however, that this song does not spur her healing journey, as by the end of the novel, she is still able to hear the song of hummingbirds, which she associates with the abuse she was subjected to in Sweet Home.

Second, Morrison edits already existing songs for the sake of this story. After Amy Denver sings a song called “Lady Button eyes” to Sethe, she claims that it is her mother’s song. However, Morgan, upon conducting a thorough research, explains that the poem is originally written by Eugene Field in his *Love Songs of Childhood* collection. It must be pointed out that Amy sings this song before the delivery of Sethe’s fourth child and before the unfolding of hardships in 124. Nevertheless, Amy’s song foreshadows what transpires in Sethe’s life. By leaving out and not singing the third stanza, “Cometh like a fleeting ghost /From some distant eerie coast;/ Never footfall can you hear/As that spirit fareth near” (Field 62), this song becomes a foreshadowing of Sethe’s third child’s death and eventual haunting of 124.

Lastly, the author writes original songs, mainly Sethe’s made-up lullabies to her children. Sethe resorts to songs to bond with her children. She hums the lullaby at the very end of the book after Beloved is gone, which leads to the belief that she is able to maintain that connection with her children, dead or alive.

Thus, it becomes evident that Morrison's use of music and songs in her narrative serves as a beautifying as well as a binding agent. The amount of repeated sentences might even indicate that the whole book is a song adorned with repeated refrains. Music and songs in *Beloved* produce a book dedicated to those who "were silenced not only by people but also by the language that would call them inferior, objects. These millions of voices unspeakable, unspoken cannot be heard through language but require a different medium—the aural" (Morgan, "Conclusion" n.p.). Sometimes, certain oppressions and suffering need a different medium to be properly expressed, as spoken and written language fail to encompass the scale of pain that is inflicted on some people. Music in *Beloved*, in this light, becomes a language-bending instrument wielded by women in their journey of reaffirming their her/stories.

In essence, Djébar's and Morrison's approach to employing music and songs in order to reconfigure her/story emerges as both similar and different. Both books can be regarded as songs of the voiceless. Their authors share the same reasons and motivations for using music in their narratives. However, they differ in the way they use it, as Djébar seems more interested in the form of music and the instruments that produce it, while Morrison leans more towards the diversity of songs and singing. This could be related to the authors' backgrounds, especially since Djébar is focused on comparing the East to the West and transgressing both by adding women, while Morrison highlights the importance of women's voices themselves. There are no instruments or musical pieces analogies to be found in *Beloved* because slavery had deprived black people of all but their voices and their deeply felt rhythmic history.

### 3.3.9 Practicing Culture: Feminine Affairs and Cathartic Dances

In an effort to show resistance, the practice of culture in the form of religious rituals is showcased as a way to preserve the cultural, national and historical identities of Algerian and African American women in *Fantasia* and *Beloved*.

In *Fantasia*, Djebbar promotes her feminine Algerian Arabo-Berber culture explicitly. With assimilation and hybrid identities aiming to dislocate Algerians' cultural and religious identities, Djebbar ensures that her people's culture is easily detected in *Fantasia*, which, in turn, happens to be imbued with various cultural instances, specifically details of weddings and ritualistic gatherings.

Describing weddings as “an exclusively feminine affair” (*Fantasia* 104), Djebbar shares her fascination with these celebrations, depicting their instrumentality when it comes to solidifying Algerian women's voiced spaces thoroughly. The author calls attention to the perseverance of wedding etiquette in an Algeria brimming with revolution. Rifles are still shot announcing the arrival of the groom, and women still call on the prophet and saints to bless the union. They wear henna and adorn their bodies with jewelry and embroidered silky traditional clothes, seeking envy and compliments. Moreover, in one of the weddings Djebbar writes about, she mentions face tattoos, a feminine practice where symbols are inked on Algerian women's body parts, specifically Algerian Berber women. These tattoos mark history, beauty and what honors and brings communities together.

As weddings prove to be more and more important to Djebbar's conceptualization of Algerian culture, she even refers to her own wedding, observing how her own father was schooled by elderly women to follow tradition, so that divine protection descends on his daughter's marriage. This serves as a reminder of how much pride organizing these events

incites in Algerian women, and how much certain rules and conditions are still regulated by Algerian women.

In addition to the above, small intimate gatherings of women where they ritualistically dance and sing are highlighted as well. Djébar remembers her paternal grandmother organizing these gatherings, thereby creating a women's sphere. In these gatherings, her grandmother dances herself into a trance, appeasing her ancestors. The women chant over the matriarch's swaying, "Flush out the ill fortune! May the teeth of envy and covetousness not harm you, O my lady! ... Bring out your strength and all your armoury into the light of day, O my queen!" (*Fantasia* 144 ellipsis in the original). Her grandmother seems to be protesting in a fervent prayer. She dismisses misery while being hailed as a "lady" and a "queen" because, in these settings, the commanders are Algerian women. They gain a power visible only to the other women who are also possessed by their ancestors' resentful cries. Djébar acknowledges this by stating that, "all the voices of the past, imprisoned in her present existence, were now set free and leapt far away from her" (*Fantasia* 145). Such ritual emerges as a significant point in Djébar's process of voicing as she compares her grandmothers to one another. She locates her maternal grandmother as the gentle storyteller and her paternal one as the roaring ritualistic singer and dancer. Both representing her/story in their distinct ways, preserving their cultural, national, feminine and historical identities as much as their identities keep them alive too.

In contrast, Morrison implicitly weaves the African background and roots of her characters along with their newly constructed attributes in her narrative. She undertakes the blending of the past and the present, which are crucial to the assembling of the future, with the aim of tracing African American history and culture (Xu 105). In addition, she predicts that this process is paramount to the building of African American literature and its own history, too (Xu 105).

As mentioned previously, once black people were brought to a foreign land, christened and coerced to take on a new religion before being forced into slavery, this new status of being a slave encouraged many of them to embrace this new religion and even reformulate it to fit their own cultural background. In due time, the black enslaved community had beliefs and practiced rituals of their own. On this, Santos shares that these rituals “provide stabilization, harmony, communal bonding and individual empowerment” (314), placing great importance on the development of such rituals. It also insinuates that these rituals move beyond a mere practice of Christianity to these ceremonial acts that appeal to one’s spirit as well as community. Santos, confirming the sacredness of that and touching upon the writers’ intention, adds that “writers present them [rituals] as resources to bring communities together, foster solidarity, and most of all, to give back subjects a sense of communal identity” (315). Maintaining his thesis from before, he adjoins solidarity as most needed in communities like the black enslaved one and swaps communal bonding for communal identity, admitting, in a way, that the final stop is to preserve one’s several identities and protect them from intruders and their creative oppressions.

In *Beloved*, Baby Suggs is portrayed as a religious figure and a cultural pillar. She is an enigmatic figure in her community. She inspires admiration and envy from those around her, particularly because they are unable to comprehend how she, coming from her background, is able to find herself again; how she knows her way around to “giving advice; passing messages; healing the sick, hiding fugitives, loving, cooking, cooking, loving, preaching, singing, dancing and loving everybody like it was her job and hers alone” (*Beloved* 161). In a way, she is the embodiment of her cultural and matriarchal ancestors. She is known as an unchurched preacher, which differentiates her from Christianity’s preachers, with the title ‘holy’ paired with her name. She is respected and loved by all. She often leads a healing ritual at a secluded area called The Clearing. In this place, people gather

around listening to her pray. Once through, she calls, first, upon children and men and orders them to laugh and dance. Next, she calls upon women and asks them to cry. The women then stop and start laughing and dancing while the men and children take on crying. Lastly, she starts preaching. She commands and demands every single one of them to love and treasure their desecrated bodies because no one else would. Finally, she dances and laughs in a cathartic release against the unconscious harboring of oppression (Santos 323). To a certain extent, Baby Suggs, as a remainder of West African culture, creates a changed tradition and religion befitting of African Americans' history (Xu 103).

Nonetheless, after what had transpired in 124, Baby Suggs' faith collapses. She refuses to dance or preach anymore. She becomes angry at God and at her community for standing by while another person of theirs lost their way. Stamp Paid begs her to continue preaching, seeing as she is the living evidence of a well-adjusted black woman. She had kept the community bonded with a resilient flair for a long time, and for that, she cannot be defeated now that the ghosts of the past wouldn't stop frequenting them.

Viewed this way, Djébar and Morrison reaffirm the salience of one's cultural roots in their narratives by associating that sense of cultural belonging with having a position of agency. It is to be noted that Djébar's coverage of cultural aspects is more extensive than Morrison's. In an Algerian context, women come from a long-known history, and Djébar seeks to mention as much history and culture as she can. These attempts are designed to stress once more the maintenance of history and culture in Algerian women's lives, regardless of time period and external forces. It also adds to her ability to glean and write about these aspects easily as an Algerian woman with hybrid identities. On the contrary, Morrison's tracing of African Americans' cultural roots is a feat in itself. The erasure that they have been put through led to them creating these blended versions of religious rituals and cultural traditions from their African roots and their exposure to white people's way of

life. However, because they have been disconnected from the potential lives that they could have had, this new regenerated culture tends to be blurry and hazy as Africans are not essentially from one singular African country, like in Djébar's novel. In this case, Morrison resolves to focus her attention on the eccentric features that African American culture managed to put together. So, it could be said that while one was busy highlighting the plethora of cultural habits of her community, the other was emphasizing the loss, retrieval and recreation of such habits. What is similar, though, is that both authors rely on matriarchs to present most of the cultural aspects, marking older women as an encompassing artistic source of traditions. Thus, Baby Suggs and Djébar's grandmother emerge as matriarchal figures who gather their communities to sing and dance their sorrows in a cathartic her/story affirming trance.

### **3.4 Writing in the Feminine: Djébar's and Morrison's Feminine Writing of Her/story in *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade* and *Beloved***

According to Cixous, "women must put herself into the text as into the world and into history by her own movement" (875), implying that *women, text, history, own*, are all components of the portrayal of women. A woman and her body should be written by herself or by another woman who has an inkling of her collective experience in order for her to guarantee an adequate representation in history. Indeed, women are omitted from grand narratives in terms of themes and composition. The former is done by ignoring and writing off their plight, while the latter is achieved through designating Phallogocentrism and masculine writing (the absence of personal experiences and emotions, no body or bodily representation, the exigency of linear writing and the regulation of vocabulary use: mainly rational and reasonable words) as the norm. This renders women victims of stereotyping and neglect, essentially bodies without any power (Cixous). For these reasons, Cixous calls for writing the body, which in reality is just the woman, and exploring what masculine language

does not allow. She prompts women writers to reject the restraints of language, its influence on the themes discussed, to find their own ways of expressing the self and body of a woman.

Certainly, after Cixous declared that women should write themselves and their bodies in order to be better represented, women and their bodies were finally recognized as the main moving agents in their lives. By virtue of that, women's writing becomes a space that allows for the treatment of themes that pertain exclusively to women. Once such a thing is achieved, over time and by accumulation, a history for women is constructed. Indeed, Djébar and Morrison, in *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, depict the women they represent in detail, separating them from all what makes their bodies and histories silent. In the above exploration of silencing and voicing of the subaltern Algerian and African American woman, they exhibit great writing skills when it comes to writing about feminine themes in a language and structure that can properly reflect them. Both authors defy the usual by ironically mimicking the silence and then countering it with resistance, which is transgressive and conforming to what Cixous sought years ago.

In this respect, Djébar and Morrison further demonstrate great efforts as far as placing the women they represent in both agent and subaltern positions in their separate narratives. Besides what has been explored in the previous sections, this is also attained through editing the narrative structure, perspective and language used in the novels, as well as the uncovering of women's bodies.

One of the features of feminine writing is non-linear narration. Viewed this way, in *Fantasia*, one soon realizes that the alternation between French accounts, oral testimonies and the narrator's personal history is not only an exclusive characteristic to a specific literary genre or is an attempt at mimicking history in order to historicize women's stories, it becomes also a way to break out of restrictive structures and language, specifically in this novel, since

Djebar uses French male accounts as an example of phallogocentric writing, in their original form and even after the author's appropriation. Djebar, then, uses Algerian women's testimonies to counter and represent the complete opposite of those accounts. These testimonies are subjective in their nature, transcribed from several women's orally recounted stories. Finally, the narrator's account presents a mixture of the previous parts born through the *qalam* that the author spoke of before. In addition, she writes various accounts from different perspectives, repeating certain stories from different points of view, exploring the multiplicity and reliability of memories, especially the stories of women freedom fighters, like Lla Zohra and Cherifa.

In a similar fashion, Morrison practices feminine writing by employing non-linear narration. In *Beloved*, time is bendable. The past and the present are around the characters, in and out of them. Characters retell the same story from different perspectives, adding details every time, so that when one memory fails, another does not. Some characters are thrown in at random times and not explained until later on (like Stamp Paid). Unlike Djebar, Morrison's multi-perspective venture is more extensive. She offers even minor characters' viewpoints actively engaging in the notion of writing those who stand at the margin of representation.

Moreover, both authors consider deviating from the usual arrangement of language. They do so by editing it to the versions that befit women's issues. Djebar interrupts the flow of the French language in her novel by employing Arabic/Berber terms. She also disrupts the syntax and sometimes even the semantics of the French language to better convey the meanings emanating from the Algerian dialect. She also confesses that sometimes she feels like she is unable to express her emotions, especially when it comes to romance: "the French language could offer me all its inexhaustible treasures, but not a single one of its terms of endearment would be destined for my use" (*Fantasia* 27). She appears to prefer, her mother

tongue when it comes to writing love-letters as the rich vocabulary allows for her to fully articulate her feelings, she calls her mother tongue, “milk of which I had been previously deprived” (*Fantasia* 62), which suggests that Djébar might perceive her mother tongue as feminine writing.

As a matter of fact, Djébar tends to appropriate the French language, or the colonizer’s language, that she uses in all of her novels. This appropriation works in her favor in two distinct ways. It frees her from any patriarchal restraints, granting her unmonitored self-expression, while also purging and reshaping the colonizers’ language so that it fits her culture. This makes her writing transformative of social and cultural structures, further entailing the process of reclamation of formerly confiscated Algerian women’s bodies. She, thus, is a freed unveiled body that can write in the feminine. She shows that a body is a tangible expression that allows for the entrance of the feminine in the greater discourse. In *Fantasia*, many characters experience this feminine expression through their bodies, whether they are abused within them, tell stories through them, speak through them or dance through them. All of these acts seem to reconnect the Algerian woman with her body, making her aware of it and its condition. With writers such as Djébar, who have access to language, they can now write about it; a feminine writing that mimics the body.

Morrison’s engagement with language, on the other hand, is twofold. First, repetition seems to be a prominent part of the book. The latter has a set of refrains that recur along it like oral tradition and songs. For instance, “Baby Suggs, holy” is repeated several times in order to reflect the community’s reverence and belief in Baby Suggs, “this is not a story to pass on” is also repeated at the end of the book in an effort to reiterate the importance of narratives like *Beloved*. Where Morrison inserts repetition, she creates and recreates voices lost in history. Second, Morrison appears to attempt to enhance the language in *Beloved*. She invents and reinvents words like “whitepeople/blackpeople”, and most notably “rememory”.

Without a hyphen, this word is outside of phallogocentric expectations. Its meaning is more than just remembering; it is the recalling of the past as if one is seeing it unfold once again right before their eyes. It becomes apparent that Morrison created this word because she believed that conventional language was unable to encompass and cover the hazardous nature/side of memory. In essence, memories are not dangerous or threatening, but black enslaved women's personal and collective memories remain a difficult space to thread through.

Djebar and Morrison make use of the above mentioned features to better represent women's bodies. Previously in this research, women's bodies have been regarded as an inextricable part of them and examined in relation to different themes, specifically, a woman's body was inspected in the position of subalternity and the position of agency. This encompassing analysis, however, has not dealt with women's bodies as entities that experience desire, pleasure and more. In this case, specific aspects related to writing women's bodily functions and pleasure are to be analyzed in relation to *Fantasia* and *Beloved*.

The narrator of *Fantasia* employs feminine writing when she explicitly describes the chasing of bodily desires and her romantic escapades, which are not familiar to Algerian women's literature. Djebar writes these scenes that are both explicit and implicit at the same time. In them, there are numerous descriptions of sexual experiences and the sensual gratification of the body as it "seeks for its voice" (*Fantasia* 109). In addition, Djebar portrays the wedding night of the narrator, a vivid scene where she explains the sexual act and relates women's bodies to what she calls the cry. This cry, to her, is love; it is also the ability to exist and connect with one's body in a positive way.

In *Beloved*, Morrison practices feminine writing by uncensoring the black female body. This is done through writing about the positive experience of intercourse and the inoffensive quality of female body fluids. It is only fitting to illustrate the positive side of black female sexuality after the abundant representation of the horrors faced under slavery. Indeed, Sethe is reminded of the time Baby Suggs schooled her over owning one's pleasure and body:

Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down. She said for me not to listen to all that. That I should always listen to my body and love it. (*Beloved* 247)

In this quote, the misery that is paired with sexuality for black women is described. Baby Suggs explains to Sethe that black women were supposed to be slave factories. However, as the matriarch and spiritual leader of her community, she advises Sethe to do the exact opposite, exploring and loving her broken body. As someone who has gone through the same experiences as Sethe, Baby Suggs' suggestion is meant to instigate a healing journey for Sethe, a way for her to not detach from and hate her body. This could mean that as long as black enslaved women re-claim their abused bodies, they can be freed of that abuse, otherwise, they would disappear within their bodies or separate from them as they become foreign abused husks.

Heeding Baby Suggs' advice, Sethe instantly forms a connection with Paul D, which leads to them having a quick sexual encounter. It is not the best for both of them, but Sethe experiences a range of emotions after:

Would there be a little space, she wondered, a little time, some way to hold off eventfulness, to push busyness into the corners of the room and just stand there a minute or two, naked from shoulder blade to waist, relieved of the weight of her breasts, smelling the stolen milk again and the pleasure of baking bread? Maybe this one time she could stop dead still in the middle of a cooking meal... and feel the hurt her back ought to. Trust things and remember things because the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank? (*Beloved* 21)

Sethe is transported to a place where she longs and wishes for a respite. Paul D coming back and this brief sexual encounter make her wish she could finally move on from all the awful experiences she had underwent. The author, however, does not fail to take the opportunity to remind the reader that during this scene Sethe's thoughts went back to the time she was raped, suggesting that having a positive sexual experience does not completely erase the painful her/story.

Besides the above, Morrison boldly describes women's body fluids. Breast milk is used as a euphemism for rape. In fact, Caesar observes that *Beloved* is "saturated" (115) with the metaphor of breast milk. When Sethe describes her assault to Paul D, she continuously repeats "they took my milk". It is described as sticky and sour from the roughness of slavery. Morrison uses this description, which is closely related to women's bodies, in order to portray the ruin that male violence inflicts on something that is not theirs and an experience (breastfeeding) they would never have, for breastfeeding is an intimate relation between a mother and her child, and Morrison uses it to show that such intimate relations are stolen by slavery and that ownership of one's own body for a long period of time is non-existent (Lorenz 1). This stolen milk ironically becomes Cixous' white ink and

through which Morrison writes. She writes in Sethe's stolen white ink about her stolen and reclaimed body.

Both authors write their novels in a manner that continues to reflect on women's bodies. Their endeavors are not confined to masculine language. Instead, their novels explore the idea of rewriting the language to fit the feminine themes. Both novels are broken down into a non-linear narration adorned by multiple perspectives seeking to narrate individual and collective history. It is also noted that, in *Beloved*, language is fairly easy to understand. Morrison modifies it only through creating words (coining terms and introducing context-specific compound words) and utilizing repetition. Moreover, she relates writing to women's bodies, specifically the notion of white ink. In fact, the whole book is written by Sethe's stolen milk. While white ink means that women's writing is nurtured by them like a mother nurture her child when she breastfeeds him, Morrison retrieves Sethe's stolen milk during rape, and writes this novel with it in order to not allow for her story be ignored. Contrary to Morrison, Djébar's interaction with language is different. Her context is influenced by colonization and patriarchal norms, so using and editing French language is as important to her identities and her country's history as it is to writing about Algerian women and their her/story. As a postcolonial woman writer, she writes a subaltern woman combating double colonization by disrupting the flow of a language established on patriarchal ideas and perpetuated on imperialistic ones. In addition to this, she directs her attention to the expression of romantic love through language. She emphasizes French language's failure in transmitting what she intends to write about love. So, she returns to her mother tongue. Djébar likens her mother tongue to milk or white ink. Through this imagery, she considers her mother tongue as a nurturing entity that can replenish the empty crevices in her identities stemming from being heavily influenced by French culture and language. Djébar, thus, employs feminine writing by violating French, as Blair refers to it in her introduction to

*Fantasia*, the way it violated Algeria and Algerian women's bodies, and by returning to one's mother tongue in order to express oneself better and defy patriarchal teachings that go against feelings and loving oneself and other people in a thorough manner.

When it came to depicting the body, Djébar's attempts proved to be quite explicit considering the context she is writing about, while Morrison presents a reconnection with one's sexual desires that is unable to fully escape trauma. Looked at from this angle, feminine writing for both authors resembles the women and women's bodies they write about, Djébar expresses:

The fourth language, for all females, young or old, cloistered or half-emancipated, remains that of the body: the body which male neighbours' and cousins' eyes require to be deaf and blind, since they cannot completely incarcerate it; the body which, in trances, dances or vociferations, in fits of hope or despair, rebels, and unable to read or write, seeks some unknown shore as destination for its message of love. (*Fantasia* 178)

Although in this passage Djébar is commenting on her own understanding of Algerian women's bodies as a fourth language, after French, Arabic and Lybico-Berber, it can also be applied to describe Morrison's attempts to write African American women's bodies; both are broken and defiant, in and *Fantasia* and *Beloved* they are written and arranged in words that cannot be described as anything but a feminine language.

In short, it could be said that both authors practice a feminine writing (Ringrose 256) that allows them to write about women and their experiences. Language, as it appears must be edited, disrupted and challenged in order to befit the feminine themes sought to be presented by the authors. This makes feminine writing not just language-based but also theme-based, meaning that the tracing of silencing, resistance, her/story writing are all

related to women and cannot fully exist and convey their message unless written in the feminine. This further evidences the harmony between Cixous' and Spivak's theories and elevates Djébar and Morrison to women postcolonial writers who effectively represent the women in their contexts and contribute to the writing and rewriting of an encompassing her/story. Djébar and Morrison are linking agents, comparatists and her/story recorders.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

While analyzing *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, there, indeed, existed these intertwined phases in Algerian and African American women's lives where both oppression and resistance clashed. Oppressive powers in the form of colonization, slavery and patriarchal norms and traditions leaned heavily on and strongly affected these women's identity markers. There were a set of deranged practices exercised on these women with the clear purpose of deforming their identities beyond repair. What is baffling is that such oppression was allowed and perpetuated by the sole idea that these brutalities would not be recorded in the grand narratives (history for instance). This cleansed version held up for a good period of time, influencing the public's views of colonizers. In *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, Djébar and Morrison employ this idea of masking the oppression then unmasking it, revealing its aggressive nature and why their narratives are still important. Besides that, they emphasize the importance of discussing and not neglecting the silence. To both authors, silence is a space that prompts them to write the oppression, the not so rare instances of agency and the individual and collective her/story that proves to be difficult to erase.

In terms of the silencing of Algerian and African American women, issues such as sexual violence, infanticide and the sully of motherhood were examined in details. Some of the main converging findings are the fact that both authors saw sexual violence as an issue that irrevocably distorts women's identities, motherhood and psyche. On the other hand, they differed in their tackling of rape with one being much more reserved writing about it than

the other. This is completely reliant on the context as Djébar comes from a much more conservative background. After they retreat from their venture into these women characters' perspectives, they insert themselves in the male perspective. The latter is soon discerned as another space that reduces and silences women.

Nevertheless, Djébar and Morrison find themselves questioning the writing and rewriting of her/story as it appears to them that both oppressions and resistance must be covered for a proper revision to be produced. So, they blur fiction and historical events and produce an authentic representation. In addition to the silencing, Djébar transcribes Algerian women's testimonies and writes the dead while Morrison personifies her/story. Both, as a result, link her/story to the dead women who were written off history. Moreover, they address several similar and differing instances of agency and preservation of her/story in the second part. They write women characters that fight stereotypes with their inherent defiance. Through this, it was established that subalternity is not a fixed part of the subaltern woman's identities, it is rather a position from which the subaltern meanders in and out of, meaning that as long as the subaltern woman is trying to defy her situation, she would be able to have access to some agency. In addition to that, Djébar and Morrison explore women aiding other women in their journeys. They present us with women who are willing to put themselves at risk to help, like Jennet in *Fantasia*, and other oppressed women, who regardless of helping, their skin color and the small privileges that comes with it prevents them from fully relating to subaltern women like Amy Denver in *Beloved*. This can mean that intersectionality of identities affects one's resistance too not just oppressions.

The researcher was able to identify how the authors favored the irony of imitating the oppressor. This stems from them wanting to understand his process in order to be able to dismantle it. This is shown in their depiction and challenging of the seclusion that plagues subaltern women. The latter strives to reintegrate themselves in their communities

regardless. It is also shown in education. Often times, oppressive powers hog and dominate over education till it becomes a difficult place for the subaltern to enter, and if they enter it, they are seen as traitors to their nations'/community's cause. However, the authors dispel this idea by having their characters, the unnamed narrator and Denver, be aware of the origin of their suffering as they take advantage of the opportunities that come to them.

Furthermore, both authors engage with the subaltern woman's traumatized psyche by writing about the small joys that some traumatized characters feel privately. They choose to depict descendants to show that trauma is generational and that despite that these characters have found ways to feel delight.

Then, the preservation of her/story on subaltern women's bodies is presented by Djébar's and Morrison's involvement of art. Both argue that storytelling and music are spaces where the Algerian and the African American woman has preserved her history. They see that storytelling, pursued differently in both novels, is important and should be protected and widely practiced. Alternatively, music in the novels is tackled and utilized differently and with consideration of the authors' contexts.

Lastly, both authors highlight cultural roots and practices and their relevance with regards to subaltern women's agency and keeping of her/story. Djébar's representation of culture in the Algerian context is uncomplicated and clear. The culture she represents is a woman's space. Regardless of colonization and assimilation, she demonstrates that Algerian culture stays vibrant thanks to Algerian women's preservation of it. However, when it comes to Morrison, culture becomes a difficult task to undertake. The diversity of the Africans that were brought to America led to the merging of their own cultures with that of their masters, showing the reconstruction of one's cultural practices and traditions mostly by women.

The last part of this chapter concludes that all of the above has been written in feminine writing because such themes cannot survive or be properly represented unless they are written in the feminine. This leads to the interpretation that Djébar and Morrison are postcolonial feminist writers and historians specialized in the feminine writing and rewriting of her/story. They bind women to words and history and create narratives that can easily pass as historical records to be consulted in the future.

While there seems to be certain differences in their historical backgrounds as well as their socio-cultural understanding of women, *Fantasia* and *Beloved* resemble one another in the arrangement of themes. They shed linear narration and exclusionary history for a historiographic metafictional depiction of women's realities, showing the affinity that groups them as two authors that seek to reconstruct their respective histories in order to accommodate women.

Their accounts might be described as personal and subversive. However, as mentioned before, history and historiography are to be questioned for their factuality leading to the belief that objectivity, factuality and linearity are constructs opens for debate. In such a case, Algerian and African American subaltern women occupy the position of the subaltern as well as the agent in their lives, leading to the believe that their subaltern woman is both voiceless and voiced, and thus has access to history revision. Her/story, then, is validated by the techniques and records available to the authors. Her/story is also validated by women's bodies that are an existent fact and argument against those that reject women's diverse experiences.

**Chapter Four: A Merciful Prison: A Feminine  
Voicing of the Unheard and their Her/story by  
Djebar and Morrison: Oppressed and Resisting  
Subaltern Women Beyond Cultural/linguistic  
Heritage and Race in *So Vast the Prison* and *A  
Mercy***

#### 4.1 Introduction

In *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, Djébar and Morrison represent a subaltern woman who pertains to their chosen contextual frameworks. This representation is built on discerning their historical and socio-cultural concerns in relation to their position in their communities. In a sense, they disrupt entrenched beliefs in biased and discriminatory discourse, which explains that their interaction with women's disregarded experiences and omitted history persists.

As they write about women's susceptibility to being silenced and their ability to have a voice, they diversify their representation by not only foregrounding Algerian and African American women but also women from other races and social classes. This venture broadens their inspection of women's history, and unknowingly shows their stance on the former disinterest in third-world women and black women by extending their narratives to host diverse women.

As Djébar focuses on writing women's struggles with and celebration of their cultural and linguistic heritage and Morrison disengages from writing women in relation with race as a social construct, they may seem to be pursuing different roads of representation. However, their main interest emerges as resisting erasure. For Djébar, it is erasure of identity, belonging and history under patriarchal customs and colonial rule, while for Morrison, race is regarded as a variable that causes both the erasure and the emphasis and oppression of women while under slavery. Djébar and Morrison fear the absence of women in the general knowledge. They assume that such absence would breed their inability to speak ever again or have access to public spaces. For these reasons, they write these two worthy of analysis novels.

Djebar's process of writing *So Vast the Prison* is unsettling and unconfined. Because the novel is divided into four parts, she moves from one character's, her protagonist-alter ego Isma's, intimate history to general history and back to the several her/stories of women. In the poetic and lengthy first part, Isma's affair is explored, from its beginning to its end, by Djebar. The second part is an abrupt move into an extensive historical research of artifacts and sites discovered in Tunisia and Algeria. Djebar inspects several records from journalists, soldiers, writers, painters, travelers, translators and those interested in economy. She relates this historical quest to Algerian women generally and Isma specifically. The third part represents the protagonist's journey after she leaves both her husband and lover in order to find herself outside of their frames. She takes up residence in her aunt's house, reintegrating with her lost Algerian roots and culture. She listens to her aunt's stories about their close family and distant relatives searching for identities in the midst of them. She travels around collecting stories in order to add them to the documentary she plans to film. The last part is the start of the upcoming tumultuous times coming for Algerian women, the Black Decade. It is very short and impactful, as it reflects the anxiety of the protagonist and her fear for her countrywomen's future, especially after barely surviving colonial rule and its ramifications.

Morrison, on the other hand, journeys back to the seventeenth century of America, where slavery practices were not yet restricted by racial constructs. *A Mercy* is the story of Florens, a young black slave girl born out of rape. Florens' mother was able to spot her unusualness, choosing to give her up to a merciful white master, unlike the one that she was enslaved to. This traumatizes Florens as she lives her life believing that her mother had abandoned her for her brother. So, she continuously seeks love and attention from women and men, leading to her becoming obsessive and aggressive. Along with Florens' account, there exist the accounts of Lina, the indigenous slave, Sorrow, the mixed-race volatile slave, Rebekka and Jacob, the white Mistress and Master of the house. Morrison weaves their

stories together, demonstrating enslavement from different points of view and positions. Moreover, Morrison delves into the issuing of laws and the changes that occurred and led to the institutionalization of slavery.

This chapter, then, analyzes the various positions subaltern women occupy. This recognition of the dynamic nature of subaltern women adds to the writing of an encompassing her/story. The researcher is set to locate the issues that lead women to shift towards subalternity and out of it. In doing so, women's bodies are regarded as records that the authors seek in order to establish a solid ground for their writing of her/story. *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* will be studied with regard to a set of themes that would draw a connection between the novels, their context, the authors, subaltern women and their positions. Analyzing these novels will offer a better understanding of women's intersectionality and experiences under oppressive powers. It will also stress these novels as an attempt at realizing a commendable her/story. In addition to what has been mentioned, the authors' writing is appraised in relation to the themes discussed.

In order to be better understood, this chapter is to be regarded as a three-part venture by the researcher. The first part is a tracing of women's itinerary of silencing. It explores the moments during which some characters were silenced or erased in their societies, cultures, religion, language...etc. The second part is an investigation of history related to women's her/story. It considers the several ways Djébar and Morrison actively engage with the writing of her/story. Women's defiance and voices are to be uncovered, along with the debunking of established historical events. In the last part, the authors' writing is examined for its reflectivity of the themes it discusses. In other words, the employment of feminine writing and its intricacies is explored.

In a study that groups *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, the authors' interest in the repression of women's bodies, and the latter's resistance against power structures, emerges as one of the main objectives, as it validates Djébar's and Morrison's historiography and advances their her/story writing.

#### **4.2 Silencing and Subalternity in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy***

One of the purposes of this research is to affirm, first, Algerian and African American women's silencing, in their respective contexts, and, then, re-affirm the affectivity of such silencing as part of the journey to uncovering their voices, thus reaching a culmination of her/story. *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, published ten years and twenty-one years after *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, respectively, are reminder-like texts, wherein Djébar and Morrison wield silence in order to shape the undertones of such erasure.

Hiddleston defines *So Vast the Prison* as a book that is only interested in "Algerian women's social experiences and their relationships with men" (*Out of Algeria* 7). However, with Algeria's turmoil-filled and long colonial history, it proves to be a difficult task to separate the effects such a history has on Algerian women, as it is still "difficult for women to find their voice and claim their place in such a chaotic environment" (Bakay 120). In view of this, *So Vast the Prison* explores Algerian women's individual and collective gendered experiences.

In *So Vast the Prison*, Djébar focuses her representations on the impact of France's prolonged colonial abuse on Algerians. Moreover, she demonstrates the parallel and constant hold patriarchy has on Algerian society and its women. As she reprimands the cultural, linguistic and historical imperialism and erasure that French colonization had exercised on Algerians, she ensures that the audience retains that patriarchy has held the same unshakable abusive position in Algerian society, as well. To Djébar, these two components have muffled

the Algerian woman from different angles, gradually aiming to either consume her identities or assimilate them in an acceptable form. With perpetrators being from the center and the margin, Djébar, two books later, is still writing a subaltern Algerian woman who is silenced inside and outside with an aim to embrace silence and rectify her/story. In *So Vast the Prison*, she embarks on another genealogy of women (Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria*), only this time, she openly recounts the history of women from her family; namely, her grandmother, her mother and herself. Not only that, but she also shares stories, narrated to her by her aunt, of women they have both long known.

Djébar's interest in unmasking the true nature of colonization does not seem to dampen in *So Vast the Prison*. She returns to presenting the brutality of invading cities. These invasions caused the deaths of a great portion of Algerians. Those who managed to stay alive were forced to surrender their stocks of food to French soldiers. She also notes the looting, vandalizing and desecration the latter committed in Algerian tombs.

Djébar's frustration with the atrocities carried out above is furthered by her disclosing how French travelers' accounts of Algerians remain deeply troubling, especially since they appear to maintain an orientalist view of the nation. Djébar castigates the Painter Delacroix for drawing the famous painting *Women of Algiers in Their Apartments* in the summer of 1832 in a fleeting stop in Algeria. This painting is an orientalist depiction of Algerian women in the harem, and Djébar regrets how it created a long lasting darkness in Algerian women's history. And as hidden history is further unearthed by Djébar, Algeria emerges as a "wild scene...satanic" (*Prison* 45<sup>49</sup>) in the eyes of the colonizer.

Djébar, then, moves on to the silencing that plagues Algerian immigrants during and after the war for independence. Isma narrates the sequence of her mother, Bahia, visiting her

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<sup>49</sup> The version of *So Vast the Prison* used in this research was accessed as a word file; as a result, the pagination is affected, becoming different from that of the print version. This applies to the rest of the in-text citations as well.

detained brother, Sélim. He is held in a prison in Metz for engaging in political activism for Algerian freedom. His acquisition is quick and unlawful, as were many other Algerian detainees. France was quick in curbing any arising protests by immediately arresting and detaining protestors. By exercising these unlawful detentions, France regulated and controlled its populations. While Bahia prepares to go visit her son, she deems it necessary to take off her veil so as to be better accepted by the French. Such action might have seemed like a resistance effort against patriarchy and Islamist fundamentalism; however, it reshapes Bahia into a compliant individual who is easily embracing the colonizer's lifestyle while reducing their own culture and religion. Bahia could also be viewed as either unable to realize her silenced state or being fully aware of it and still choosing to mimic the colonizer in order to see her son. Bahia gambles some of her identity markers away as a means to preserve some of them too, relinquishing religious expression, culture and language for womanly freedom, gender expression and the hope of maintaining her motherhood.

She is, indeed, allowed to visit her son because the wardens are surprised by her youthful and attractive looks. They patronize her as they marvel at how a woman looking like her can have a criminal son like him. They see the motherhood part of her as a diminishing factor to her potential, perfectly assimilated self, whilst she does her best to maintain this façade just to see her son.

Once Bahia and her son meet, they are given fifteen minutes and are listened on the whole time. This close monitoring forbids them from speaking in any other language but French. This explains that some language erasures are forced on the colonized by instilling fear in them for themselves or their loved ones.

From Bahia's perspective, she is watched by both societies, the patriarchal one and the French one, who unsurprisingly also looks down on her, judging her hard enough to deter

her from properly hugging her son. The colonizer objectifies her by assigning her the image of a civilized human reverting to their old ways by bearing barbarity (her Algerian son). Through this, she becomes an example of a failed complete assimilation. What is for certain, however, is that Bahia is heartbroken by not being allowed to be affectionate with her son. As someone adapting to the French way of life, she cannot freely be a mother to a detained Algerian in a French prison, nor can she be allowed to show affection for her son in their country. Bahia is one example of many Algerian women who were suffering from the silencing that comes from patriarchy and colonialism. Bahia is lost and restricted by both, accessing, as a consequence, the sorrow of her entire maternal line.

Meanwhile, in *A Mercy*, Morrison widens her range of muffled voices by portraying distinct and relatively novel individuals. This entails familiarizing her readers with the realities of the early establishment of the slave institution and the systemization of its brutality against non-white entities. Through that, she considers mirroring the layout of American history by exemplifying the subaltern reality of women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, taking an extra step towards a more diversified her/story. While pursuing this endeavor, Morrison opposes any past claims over the unity of women's experiences debunking the excuse of being uninformed on such diverse experiences by being an African American woman writer writing about black, indigenous and even white women's distinct experiences with silencing and oppression, which are variously motivated in accordance with the women's respective intersectional identities.

Before slavery and its continuance hinged on one fertile race, it was a casual practice and an actuality rooted in the generational silencing of women (the oppressed and the subaltern). For this reason, Morrison was so adamant about describing the purpose of writing *A Mercy* in her several interviews as separating race from slavery, and then showing how the idea of race was gradually constructed under a negative light. With that being said, the

separation, isolation and overt power exertion on non-whites and non-Europeans highlight a carefully concealed extra malicious dimension of slavery. Even supposing that oppression was not racially motivated at the time does not deter one from noting its relation to gender and class.

In *A Mercy*, Morrison forwards silencing through the eyes of the white Dutch trader Jacob Vaark. His perspective soon becomes an extensive history lesson on the cruel beginnings and developments of enslavement. Being the master of his house, Jacob is a slave owner; however, from his position, he does not see himself in a master/slave dichotomy, as to him, the help in his house are bought maids and servants. He associates merciless slavery with plantation work and blatant abuse of which neither he practices. Instead, he travels all the time for his work, leaving one white woman with three female colored slaves to fend for themselves. He perceives himself as a hard worker and a merciful master, which clashes with his sour attitude towards settlers who live extravagantly while they abuse and dehumanize their slaves.

In one of his travels, he embarks on a business trip to collect his owed debt from Senhor D'Ortega, an indulgent Portuguese slave trader. Jacob harbors nothing but distaste for the pretentious man, his wife and his lurid house. Most importantly, Jacob is wary and alert entering the territory, where D'Ortega lives, as a white man, seeing that it is the location of a particularly violent rebellion. The latter is known to the world as the Bacon Rebellion<sup>50</sup>. Due to it being so diverse, this uprising scared the colonial elites into issuing laws that would strengthen racial divisions with the aim of creating partitions between races that would keep them from congregating and resisting again in the future (especially once the Virginia Slave

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<sup>50</sup> "Bacon's Rebellion, fought from 1676 to 1677, was an uprising against Governor William Berkeley's rule in colonial Virginia driven by an interplay of forces, including high taxes, falling tobacco prices, and escalating Anglo-Native conflicts along the western frontier", retrieved from Encyclopedia Virginia.

Codes<sup>51</sup> are enacted, twenty-nine years later, in 1705). Jacob narrates the consequences of Bacon's Rebellion as follows:

In this territory he could not be sure a friend or foe. Half a dozen years ago an army of blacks, natives, whites, mulattoes— freedman, slaves and indentured— had waged war against local gentry led by members of that very class. when that "people's war " lost its hopes to the hangman, the work it had done— which included the slaughter of opposing tribes and running the Carolinas off their land— spawned a thicket of new laws authorizing chaos in defense of order. by eliminating manumission, gatherings, travel and bearing arms for black people only; by granting license to any white to kill any black for any reason; by compensating owners for slaves maiming or death, they separated and protected all whites from all others forever. Any social is between Gentry and laborers, forged before and during that rebellion, crumbled beneath a hammer wielded in the interests of the Gentry's profits. In Jacob Vaark's view, these were lawless laws encouraging cruelty in exchange for common cause, if not common virtue (*Mercy* 8)

Jacob sets the tone of how a rebellion that was started by different races and social classes ended up being a damnation for only one race, the blacks. "Chaos," he calls it, negating the viability of such laws. What is to be observed, however, is that Jacob fears, first and foremost, for his race's future safety, all while sporting victimized language and complaining about the unfair land distribution.

Later on, at the dinner table at the D'Ortegas' residence, Jacob is swamped by colonial exuberance and racism from the couple (even in front of their young children). They

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<sup>51</sup> A set of laws that aggravated slavery, for instance, enslaving African Americans for profit and hunting and capturing them if they escape became lawful.

do not care, or think it serious to do so, teaching the next generations the same degenerate behavior of mistreating the servants and not reigning in the racist and colonialist remarks. At one point, they call Angola Portugal, asserting the political dominance and control granted to them over other countries.

It must be noted that, while Jacob endeavors to convince the readers that he is against such travesty, disgusted by such behavior, his aversion stems from a deeply hidden inferiority complex. He faults D'Ortega's lavish lifestyle and house, rather than advocating for the oppressed. Deep inside, he wants the same house as D'Ortega, feeling like he would do it justice because he is more righteous and moral, but his attitude towards D'Ortega's wife says otherwise. His dislike of her comes from her political views as well as gender; he states that she is "making sense-defying observations as though her political judgments were equal to a man's" (*Mercy* 15). With a sexist undertone, he almost scoffs at the prospect of having a woman offer her political opinion regardless of the morality behind it, which reflects his choice of only younger female slaves at his property.

Since D'Ortega is unable to pay his debts, he offers Jacob slaves instead, lining them up for him to choose from. Jacob is appalled by the suggestion at first, then gives in, seeing that Ortega won't pay him any time soon. What happens next is a sequence of dehumanization and objectification where black slaves are pushed further outside the sphere of humanity with each appraising look from and every word that comes out of D'Ortega's mouth. He starts pitching the sale of each slave by listing their weaknesses, possibilities and talents.

Jacob becomes aware of the visible abuse marks on every slave. There are ones with scars signifying old injuries, others with wounds meaning new injuries, all too visible and too daring. There is also a slave with a facial branding signifying that he attacked a white

man twice, marking him as a dangerous animal to be wary of. His attention finally veers towards female slaves. From his viewpoint, we are able to gauge how haggard they look. He observes that, “the women’s eyes looked shock prove gazing beyond place and time as though they were not actually there” (*Mercy* 19-20), meaning that they saw enough horror to not be surprised by it anymore since this whole routine is the numbing usual. Jacob understands the gravity of what was happening in front of him, that there is an us vs. them, a good vs. evil and a flesh-as-commodity performance taking place right in front of him. This awareness, however, does not dim his self-preservation; he could feel that some of the slaves had an underlying rage that might lead to an outburst one day, calling it an avalanche. This could also be interpreted as Jacob having the ability to recognize them as humans, and thus, noticing their emotions; whereas, Ortega has long deemed them as business, pleasure and torture, relegating their rage to animosity.

Jacob chooses a woman slave, rationalizing that they are more efficient workers, and while he is away on his work trips, he wouldn’t have to worry over theft and rape, which is not the same leniency he grants the white male indentured servants he allows on his property. It can be understood that he approves of white male servants while believing that black male servants are more violent and to be better replaced by the much weaker, more impressionable young female black servants. This indicts Jacob with being a sexist and a racist. Ortega vehemently refuses to hand over the slave Jacob chose, making Jacob immediately guess the reason. A white master coveting a black woman slave can be only for one reason: rape. Ortega immediately starts pitching other slaves, reminding Jacob of the potential profitable gain he could acquire from trading in flesh. But, since Jacob still saw slaves as poor animals to be merciful to, he took the black woman slave’s young daughter after she begged him to.

On his way back, Morrison, curiously enough, addresses the discourse around Africans selling one another into enslavement and basically helping the establishment of the

Transatlantic Slave Trade. Morrison utilizes certain white male characters to validate this practice and convince Jacob that slave trade is a reasonable, successful and undemanding business. Through this, Morrison allows the readers to see that even the most merciful white master still harbored greed, and that regardless of how much compassion he wanted to show, secretly, his interest in profit became obvious.

Jacob's sudden reversion to the practices of his people shouldn't be a surprise, as Morrison appears to deliberately use his viewpoint to evidence the forceful acquisition and oppressive treatment of slaves. Morrison poses him as merciful, and yet gives the readers enough hints to be able to identify that he carries a dormant ambition to build a house like Ortega's, and hidden sexist, racist and colonialist undertones to his demeanor. When it comes to joining the business of sugar cane plantations in Barbados, he reasons that as long as it is happening far away, then it should be fine because, after all, he is not like the foolish Ortega.

Given these insights, it can be inferred that Jacob practices a tolerant version of enslavement where he perceives himself as a righteous and merciful person, all while doing the exact opposite. Taking that into account, his perspective proves to be a significant tool rightly employed by the author. Using a white man to validate the silencing and subalternity of slaves, men or women, is a clever decision because if a white man noted that something was amiss, then it most likely would be just that. At the same time, Morrison does not forget to keep Jacob's own hostility present within the text, reminding the readers that no white man was fully the ally of slaves during the seventeenth century in America.

In light of what has been discussed above, it can be said that both authors attempted to touch upon distinct aspects of silencing. The subjects they stand for are still subaltern due to the effacing they suffer; however, their undertaking of such a topic differs. For Djébar,

she focuses on investigating the forceful silencing one goes through when they are exiled from themselves and heritage, in contrast to Morrison, who singles out dehumanization as her main focus. Djébar's frustration is reserved for what happened to Algeria's cultural and linguistic heritage because of colonization. She expands on this by moving from the violence inflicted on Algeria to the change it sprang on Algerians like her mother. Through this, Djébar introduces the idea that France's passive version of colonialism has carefully manicured Algerians' identities by muting some parts of them and emphasizing other parts, resulting in the destabilization of Algerians and their belonging. Morrison, on the other hand, opts for an unconventional point of view in order to fully rummage through the silencing of black slaves. She evidences their subalternity by exploring laws that were catered especially for black people in order to turn them into objects for trade. Ultimately, Djébar and Morrison present a subaltern who is undergoing either a methodical process of effacement or dehumanization, almost foreshadowing the upcoming dreadful instances of silencing in the novels.

In an unforeseen manner, they both maintain the idea of masking and unmasking the real oppressor. Djébar lurks behind patriarchy and the possibility of the opportunities France offers, while Morrison considers interracial/intertribal conflicts (that led to the capture and trade of some Africans) and tolerant slavery as other options or issues to be inspect first, only for them to both return to one instigator, French colonial rule for Djébar and cruel chattel slavery for Morrison. Indeed, it is because there is an origin for these problems that Djébar and Morrison are able to pinpoint and discuss the subsidiary issues. In the next sections, Djébar and Morrison propose more particular cases of silencing that concern the women in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, particularly, and her/story generally.

#### 4.2.1 Re-encountering Oppression: Rediscovering the Subaltern Self

The narrator in *So Vast the Prison* is exposed to a world where learning the colonial language, in the Algerian context, French, is both inevitable and necessary. To her parents, it has become an abating part of their lives, especially when it comes to navigating living in France or having to deal with the French. Isma's history with the language began innocently when it was unveiled to her by her father. This, of course, was not a polarizing issue yet, as she had noticed that even her mother had adopted a convincingly assimilated French lifestyle. That is, at least until she was posited back into the Algerian community and met with the patriarchal norms that govern it, from the cloistering of women and young girls to their veiling, to witnessing polygamy and its impact on families. Returning to the French immigrant community after such an encounter, Isma is met with the revelation that her body is westernized and liberated. She acknowledges this truth when she labels it as gaining a corporeal mobility. This might allow for her to prefer the other side of herself that has been so thoroughly exposed to French culture and language, meaning that it might not seem like she is being silenced or turned into a subaltern. However, this situation she finds herself in is indeed subduing the Algerian identity markers she possesses, for instance, speaking Arabic and Berber is a demanding task, and integrating back into her native country becomes a challenge. Her 'self' and hybrid identity hinge on actively recognizing both parts of herself. Having one side that is free while the other is still a woman, Muslim, Algerian, of Berber decent...etc. creates issues over which side she is on, and that choosing one side over the other would inevitably mute a part of her.

Indeed, signs of this inner conflict start showing on Isma. She finds herself forced to forsake her roots or mimic the colonial other at times, while, other times, she finds herself in a position where her hybrid nature alienates her not only in France but also in Algeria.

In fact, Isma shares a memory that had stuck with her from the bombings of North Africa (otherwise known as the North African Campaign<sup>52</sup>) by the Allies during WWII (1940). She recalls waking up in her parents' bedroom, a space of safety where she would cuddle with her parents during heavy bombing; however, this time the room felt both familiar and foreign at the same time. This disoriented version of her soon starts to feel the intrusion forced upon her by finding a French woman, a teacher, and her son sleeping right next to her on her parents' bed. Apparently, this woman had sought shelter in their house for fear of the bombing, so her parents had offered her their bed while they used an extra mattress to sleep in the living room. Isma cannot help the annoyance that takes over her. The presence of two French people in her parents' bed frustrated her, as it seemed like her Algerian-Arabo-Berber parents were swapped for this French woman and her son. Ironically, this is not so different from her reality since her parents had embraced French culture and are not actively transmitting any ethnic culture to her. The narrator declares her annoyance at this situation and designates this woman's son, Maurice, as the source of it, "For me this was the height of disruption—"he" was in my house, in the most secret part of "my house," of "our house," and he kept right on sleeping as if nothing had happened!" (*Prison* 94). To her, this boy represents the French invasion of the Algerian selfhood and identity. She feels not only helpless and pressured into silence in his presence (Violet 40-41), but she also flutters back and forth towards her female identity and feeling less than his male presence, essentially feeling doubly colonized. She wonders how this boy is allowed here, Maurice, who is male, on the winning side, French, handsome, and a son who has the undivided attention and affection of his mother. For a brief moment, Isma feels attacked by these parts of him that are the polar opposites of her identity markers. She gauges that every part of him makes him invincible, while every part of her erases her voice. She was a female, not on the winning

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<sup>52</sup> A series of military operations launched towards French North Africa by the Allies during the Second World War

side, Arabo-Berber, not remarkable looking, and a daughter who did not have her mother's full attention because there was a son after her who was treated like the first and only born. Isma had none of that attention, nor the utmost affection, which made her feel displaced and dislocated in her own body. In that moment, she becomes ambivalent, despising Maurice on the one hand and desiring his position on the other. This desire for his position is realized through her adoption of French language and culture through her parents, which has caused her a different type of dislocation, one that is issued by the people of her own native land.

Accordingly, Isma narrates the consequences of her parents' decisions. She relates how one day, when she was playing with one of her Algerian friends, she is grabbed by the sisters of this friend and taken to the back, where they raise her skirt and start to examine her silky French-style underwear. They feel it and talk between themselves. They laugh, thinking that they are looking at French womanhood. They do so in a repulsed and degrading way, and yet their hasty hands and quick eyes speak of an envy that Isma had known and felt when she came face to face with Maurice. They, too, show signs of ambivalence and flickering between hating the French colonizer and wanting to know what French womanhood, and the elegance and delicacy that are associated with it, entail. During this process, they end up terrorizing a young girl who has been put in this underwear by her mother, who, in turn, is trying her best to mimic the French. The narrator is aware of the disturbing act that had just happened to her; she confesses that it was "an assault that brought tears to my eyes" (*Prison* 103). She feels like she has just been isolated from the women of her country and her native community. She becomes anxious and apprehensive, but ends up rationalizing that she could not be too isolated from her Algerian female community and pushed towards the French one since she was still too oriental for French culture. This is depicted through an incident where her grandmother gave her an amulet with Quranic writings on it that made her feel connected to her grandmother and motherland. Because of a health examination at school, her mother

takes away this amulet. Isma expresses her displeasure with her mother's action, for this amulet symbolized that her grandmother's, and even all her female ancestors', protection was with her, especially after what had happened to her. It seemed to her that her own mother was stripping her once more of her cultural identity. And when she explained to her mother that the other girls at her school wore their crosses freely, her mother justifies her action by stating that, "They would call ... [her] a pagan" (*Prison* 103). This carries several connotations. Her mother sees the exposition of religious identity as a downfall, and so she silences her daughters' religious expression for fear that their mimicry would be revoked by the colonizer. In such a case, the narrator is once more pressured and not allowed to exist with all her identity markers intact. She laments, "I was stripped, I might as well have been naked. And it was my mother who, caught up in a fit of rationality, took this first writing away from me" (*Prison* 103). Her mother, influenced by French ideologies, sought to reshape her daughter into a version that the colonizer would either find passable or ignore altogether, not realizing the amount of damage she had caused her daughter's sense of self.

Likewise, Florens, born and raised in slavery, had known no other life but that of a slave worker. On her journey to fetch the blacksmith, she meets a company of slaves, with their newly assigned jobs at the tannery, dreaming about the freedom they do not possess. Morrison presents a confused Florens who questions, "I don't understand why they are sad. Everyone has to work" (*Mercy* 37). This interaction is an important first step in Florens' journey to gaining an understanding of her and her people's status as slaves. She is associating enslavement with the plain and direct chores that have been assigned to her and the other slaves at the house of Vaark, while the enslavement that these slaves know is wickedness beyond imagination. This appears so because most of them had already paid their debts, but their master deemed that untrue and sent them somewhere else to work, stripping them of any possible autonomy they could have reached. As a result, having work

does not always mean a decent work environment. These slaves accuse Florens of being daft or simply just young because she is yet to be exposed or subjected to the other, more prevalent side of slavery. They explain to her that a job at the tannery<sup>53</sup> means that your death will not be reported. You just disappear in acid one day. Generally, this proves, once more, that some of the enslaved do not know the gravity of their situation, especially those born into it or acquired young and placed under a tolerable treatment from their masters throughout their bondage. This incident would also help open Florens' eyes more to her status as a subaltern and how much of a dispensable and disposable entity she is to her white masters, or at least to Rebekka Vaark. Florens had not yet fully understood this because she loves and trusts the blacksmith, but Rebekka had used this piece of information (that Florens loved the blacksmith, and that she would do everything in her power to reach him) to her advantage. Rebekka had not cared if Florens would be harmed along the journey, beaten, raped, stolen...etc. Florens simply does not exist where white priorities lie first.

While on her way to the blacksmith, Florens stops at a widow's house seeking shelter and food for the night. This woman, widow Ealing, has a daughter, Jane, with an unusual appearance. A band of religious white people comes to conduct an inspection of Jane because they think she is the devil. This group, a man, three women and a child, is horrified by the sight of Florens. They proceed to call her racial slurs and debate among themselves if they have ever seen such a *thing* before, which is the absolute opposite of Florens' initial thoughts. She was instead focused on how sweet the child looked until that child broke out screaming, terrified of Florens and imitating the disposition and values of the adults she came with.

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<sup>53</sup> "A place where animal skins are tanned and made into leather," Retrieved from Britannica.

Florens is soon linked to the devil, whom they called the black man<sup>54</sup> at the time. Sensing that she is in danger, she attempts to speak in order to explain to them her traveling purpose. This startles them more. The prospect of blackness speaking seemed to fit the devil's descriptions for them. So, Florens hurriedly shows them a letter given to her by her mistress, Rebekka. They are so skeptical that they do not even pick it up by hand. The letter has the following content:

*The signatory of this letter, Mistress Rebekka Vaark of Milton vouches for the female person into whose hands it has been placed. She is owned by me and can be knowne by a burn mark in the palm of her left hand. Allow her the courtesie of safe passage and whitherall she may need to complete her errand. Our life, my life, on this earthe depends on her speedy return.*

*Signed by Rebekka Vaark, Mistress, Milton*

*18 may 1690 (Mercy 107 italicized in the original)*

Rebekka confirms Florens as a property, specifying her as a female person. The language she uses is familiar to white people and essentially denotes Florens as a species of an animal. She also identifies her by a burn mark on her hand, not her name, confirming her slave status and engaging in a conversation with other white people over Florens' social and economic stratum. Florens does not exist in this exchange. She is barely an object that one confirms and the other heeds. Rebekka, in this sense, also shows the anticipation of such an incident. She knew that this letter would be needed in order for Florens to be granted passage. This

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<sup>54</sup> Morrison is reflecting the era by using this description of the devil. One of the most famous literary classics of that time, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, is found to explain the use of this expression, Hawthorne notes this concept as "A common euphemism for the Christian devil, whom the Puritans associated with the forested wilderness that surrounded their settlements and with the Native Americans who dwelled within it" (250 in Łobodziec 335)

might mean that slaves like Florens already have a prearranged fate of silencing and subalternity, which might challenge the contestability of such oppressions to begin with.

What follows is far more adverse than what has already been discussed previously. It appears that Rebekka's letter did not sway the group, so they decide to administer their own invasive inspection of Florens. They subject her to a cold and assessing observation where she is bombarded by racist remarks and alienating behavior. She is further debased by being stripped naked and inspected inch of skin by inch of skin, they even look between her legs. Her body is violated, degraded and subjected to their inquisitive and humiliating gaze. Even Florens recognizes the abnormality of what was happening to her. From her perspective, their gaze is distant, not fearful, disgusted or hateful, just calculating, cold and othering. She argues that animals would have more of a soulful look in their eyes towards her, concluding, thus, that to them, she was less than an animal. Besides, she was appraised like an object, and even the child called her an "it". At the end of the sequence, she was not believed, they took away her letter and promised to study it, pray and reach a verdict. It must be noted that this white religious group's standpoint is confusing. On the one hand, their behavior is fueled by a steady religious belief and fear of this evil figure, whose whole purpose is spreading wickedness on land, while on the other hand, questions arise over the association of only one race with evilness. Regardless of their intentions, there appears to be a certain malevolent comprehension of race and religion on their part, which impacts Florens' sense of identity.

Indeed, she runs away, with the help of the widow's daughter, and once she returns to her journey, she starts to contemplate what had just occurred to her. Up till they mentioned it and emphasized it, Florens was not fully cognizant of her skin color and the notion of being black, or more accurately, of being a bad/evil black. They, as the dominant race, created a novel connotation for her skin color, changing in the process her perception of

herself. Suddenly, being black became a bad trait, and being black on the outside meant that she was as black on the inside, too. Nevertheless, it was clear to Florens that she was gawked at like a strange object/animal, which succeeded in sending her on a spiral, where she internalizes this incident. The latter had been more impactful than she had thought because her internalized abandonment issues, stemming from the trauma of witnessing her mother offer her for sale instead of her brother, started to resurface once more. She wonders if her mother had seen this outside and inside darkness and decided to abandon her and keep her brother instead (for whom she developed an intense hate). The actions of that group of people went unaddressed and unaccounted for, as Florens blames herself and self-destructs in the process:

Inside I am shrinking. I climb the streambed under watching trees and no I am not the same. I am losing something with every step I take. I can feel the drain. Something precious is leaving me. I am a thing apart. With the letter I belong and am lawful. Without it I am a weak calf abandoned by the hurt, a turtle without shell, a minion with no telltale signs but a darkness I am born with, outside, yes, but inside as well... is that what my mother knows? Why she chooses me to live without? Not the outside dark we share... but the inside one we don't... (*Mercy* 109-110)

Florens discovers the reality behind being a female slave of a different race, venturing outside the safety of the house of Vaark. Everything dawns on her as she admits to not being the same anymore. This quote shows the readers how convinced she is of having darkness inside her and how daunting it was to realize that, without white masters identifying her, she does not exist, which is once more very telling of her inferior position.

Both authors, thus, tackle context-distinct themes, and yet, surprisingly, there seems to be some similarities in the discussion and the undertaking of the overarching issues. Djébar's main dilemma was the ramifications of being exposed to French culture and language at such a young age, while Morrison highlighted the reality of being a slave during the late seventeenth-century America. Isma and Florens had both never recognized their oppressed and subaltern status until they came face to face with a harsh introduction into a world where one's hybrid existence or racial group are weaponized against them. Isma is shown to be silenced by both sides of her. She is able to witness how the colonizer is succeeding at forcing itself on her and her family, essentially altering and turning them into a target in their motherland. This leads to Isma's alienation within both parts of herself. Similarly, Florens also realizes that abuse had been present all along in her life and from the place she saw as safe. Beyond the Vaark estate, she was inserted into situations where the worst was made worse because of her inferior status.

Indeed, both authors consider the alienation and objectification of Isma and Florens. Both of them experienced the invasion of their personal space and body as well as the reducing appraisal of others; subsequently, becoming objects/animals under the gaze of their oppressors. While Morrison appoints white religious people as the main perpetrators to achieve that, she establishes religious beliefs and racial differentiation as the roots of the issue of enslavement, as to Morrison, it is important to pinpoint the construction of race as a negative trait that affects black men's and women's lives. Djébar, however, utilizes Algerian women to establish a cultural and gendered differentiation. These Algerian women are also experiencing ambivalence, which has eventually led them to harass a young girl. The author, in this case, strives to reinstate French colonialism as the main issue plaguing Algerians, whether it is girls trying to see what French underwear (or French womanhood) looks like, or her mother severing her connection to her motherland, or a French boy invading her

parents' bedroom. It appears that Djébar wishes to clarify that France had never stopped being the main perpetrator. Admittedly, there exists a chain of aggressors who greatly affect the psyches and identities of those they torment; however, there also exists a starting point for all of these problems: French colonialism and its constant workings in disguise.

Another similarity would be Isma's and Florens' complicated relationships with their mothers. Djébar and Morrison designate mothers as guides to the next generations. They nurture and instruct the next generations on how to grow a selfhood, a gendered identity, a cultural identity, a national identity and a racial identity. However, they also demonstrate that they can be the exact opposite. While Florens believes that her mother had abandoned her because she was black and evil, Isma knows that her mother has renounced their culture and tried to pass this new way of living to her daughter. This created issues for Isma as she felt like her mother is harming her duality, abandoning their origins and abandoning her, as much as it created issues for Florens also who was convinced that her mother had abandoned her not only through forsaking her but also by shirking her responsibilities, dispossessing her of a motherly connection and the ability to learn blackness properly.

#### **4.2.2 Conspicuous Silencing: Isma's and Lina's Perpetuated Erasure**

While portraying the silencing of women in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, Djébar and Morrison had previously traced an inferiority-unveiling trail for some women characters, who were previously unaware of possessing such an inadequacy. Having said that, they also offer a perspective of the subaltern woman, who is directly and explicitly ill-treated, resulting in the blatant attempt to dim her identities. Granted, Djébar and Morrison associate the dulling of one's identities differently. Where Djébar, through Isma, explains it as the exile one feels as a result of the severing of their linguistic heritage, Morrison explains that silencing extends to indigenous women like Lina. The extremes of identities effacing are soon noted from reprogramming to objectifying to abandoning.

In *So Vast the Prison*, it becomes evident that Isma had never lived in a world without the French language. So, after not realizing that she had been a subaltern all along, her perception of her life is soon stormed by all the instances during which she had been silenced in the past. In addition to that, now she is able to determine if she is being actively silenced. Isma's silencing her/story begins with her father bringing her along with him as he, an Arab Algerian, teaches French to Algerians. He is well-known for his strict teaching, and in Isma's memory, she sits at the very back of his class observing him teach this foreign language, slowly donning its nuanced cultural traits that cause her to be distant from her usually warm father. She even starts to unconsciously call him "the master", confusing him with the French master, which is colonialism and its cultural and linguistic impact and implications. Her father also possesses a hybrid identity, and Isma suddenly feels so protective of her own identities as she realizes how much his presence will infringe on her own, alter her so much she would not be able to relate to the people of her country, especially the women (Silmi 62). She is already the master's daughter who is able to discern the accents, the wrong pronunciations, and "the deficient" (*Prison* 95) diction of her father's students. Aside from that, she is also able to see every Algerian aspect of them being systematically suppressed. Her father, then, emerges as a symbol of imposed cultural assimilation, starting with her as she sits in his classroom "in the grip of anxiety" (*Prison* 95).

Isma notes that, in that classroom, she is invisible to her father, who is now a paragon of French culture and language. In spite of her efforts, she is unable to hold his attention, so she finds herself in a space where she wants to be both acknowledged and ignored by him. Isma arrives at a cramped space adorned with ambivalence when she divulges to the readers that she prefers being in the shadow where she is "passionate but powerless" (*Prison* 96). Through this confession, it seems as though Isma has accepted her muted reality, where a simple interaction with a language has become a symbol of power and control exertion

(Fanon). The language of the colonizer, in this new perspective of hers, means oppression and suppression, and that is evidenced when her father's demeanor changes, returning to his warm and calm self after leaving the school. Isma is once more acquainted with the real aggressor in the history of Algerians.

This exasperation Isma feels, however, does not only come from her father, but also from her mother. The latter had forgotten her ancestors' original language (Berber) and then stopped conversing and writing in Arabic once she moved to France. Isma labeled this as "legacy erased" (*Prison* 60), coming from a person who is supposed to be "the bearer of this ancestral legacy" (60). The general implication here is that French colonialism does, indeed, target the keepers of culture and history (women) in order to methodically erase nations and build new ones on their rubble. Isma declares herself and her mother as:

*Fugitive[s] without knowing it, or rather without knowing it yet...I become conscious of my permanent condition as a fugitive..., I am becoming more and more a renegade in the so-called foreign language...I have lost the wealth I began with—in my case, my maternal heritage—and I have gained only the simple mobility of the bare body, only freedom. (Prison 61 italicized in the original)*

Isma considers herself to be an Algerian who was made to run away from Algeria's patriarchal traditions, only to be regarded and feel like a deserting outlaw in France. Moreover, she agonizes over losing her "wealth". For her, maternal ancestral heritages were an inherent "wealth" that a mother passes to her daughter in an effort to stabilize, heal and maintain her/story and the community as a whole. However, this blessing is now addled by French words that had invaded her mother's rationale and severed Isma from her lineage. Isma's mother, Bahia, has carried out several female roles from a young girl to a teenager to

a married woman, and along these periods of her life, she lost her heritage. As a young girl, she lost her father's heritage of Berber languages and culture, and during her teenage years, when she enjoyed Arab-Andalusian music, French soldiers came to her house and destroyed her notes. Isma informs the readers of her mother's sentiments over this attack:

My mother told me with tears in her eyes the grief she felt over the violent attack on this writing. Her sorrow might have seemed incongruous during those days when all around us so many women were weeping— some for son, others for brother. Nevertheless because this writing had come so far, navigating from Beyond the centuries and chores, haven't been transmitted from woman to woman come out some of whom were in flight, the other is locked up, I in turn felt my heart in strange hold. (*Prison* 60)

Indeed, Isma is able to relate to her mother's agony. She discovers that a certain link of history between Algerian women had been severed, breeding sorrow and distancing Bahia further away from her heritage. Bahia is more estranged once she marries Isma's father and becomes isolated while he works. One soon comes to realize that Bahia no longer possesses any ethnic or gendered cultural traits to pass down to her daughter. This damages the bonds that thread the Algerian collective female experiences together. Isma reiterates that having a free Westernized body did not prevent her from feeling trapped in two spaces of herself at once.

Besides Isma's experience with silencing as a young girl, she manages to, now, recognize her actively muted position as a grown woman. She continues to struggle with having a foothold in both Algeria and France when she finds herself romantically entangled with a younger Algerian French man, who establishes clearly that he tends to lean more into his French side. Isma becomes furthermore entrapped by the French language, seeking

completion, but feeling out of place. The places the French parts of her have taken her to were enlightening, but they have also been repulsive and filled with the fetishization of resistance and death. Once she goes back to her Algerian roots, she admits to committing emotional cheating to her husband, who physically assaults her in a fit of rage. She ultimately returns to her husband in a self-sabotaging endeavor that makes her aunt declare, “where are our rights, whether we are illiterate or educated, all of us, all women? It is as bad today as yesterday” (*Prison* 76).

Regarding *A Mercy*, Morrison introduces Lina as a character who is cognizant of her effacing. Lina is an indigenous slave who was bought by Jacob. Her presence is not enigmatic, but rather a clarifier of Jacob’s intentions. He chose to buy her, an indigenous slave, out of many other options because “in contrast to Atlantic world slavery...native slavery was not labor—based system. Native slaves worked, but often to support, rather than enrich, their masters... native slaves were...social outcasts” (Bossy 213). He wanted a healthy and cheap hand to help his future wife with housework. So, her acquisition was based on her cost-effectiveness and ability to do the work she was already used to as a native girl. Chosen on the basis of stereotypical assumptions, Lina narrates how her tribe was fairly self-sufficient before they came into contact with Europeans. In their tribal communities, they lived, hunted, planted and connected with the nature around them until Europeans tricked them, infected them with diseases and changed their lives for the worse.

Lina mourns the perishing of her people, feeling guilty over surviving when the rest succumbed to a peaceful death. She recalls how a group of Presbyterians took her in and then proceeded to reprogram her by erasing any remotely “heathen” (*Mercy* 44) cultural/ethnic trait of hers. Bathing naked in the river became a sin, picking fruit off of trees became theft and eating using one’s fingers became a deviant and immoral custom. Even her clothes upset God, “so they burned her deerskin dress and gave her a good duffel cloth one”

(*Prison* 45). Their alterations continued from “[Clipping] the beads from her arms and [scissoring] inches from her hair” (45) to baptizing her and giving her the name Messalina, or Lina for short. When they reached their desired assimilation goals, Lina forgot both the names that were used by her tribe and the language altogether.

It seems as though all of these actions are done in order to integrate her into their community; however, their choice of her new name gives away their intentions and what they think of their position with regards to people like her. First, they try to culturally exterminate her by decreeing that everything she had known all of her life is wrong and against God, and then they seal this transformation by changing her name to Messalina. Xingyu explains that, “Valeria Messalina was the third wife of the Roman emperor Claudius with a notorious reputation for promiscuity. Europeans’ naming of Lina reveals their bias towards American aboriginal women, leaving Lina at the position of Other” (553). This confirms that Lina has been othered by this religious band, who, by doing so, designated themselves as the dominant group. They chose a name that is, for them, befitting of a young woman of a different race and heritage, reformed, but not to the extent that she becomes fully included in their rituals, drawing once more a clear line between those who dominate and those who are dominated.

Lina, then, recounts her story with a European man whom she had taken as a lover. She reveals that their first sexual encounter was alcohol fueled, and the second one was aggressive and angry. She was severely attacked by this man, that scars were still visible on her face, arms and legs from his fists and whips. She expresses her frustration over having no protective law or a surname to stand against a European man. She was silenced because she was an indigenous woman with no rights and the positions she stood at aggravated her subalternity. In addition to that, she was abandoned by the Presbyterians who tried to reform her. Morrison writes, “The Presbyterians, recalling perhaps their own foresight in the name

they had given her, never asked what had happened to her” (*Mercy* 49). Because Lina did not have another place to go to, she went back to them, seeking shelter a second time. These Presbyterians, however, end up showing their true nature. For them, promiscuity is incorrigible as they held women, in general, to unreasonable expectations. Regardless of that, they surely condemned Lina to a destiny of forever being an unchaste lowly indigenous woman by giving her such an ominous name. Lina is immediately cast aside, made to sleep out like a dog until she was purchased by Jacob.

Lina’s series of cruel treatment is furthered when she is purchased from an advertisement in a paper. This advertisement reads as follows:

He had searched the advertisement posted at the printers is in town. ‘A likely woman who has had smallpox and measles.... a likely Negro about 9 years.... Girl or woman that is handy in the kitchen sensible, speaks good English, complexion between yellow and black.... Five years time of a white woman that understands country work, with a child upwards of two years old.... Mulatto fellow very much pitted with smallpox, honest and sober.... White lead fit to serve.... Wanted a servant able to drive a carriage, white or black.... sober and prudent woman who.... Likely wench, white, 29 years with child.... Healthy Deutch woman for rent.... stout healthy, healthy strong, strong healthy likely sober sober sober....’ until he got to ‘Hardy female, Christianized and capable in all matters domestic available for exchange of goods or spice’. (*Mercy* 48-49)

From this passage, several layers of domination and oppression can be identified. First, the fact that it is advertising human beings as goods for sale or trade is the pinnacle of objectification. Second, Morrison uses Jacob as the white master leaping through all of these

human options looking for the perfect servant for him and the wife he is expecting from Europe. Third, and after careful consideration, it soon becomes evident that there exists a certain classification of servants in these advertisements. Each servant is described by a set of specific attributes that categorize them into efficient workers, and thus, sellable and highly prized or defective ones, so they warn the buyers of what service to expect of them. This piece of dehumanizing text is teeming with objectification, racism, classicism and sexism of more than one race. There are both women and men slaves offered for sale; however, it is important to note that there is not enough information on the male slaves other than their age, race and ability to do work, in contrast to women slaves, the information provided by the sellers on them is much more detailed. These sellers succeed in breaking apart these women's identities by describing their race, appearance, health, marital status, parental status, nationality, religion and sexual activities as a means to find them a suitable working environment that would completely exhaust and take advantage of every identity marker they possess. Each slave is to have an oppressive journey designed just for them. If the woman with the child is bought, she is going to do her assigned work while her child would also be doing some sort of work, leading to their separation. If a woman, who has been sexually active, is bought, then the buyer is expecting her to provide these services even though there is no evidence to confirm that she is a "wench", and not someone who has been sexually violated and then branded as such.

In this advertisement, Lina is described as a "Hardy female" which is a reminder of her surviving the epidemic that plagued her tribespeople. As someone who had been subjected to the worst of conditions and managed to live, she becomes the best candidate to leave behind with his wife as Jacob travels. She fits the stereotypical image of a strong and tall woman who is Christianized enough to know about God, but not as strong-footed in the community. For this, it could be inferred that Morrison is exploring the treatment of slaves

and the process of trading in flesh on a smaller scale, suggesting that it was as harmful and debasing as one could imagine.

On another note, Lina is silenced again once Rebekka falls sick after Jacob's death. Lina's dismay comes from "the death of their master [which] means the continuance of insecurity and suffering in the New World for these women" (Stanković 316). If Rebekka is to die, they would be left alone, just servants in a huge property. The religious people have already shunned them and the male indentured servants would not be of help as there is a major difference between the enslavement of Lina, Sorrow and Florens and the servitude of Scully. The girls' enslavement would never end, even with the death of the master, but people like Scully, the indentured servant, do have the opportunity to end their servitude. Rebekka's possible death meant death for Lina, and as a result, Lina is once more displaced and paralyzed by fear of the unknown. She suffers from not knowing who she is or what she stands for. Still, she knows one thing for certain, and that is, "this land is [her] home...but... [She is] exiled here" (*Mercy* 56).

For the most part, both authors seem to adhere to their contexts, all while maintaining the same theme of witnessing oneself be silenced by dominant structures. Experiencing a sense of systematic conditioning appears to be a clear theme as both characters, Isma and Lina, are pushed out of their communities, exiled, either by their direct family members or by a group of people whom they considered as a second family. Djébar and Morrison write characters who suffer from a loss of cultural and linguistic heritage. The latter has kept their supposed primitive communities together for centuries before foreign forces decided to take control. In such a case, Isma is convinced that her relationship with her maternal lineage has been severed, while Lina struggles with forgetting her roots. Moreover, having their origins be repressed continued to spawn an endless cycle of silencing in their daily life. Both are mistreated by their loved ones to the point that both have been attacked and physically

assaulted by men. Having said that, when they tried to seek asylum with those they trusted, Lina was cast away and deprived of her rights, while Isma, also deprived of her rights, was welcomed and embraced by her aunt.

Ultimately, it could be said that Morrison had attempted to remain true to her statement<sup>55</sup> whilst highlighting enslavement as an extremely agonizing experience for women regardless of their race. Lina is subdued because of her gender, race and ethnic background, and at the end, because she does not have a white master anymore. Djébar, on the other hand, focused on the instability that is planted in every Algerian man's or woman's life by the colonizer and its remnants. She emphasizes the idea that women are typically left without rights by the patriarchy, and without belonging by France. With such statements, Djébar circles back to the colonizer as the main issue, indicating an inescapable double colonization of Algerian women, as well as that of indigenous women in *A Mercy*.

#### **4.2.3 Novel Trajectories: Rebranding Sexual Violence**

In *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, the violation of women's bodies is still an indicator of power structures' domination and control over those they deem as lesser. Besides that, the collective negative effect that such dominance intends is easily perceivable in the way it affects communities, their autonomy, support systems and sense of freedom. In the case of African American women, this domination is exerted by white masters, while for Algerian women, Djébar explores the novel topic of child marriage as the manifestation of patriarchal expectations of young Algerian girls.

In *So Vast the Prison*, the narrator recounts the story of her grandmother, Fatima, who was married off at the age of fourteen to a man more than sixty years old, with the name of Soliman. Her father, Ferhani, has secured this transaction without her consent, seeing as it

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<sup>55</sup> That slavery is separate from race.

was the societal norms and customs of that time. Her father had blatantly hoped to obtain the financial benefits that would come from having his minor daughter become a young widow under his care, once her husband died. Besides, Ferhani also secured this deal by marrying Soliman's daughter as a second wife while his first wife was pregnant. All of the above incriminates Ferhani and his decisions. He sold his young daughter to an old man for profitable gain, burying her in the bed of an old man at the very beginnings of her life, and later on, establishing instability in her life as a young widow. Fatima had been sold, just like a slave, by her own father, who sentenced her to years of trauma by coercing her young body to submit to a man who has several grandchildren her age or older.

The sequence of the daughter sitting in her room, veiled and waiting for the elderly husband to come and consummate the marriage, is unsettling and reads as follows:

Fatima feels her heart stop, her body suddenly grow cold. She keeps her eyes cast down when the man—her master—raises the light veil with his fingers and brings his gray face close to the young bride's eyes ... His hand gropes, brushes Fatima's cheekbones, her eyes, and slowly, finally, she looks at him. Humbly, Soliman murmurs in a voice full of emotion, "A gift from God, my daughter! From God!"

Then, as is customary, he goes to the corner of the long room to begin his prayer: trembling, praying that God grant him the potency, the power—he repeats the word at the end of his invocation—"the power to enjoy the gifts of God!" (*Prison 75*)

Certainly, Fatima has been a girl who had hopes and dreams. She longed to explore the city, the port and the sea; to watch the night sky and gaze at the stars, only to be forced into this huge engagement that she does not fathom at such a young age. Before the scene mentioned above is presented to the readers, they are told about the old guardian keeping an eye on her

and waiting for the groom to enter the room. This could be interpreted that the community knew she did not want this to happen to her, and that she might even attempt to flee. Indeed, Fatima's innermost thoughts were busy. Her mind kept on wandering towards the possibilities of not getting married, and having the fictitious figure of the bride thief come and whisk her far away from having to go through what is described above. It is apparent how much she does not want to be in this position. She freezes up, not even lifting her head to look at the old man's face. It must be noted that she calls him her master, already having established the power dynamics of the husband as dominator and her status changing to dominated. He is going to influence the flow of her life, managing and regulating it, and that tone is set from the moment it is implied that one side is coerced and the other is taking advantage of it. Djébar does not shy away from visualizing the groping of a fourteen-year-old Fatima, suggesting that her future is going to be fraught with non-consensual fondling. What is more implicating is that Soliman knows that she is young, impressionable and pressured by societal constructs to submit when he calls her 'my daughter'. Soliman is taking advantage of Ferhani's greed to satisfy his own sexual greed. The overarching implication in this situation is that Soliman and Ferhani have power over young girls, like Fatima, allowing the pillage of their bodies and the doom of their futures. Djébar employs this form of child marriage by forwarding her grandmother as a child bride with nuances of sexual exploitation, thus portraying a form of silencing of young Algerian girls where their sexual and female identities are scarred by patriarchal ideals.

In a similar vein, in *A Mercy*, Morrison makes a conscious choice not to address rape directly. She alludes to it by hinting at its existence to the readers, but never actually engaging in graphic details like she did in *Beloved*. In addition to not wanting the notion of rape to be overstressed, it could be noted that she is imitating the period of time when it was generally known that there is sexual violence founded on multiple socioeconomic and

sociopolitical factors (Bourke 7 in Roynon 48), but never acknowledged as a major issue. Morrison paints an America before it became the America the world knows nowadays. In that previous version, America is a lawless place, marked by the disturbingly frequent and unpunished sexual violence against women of color by men. In *A Mercy*, almost every female character has either been attempted on or forced to have sexual relations with the men. Minha mãe<sup>56</sup> was subjected to rape when she first arrived, and continued to be assaulted all the time by her white Master D'Ortega. Sorrow is also subjected to such assaults, and even Lina has suffered a drunken abuse carried out by a European man.

The author delineates the persistence of such an abuse from its very beginnings to its most recent occurrence in the novel. Minha mãe, or Florens' mother, explains how once she was brought up to the new world, she was 'broken in' by some men in the shed. She reflects on not being able to see what happened to her or see the men who violated her and the two other women with her. As a result, she does not know who fathered Florens. This act is so demeaning and later even more reducing when they are given an apple each as a reward. This assertion of dominance is done by black men and entails a taming for the upcoming aggressions by white men. In such a case, women like Florens' mother, who had been bodily violated by those of the same race and class and then by those of different race and class, inevitably lose all hope at survival and dignity and are thus isolated and then severed from their communities, for the rape of black women is an attack on the community as whole (A. Davis). This violence becomes a measuring tool for the extent abuse and silencing can be. And while Morrison tries to separate race from violence, Minha mãe recognizes that, "it was there I learned how I was not a person from my country, nor from my families. I was negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song—all of it cooked together in the color of my skin" (*Mercy* 157). These actions tend to escalate in gravity with the

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<sup>56</sup> Portuguese for 'my mother'.

birthing of more slaves, who either don't know their fathers or are the master's unrecognized seed, raising a troubled next generation with psychological and identity issues.

Then, Morrison visits the topic once more with *Sorrow*, a young mixed girl rescued from a foundered ship. From her perspective, it is insinuated that she is a child of rape, separated from her birthing mother and kept isolated with the captain, who could be her father. She was found by the sons of a sawyer who were responsible for "the silent submission to the slow goings behind a pile of wood" (*Mercy* 122). After the fact, she was hurriedly given to Jacob as an extra maid. During her stay at his house, she gave birth to a dead child. Being eleven years old and having no prior contact with women, she hadn't even known she was pregnant or what depravity she was subjected to, leading to the belief that subalternity might be inherent in some women born into oppression. Moreover, *Sorrow's* usage of language and understanding of her body were so limited that she did not even know how to describe labor pain, only repeating that there was a ring of fire between her legs. *Sorrow's* chain of violation does not stop there; she gets pregnant once more by the deacon, which is again merely alluded to by "a hurried one in a church pew" (122). *Sorrow* reflects upon how haunted her life was with every horrifying event that happened to her, pulling the readers in to sympathize with her over the inferiority she had been subjected to.

It could be observed that both authors did, indeed, evade the topic of rape in these particular novels. They chose two different ways to portray the sexual abuse and coercion of Algerian and African American women's bodies. Djébar chose to change the label and form of such an intrusion by referring to an issue that was rampant in Algerian society. Through *Isma*, Djébar demonstrates the consequences that come from creating child brides during the times when her grandmother was married off. At the time, because of patriarchal societal norms, constructs and entrenched customs and traditions, such a practice was normalized. Djébar, however, felt compelled to write about this issue. Even though it is not categorized

under rape, it is still a form of stripping of anatomy and dispossession of consent. Morrison, in contrast, maintains the idea of sexual violence against women's bodies, all while circumventing the possibility of details. Morrison appears to emphasize the emotional damage and consequences of the physical and sexual abuse rather than the abuse itself. With that being said, she does make a plea in the final chapter of the novel by offering a confirmation to the readers that what they were reading was, in fact, an adjusted, more censored version of sexual abuse.

It may be argued that the authors are ironically and purposefully leaving out any direct mention of rape from their narratives. This is done in the hope that this erasure would also prevent any interference of patriarchal discourses that tend to prioritize women's honor, chastity, duty and religious beliefs over their pain. Moreover, it could be argued that they are protecting their art form, especially since they have already written about physical and sexual abuse so vividly in the other two novels. Rewriting detailed rape once more might spark an issue of whether they are over eroticizing rape, creating a haven for the male gaze to thrive, all while disregarding and reducing the plight of victims. Therefore, in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, they avoid writing any rape scenes, only alluding to a coercive, not wanted action happening to women in order not to fall for that 'glamour of shame' ideation (Roynon 49). Still, the same ideas behind physical and sexual abuse persist, and are packaged in a euphemistic depiction, on the one hand, and child marriage on the other, so as to not overemphasize the act of violation but the perpetrators themselves. It is worth noting that Roynon condemns this writing evasion by asserting that this 'eschewing' might lead to a "passive hopelessness" (49) of women, whereupon such violent acts become unavoidable and inescapable.

As a result, it can be understood that Djebbar and Morrison advanced in their writing about women by opting to experiment with a new writing endeavor. Skillful enough not to

restate themselves, while also imitating the time periods they write about, it is interesting to witness the similar trajectory they have both taken in their revisitation of such a crucial topic and its several manifestations. They appear to be restating that some of the silencing forms tend to speak for themselves.

#### **4.3 Her/story in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*: Ancestors and Descendants**

Spivak, despite suggesting that subaltern historiography cannot fully encompass and represent every subjective reality of the subaltern (signifying that a revised subaltern history is not possible), claims that women's relationship with silence is entirely and solely comprehended by them because they already have an understanding of the parts of them that manifest and shape their silencing: race, class...etc. She, ultimately, concedes, explaining that she is simply troubled by the fear of imitating grand narratives and creating an epistemic violence-adjacent knowledge system (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 82).

The key takeaway from the above is that only women can define their experience of being silenced and having a voice. Therefore, Djébar and Morrison reconsider history by assuming the role of historians. They either hunt for women in the shadows or insert them into the narrative with a final mission to put together a her/story that is reflective of the communities they stand for. Indeed, this reassembling of history constructs a her/story that swaps the discourse of colonial victors with that of the subaltern woman. Djébar's writing trajectory is still a threefold one, with some minor adjustments. This time she focuses more on her autobiography that is presented by her, now, named alter ego, Isma. Instead of war heroines, she writes the history of women in her family (her mother and grandmother). And finally, she persists, combing through foreign chroniclers' accounts. Morrison, on the other hand, revisits slavery in its infancy, seeking to bring to the center the bondage of several women from different races and social classes.

Djebar and Morrison engage with the (re)writing of history in different and yet similar manners. While Djebar carries on tracking the memories of women (related to her or not) in a not-so-chronological sequence, Morrison retraces her steps to a much earlier history than that explored in *Beloved*. These techniques help them cover every piece of women's history they could have missed in the other two novels. In addition, they introduce subaltern women's diversity as a complex attribute that diversifies and enriches her/story while at the same time exposes the disjointedness of history; a history that overlooks women's presence in favor of producing a seamless womanless patchwork. Djebar and Morrison consequently find themselves pursuing the recuperation of women's identities, the management of their trauma and the resistance against the powers abating them. Indeed, both utilize the imaginative power that postcolonial women writers tend to possess to carve spaces for women to express their voices. For them to be able to find different ways to still challenge history and redistribute subjectivity to different subalterns is a testimony to their skillful writing.

In *So Vast the Prison*, Djebar, or Isma, is on a quest to find herself. This quest depends on the retrieval of the collective her/stories and memories of Algerian women. In this respect, their shared her/story might offer her discernible patterns for her own her/story writing. The novel is divided into four parts. The first part, "What is Erased in the Heart", is an autobiography of a portion of Isma's life where she unpacks what erased an old love and planted a new one in her life. The second part, "What is Erased in Stone", is a deep investigation of history and historical artifacts where Djebar disassembles the erasure of the old ethnic languages that were carved in stone. The third part, "A Silent Desire", is the author's attempt at blending personal and collective history with a different art medium. She embarks on a project named *Arable Woman*, for which she travels back to her village to meet and film different women as they testify on their experience with colonialism, war of

independence and patriarchy. The fourth and last part, “The Blood of Writing”, is the shortest and perhaps the most impactful as it directs the readers to Algeria’s tumultuous future after independence. Overall, it is clear that Djébar is still moving from the smallest unit (her) to the collective one (Algerian women and their her/story) and back in a catalytic journey of desperately seeking to re-thread the knowledge and maternal lineage she feels she has lost.

The second part of the novel might be the most fitting as a representation of (re)writing history into her/story. Djébar had consistently maintained her concerns over the cultural and linguistic heritage of Algerians throughout the novel. She devotes the second part of the novel to the extensive research she has done on North African historical and cultural heritage. With such research, she sanctions the importance of this heritage to the development of her/story. She navigates the accounts of various chroniclers: writers, poets, painters, soldiers, business owners, translators...etc., who had visited Northern Africa, specifically Algeria, even before colonialism. While conducting this extensive investigation, she comes across the discovery of the Libyco-Punic Mausoleum of Dougga, or simply, the Stele<sup>57</sup> of Dougga<sup>58</sup>. She writes several chapters speculating over the script written on it and how much of a conundrum it was to translate. To her, this discovery was monumental and yet extremely butchered by the several foreigners who were unable to fully decipher it. Djébar, however, was on a mission to show the readers that all of that could have been solved if someone bothered to ask the locals. She does this deliberately, shifting directly to the story of Tin Hinan, the Berber/Tuareg queen, entangling her with the rest of the research she is conducting.

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<sup>57</sup> Also known as Stela, “A usually carved or inscribed stone slab or pillar used for commemorative purposes” retrieved from Merriam-Webster.

<sup>58</sup> “The best-preserved ancient Roman city in modern Tunisia” Retrieved from Britannica.

Djebar describes the fugitive princess' Tin Hinan's travels across the desert. Tin Hinan leads her company riding a white female camel. Exiled and accompanied by her caravan, composed mainly of women and young girls, white and black, Tin Hinan carried the best historical record with her: her body. She had built a life for her and her people in the desert, lived, died and was buried in it. Her preserved body was excavated by a French-American archaeology team in 1925. Djebar reports that her burial site was adorned with several cultural artifacts and a strange scripture on the walls:

*The tiffinagh inscriptions found here. They are very ancient in origin and they can also be found on the walls of the neighboring chambers (the chouchatts), where each of the princess's friends was buried in turn.*

*Libyan writings. Earlier even than the writing at Dougga, they are in Libyan script, no longer understood by the Tuaregs, who respectfully followed the archeologists into the tomb, then averted their gaze when faced with the recumbent Tin Hinan.*

*And so I imagine the princess of the Hoggar who, when she fled in the past, carried with her the archaic alphabet, then confided the characters to her friends just before she died.*

*Thus, more than four centuries after the resistance and dramatic defeat of Yougourtha in the north, also four centuries before the grandiose defeat of la Kahina—the Berber queen who will resist the Arab conquest—Tin Hinan of the sands, almost obliterated, leaves us an inheritance—and does so despite her bones that, alas, have now been disturbed. Our most secret writing, as ancient as Etruscan or the writing of the runes, but unlike these a writing still*

*noisy with the sounds and breath of today, is indeed the legacy of a woman in the deepest desert. (Prison 57 italicized in the original)*

In the passage above, Djébar, through Isma, clarifies several points regarding one's perception of history. Firstly, she asserts that the writings are in the form of an ancient Berber scripture called Tifinagh<sup>59</sup>. This makes the carvings one of the earliest messages known to history, even earlier than the stele of the Dougga that sparked a fierce competition between researchers and translators. This provides insight into the intentions of archaeologists. It appears that regardless of women's achievements, they were bound to be eclipsed by other events, and thus, completely effaced from being agents in their discovered history. This is further signified by Djébar, when she presents the parallel effacing metaphor of having archaeologists discover and bypass women's statues with wrecked faces and wings. Secondly, Djébar confirms Tin Hinan as the original keeper of history, substantiating her claim by describing the legacy of culture and language Tin Hinan had left etched behind her, after carrying it across the desert. She labels what Tin Hinan passed down as an "inheritance" that is tangible, lawful and usually concerns family (in this case, Algerians, specifically women). This is impactful for Isma, as she had previously called the silencing of her mother and herself a "legacy erased". Legacy is usually not as tangible and tends to pertain more to cultural or intellectual aspects. So, for the author to emphasize that Tin Hinan had left Algerian women an inheritance that is also a legacy is her way of reaffirming her identity and finding her history. A her/story that was almost lost to colonialism and its impact.

Djébar further depicts how respected Tin Hinan still was by the Tuaregs who were guiding the archaeologists. Her being from the fourth century and them being from the twentieth century did not affect their respect and acknowledgement of her, which suggests

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<sup>59</sup> "Constituting a Libyan alphabet that is apparently descended from the Old Libyan or Numidian characters derived from the Punic cursive script and is still used by the Tuaregs." Retrieved from Merriam-Webster

that she is still an important part of the history of the ethnic tribes of Algeria. To the West, however, she is but a relic to gawk at. Djébar, indeed, expresses her disapproval over the disturbing of Tin Hinan's dead body. She sees that her body should have stayed in the Sahara, where she belongs. There, she is to stabilize the rest of her/story, becoming a lifeline that connects Algerian women with their land. Tin Hinan, in this respect, represents Djébar's attempt at (re)writing history into her/story by highlighting once more the manner in which Algerian women's bodies never ceased being historical records.

In essence, Djébar does not forgo any opportunity to remind her readers of women's roles in the community. She braves that even if the stele of the Dougga had no clear connection with women, it must have been related to them. She supposes that the writings were a spoken and a written language circling from one culture to another and from one generation to the next one kept alive with the help of women, wives and daughters. In the desert, every word preserved and every correspondence that fell into the hands of women kept the rest away from submission to the colonizer, for at least seventy years after the first invasion.

Aside from what has been mentioned, Djébar resolves her frustration with the orientalist depictions she had encountered earlier by detailing a discovered statue of an unknown woman. She describes the woman's grand stance, her clothes, her braided hair and her erased features. Djébar perceives this lack of facial features in a poetic light as it contrasts with the rest of the statue. Faceless she might be, but the way she is presented is easily identifiable. This woman's presence is imposing, majestic and beautiful, which is the best response to Flaubert's "satanic" view of Algeria.

By emphasizing and rewriting this portion of history, this second part of the novel contributes to the discussion on Djébar herself as well. Djébar uncensors the veiled area of

knowledge pertaining to Algerian women, proving that enough research can make a change. It can return lost glory to those who preserved and protected history.

Djebar, under the guise of Isma, is pleased with her discovery. To be able to write about this, now, dead woman, and immortalize her for being rebellious, independent, respected and dedicated is a cathartic experience for her. As someone who grew up around French culture and language, a father who introduced the French lifestyle as the new way of living and a mother who lost her connection with her native roots, discovering and writing about figures like Tin Hinan reconnects Isma with her history. She feels the reaffirmation of her national, cultural and linguistic identities, and most of all, her female identity and her/story (Rodríguez Drissi 7).

Tin Hinan's story must resonate with Isma's story, giving her hope that she can resuscitate the parts of her that have gone silent over the years (Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria* 81). From Isma's perspective, Tin Hinan also left her old life and moved across the desert, removed from her tribe and facing death. However, she did not lose her sense of who she was. From another angle, Djebar inspires by writing these women. She not only restores their voices but also grants other women, like Isma, the capability to face their silencing. All of this puts emphasis on the importance of women writers in (re)writing the narrative.

Following on from the above, Djebar, emboldened by the results she reached in the second part of the novel, proceeds with an excavation of the history of the women in her family in the third part. She believes that the thread connecting Algerian women from Tin Hinan to Isma remains intact. In other words, she needed to write about these women in order to bring them to light for this thread to be visible again. She even questions why her mother, who apparently has gone through the same troubles as her, did not try to write about what she has experienced, from the death of her sister to feeling isolated and lost when she

got married. The author's inquiry is most likely the result of her realizing the power that exists in writing the silence and the resistance.

The resistance for agency and re-acquisition of one's voice and autonomy in writing is unattainable without braving the silenced and subaltern self. The gaps in history tend to be louder, contesting their nature and seeking to be re-populated. For that, Djébar recreates the lives of these women in words by looking through the eyes of not only those alive but also the dead women. Most Algerian women do not depart with a peaceful mind, having been subjected to living under French colonial rule and patriarchy for a long time. The dead, then, become witnesses, and their return is marked by the narration of truths. This process is a healing purgatory for the author as she sees that those abused, ignored and erased from history return to haunt the living, demanding a proper funeral. It could be noted that Djébar is arranging a funeral of words for the dead women of her family, appeasing them and resolving their resentment.

In a parallel manner, in *A Mercy*, Morrison goes beyond the past she explored in *Beloved*, perusing the history that established the seventeenth century of America. Assuming the role of a historian, she inspects and analyzes historical events, searching for women's history. She, then, reclaims her/story by providing a glimpse into the trials and triumphs of women. Šesnić expands on this by stating:

A novel that imaginatively deals with the early period of American history from the perspectives of underprivileged groups. Morrison's 2008 novel, *A Mercy*, is written in the mode directly opposite to the majority of historical and fictional accounts of the colonial period. It represents a mosaic of personal histories of various members of early colonial society. What they all have in common is that they are marginalized in one way or another, with

regard to their gender, race, religion, socio-economic status or ethnic origin.

(309)

A revisit of the topic of slavery, after more than twenty years, is meant to unearth more information about the beginnings of such a practice. Morrison positions this pre-institutionalized-slavery era as a period with slaves, not as a slavery period, while insisting on foregrounding those who are affected most, women. Morrison exposes the hidden details behind black, native, mixed and white women's existence in America, and urges her readers to consider what triggered the social construction of race in relation to enslavement. Moreover, in *A Mercy*, Morrison confronts the overlooked extermination of the native population of America.

Morrison features the (re)writing of history in several different ways. First, her interest in separating slavery from race never seems to influence a separation between slavery and gender and slavery in gendered races. In other words, Morrison did not abandon the idea that slavery is more oppressive towards ethnic and colored women. She further supports this implicit claim of hers by reporting on the experiences of intersectional women in detail. Each female slave character stands as the representative of her race. In this way, race, class and gender are once more attached to one's condition and history. Each character is given several sections to explore their personal history, which doubles as the collective one, too. With the character of Lina, the narrative shifts to the natives, their history of oppression and prevalence. When the narrative shifts to Sorrow, the condition of mixed women is discussed. They evade some issues, but at the same time experience trauma. Being the master's offspring, especially women, places them as candidates for far more atrocities. And finally, when Florens is speaking, the authentic black female slave experience is reiterated once more.

On the other hand, it could be observed that Morrison is feminizing existing events by reimagining collective memories (Morrison, “The Site of Memory” 91; Šesnić 311). She reconstructs known events and their memories, such as the Middle Passage, the laws issued against slaves...etc., by adding feminine details so as to reproduce the real experiences of women. This is best illustrated by having African American women, mother and daughter, as main narrators. The daughter, particularly, is a major element in the arrangement of the overall story. Florens shifts the focus to the subaltern, giving them an expressive voice. Bhabha labels this as, “forcibly entering the house of art and fiction in order to invade, alarm, divide and dispossess” (18), or a form of decolonization with the potential of powering a recovery of what has been lost. Bhabha’s view adds an extra dimension by acknowledging this venture of Morrison as part of the literary canon.

In fact, through careful observation and analysis, Morrison appears to imbue her characters with the same motivations. Indeed, a connection is soon drawn between Beloved and Florens. In *Beloved*, the ghost of the baby comes back in the form of her/story determined to tell her and every wronged black woman’s story. She looks for acceptance and recognition so fervently, even though she is merely the spirit of a baby girl. It may be argued that Morrison chose to replace this ghostly figure with a human one in *A Mercy*. She reimagines her own story by rendering the ghost into a human. Morrison, then, demonstrates how this child grows up to be a collector and inscriber of women’s stories as well. At such a young age, she had undergone and witnessed the experiences of the women around her with oppression, prompting her to want to record her individual and their collective experiences (on the walls of Jacob’s vacant house) as the last link in the chain of these women. However, Jacob’s ghost is seen to be haunting the house, which remains, in turn, deserted on the order of his widow. This could mean that Morrison’s fears are projected in

her writing. She seems to be wondering whether her writings would also be made invisible by the ghost of the white man or not.

Therefore, Morrison opts to authenticate her/story by affixing Rebekka's own story to the rest. Rebekka Vaark is a free white woman and the wife of Jacob. Morrison explains that Rebekka had been stubborn as a young girl, which motivated her father to sell her to a capable husband far away in the New World. Rebekka's distaste for the church stems from her believing that religion was based on hatred and that it should not be allowed to infest communities. Her unusual outlook on life caused her hasty sale to Jacob as Rebekka's father "was quick to offer his eldest girl. The stubborn one, the one with too many questions and a rebellious mouth" (*Mercy* 70). Rebekka had to carefully weigh her options. Seeing that she had no future in Europe, even as a white woman, she decided that a wife was the least detrimental to her person:

Between the warning of immediate slaughter and the promise of married bliss, she believed in neither. Yet without money or the inclination to peddle goods, open a stall or be apprenticed in exchange for food and shelter, with even nunneries for the upper class banned, her prospects were servant, prostitute, wife, and although horrible stories were told about each of those careers, the last one seemed safest. (*Mercy* 73)

Simply put, Rebekka chose the option with the least damage control. As a wife, she could regain some control of her household, and since her husband ordered an unchurched woman, she could banish religion from her household and raise affectionate children. It is soon identifiable; however, how she was forced to leave her continent for America. She was sold and shipped along with several other women, who were an amalgamation of prostitutes and criminals, across the sea. Despite the unsafe travelling conditions (she could have died or

been sexually assaulted), her journey was made bearable because of the women she was travelling with. They told stories, laughed and persevered till landing. In the new world, Rebekka seemed to adjust quickly, at least until her life was troubled again by the death of her children and husband.

Morrison had previously demonstrated a similar pattern of authenticating historical events pertaining to people of color by presenting them from the perspective of a white character, Jacob. For women's history, she settled on describing how even the free poor white woman was not unaffected by discrimination. This could be perceived as controversial, as it seeks validation through the entities initiating the harm. Regardless of that, Morrison's manipulation of words to achieve her goal is undeniable. She ironically leverages whiteness to further the history of the unseen. It could be argued that Morrison has created a collaboration between white women's history and women of color's history. This incites curiosity and introduces the differences that race brings to the condition of women at that time.

Accordingly, Djébar's and Morrison's approach to representing the silencing, voicing and their relation to her/story remains relevant to their respective contexts. They put themselves in positions where they are able to clearly perceive oppressive structures, the subjects of these oppressions and the resistance against them, not only once but twice, fully claiming the postcolonial intellectual role that Spivak proposed.

Besides looking at the reasons behind the issuing of such silencing, how it is maintained and how it is overcome, both authors analyze these notions in an effort to write the woman back into history and free her of her prison. Both authors incorporate the existing knowledge and the blank spots into their process of restructuring the knowledge that shapes her/story. They remain so dedicated to writing her/story that they find themselves probing

early history, much earlier than the history in their previous novels, in an effort to find that one precedent obscured woman that they can reconstruct with the help of their imagination, and use to propel and encourage the rest of the women. The latter are, to Djébar, “imprisoned bodies” (Silmi 59) that need to be freed and brought to the light by writing in order to gain freedom (Silmi 60). Similarly, Morrison views writing women as a process of bypassing trauma and liberating the self.

In addition, this deep dive into early history by the authors seems to have other objectives. In *So Vast the Prison*, the recovery of pre-colonial Algerian history aims to demonstrate the continuity of existence and resistance of women pre and post France and its imposing presence. Choosing not to overemphasize France as a point of reference, Djébar attempts to sever the link that shackles Algeria and Algerian women to Europe. In a similar fashion, Morrison explores the 1600s of America, seeking to isolate race from slavery as a means for her to be able to represent other oppressed races and remove herself from being likened to the indifferent oppressor.

Djébar and Morrison succeed at engaging their readers with topics they had already addressed. They keep the reader entertained by conjuring a dislocated narrative that is meant to locate displaced women in history. Roye marks this as waging “war against an absence, a void—an absence of sympathetic attention to the underdogs of a racist social order, a (near-)void of kindly interest in their world” (212). Although Roye is referring to Morrison, stating that her writing is casting the “nonexistent into a compelling existence,” and “[bringing] the ...invisible into full view” (212), this could also be applied to Djébar, who has stayed consistent in the tools she utilizes when investigating Algerian women’s bodies and histories.

In light of that, Djébar employs a similar but more simplified structure to the one used in *Fantasia*, while Morrison’s approach is both explicit and implicit in its treatment of

women's issues. Djébar focuses on growing her biography by giving it a historical dimension, while Morrison's dive into neo-slave narratives<sup>60</sup> is revived in *A Mercy*. Djébar inspects history to find the occulted Algerian women who can be enough motivation for her to be able to listen to and write freely about the women in her family. Her handling of historiography is still corrective and yet personal; for this reason, the process of rewriting history in the form of her/story is a journey of self-discovery and an attempt at improving the future for Djébar. On the contrary, Morrison's research was heavily historical and dispassionate. She has admitted that she has taken a lot of time to perfect and refine every possible historical detail in the novel. She greatly valued accuracy while writing her/story, making her process of historiography inquisitive, precise, but never falsified. It aims to soothe and heal the past in order to mend the future.

Taking into account what was previously mentioned, *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* can also be considered historiographic metafiction. They both show signs of revisionist efforts from the authors (Aletti; Stanković 310), as in, they question established history, blend it with literature, use irony to destabilize it and then enable the reader to see history unfold through the eyes of several distinct characters, justifying the unreliability of history when it comes to representing the previously silenced: the subaltern woman (Roper 173 qtd. in Stanković 310). Indeed, most of the narrative perspectives in the novels are in first and third-person narration, distinguishing the protagonists, or the leaders of the stories, and showing diversity and its depiction in rewriting history.

Certainly, the subtle blur between Djébar and Morrison and their characters remains unchanging. It is already known that Isma, the main narrator in *So Vast the Prison*, is the alter ego of Djébar. This animates Isma and puts her thoughts into perspective, seeing as the

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<sup>60</sup> Neo-slave narratives emerge as texts that are intended to detail slaves' lives associating them with some auto/biographical strategies (Morrison, "The Site of Memory" 92).

retrieval of history that she seeks becomes a duty that must be fulfilled towards her countrywomen. The same could also be applied to Morrison. The main narrator, Florens, who writes in order to memorialize her story and find herself anew, could be likened to the author. In this case, Djébar and Morrison appear to utilize her/story-writing-fictional-selves to prove that the link connecting women to one another, and allowing them to preserve her/story bends rules transcending from the fictional literary world to the real historical one and vice versa (Bhabha 254; Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria* 101).

Both authors acknowledge that writing their novels proves to be a challenging task. Djébar concedes that it is even chipping away at her spirit. Because she is urgently writing the dead, as an Algerian woman writer with a hybrid identity, she senses that she is being affected by the witnesses, so she attempts to vomit, or amputate, the words of these women ancestors, who want to so desperately come out of her voice and body. In a similar fashion, Morrison mentions the difficulty of traveling through history with an aim to write the dead, the undead and the upcoming. However, since she is also interested and fascinated by her ancestors, she explains that “something as ineffable and as flexible as a dimly recalled figure, the comer of a room, a voice” (Morrison, “The Site of Memory” 95-96), is enough to make her “rip [the] veil” (91) and appease the souls of the dead.

Despite the small differences discerned between Djébar’s and Morrison’s undertaking of her/story writing, they tended to fall back into the same border-transcending themes. Both novels reiterate the concurrent nature of silencing and having a voice in the subaltern woman, and the challenges it presents for the postcolonial women authors endeavoring to write them. Ultimately, Algerian, African American, Native, Mixed and White women, under patriarchy, colonialism and slavery, exhibit a similarity that is not detrimental to their unique identity traits.

Given that instances of resistance and agency expression are not restricted to the above, in the next section, more examples of defiance are to be consulted in detail.

#### 4.3.1 Defiance in the Subaltern Woman

Algerian and African American women have long stood their ground against oppression, not only because they felt the pain and had to practice resistance and seek agency, but also because they inherently establish themselves as resisters against the standard reactions.

In *So Vast the Prison*, Djébar establishes patriarchal customs as a reducing effect in women's lives, when she portrays the subaltern position of Fatima, the fourteen-year-old bride. As a child, she was exposed to the societal constructs that restrict her, particularly how to act and what to do or not to do. She had no access to education, personal money, or even the decision to get married; however, Djébar sheds light on a small inherent resistance that Fatima practices after spending the night with her elderly husband. Fatima is unreadable by the other women:

The day after her wedding she stood up straight and mysterious, neither bitter nor beaming with fulfillment: nor was she closed and withdrawn; she put on no airs; she concealed nothing... She said nothing. She confessed nothing. Nor did she seem to regret anything either.

Even after the next day in the *hammam*, when she would only tolerate bathing with her young aunt and her younger sister, she did not listen to the murmurs afterward... (*Prison* 75-76 italicized in the original)

This passage demonstrates how Fatima shows the ability to recover her footing after what had happened to her. She is entitled to her reaction and not responsible for feeding the other women's gossip sessions. She has not yet become a prisoner to the oppression that produces

resentful, sour women. She operates innately as if she is going by the same day of her life, scaring the rest of the women around her instead. She is a resilient young girl who, before she had to be intimate with the old man, consoled herself with promises to examine the house and enjoy its beauty once it was all done. Fatima was on a mission to learn how to live like the women in the city and ultimately be okay.

Likewise, Morrison ever so slightly hints at what happens to Sorrow. As readers, we are not directly told that she had been raped or taken advantage of, but it is easily understood from the text. What is more is that Sorrow herself does not acknowledge it, and if she does, it is in the most nonchalant manner. It is not a significant part of her life. Due to her first encounter being when she was much younger, it could be argued that she might not have had an understanding of what was happening to her, but because of Sorrow's characterization, we are not able to confirm for sure that that was not the first time it happened to her. Also, the fact that once Sorrow realizes that what was happening to her resulted in having children, which she covets most, her nonchalant reaction becomes understandable. She never divulges what happens to her or complains, or even identifies it as abuse to the others. She knows that it is not right, but her demeanor stays indifferent, and she never shares her innermost thoughts with the other slaves. She had been exposed to abuse, but appears not to absorb or internalize it. Sorrow's internal thoughts demonstrate her indifference and disinterest in being an active part of the Vaark community of women. She believes that the women in the house Vaark have built dysfunctional and dependent relations with one another, and she does not want to be part of these relationships because she prefers doing as she pleases.

Undoubtedly, both authors take these two characters, who have been severely oppressed due to being sexually assaulted or made a child bride, and write them as defiant women.

#### **4.3.2 Comradeship Among Women: Extending Empathy and Transcending Race and Class**

An unexpected comradeship between women appears to reside within Morrison's and Djébar's narratives. Adamant to show how Algerian and African American women resist the forces that drive them apart, the authors show the natural companionship these women build around each other during difficult times. With respect to the authors' context, the instances vary, keeping the same general idea flowing.

In *So Vast the Prison*, Djébar writes an Algerian woman who is empathetic to other women. Djébar ensures that Algerian women do not become the expected product of patriarchy and colonialism (Singh 39-40). She depicts them as women who resist the uncivilized image imposed on them by power structures, offering subaltern women who empathize with other women instead of nurturing competition, ignorance and hatred.

Djébar utilizes Isma's character to show empathy towards two other women. While Isma is having an affair with a young gentleman, she soon notices a young girl roaming around him. She explains that this girl looks at him with an intense, loving gaze, which weirdly pierces Isma's heart. Isma realizes that she knows that this girl is struggling with her feelings towards this young man, as Isma too longs for him, the Beloved, but is unable to cross that final line between them. Isma's empathy for this girl places her automatically on her side, worrying for her and wanting to protect her from the instability of these emotions. Isma, then, exhibits her empathy once more when the Beloved tells her about his previous relationship. He recounts that he fell in love with a married woman with a child. They decided to run away and hide from this woman's husband. He recounts that the husband found them eventually, which led to the short imprisonment of the Beloved. As he describes these events, he shows signs of incredulity and indignation at what occurred to him. He also emphasizes that the woman was so worried that she was going to lose custody of her child

that their eventual parting was the right decision for both of them. Isma experiences a range of emotions listening to him recount this story. She cannot fathom the easy manner in which he spoke about this woman. She wants to attribute this nonchalance to his young age, but still feels absolutely uncomfortable. This stems from her being in the same situation now as this woman was before. She knows how difficult a situation and decision this woman had to take, chasing a passion she probably thought she would never encounter in her life again. Isma is able to see past her affection for this man and recognize the ruin he brought upon this woman's life.

Isma is profoundly affected by the story of this French woman. She commemorates her name, Genevieve, while never presenting the readers with the Beloved's name. Isma declares, "Genevieve, image of the sacrificed woman whom I would never know, whom I already imagined as some new distant relative" (*Prison* 30). Genevieve became a relative of Isma's, and family is really significant to Isma, at least to the extent that it inspires her to write the stories and experiences of the women of her family, aspiring to preserve them in words. Indeed, Isma writes Genevieve in *So Vast the Prison* even though she had never met her. A sisterhood had unknowingly formed between them. Decisions, mistakes and the love of one man did not tear them apart or create animosity between them; it rather made Isma empathize with Genevieve. Even Genevieve's French descent did not change Isma's mind or heart, as it appears that the brutality of colonialism was palatable when it came to the nonchalance of men.

On a different note, after Isma's life became overly complicated (because of the affair and its consequences), she retreats to her aunt's house. There, she confesses to her aunt that she is getting a divorce. Her aunt's response is a simple advice instructing her to ensure her rights. Isma's aunt is supportive of her, and because until then she had been telling her stories

of other women's suffering, repression and defiance, she encourages her to appoint a lawyer and retain her rights.

In contrast, Morrison focuses on the transcendence of female friendships over racial and class issues, particularly in her portrayal of Rebekka's and Lina's unexpected friendship. At the beginning, Rebekka and Lina disliked one another. To a Rebekka, who just about arrived in America, Lina seemed healthy, beautiful and a controlling entity in Jacob's house. This made Rebekka question the positions she will be occupying in his house, when it appears that Lina had been fulfilling most of them. Meanwhile, to Lina, the bought slave, Rebekka seemed like a white woman who assumed authority despite her lack of it and despite the fact that she had no right to do so to begin with. This, however, did not last long because they soon found only one another to lean on, especially as Jacob Vaark travelled for his work. At the time, they were both slaves in their own way, Rebekka to patriarchy and religious extremism, and Lina to patriarchy and slavery. They were dismayed, but they found company in one another, establishing a connection over their trials and errors doing farm work. One may suppose that because Jacob was absent most of the time, no enmity needed to be fostered between the women; besides, Jacob not having any sexual interest in the slaves he bought helped greatly. Either ways, Lina learns that Rebekka was a normal person, who even let her make and apply cures from her indigenous culture on her while she, Rebekka, was sick while Rebekka learns that Lina is her only friend; one that she can connect with on an intellectual level and that cherished her children and buried them with her. Lina, who can never have her children, and Rebekka, who is unable to keep her children alive past five years, their connection is deeply rooted in their bruised and non-existent motherhood as well as their subdued identities as women because of the authority who is Jacob (Xuefei 70).

With that being said, Rebekka's and Lina's friendship is a multilayered liaison. During some instances, Rebekka does seem to undermine Lina's beliefs and ignore them.

Rebekka finds herself wondering, in a voyeuristic manner, about Lina's love and sexual life. While for Lina, Rebekka becomes homework. One she needs to excel at in order to achieve the perfect hybrid status, especially since she never confides in her or trusts her with small details of her private life. This might go back to the dynamics of their relationship. Rebekka remains the white dominant in this relation, which naturally subordinates Lina. In effect, there is no balance between them in terms of authority, leading to the othering of one over the other. Consequently, the underlying tone of their friendship stays murky, indecipherable and susceptible to any sudden or quick shift. The latter is made true later on, when Rebekka fully assumes the slave owner status and starts mistreating Lina (Fetters 29).

Contrary to the above, Morrison shows her readers a different side of the interactions that group black and white women. When Florens seeks refuge at a widow's house, the latter initially refuses but then, in a sympathetic moment, decides to shelter her for the night. Their fleeting encounter has more sympathy in it than the lifelong interactions between Lina and Rebekka mentioned above. This widow's daughter, Jane, helps Florens flee from their house by giving her food and setting her on her way. Jane, being alienated for having unique physical features, commiserates with Florens, who had just been unpleasantly inspected. Jane's sympathy comes from her low status. It allows her to see the oppression present at the bottom, or the margin, unlike middle-class white women, who are not able to fully fathom others' struggles. In a way, Morrison presented two different examples of white women befriending and helping women from other races, where one turned sour, and the other was naught but a brief and knowing interaction based upon shared female and class identities. This leads once more to the insufficiency of relating women's experiences solely because of their shared gender.

Besides the above, Morrison highlights the veiled thread that connects women. Morrison presents the unlikely alliance that formed between Florens' mother and another

African woman on the plantation. Seeing as her daughter had started to hit puberty, minha mãe was ready to offer her to the son, Figo, of the other woman. They had an unspoken agreement to protect their children, and as feeble as it may sound, they did everything in their power. While with white women, there is a moment when Rebekka feels uplifted by her ship companions, listening to them gossip and mockingly imitate high-class women made her think that it was not such a bad thing to cross an ocean to a foreign land and a foreign man. She discovered that it was not only her life that had taken twists and turns, but other women's lives, too. It can be argued that Morrison is contrasting black women's struggles with those of white women to show the severity of and the measures taken by the former.

On that account, Djebbar and Morrison solidify the mutual understanding that forms between women. Whether it is a fleeting acquaintance or a long history that brings them together, while under duress, they seem to help and support one another. It is to be noted that Isma's empathy for the two women who loved the Beloved is consistently felt, meaning that regardless of meeting the women or not, it feels as if she has already interacted with them (Genevieve specifically) through the Beloved. Their interaction transgresses political conflicts and lands on that feminine part of them that sought the same passion from the same man. However, in *A Mercy*, there exists a subordination conflict in Lina's and Rebekka's relation that is, later, substantiated by the author's illumination of the further worsening of slavery during colonial America in *A Mercy* and Antebellum America in *Beloved*. Nonetheless, Morrison ensures the representation of the contrast that exists between the interactions of black women and those of white women, demonstrating how differently political and racial conflicts seem to be rooted in women's identities.

### 4.3.3 The Agency of Motherhood

Djebar and Morrison evoke women's agency by rewriting their motherhoods in a defiant light. Because motherhood comes to women willingly and unwillingly, the key objective of the authors is to, one, touch upon the reclamation of one's anatomy and identity as a previously violated mother, and two, introduce the relish and devotion of willing mothers. In this sense, motherhood is to be viewed as a part of women that confronts power structures, however subtle they are.

Motherhood remains a sacred position to hold across cultures. Regardless of the changes in societies, women are always related to motherhood or mothering and the abuse that comes with it. Üstün Kaya explains that "patriarchy controls, manipulates and oppresses women when they become mothers" (883), which conveys that patriarchal societies and oppressive communities tend to be more forceful on women's anatomies. Women, on some of these occasions, appear to take this oppression and remold it into freedom (Üstün Kaya 874), proving the fluidity of motherhood. Djebar and Morrison, then, represent noncompliant and unyielding mothers in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*.

Djebar explores the motherhood of Isma, her mother, Bahia, and grandmother, Fatima. She expands on her grandmother's story after she becomes a widow. She narrates how her grandmother pleaded with her dead husband's family to let her take her daughter and go live in the mountains where her family, her culture and their serenity resided. This exhibits Fatima's maturity at just sixteen years old. As a young mother, she soon realized that living with her young daughter in the big family house might take away or influence her authority as a mother, so she made the decision to leave the house. While living away, Fatima remarried two times. She is portrayed as a great mother to the three more children she had with her second husband, who is described as a very nice and graceful man. Once he died, she remarried one more time, giving birth to Bahia. Shortly after that, she finds herself

making another motherly decision, which is leaving her third husband. She buys a new house and moves her children into it. She justifies that her actions came from her wanting to protect the assets left to her three children by their dead father, sensing that her third husband was abusing their inheritance. She risks her marital life for her children's future by asking for a divorce. Fatima's allegiance lies primarily with her children. She takes her role as a mother very seriously, aiming to guide and protect her children at any cost.

In the new house, Fatima is challenged by the sickness that befalls her children. Most of her children contracted typhoid, which ended up taking the life of her second-oldest daughter. Fatima, however, does not surrender to helplessness; instead, she calls for a French doctor to come treat her children. She knows the risk of this choice in the patriarchal community she lives in, where seeking medical help from the French, specifically, is frowned upon. Fatima goes against these societal norms with the aim of providing the help needed for her children. Her actions as a mother are also important because they caused a chain of reactions in the community. Fatima, the daughter and wife of saints, invited a French doctor into her house to treat her children and changed the mindsets of people around her. Her motherly instincts propel a shift in the old ways, not only once but twice.

Then, the author moves to Bahia as a mother. It is implied that Bahia prefers being a mother to her sons more than to her daughters. Bahia was so devastated by the untimely death of her first son, at only six months old, that she now treasures her second son so much. She even removes her headscarf and travels a long way just to be able to see his face. It appears that she has internalized the trauma of losing a child early on by displaying favoritism towards her sons and reason and strictness towards her daughters. With this, Djébar manifests the bereaved mother, who is still a great mother to all her children (this is seen with her pushing Isma to learn and better herself), but seems to lean more towards

mothering what she perceives as the stronger and remedial entity, her son. Through him, she sometimes finds agency and attempts to heal her scarred past self.

Finally, Djébar presents Isma's, which could be considered her own, experience with being a mother. Isma is not troubled by her infertility. She, along with her husband, were immediately ready to adopt. She recalls the first time she met her daughter, describing the moment as falling in love, "you were waiting for me! All I saw was your eyes! You were the only one I saw! When we left that room, your father, like me, could only talk about you. The next few days, while we waited for me to bring you home to us for good, we met up with your eyes everywhere!" (*Prison* 115), this shows Isma's excitement for being a mother to this baby girl, who has completely enchanted her and eased her entry into motherhood. Once Isma experienced motherhood, she was prepared to risk everything for her daughter. She recounts when her daughter decided to live and study in Algiers. Years later, knowing that new turmoil was coming to Algeria, in the late 80s and the beginning of the 90s, Isma takes the first available flight back to Algeria to find her daughter, protect her and be with her during those tumultuous riots of October 1988<sup>61</sup>. Isma, then, persuades her daughter to go back to France, where it is safer. She is aware that she is transforming her daughter into the latest fugitive of the family, taking away her ability to choose and decide for herself. She reasons, nonetheless, that she chose her daughter and this motherhood, and for that she would prefer her daughter to live in a place where she can "breathe in air that is free" (*Prison* 116).

In a similar fashion, Morrison presents various mothers and their sacrifices, the changes motherhood has brought to them and the unconventionality of motherhood. Florens' mother symbolizes the sacrificial mother. Minha mãe was able to see the uniqueness of her daughter from such a young age. This dawned on her as she further realized that Florens was

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<sup>61</sup> They were these violent riots that caused many civilian deaths. The riots started with the aim of uprooting Bendjdid's one party government (FLN), pressing the government to remedy the country's failed economy, re-integrating Algerian youth into the socio-economic discourse...etc.

either going to be sold for a high price or coveted for all the wrong reasons. So, she gave her up to Jacob, whom she attributed humanity and mercy to. Because Minha mãe knows firsthand that enslavement is a combination of physical, emotional and mental abuse (Monk 5), this was the only way she could express her motherhood as a slave mother, to find the best opportunity for Florens and to set her as close to freedom as she can.

In contrast to Florence's mother, the author offers the reader a different mother who would never give up her child. Sorrow, who has been violated and made pregnant, did not know she was pregnant or going to be a mother. Because she was very young, isolated and slightly mentally unstable, she did not understand her condition until she gave birth to her first child, realizing that she could have a child to raise and love. However, her first child is drowned by Lina, who believes that anything coming from Sorrow is a curse. This haunts Sorrow as she constantly repeats that her child must be breathing water.

Although Sorrow's first encounter with motherhood is dispiriting, she maintains a positive outlook on her situation by getting pregnant one more time. This time, however, she takes good care of herself, ensuring the baby's safety. Once labor starts, and after putting distance between her and the residents of the house, she successfully gives birth to a daughter, near the water where her first child was buried.

With the birth of her child, Sorrow acquires a new sense of self. Motherhood seems to have brought her good change. For one, she becomes mentally stable. Before coming to the house of Vaark, Sorrow had an invisible companion with her at all times. This entity, with the name of Twin, can be described as either an imaginary friend or Sorrow's alter ego. Twin became a part of her life after she came out of a "deep...opium sleep" (*Mercy* 138). She caused Sorrow not to do her chores properly, suggesting that she should wander

around and even lie to everyone. Twin's disappearance signals the merging of Sorrow's split consciousness. Wardi explains:

It is only through giving birth to her second child...that sorrow's fractured consciousness becomes whole and she thus becomes "complete" in name and disposition. Bereft of agency or home, sorrow's exilic condition is ameliorated through maternity. Displaced, she nevertheless becomes at home with herself. (30)

Sorrow changes her name after having her daughter, feeling as if she had been changed into completeness. She now does her chores, listens and takes care of her daughter. She even plans to escape with her child when ready, refusing to live under the bitter version of Rebekka. This showcases how agency and clarity came to Sorrow after she was allowed to fully be a mother.

Then, Morrison explores the modern idea of adoption with Lina and Florens. Lina, who has never experienced pregnancy or motherhood, considers Florens as her daughter and treats her as such, for Lina had fallen in love with her the moment she saw her. Florens was brought to the house of Vaark on the pretense that she would console Rebekka, who had just lost the last of her children, but Rebekka showed no interest in Florens. It was rather Lina who found consolation, seeing as she was the one who helped in the birthing and raising of all of Rebekka's children, serving as a foster mother all along. Besides that, Lina sees so much of herself in Florens. So, she claims her as her own, putting her to sleep next to her, bathing her and offering her every piece of knowledge she possesses. She is fiercely protective of Florens, seeking to eliminate any harm befalling her like a true mother.

In view of the above, both authors appear to have used motherhood as part of the female characters' agency in the novels. In terms of being a selfless self-sacrificing mother,

Djebar writes Fatima, who is empowered by being ready to do anything for her children, relocate, leave a husband or even invite the enemy into her house. It is because of her children that she can stand confidently and defend herself and her children, which is the same for Morrison's character, Minha mãe, who finds the courage to surrender her child, hoping that it would better her life. Minha mãe puts her safety at the master's house and her motherhood to the test by standing up to D'Ortega and offering her daughter to be taken away from the estate that would become her emotional and physical grave one day.

Then, both authors seem to agree that an adoptive mother is as motherly as a biological one. This is well illustrated in the characters of Isma and Lina. Both crave a family where their love for their kin would protect them, unlike Isma's mother and Lina's dead family, and low position in society. For that, motherhood can be an effort at correcting and revising the traditional beliefs.

In addition, Djebar and Morrison bring forth the issue of traumatic experiences and motherhood. Djebar alludes to the manifestation of the trauma of losing a young child in Bahia and how that affects the type of mother one becomes to the rest of her children, a fair and protective one, while Morrison presents this trauma as part of a process of rescuing an already traumatized self in *Sorrow*. In fact, *Sorrow* is chosen by the author to demonstrate the delights of motherhood and how such love can help reconstruct one's identities. In such cases, motherhood emerges as a "site of power for women" (O'Reilly 1).

#### **4.3.4 Literacy and Education: From Opportunities to Writing Freedom**

The notion of having access to education or learning to read and write is seen as an opportunity by Djebar and Morrison in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*. They use it to show that their female characters have gained some agency by knowing how to read and write.

In the case of Djébar, she emphasizes Isma's diverse learning background. Isma, growing up, had both an Islamic education and a French one, which contributed to her curiosity and intellectuality. This is by virtue of her father, who used to take the four-year-old her with him while he taught French to young Algerian boys. She, at such a young age, was extremely aware of the boys' intense stares and incomprehension of the reasons behind there being a young girl with them at school while their sisters were secluded back at home.

Isma's father was very forward with integrating his daughter with the rest of his students. He almost wanted her to see how important and difficult it was for slightly older boys to learn a foreign language without a trace of their culture remaining in their pronunciation. Her father explained that not only learning French from a young age could be the solution to a better assimilation, but he also advocated for the teaching of young girls as well. Djébar offers, "My father talks at length with a neighbor, an employee who is 'native' like himself and who has recently come from our city, Caesarea. My father is talking to this young man about the need to send 'our daughters to school, all our daughters, in these villages and in the old cities as well, where traditions benumb them'" (*Prison* 105). Isma is fascinated by her father's ahead-of-the-time thinking. He strongly believes that young girls not being exposed to formal education would lead to their premature and figurative death at the hands of tradition. Furthermore, this is better supported later when Isma narrates how her education helped her become well-read. It allowed her into "A wide-open realm, an expanded space ..." (*Prison* 105 ellipsis in the original), and later on, powered her writing venture. It also led to her building strong friendships and feeling compassion for the women who did not have the same opportunities as her.

Likewise, Morrison stresses the importance of reading and writing for female slaves. The prospect of slave education was prohibited. An owned slave was never to learn to read or write. This was one of the rules set by the oppressors in order to fully dehumanize and

efface slaves (Mitchell 85). In spite of that, Florens and her mother became literate with the help of Reverend Father. He was a religious man who believed that all God's creations were worthy of grace. Florens explains how he was not allowed to teach them but still showed devotion by using two books and a slate while they used sticks, sand, pebbles and rocks. She recalls how much of a fast learner she was that she started writing sentences before everyone else.

Meanwhile, her mother believed that learning was the answer to their problems. She learned from living in this new world that there was no protection for people like her, and that as long as they had no voice, they would never be able to escape the grave conditions they were subjected to. Florens' mother makes a wish, "I hope if we could learn letters somehow someday you could make your way...what I know is there is magic in learning" (*Mercy* 154-155). Minha mãe's plea goes far beyond her daughter to extend to every enslaved woman who lived through what she has been subjected to.

Thus, it is noted that both authors attribute the encouragement of learning to parental figures, mainly male/fatherly figures. With Isma, she was encouraged to learn by her father, while with Florens and her mother, they were encouraged and taught by a priest. For Florens, her mother was also a major supporter, and we know from the previous novel that Isma's mother was also interested in her education. They have, however, different motivations for supporting their literacy. Isma's father cared first for his daughter's assimilation and second for young Algerian girls' preservation of their liveliness against the dulling of tradition. Whereas, Florens' mother wanted her to be free of the domination she herself was enduring. The priest, on the other hand, wanted them to believe in God and find freedom in faith.

It is worth mentioning that, in the case of Isma, there is a pressure to learn, mainly because of the power her parents want her to acquire as an educated young lady, in contrast

to Florens, who was not pressured to learn. She understood from a young age that it was important to be literate for young black girls like her. What motivated her more was that she found something that she was better at than her younger brother. This is quite similar to Isma, who realizes that her father is proud of her as his oldest child, a well-educated daughter, unlike her mother, who leaned more towards her sons. This motivates her to uphold her father's expectations as she describes him as someone who had enthroned her. Both characters take this education, or opportunity, which was ironically presented to them by male figures, and mold it into a skill that would help them later on write; write their freedom; write the freedom of other women; write her/stories that free and empower women.

#### **4.3.5 Transcendent Storytelling: The Recorders and the Records**

Djebar and Morrison demonstrate unwavering interest in storytelling as a key component to recording her/story. Storytelling proves to be significant to the flow of the narration in both *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*. From preserving the sacred relationship that forms between women storytellers to preserving history itself, the authors utilize certain characters positioning them as the records, sharing oral her/stories, the recorders transcribing her/stories or both.

Djebar presents Isma as a character who receives stories from different female figures in her life. Because she is writing a semi-documentary on Algerian women, she tours the mountains where her ancestors resided, collecting pieces of truth from the elderly women. Indeed, the confrontation she had with her ex-husband before deciding to embark on this journey prompted her to search for herself in the midst of her countrywomen's her/story. Her journey of listening to women's oral traditions started when she sought her family, mainly visiting her paternal and maternal aunts. She even visited distant relatives and went to communal places like, hammam, collecting fragments of women's stories and observing the trading of stories. Her paternal aunt would start every sentence with "O! The daughter of

my brother!” (*Prison* 110), as an endearment, as well as a motif of the start of another anecdote. Her maternal aunt, on the other hand, is seen by Isma as a guide. Isma had taken refuge in her aunt’s house listening to her give, “detailed anecdotes about the women who were her neighbors and whose nagging voices sometimes reached us” (110). This aunt is the main source of stories for Isma, such as the life story of Fatima, Isma’s grandmother. While narrating these stories, she would be interactive, sharing her opinion on the events while narrating. She would also have a cadence to her narration, showcasing how affected she is by what she was recounting. It seemed to Isma that her aunt was passionate about telling her mother’s story. She felt like Fatima’s pain was passed down to her daughter, who, in turn, needed this release of storytelling. Isma is both fascinated by her chronicler aunt and offended by their two-woman party, confronting and lamenting over her subaltern grandmother’s life.

In addition to the above, Isma is unable to escape the frustration that comes from her inability to remember or fully grasp the importance of her grandmother's gatherings and dance parties, thinking of all the stories she could have collected during those gatherings. This is because Isma believes that collecting stories about women from the source is an important step in the process of finding and reclaiming their her/stories and lost selves. This further highlights her aunt’s significant role as the storyteller, for she is the closest Isma can get to the source. Subsequently, the notions of storytelling and authenticating it emerge as a significant step in Isma’s endeavors as it grants her access to forgotten her/story. She takes the additional step of ensuring the passing down of these stories and anecdotes to the next generations, showing that, one, she was not discouraged by the fact that she was not able to receive the stories from her own mother and grandmother, and two, that she was able to recover women’s her/stories regardless of them being alive or dead (Salhi 71).

After collecting these stories, Isma becomes the main storyteller. She arranges these stories by weaving them in between her own personal accounts. She does so in the hope that these accounts of women interacting with the War of Independence (whether fighting in it or losing their purpose after it), distant cousins disliking their husbands and grandmothers divorcing their husbands could reach a world where they would not appear as lesser beings but rather as fighters. However, it must be noted that there was no direct dive into the perspectives of the protagonists of these stories she collected. Mostly, it is Isma receiving and then diffusing the stories, which solidifies her position as both the recorder and the record.

As far as storytelling in *A Mercy* goes, Morrison assigns this practice to three main characters, Florens, Minha mãe and Lina. While the other characters also narrate their history, these three characters actively engage in the act of sharing stories, with the reader and with each other, in order to pass down historical knowledge, affirm themselves and teach significant lessons. Beaulieu declares that, “even though the novels are written texts, Morrison’s narrators are oral storytellers because of the way they relate the story to the reader.” (240), hinting at the involvement of the reader, who tends to be the final receiver of the story. When it comes to the variety and abundance of narrators, Beaulieu views it as Morrison’s effort at “cobbling” (23) the history from every account possible. This is usually because most of the subaltern’s history has been erased, forcing writers to explore what has been preserved and shared between the women.

Florens, her mother and Lina come from cultural backgrounds that celebrate the tradition of storytelling. As Florens was growing up in Jacob’s estate, she grew particularly close to Lina, who had, in turn, considered her as her own. Certainly, it was Lina who first introduced Florens to storytelling. They would lie together at night and Lina would tell Florens several stories, “stories of wicked men who chopped off the heads of devoted wives;

of cardinals who carried the soles of good children to the place where time itself was a baby. Especially called for where stories of mothers fighting to save their children from wolves and natural disasters” (*Mercy* 58). Florens was brought up on Lina’s stories, which appear to have been instructive in her life. It could be suggested that Lina used storytelling to bond with Florens. At the same time, she used it to teach her about history and life. One of the many stories Lina recounted is a story of an eagle mother. The latter protected her eggs from every predator, “At the tremble of a leaf, the scent of another life, her frown deepens, her head jerks and her feathers quietly lift. Her talons are sharpened on the rock; her beak is like the side of a war god. She is fierce, protecting her borning young. But one thing she cannot defend against: the evil thoughts of man” (*Mercy* 58). After this man attacks her nest, the eagle mother continuously falls down. This story could be perceived as an allegory for enslavement and its consequences on mothers. It, undeniably, applies to Florens and Minha mãe, who has become this eagle mother, endlessly falling into despair because of abuse, and the possibility of it happening to her own daughter.

Florens is seen demanding to know what happens to the motherless eggs, to which Lina answers that they survive. What Lina does, however, is that she answers Florens’ question with “we have” (*Mercy* 59), insinuating that they, the parentless enslaved, are surviving regardless of their situation. Through this, it is noted how Lina seizes the opportunity to teach Florens a life lesson and a piece of history.

A similar story to the eagle mother is seen to be sung by Florens’ mother right before she meets Jacob and begs him to take her child away. Minha mãe’s version is about a green bird that dies while trying to protect her eggs from a monkey. This is very symbolic as it appears that similar stories circulate communities and cultures even. However, because in Minha mãe’s version the mother dies and the future of the eggs is unknown (most likely dead because of the monkey), she decides to give her daughter up to Jacob. She strongly

believes that if she does not abandon her child, she too, like the green bird, would die and never know what had happened to her daughter. This story, passed down to her through several ancestors, appears to have encouraged her to make a choice.

Florens' mother, in the last chapter, returns, narrating her own life events chronologically. She explains the rationale behind her actions while addressing her daughter, hoping that one day her daughter would be able to hear her mother's stories the same way she was able to hear the story of the eagle mother. From this, we can deduce that storytelling persists even when it is not passed down to the immediate next generation by biological mothers. Women's experiences are carried by the living and the dead, and they manifest differently according to the cultural teachings surrounding them. Morrison had already touched upon this aspect when she manifested the spirits of the ancestors in *Beloved*, who returned to speak of their her/stories, challenging and guiding their lost descendants. Women, then, are indeed linked together regardless of their perpetuated erasure.

By the end, Florens emerges as the main storyteller. She becomes the final receiver of all of these stories, along with her own personal experiences. This prompts her to continue the cycle, transforming into the recorder of stories and the records themselves.

All in all, Djebbar and Morrison reach the shared conclusion that the thread of storytelling tradition persists between women connecting and uniting them as they teach the next generations, preserve her/story and escape subalternity. The authors use main storytellers who receive and distribute stories. The narrators, Isma and Florens, they utilize often blend with the authors themselves, implying that Djebbar and Morrison are the main storytellers of the novels.

#### **4.3.6 Practicing Culture: Border-Transcending Practices**

In *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, Djebbar and Morrison ensure the incorporation of traditions and cultural practices, stemming from religious or community-based habits. By

having cultural roots in the narratives, the authors restore the characters' sense of belonging and, thus, their position of agency.

With the spread of French cultural practices among Algerians, Djébar strives to counter this by reintroducing several authentic Algerian cultural practices, emphasizing their prevalence in the face of gradual erasure. Djébar imitates the latter, in *So Vast the Prison*, by employing cultural instances sparingly, highlighting the prominent patterns that withstood erasure. Indeed, Salhi stresses that, "in addition to insisting on the importance of women's oral transmission (of her-story) in the project of rewriting national history (his-story), Djébar also gives women's role as transmitters of cultural heritage, as the 'porte-mémoire'" (71), in order to accomplish this, Djébar underlines four specific practices; two of them are considered a secretive part of women's affairs while the other two are more publicly known.

Djébar reveals two private cultural aspects, the hammam<sup>62</sup> and sorcery. The notion of hammam is used as the opening scene in the novel, through it, Djébar establishes the freedom of the female Algerian body, physically and conceptually. The hammam, thus, is regarded as an essential part of women's traditions. They seek it to clean their bodies and souls. In it, they undress (with the exception of their gold jewelry), relax (some even sleep), and find the courage to chat about and ruminate over their domestic lives, mainly their experiences with patriarchy and their husbands, otherwise known as the enemies in their lives (Rodríguez Drissi 3). In the hammam, Algerian women relocate their voices denouncing the same enemy and forming a tradition and culture of it (Rodríguez Drissi 3). Then, Djébar presents a sorcery-related scene. When Bahia's older sister dies of Typhoid, a young Bahia, out of shock, loses the ability to speak. Women advise Fatima to send her

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<sup>62</sup> A type of public bathing house found in the regions that were previously under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

daughter to a local sorceress who is known for her skillful “[Freeing of] someone possessed, kidnapped by a beloved now among the dead who held on to this person ‘despite the will of God’” (*Prison* 85). Djébar sketches a general picture of the ritual, offering that it is to happen near the beach, but she does not provide extra details, protecting the confidentiality of these practices. Indeed, Bahia returns to being able to speak after this ritual. In this case, it appears that Algerian women return to divination and sorcery as part of their feminine culture. It is a women-only space where they can explore both healing and harming. Djébar’s bravery must be noted as she writes this dangerous and protected part of Algerian women’s culture, in an Islamic society.

Djébar, then, revisits celebratory traditions by recounting Fatima’s wedding and the naming ceremony of Bahia’s son. Wedding celebrations comprise a significant part of the Algerian culture, specifically women’s lives. It especially honors the considerable shift in women’s lives and unlocks a festive space of expression for them. Djébar presents what she dubs a nuptial procession, or simply a wedding parade. Guests join this march helmed by the bride, Fatima. In fact, the latter is hidden beneath her father’s flowing woolen cloak. She rides a ceremonial mule followed by a line of women and children bearing candelabras. The parade is guided by singing musicians heading towards the groom’s house. Fatima, who is clad in traditional clothing, adorned with makeup and henna, is then to wait in the groom’s chamber under the watchful eyes of a female guardian. Within this tradition, the whole community celebrates the change issuing in the young bride’s life, going hand-in-hand with her, assuring her of their support, while they uphold traditions. In the same line of celebration, Djébar recounts the naming ceremony of Bahia’s son. She explains that new mothers and babies are celebrated after the seventh day of their birth. It is a ritualistic affair, overseen by a matriarch and brimming with women and their ululations as they assemble to witness women musicians sing and dance. Such a ceremony puts emphasis on the importance

of having a community that honors new mothers and their babies without forgetting to reaffirm the feminine nature of this practice.

On the other hand, Morrison opts for an exploration of indigenous culture through Lina. Although Lina had become a perfect hybrid, blending seamlessly with her surroundings (especially before Jacob's wife-to-be came), she still shows signs of retaining her culture.

Lina, after being subjected to ethnic and cultural cleansing by the Presbyterians, was able to preserve fragments of herself that evoke her native culture and tribe:

She decided to fortify herself by piecing together scraps of what her mother had taught her before dying in agony. Relying on memory and her own resources, she coupled together neglected rights, merged Europe medicine with native, scripture with lore, and recalled or invented the hidden meaning of things. Found, in other words a way to be in the world. (*Mercy* 45)

Through this passage, Lina's relentlessness is easily discernible. She breaches the boundaries (set by the colonialists at the time) that restrict and isolate her and merges them with every cultural and self-defining characteristic she has left (Xingyu 552). She, essentially, creates a version of herself that is able to sustain the changes that were forced on her and even serve as a motherly figure for Florens (Kovács 169). Lina, in this respect, appears to possess the hybrid identity that Bhabha theorized, meaning that, as long as she still visits her cultural practices, resisting complete erasure, she can destabilize the powers aiming to eliminate her existence.

As a matter of fact, Lina's people were self-efficient before foreigners targeted them. The entirety of her perspective shows how aware and smart of an individual she is. This sharpness, she cultivates, is rooted in the need to survive and powered by her cultural

heritage. Morrison explains that Lina still used a hammock for sleeping and bathed in the river. The latter is a practice that seems so strange to the other characters, even erotic, particularly to male characters. However, to Lina and her tribe, it is a place of cleanliness, socialization and spirituality. Through the river, she reconnects with her ancestors and maintains those bonds.

Apart from that, Lina is portrayed as an individual who dabbles in lore and prophesying as part of her cultural beliefs. This is not strange to her or her tribespeople because she remembers hearing the sachem<sup>63</sup> prophesy the destruction of all non-Europeans by greedy nature-abusing Europeans. In fact, she starts to formulate her own sets of beliefs. She shares the belief that one must not seek their reflection as it will drink one's soul, meaning that appearances, which Europeans coveted and advanced based on in the massacres they committed, are the downfall of humans because they turn them into parasitic predators. In addition to that, Lina uses this spirituality and healing knowledge to help improve Rebekka's sickness. She brews concoctions inspired by her mother's final words and places magic pebbles under Rebekka's pillow in order to expel bad spirits from her body. Lina risks exposing that she still practiced her culture in order to keep Rebekka alive, especially since Rebekka's survival decreed their, the slaves, survival. This fear also comes from her strong belief that Jacob Vaark died because he violated nature. The moment he killed the trees to build his house, he was to die. And even before all of the above events, Lina, at just fourteen, had placed a curse on the lover who abused her, showing that she had engaged with these practices even while she was being taught Christianity, all for the purpose of protecting and avenging herself.

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<sup>63</sup> "A North American Indian chief", retrieved from Merriam-Webster.

The writing of her/story, thus, appears to require the integration of cultural aspects in order for it to emulate the authentic and resistant women's history. What is of notable significance is that both Djébar and Morrison exhibit similarities in the cultural practices they chose to present. The similarities are that of bathing and the interest some of the characters had for spirituality and magic, although Djébar diverges by including public practices of culture that are appropriated by women. Djébar's representations, in this case, are used to reaffirm the women's mutinous spaces, while Morrison's shed light on the empowering qualities of cultural aspects, emphasizing that some communities are imperishable in their fight against erasure. It may be inferred that some cultural practices exist outside of borders, transcending nationalities, beliefs and races. They are protected and sustained by women, granting them the ability to also exist outside of oppressions sometimes.

#### **4.3.7 Desire and Love: In Pursuit of an Un-subaltern Self**

In *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, Djébar and Morrison introduce the novel theme of love and desire. This previously unexamined notion is meant to feature affection and the autonomy it ensues on a woman's body and emotions as an untapped act of resistance carefully veiled within her/story.

Djébar chronicles Isma's thirteen-month-long affair with a much younger co-worker known to the reader as the Beloved. The first part of the novel is dedicated to the exploration of meeting, falling in love and sexually desiring the Beloved. This new ability of Isma to find attraction and excitement for him makes her think, "how good it's going to be alive from now on" (*Prison* 5). Djébar depicts this chasing of desire as a freedom from societal constraints, especially Isma's loveless marriage.

Djebar devotes seven chapters to the love story of Isma and the Beloved. In them, she describes, in detail, Isma's complex emotions towards him. He is an entity that she yearns for when he is not near her. He becomes a lifeline to her existence as she expresses, "*I exist, everything exists, because he is real!*" (*Prison 7* italicized in the original). These sentiments come from her seeking to belong someplace, where a completed and stable version of her resides. Certainly, the readers are soon introduced to this man and what makes him so desirable. The Beloved appears to also be a hybrid like Isma; however, from her perspective, he presents as a well-adjusted hybrid. Although he lived in both France and Algeria, he prefers living in Algeria more. He doesn't speak Arabic or Berber and has no interest in learning these languages at all. He believes that he can live peacefully in Algeria without worrying about the culture and language. His practicality baffles Isma, but she soon realizes that this is possible for him because he is a man with a stable job, freely experiencing love. For these reasons, being with the Beloved is fulfilling to Isma's hybridity as he stabilizes and destabilizes her, "I unveiled myself. Thus I was in search of myself. Thus I attempted to disguise myself from myself" (*Prison 8*). Isma appears to be trying to construct a different much happier and fuller childhood and adulthood through him. She attempts to console her younger, unstable self by exposing her to a person who succeeded in untangling the two sides of him, in addition to freeing her married self from the repression and indifference it had been plagued with.

Be that as it may, there were moments in this escapade when Isma was repelled by the Beloved. She discovers that he has no connection to or interest in his Arabo-Berber heritage. He is too assimilated, carefree and suddenly very distant from her, mainly because she never lost that attachment to her roots. Isma reflects, "when one learned Arabic, outside of school, it was not to have a career but to be willing to die!" (*Prison 11*). Since she is nine years older than him, she has lived an eventful life, witnessed the war and identified and

appreciated the importance of knowing one's own cultural and linguistic heritage. Additionally, his nonchalance is also significant in the way it affects Isma. She declares, "my visibility for him made me visible to myself" (*Prison* 19). Indeed, she longs for a sense of completeness by being with him, while he harbors nothing but disregard for her troubles; as a result, she becomes further destabilized, discovering that she might have been seeking his approval, too, crowning him as the newest authoritative figure in her life.

Isma, ultimately, confesses to her husband that she has been harboring all of these emotions for another man. He retaliates, calling her an adulterous woman who has become a slave to her desire and body. After their confrontation, however, Isma decides to go back to her husband, and when one night, they go to a dance hall, her husband sees the Beloved. They engage in a verbal altercation that leaves the Beloved turned away from Isma. As it appears, he had cowered from Isma's husband and turned his back on Isma, not bothering to even spare her a look. This deeply hurt and disappointed Isma. She ponders, "*How could I ever have been attracted that way to someone who's back I am seeing now? Because he's running away, is it possible? Because he is leaving, he is afraid, can this be true?...I loved a child, and adolescent, a younger brother, cousin, not a man. I did not know it yet*" (*Prison* 32 italicized in the original). She admits that she would have easily abandoned her husband and followed her Beloved, only he kept his back turned to her, not acknowledging her existence publicly. She suddenly remembered her grandmother's words, "a man is someone whose back one does not see" (*Prison* 33). Although she saw him as a loved one, a Beloved, he relegated her to the position of a stranger and showed his true weak and uncaring nature.

After experiencing this disappointment, Isma is accompanied by her grandmother's words, for she realizes that maybe she was enamored by the need to mother him and be accepted by him. So, she calls out to her grandmother to help her with her chosen next journey of finding herself. She pleads, "I am trying, because of you, thanks to you, to get out

of this mess, and at the same time perhaps to free myself from the spell of my obsession. Help me, grandmother, but not with your bitterness or harshness. No! Speak to me...” (*Prison* 33). Isma, in this, is in need of female guidance, one she will gradually acquire as she listens for women’s voices, her grandmother included, and writes her/story. In the wake of these events, Isma recognizes that she no longer needs the Beloved. She, now, calls him the formerly Beloved, beginning a new chapter in her life where a genealogy of Algerian women is an answer to her troubles.

Similarly, Morrison portrays a female character, Florens, who is deeply in love with the blacksmith, a free ironsmith black man often hired by Jacob Vaark. To Florens, the blacksmith represents freedom, attention and a replacement for her mother’s lost affection, she insists, “You are my protection. Only you. You can be it because you say you are a free man...” (*Mercy* 66), which explains why she is eager to be in his vicinity. She aims to complete her cracked sense of confidence, existence and self through his attention.

In the opening of the novel, Florens addresses the blacksmith directly. She confesses her undying love for him, “you are my shaper and my world as well. It is done. No need to choose” (*Mercy* 67), which elevates him to a position of great importance in her life. Moreover, after the humiliation she had endured on her journey to him, she seems to seek him because he must know what it means to be black. She hopes that he will teach her how to be as autonomous and black as he is. What escapes Florens, however, is that regardless of how often she pursues him, she cannot divorce slavery; instead, the conditions of people like her worsen over time, which has been thoroughly explored in *Beloved*.

The author, then, shows from a different perspective, Sorrow’s, the sexual relationship between Florens and the blacksmith. Sorrow, who has a habit of wandering in the forest, stumbles upon them engaging in sexual intercourse. She notes the synergy and

enthusiasm in their act. It is so foreign to Sorrow to see emotions and movements during sexual intercourse. She even likens it to dancing. From this, it is evident that Florens must have felt as free as the blacksmith in those moments, as she was allowed to show her emotions, unlike Sorrow, who is often apathetically raped.

However, once Florens arrives at the blacksmith's residence, she is surprised by the young boy he is fostering. Because of her past traumas, Florens steps into that dark place where her mother abandoned her for her younger brother again. During her stay with this boy, Malaik, Florens is plagued by nightmares. In his presence, she dreams about not having a face, as in, losing the identity she managed to put together while living in the house of Jacob Vaark and loving the blacksmith. As a result, she becomes expelled once more, fighting for scraps of affection with another young boy.

The presence of Malaik is a nuisance to Florens. So, when she suspects that he stole her boots, which are Jacob's, a small protection she carries with her everywhere, she is quick to attack, leaving him unconscious. Apparently, Florens was having a psychotic episode, going into a trance that was broken by the intervention of the blacksmith.

Florens is confused by his reaction. He hurries to check on the child first, which Florens is clearly upset by. She implores him over his obsessive concern over this boy, and he responds by striking her and sending her away. She questions him again, and he elaborates:

Because you are slave.

What?

You heard me.

Sir makes me that.

I don't mean him.

Then who?

You.

What is your meaning? I am a slave because sir trades for me.

No. You have become one.

How?

Your head is empty and your body is wild. (*Mercy* 134-135)

The blacksmith confronts Florens with her animosity, lack of maternal instincts, humanity and sense of community. She is a slave not only to a white man but to her trauma.

She attempts to appease him by confessing her love, but he dismisses her sentiments:

I am adoring you.

And a slave to that too.

You alone own me.

Own yourself, woman, and leave us be. You could have killed this child.

No. wait. You put me in misery.

You are nothing but wilderness. No constraints. No mind. (*Mercy* 135)

He accuses her of being irrational and callous, essentially a slave to her body and desires, which is a version of her he does not want to associate with as a free black man.

Florens returns to Jacob's estate in an unrecognizable state. The indentured servants note that she looked, "barefoot, bloody but proud" (*Mercy* 141). She comes back with no shoes on her feet, signifying the loss of the safety she once knew before leaving the house. However, she expresses that she feels like her "way is clear after losing you [the blacksmith]" (*Mercy* 149). The reader soon learns that she had attacked the blacksmith, then ran away with her perception of life different. She is changed now, her feet are hard, and she knows herself well. When Florens' journey started with her wanting love and affirmation, she never

expected the horrors she would encounter or the state she would find herself in. So, she starts writing about her life and sentiments on the walls of Jacob's vacant house. It must be noted, however, that regardless of the events leading to her being abandoned (whether it is her young brother on her mother's hip or a young boy in the blacksmith's house), she appears to arrive at the same place of abandonment. Only this time, she wishes she could know what her mother would have thought of what Florens has been through; she wishes she could tell her mother what she has endured. One can be assured, however, that Florens has embraced herself, concluding, "I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last" (*Mercy* 153).

Consequently, Isma and Florens consider love and the bodily autonomy it grants one as a chance to fill the empty spaces in their identities. It also doubles as an act of resistance against the coercion of women's bodies and emotions. Bourke upholds that using "a man's body as a site of pleasure" instead of "an instrument of oppression and pain" (437 qtd. in Roynon 50) could become a significant change in the agency of women. Having said that, once Isma's and Florens' relationships with the men became more than physical attraction, they came face to face with disappointment. The Beloved and the blacksmith stifled Isma's and Florens' voices by lacking empathy and interest in the women themselves. This repositions Isma and Florens to the unavoidable subaltern position Spivak suggests. On this, Bhabha argues, "Agency requires a grounding, but it does not require a totalization of those grounds; it requires movement and manoeuvre, but it does not require a temporality of continuity or accumulation; it requires direction and contingent closure but no teleology and holism" (184), this quote widens the borders of agency, explaining that at the basis, agency is being able to make and act out conscious decisions. There is no need to totalize and restrict its existence. It can be flexible and not continuous as long as there is an overall sense of direction. Therefore, this setback in Isma' and Florens' journey towards a reclaimed

autonomy, voice and her/story is not as drastically impactful as one would expect. This also relocates subalternity to a contestable trait that is hardly an inextricable part of one's identities.

Djebar and Morrison demonstrate their characters' recovery of their voices by having Isma venture into her roots and among Algerian women seeking personal growth in a healthier manner, and by having Florens pour her focus on first writing her story, and then planning to escape on a soul-searching venture with Sorrow and her daughter.

Djebar and Morrison surprise with the similarity of their treatment of this theme. They show once again how certain aspects of women's lives merge regardless of their intersectional identities. However, they persist in the fact that context carries value as well, setting them apart as individuals grappling with themselves towards agency and uniting them under the umbrella of her/story.

#### **4.4 Feminine Writing in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*: Escaping the Merciful**

##### **Prison**

In *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, Djebar and Morrison are still committed to the idea that a woman is her body, and through her body, she's able to speak. Maintaining the notion that a body carries various meanings, it could be said that writing, desire, resistance, power...etc., all culminate and are better represented through the body of a subaltern woman. Moreover, historiography is looked at by these authors as a chance to re-occupy history with women and their stories, which makes the above conducted analysis and discussion of *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* an encompassing exploration of the implications of subalternity/silencing and agency/resistance in the feminine. Consequently, this exploration has not only been a thematic one, but it is also of feminine writing (Ringrose 29-30). Simply

put, these authors tackle feminine themes and writing techniques and styles that facilitate the transmission of their message.

Djebar and Morrison employ feminine writing by linking language, writing, women's bodies and her/stories together. Their approach to feminine writing is easily discerned. In Djebar's context, colonial rule not only succeeded patriarchal thought but was also a simultaneous culprit, imposing on the subaltern Algerian woman's existence, while in *A Mercy*, early slavery subjugated women regardless of their race. In this respect, the need to seek freedom of the body, unearth female languages and narrate in the multiple becomes an urgent task for Djebar and Morrison.

When it comes to the structure and narration of the novels, both authors opt for non-linear narratives. *So Vast the Prison* is broken down into a love story, a historical quest, a family history and a foreshadowing, demonstrating that it already does not follow the typical structure of narration. The third part particularly shows an extra dimension of unconventional writing by further interrupting the narrative flow with short chapters entitled *Arable Woman*. The latter is a documentary for which Isma is collecting several Algerian women's stories. Through this novel, the reader is allowed a glimpse into the making or behind the scenes of this production, which is now known to the world as the documentary film *The Nouba of the Women of Mount Chenoua* of 1977. This provides an insight into Isma's thoughts and feelings about her life and the condition of the women she is filming, making the novel an experimental piece of writing that moves the reader between mediums of art and expression.

In Morrison's novel, non-linear narration is also used. She narrates the story from several perspectives of different genders, classes and racial groups. All the narrating characters, but Florens and her mother, speak in the third person narration, which pushes them to the background just enough for the reader to understand that Florens' first person

narration is the one to look forward to carry the main plot, while her mother's singular and final chapter serves as a clarification and commentary on women's enslavement. There is no concept of time throughout the novel; every single character's story overlaps, at least until Florens' arc becomes a personal quest. Indeed, her point of view is not only a first-person narration but is also in the present simple, showing the immediacy and urgency of her story. Morrison arranges a puzzle-like narrative demanding the reader's attention and aiming to achieve certain reactions from the implicit and explicit treatment of difficult themes.

Djebar and Morrison spread across the timeline, seeking to cover any aspects they might have missed in *Fantasia* and *Beloved*. Their narration, however, is not reflective of the linearity of events. Djebar jumps from these childhood anecdotes to the story of a friend of hers to an ancient Berber queen's travels, while Morrison shifts from one disturbed perspective to another, in order to emphasize the choppiness and disjointedness of time and living. It is because there is no correlation between life events and time that linear and censored history is constantly subject to criticism. So, it goes without saying that Djebar and Morrison choose to employ non-linearity in their texts. Moreover, the switching between first and third narrative perspectives plays a role in foregrounding previously buried subjectivities. As women postcolonial writers, addressing all the issues present in their communities becomes a complex task successfully untangled with the help of feminine writing. They elude restrictive language and present an immersive literary piece.

Additionally, one of the reasons that makes *So Vast the Prison* a feminine writing is that Djebar writes in a language that is not only a mixture of French and Arabic but a feminine language. Confirming that feminine and masculine languages differ, she explains:

[I come] from a world and a culture profoundly marked by traditional sexual segregation (women inside, separated from the men who are outside, the masculine public sphere opposed to the intimate, family sphere, the

monotonous speech of men's spaces different from feminine polyphony – murmurs and whispers or, on the contrary, outcries in female society . . .) [I come] thus from this fatal, mutilating dichotomy. (Djebar, *Ces voix* 72 qtd. in Hiddleston, “Feminism and the Question of ‘Woman’” 92-93)

This appoints masculine language for the public sphere and regards any different type of communication as unknown, elusive and other. Due to this, Djebar, on several occasions, designated the language she is communicating with as different perhaps even foreign.

In view of the above, recollecting stories proves to be a difficult task for Isma as this venture unlocks memories and haunting dreams she cannot explain. She dreams about vomiting stories in a language she cannot make up. She likens her mouth to a vaginal canal that is giving birth to words every night. She labels these words as:

A long ancestral cry. My open mouth expels, continuously, the suffering of others, the suffering of the shrouded women who came before me, I who believed I was only just appearing at the first ray of the first light.

I do not cry, I am the cry, stretched out into resonant blind flight; the white procession of ghost-grandmothers behind me becomes an army propelling me on; words of the quavering, lost language rise up while the males out in front gesticulate in the field of death or of its masks. (*Prison* 123)

In this, she confirms that the dead are trying to feed her their stories through their lost languages. She becomes a vessel for them. However, since she does not know of these lost languages, she feels helpless, which might be why she is in agony. She feels the pain but not words, which might have encouraged her investigation of the writings on the Stele and those in Tin Hinan's tomb. As for Djebar, she considers those writings as female writings that are historical in essence (Ringrose 29-30). She hints at this when she portrays male archaeologists struggling, unable to translate what they had discovered, explaining that this

might be because female writing requires other women to interpret fully (Hiddleston, *Out of Algeria* 98).

In this quest of pointing out a feminine language, Djébar soon and without realizing it becomes proficient and knowledgeable of it, at least until she experiences a soul-breaking event of having a loved one ignore and deny your existence. She contemplates:

The voice spun out clear and hard; it did not speak in French or Arabic or Berber but in some language from the hereafter spoken by women who had vanished before me and into me. The voice of my grandmother who died a week after independence and who vehemently addressed me from the depths of my raging, my astonishment. (*Prison* 32)

Feeling betrayed by her Beloved, Isma gains the ability to speak and write in the feminine through her grandmother, the latest of the dead women in her family.

Through all of these instances, it becomes evident that Djébar found, became exposed to and developed her own *écriture féminine*. By the end, she was able to use imagery and descriptions that are vivid and sensual, and manage to approach the woman's body with a worship-like attitude that celebrates her anatomy.

In contrast, Florens' motivations for writing stem from the relentless nature of her abandonment trauma. No one appears to be speaking through Florens but herself. Instead, she speaks to the other, mainly, the blacksmith and her mother. It is not implausible to suggest that Florens might be one of the many female ancestors wanting to speak through their descendants.

What is evident, however, is that the composition of Florens' chapters is distinct. For instance, Jacob's sections are written in an elevated, dispassionate and sharp language, while Lina's, not as formal as Jacob's, are still well-composed and emotionally charged chapters that tackle women and their bodies. By looking at these two's chapters, Florens' chapters

stand out. They are written by Morrison in a loose and unconventional style. Most of her sentences are distorted like, “With you my body is pleasure is safe is belonging. I can never not have you have me” (*Mercy* 131), or “the dark is me. Is we. Is my home” (*Mercy* 110), suggesting Florens’ reliance on the intense descriptions of her experiences with and feelings for the blacksmith. Florens’ writing is fueled by the need to share her story, marking it on the walls and floors of Jacob’s house. Morrison takes a detour by showing this unruly version of language that Florens uses in order to better express her female experience, a language that has a feminine perspective on things.

It is worth noting that Morrison made some inconsistent stylistic choices by relating some characters to the manner in which their chapters are written. Some sections are reflective of the characters’ social and racial groups, while others are not, but every chapter still manages to feminize the language and the events.

The third aspect of feminine language used by the authors is speaking about the body of the subaltern woman, not through it. Djebbar had previously explored Isma’s westernized body. Because of Isma’s early exposure to French culture, she was able to evade patriarchal norms. And while that, at the time, weighed her down and made her doubt her allegiance to her country and female ancestors, over time, it proved to be a great vehicle for delivering stories about other women’s, dead and alive, bodies.

Since the oppressed female body was previously presented, this time the socially and sexually free body is explored. During her affair with the young man, Isma narrates the experience of sexual desire and pleasure after being in a loveless and passionless marriage for years. It starts with soft touches of fingers in a car to a kiss on the forehead to sexually fantasizing about him. In all of those moments, Isma was free, and her writing became detailed and emotionally charged. She meticulously ascribes the passion she was feeling to the words she chooses.

In a similar vein, Morrison readily partakes in the writing of the body and its pleasure as well. In *A Mercy*, Morrison engages in a twofold representation: the exploration of the rape of female slaves as a representation of silencing, and the depiction of one of the main female experiences, sexual intimacy, as a representation of agency. Roynon affirms that, “Morrison both protests the routine abuse of women and suggests that viable alternatives exist” (48), in the form of these strong, passionate emotions that are the epitome of youthful desire. Through the eyes of Sorrow, Morrison details a positive sexual exchange between the blacksmith and Florens:

The blacksmith and Florens were rocking and, unlike female farm animals in heat, she was not standing quietly under the weight and thrust of the male. What Sorrow saw ... was not the silent submission...This here female stretched, kicked her heels and whipped her head left, right, to, fro. It was a dancing. Florens rolled and twisted from her back to his. He hoisted her up against the hickory; she bent her head into his shoulder. A dancing. Horizontal one minute, another minute vertical.

Sorrow watched until it was over; until, stumbling like tired old people, they dressed themselves. It all ended when the blacksmith grabbed Florens’ hair, yanked her head back to put his mouth on hers. Then they went off in different directions. (*Mercy* 129)

In the passage above, several interpretations can be gleaned. First, female passiveness is dispelled. Then, Morrison is seen to be using sensual emotive descriptions. Moreover, it is observed that she includes the idea that some slaves were free to explore their sexuality, especially since it resulted in more children, which was profitable to the slave owners, who traded in flesh or those who just needed extra working hands. Another point of consideration

is that the author also used someone, Sorrow, who has never experienced this type of affection to show her the difference between right and wrong, especially Sorrow who never had a figure in her life to teach her about what was happening to her, so it was an important moment in the book for both the characters engaging in the act as well as for the person watching.

It is reasonable to assert that writing about women being in free and restricted spaces contributes to a change in regards to their position, whether in language or history (Cixous 77 in Ringrose 77). Indeed, for these authors, to be able to write characters in their subaltern and agent positions is reaffirming and freeing of despair as it places them in a space of possibility and mobility.

Although feminine writing stays elusive, even by Cixous' standards, it is still attributed to having a voice. Ringrose further refines this notion by claiming that feminine writing is a writing that is audible, meaning that one is supposed to hear the voices of women when reading an *écriture féminine* (139). This is, not only easily discerned from Djébar's and Morrison's texts, it is even presented in a thematically discernible manner. They do that by retrieving a group of women's voices, then designating one main leading voice, who explains to the reader that there is a certain amount of a chain-like storytelling occurring.

The leading voices in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, Isma and Florens, write in red ink, which is a metaphor for blood, the blood of her people for Isma and the blood from her strife with the blacksmith for Florens. This red ink soon turns into, "ash white... [It] does not dry, it simply evaporates" (*Prison* 127), for Isma, especially when she writes about the silencing of Algerian women. For Florens, she washes her hands of her and the blacksmith's blood, grabbing a nail instead to carve her story on walls. Red ink becomes non-existent to her. This raises questions over whether writing is continuously shifting, not because of unstable signifiers, but because there is always going to be writing soaked in women's blood.

The more there is bloodshed, the more stained any writing produced will be. In the case of Morrison, it is more symbolic as Florens uses an iron nail. Since iron is used for shackles, iron bits...etc., it could be seen in a light where it induces the same oppression. However, the fact that Florens renders it as a functioning pen to write with is significantly freeing (Cabral 578). Florens becomes what she longed for, someone as free and as skillful as the blacksmith; someone who is able to cause change and produce art (Cabral). The writing is no longer for the blacksmith; it is for herself (Cixous). As far as Djébar's quest towards a feminine writing goes, Ringrose contends that Djébar's previous quests, especially that of *Fantasia*, have been unsatisfactory as they appeared aimless (256). This is remedied in *So Vast the Prison* as Djébar adopts a "matrilineal" writing, one that connects women through their maternal lineage, otherwise known to Cixous as white ink.

Consequently, it becomes apparent that both authors' exploration of feminine writing is based on, "a common starting-point of exclusion, a common engagement with the locus of the repressed, a common maternal source, and a common desire for resistance" (Ringrose 256). Whether it is at the level of themes or language, Djébar and Morrison write silencing and its location; they also write the importance of either having a maternal origin or being the maternal origin. And finally, they pursue the resistance of the subaltern woman against patriarchal and restrictive language and the rest of the power structures that seek to bury her. Indeed, Djébar aims to escape the vast prison she and other Algerian women reside, while Morrison benefits from the rare mercies in American history to explore women's potential.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

After analyzing and comparing subaltern women, their experiences, their positions in their communities and the writing of their her/stories in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* by Djébar and Morrison, it is confirmed that there are three oppressive powers perpetuating the abuse of women: colonization, slavery and patriarchal norms, with the last two being at

the helm of the issues plaguing women in these two novels. In fact, the notion of having the real culprits not face the consequences of their deranged actions is still a major theme in these texts. It reflects its importance as well as history's failure when it comes to representing the subaltern woman.

Additionally, Djébar and Morrison cover and uncover oppressions according to their chosen context. Djébar sets patriarchy against French colonialism, highlighting how the former drove Algerians seeking freedom towards the latter. However, the latter eventually altered the essence of some of these Algerians, emphasizing the newly deformed parts of their identities. Similarly, Morrison explains how slavery was a rampant practice where non-Europeans captured and sold one another for profit. She then moves to the idea of tolerant enslavement, only to return to the wrongness of mastering and enslaving others regardless, reducing them to objects and relegating them to the shadows. For both authors, there existed a specific triggering problem (French colonization and enslavement of non-Europeans, in addition to patriarchy), from which the rest of the issues stemmed.

The above brings to light the diverging positions the authors chose to represent in terms of the silencing of the subaltern woman. Djébar presents characters that speak from a position of exile where their cultural and linguistic heritage is depicted as disturbed and hybridized, while Morrison focuses her interest on the dehumanization that went into solidifying the institution of slavery. However, even if, to Morrison, dehumanization operated without paying any heed to any specific race, it is still used to erase certain intersectional individuals and their associated cultural practices. Likewise, Algerians' identities are no longer what they were before colonization, specifically, Algerian women's intersectional identities. Their different identity markers have been severely modified, which is a reality that troubles Algerians up till now. This makes Djébar's and Morrison's endeavors different but still similar. It is worth noting that Morrison utilizes an engaging

point of view to look at silencing. It is presented from a white man's, Jacob's, perspective and supported by the author's extensive research. At the end, both attempt to show that there exists a subaltern woman who is either effaced, dehumanize or both.

When it comes to delineating the silencing of subaltern women, the themes discussed are revealed to be diverse. Djébar and Morrison explore the subaltern self who is knowingly and unknowingly silenced, track subaltern women's cultural erasure and revisit the idea of sexual assault. In fact, they were both interested in the idea of having subaltern women struggle with their identity, belonging and culture, and yet not recognize their subalternity, thinking that they had access to the center when it was not the case. This may be due to the following possibilities: one, subalternity is inherent and inescapable; two, subalternity is a position women unconsciously move in and out of; and finally, three, subalternity is an unfixed position that women do not recognize entering or exiting because of the abuse they undergo. The authors surmise, however, that there exists no subaltern who is unable to eventually recognize their silenced position. Indeed, there seems to be a moment in the subaltern woman's life when something starts to appear amiss. This is portrayed, in *So Vast the Prison*, through Isma, who has a special upbringing. She is brought up on both her native culture and language and the colonizer's culture and language, which led her to recognize that there is an imposition on her marginalized person and native culture from the center, while in *A Mercy*, Morrison explains her protagonist's, Florens', belated realization that her peaceful life under the Vaarks is not a reality for other slaves. The authors, then, relate this instability partially to these women characters' mothers and their absence when it comes to teaching their daughters their her/story. This emphasizes the connections needed between women in order to achieve a better understanding of themselves, history and their major role when it comes to the keeping of her/story.

All in all, Djébar and Morrison introduce characters who are pushed out of their communities. They show the effects of taking a subaltern woman out of her community, culture and language, leading to her feeling incomplete. The authors further explain that this severing from one's roots affects women's interaction with love and creating deep connections with others. On another note, an emergent issue would be the authors' evasion of the topic of sexual assault/coercion. They both choose to emphasize the violators, the act itself and its consequences rather than reiterate its traumatizing details. Djébar, specifically, addresses the cultural nuance of this issue while Morrison shows the trajectory of the children resulting from rape. In this light, there seem to be two perpetrators in their lives, slavery and colonial rule, on one hand, and patriarchal men, on the other. These entities doubly colonize the subaltern woman, hindering her ability to document her/story.

In conjunction with the above findings, Djébar's and Morrison's process of writing and (re)writing her/story in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* can be summarized in the following points. First, their confirmation of history's inaccuracy certainly grew as they dug deeper into the silencing of subaltern women. This further prompts them to rectify and create a comprehensive her/story. It could be said that they have opted for a blend of genres that would allow them to experiment with the warping of time and its relation to women's ancestry, positions and perspectives. They settle on writing historiographic metafictional texts that have clear signs of revisionism in the form of autobiography (Djébar) and neo-slave narratives (Morrison), suggesting a blur between history and fiction that highlights shadowed women. Another point to consider is the authors' emphasis on the synergy that exists between being silenced and having a voice in the subaltern woman. They reiterate the necessity for both to exist in order to have a better representation of her/story. They emerge as postcolonial feminist intellectuals who unearth and consider the sources of women's

issues so as to reach beyond the known history and liberate these women and heal their trauma.

Consequently, Djébar and Morrison write subaltern women who have similar and differing instances of resisting and preservation of her/story. They offer women's inherent defiance as a reaction to the sexual assault/coercion they are subjected to. These women are depicted as entities who do not succumb to the trauma that comes from the seizing of their anatomy. In addition, in order to counter this issue and the unexpected motherhood that results out of it, the authors, on the one hand, render this motherhood into an enjoyable experience wherein the psychological trauma emerging from it is healed once they learn to love their children, while on the other hand, they present how motherhood can become a painful sacrifice and an opportunity to correct and revise society's traditional beliefs. Through this, it becomes clear that female agency and regaining control over one's life can be achieved by becoming a mother, whether biological or adoptive.

Then, while seeking to understand if such defiance persists in the relations that bring women together, they are able to categorize women's relationships into fleeting acquaintances and longstanding ones, where they help one another resist the oppressor. It is to be noted, however, that Djébar and Morrison defer in their presentation of these relationships because of the specific contexts they are tackling, for instance, Djébar is able to depict empathy between women that goes beyond political conflicts, while Morrison portrays a friendship that transcends racial and social groups (Rebekka and Lina) only to fall apart because of the subordination that exists between mistress and slave. In Morrison's context, any comradeship that could possibly form between women with varying intersectional identities becomes unstable. It even sours over time, showing that political and racial issues are deeply rooted in some women's identities, making it difficult to establish true connections with other women.

Nevertheless, Djébar and Morrison attempt to salvage the relationships between women by engaging with the practice of storytelling and cultural traditions that reunite them. For both of them, storytelling and practicing culture emerge as an important part of women's history. Indeed, culture is a space where women's agency and the keeping of history exist most. While presenting this theme, the authors showcased several similarities that have the possibility of elevating these customs to universal practices kept alive by women who practice them publicly and privately. Concerning storytelling, it is presented as a component of the preservation of one's cultural identity, a notion that transcends national cultures and comprises a crucial part of women's traditions. Djébar and Morrison emphasize the thread that connects women when they tell stories among themselves, making it difficult for oppression to completely weaken their bond.

On a different note, Djébar and Morrison discuss women's education and its crucial role in the inscription of oneself into history. They write female characters who believe that unless they leave an imprint around, they will be forgotten. So, there is freedom, empowerment and choices in learning to write, especially for subaltern women. Once they reach the agency of being able to write, they can be the voice for themselves and those around them.

Finally, they address the theme of love and desire, which counters subalternity and having an unstable and hybrid identity. Love and desire are seen by the characters, Florens and Isma, as two emotions that would help them complete their lost selves and, thus, regain agency. Having said that, regardless of how passionate and freeing the romantic love that both characters experience, they eventually find themselves extremely disappointed by the men they have chosen to find freedom in. This hinders their journey as they contemplate their choices. Nonetheless, by the end of this section, it is concluded that agency is actually flexible and continuous. So, as long as subaltern women are seeking to be agents of their

own lives, discovering their positions of oppression and resistance and writing their her/story, agency would exist. As a result, agency is a position that subaltern women move in and out of. It yields women's her/story that groups their intertwined and inextricable trials and triumphs. Ultimately, Isma and Florens embark on a soul-searching venture that proves to be similar and yet different.

In light of the above analysis, discussion and conclusions, Djebbar and Morrison do, in fact, write in the feminine. It is well reflected in the techniques as well as the themes they offered. In addition to that, they provide their own take on female languages that encompass women-related themes.

The analysis of *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* demonstrates notable similarities regardless of the different contextual backgrounds of the novels and the authors. This diverse socio-cultural perception of women prompts Djebbar and Morrison to adopt non-linearity and explore subaltern women's experiences in their rewriting of history into her/story. As they reconstruct their respective her/stories, creating spaces that can house women, they show their similar and dissimilar concerns.

One can deduce that *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* are these intimate and disruptive accounts that challenge history and trigger postcolonial feminist intellectuals' process of historiography. In that case, women hold both subaltern and agent positions, which enables them to challenge their erasure. Djebbar and Morrison utilize their history, different resources and writing skills in order to successfully write a her/story that is based on diverse women, their experiences and their bodies.

# **General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

This thesis has taken history, women, voices, writing and literature as its main concerns. In order to test the relation that groups all of these variables, Djébar's and Morrison's narratives, *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade*, *So Vast the Prison* and *Beloved*, *A Mercy*, were chosen as the best candidates through which the study of history and its relation to the writing of women and their voices can be best represented. Seeing as this study is built upon a comparative view of these authors and the women they write about, it was really important for us to establish, early on, the diversity that groups and differentiates them. To prove this, we visited postcolonial and feminist theorizations, establishing the contexts Djébar and Morrison chose to write about on the one hand, and shirking any similarity that would mirror the tenets of mainstream feminism on the other. With these ideas in mind, we went on to designate a postcolonial feminist approach as a way for us to investigate these diverse women and their previously defined dominating powers and socio-cultural and historical contexts. Our view recognized the women Djébar and Morrison write about, as doubly colonized. The implications of this finding suggested women's intersectionality of identities as the basis for their manifold oppression and relegation to a silenced subaltern position within literature and historical discourse.

While conducting our conceptual investigation, we understood that history is not factual but rather sporadic, and thus a version of it that accommodates women could be achieved, and is indeed achieved in these narratives. In effect, this is accomplished through Djébar's and Morrison's attempts at unearthing women's silence and rewriting history by documenting women's moments of resisting this silence, meaning their moments of agency.

So, to reiterate, this thesis aimed to examine, under a comparative perspective, the writing of subaltern intersectional women's silencing and voicing, the rewriting of their

history into her/story, the determination of whether this her/story needs a feminine style to survive or not, and finally, to locate any possible changes in the authors' thematic choices along the years.

While analyzing *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, the experiences of subaltern women emerged as indeed oscillating between subjugation and resistance, under colonial violence, the brutality of slavery and patriarchal constructs. These women's silencing/subalternity is presented as a result of the above amalgamation of oppressive ideologies, thus making it manifold. In fact, it is interesting to note that Djébar and Morrison have a similar understanding of the mechanisms of oppressive powers. Djébar considers notions such as having friendly French neighbors and being thankful for the opportunity to acquire a formal French education, while Morrison contemplates tolerant slavery and having a kind white master, only for both of them to return to and stress the main oppressors in female characters' lives later on. By masking and unmasking oppressive systems, Djébar and Morrison anticipate the criticism they would face for writing about women's oppression, and the excuses that would manifest in defense of such atrocities. They also imitate the silencing forced on women by showing how it can easily be executed and wielded to hide truths. From this, both authors reconcile with the idea that women are silenced and that it is this silence that carves the possibilities for their voices to emerge. To put it differently, silence becomes an indicator for the spaces open for revision, and because it has already been established that no subject is completely devoid of voice, silence sometimes malfunctions, allowing the authors to listen for women's muffled voices.

When it comes to returning to the actual oppressive powers, Djébar and Morrison arrange the silencing that these powers exact on female characters into a set of themes. They confirm these themes as sexual violence, the defilement of motherhood and infanticide. They see sexual violence against Algerian and African American women as a sensitive and

triggering matter. They identify it not only as the main factor in the irreversible changes that occur on women's identities, motherhood and psyche, but also as an irremovable stain on women's bodies. Their presentation of sexual violence, however, differs. Morrison opts for a graphic and detailed representation of rape. Her descriptions of the debasement of the character Sethe were exhaustive and meant to conjure the unjustness of having one's voice be stolen from them. Djébar, on the other hand, skirts around the issue, injecting her thoughts, through her unnamed narrator alter ego, into the narrative. She experiences sorrow and anguish over whether to write the abused Algerian woman by French soldiers or the dignified Algerian woman within her community. Such a difference surfaces because of the authors' varying contexts, specifically Djébar, who appears conservative-context bound. This further reveals the importance of heeding the context in this analysis. In addition, they both seek to present the male perspective as another part of the silencing of women. Although they go about it differently, with Djébar allowing her female characters to assert their own silencing by men; whereas Morrison writes this silencing from male characters' invasive point of view, at the end, they both fault men's disregard of women's experiences with the violence of oppression. If one is to consider the cumulative results presented, the conclusions would suggest that the writing of Algerian and African American women's silent positions is achieved through an amplification of their double colonization and double oppression, by male figures and oppressive powers, as well as through a thorough reflection upon female characters' specific socio-cultural dynamics.

Verily, while this pursuit of the silence is taking place, one is soon able to sense the authors' displeasure with women's historical representation. So, they try to rewrite it by editing history and adding the positions of resistance formerly ignored. This is a notable point of divergence for the authors. With heeding their contexts and the notion of rewriting history, Djébar engages with every possible aspect of rewriting. She destabilizes orientalist

records by rewriting them with the addition of Algerian women; she writes her own autobiography and finally documents the testimonies of Algerian women war fighters, all in an attempt to cover every single part of history that is used against Algerian women. This also implies that *Fantasia* is both a personal and a collective her/story. For Morrison, she opts for a multi-perspective retelling of a real female figure's life story in a manifestation of a neo-slave narrative. So, she also destabilizes an existing narrative by reimagining and adding to its gaps that have long been left desolate or filled with wrong information. In addition, she utilizes magical realism, which allows her to bring back a dead character, Beloved, to the living world. Beloved becomes the manifestation of her/story in flesh, returning to condemn her mother's crime and to be a vessel for every single abused ancestral African American woman from the Middle Passage until the setting of the novel. Morrison personifies her/story in order to show how some women are not ready to face their heartbreaking life events, in contrast with others who are welcoming of it, like Denver, who is a character that emulates the author. She is accepting of her/story and eager to learn more and teach more about her legacy. This puts Djebbar and Morrison in a similar position where they find themselves hidden within their characters and thus making their narratives personal and collective ventures.

The rewriting of history, however, proves to be not limited to the above notions. Djebbar and Morrison write an inherently defiant subaltern woman, which reaffirms the assumption that argues for the agent positions of subaltern women. This implies that subalternity is indeed not fixed but more of a position that subaltern women wander in and out of, according to which oppressive power is more in command at the time. Moreover, they explore women being helpful towards other women, with certain exceptions like racial differences and privilege in the case of *Beloved*. The implication garnered from the latter is that the intersectionality of identities is not just a vehicle for understanding the complexity

of women's oppression; it also explains how some instances of resistance occur and how other instances do not occur because a woman's identity markers designate her as oppressed but not subaltern, like Amy Denver.

That being said, when it comes to depicting women's names as part of their identity affirmation, both authors approach this subject in an intensely similar way. They even employ the same tactic of having subaltern women enjoy this affirmation from their male partners. Hence, we can assert that Djébar and Morrison dare to exploit patriarchal ideals ironically in order to advance their endeavor of indicating patriarchy, colonialism and slavery as powers that work against subaltern women's prosperity.

Then, Djébar and Morrison introduce seclusion as alienation in *Beloved* and cloistering in *Fantasia*. In the first, Denver and Sethe are treated like strangers in their community because of Sethe's crime, while the latter shows the cloistering of young girls until they get married. This seclusion is followed by escaping it and integrating oneself within their respective communities through seeking a formal education.

Additionally, Djébar and Morrison tackle women's traumatized psyche by depicting them fashioning small delights to uplift themselves. They even choose descendants of the directly traumatized in order to maintain generational trauma as an issue to be addressed. Then, they re-emphasize the preservation of history on women's bodies through art. They sanction storytelling and music as both sites where Algerian and African American women's history has been protected. We do note, however, that storytelling is pursued differently in both novels, and that is purely, yet again, related to socio-cultural nuances. In an Algerian context, storytelling is more of a performance, while for Morrison, it is an intimate sharing of trauma and happy moments between the characters. Moreover, music is employed distinctly. In the case of *Beloved*, Morrison focuses on songs, their meanings and the act of

singing and creating music, seeing as African Americans had nothing but their passionate voices and melodic history. In contrast to Djébar, who chose to apply a musical structure and musical instruments that pit the West against the East, showing her attempts at transgression.

Lastly, both authors underline the importance of cultural practices to Algerian women's and African American women's agency and connection to their history and bodies. Djébar takes her country's well-established cultural practices, like wedding ceremonies, gatherings...etc., and displays them in an uncomplicated manner. However, Morrison finds herself making great efforts, hunting for cultural practices in the midst of an amalgamation of people. Indeed, one needs to understand that African slaves were captured from different countries, so each person came with their own cultural practices that have been exposed to erasure through dehumanization. Morrison attempts to remedy this issue by showing how these African American slaves have cobbled a makeshift culture consisting of all of their spiritual beliefs in addition to the beliefs they gained in America, like Christianity.

The last part of analyzing *Fantasia* and *Beloved* confirms that all of the above have been written in feminine writing. The argument here is that there is no masculine writing (characterized by rigidity and detachment) that can allow all of the above to survive, which makes feminine writing not just a stylistic choice but also a thematic choice that some authors make in order to enhance their narratives.

On the other hand, concerning the study of *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, we have identified slavery, patriarchal norms and the remnants of colonial rule as the leading issues in subaltern women's lives. In fact, Djébar and Morrison find themselves blaming these women's underrepresentation in history on these particular issues. Interestingly enough, Djébar and Morrison, and in relation to their social and cultural factors, interplay these

hierarchies, emphasizing one over the other and vice versa. This is done to determine the originators of the offense against subaltern women. To illustrate, Djebbar focuses on the harmful nature of patriarchal constructs in her nation and on Algerian women, however she concedes by placing patriarchy against colonialism and negotiating the idea that patriarchal thought pushed people seeking to be free towards French colonialism, while the latter deformed Algerians' identities so severely that they are unable to go back to their roots anymore. In a similar fashion, Morrison builds her arguments gradually by announcing that race was not, as of yet, a central element of enslavement, that slavery has been a natural practice of human evolution, and then she explores the idea of tolerant slavery under a white man named Jacob Vaark, only to find herself explaining and re-explaining how unacceptable it is to enslave other humans regardless of their gender; no human should be allowed to own another human because, in retrospect, it has led to a stubborn violent domination that sought to reduce the dominated into objects that can be better controlled.

From the above, we are able to discern how the authors chose to depict the silencing of women in these novels. Because Djebbar settled on a postcolonial portrayal of Algeria, she establishes a nation fraught with social, cultural, and linguistic issues. Several of the characters she writes in *So Vast the Prison* feel their exile from within themselves due to the schism between their native culture and language and the colonizer's. They are, indeed, hybridized and lost between two parts of themselves. Morrison, in contrast, chooses to focus on the silencing, dehumanization and the continuous modification of one's identities and self from a controversial white male perspective. The above suggests that women's intersectional identities are isolated, warped and erased, and that both authors begin from different points in their analysis, only for them to reach the same conclusion.

In terms of assorting the notions of silencing, the themes tackled emerge as diverse. Djebbar and Morrison present the idea of being conscious and unconscious of one's

subalternity. They write female characters, Isma and Florens, who do not perceive themselves as silenced until they are faced with a devastating instance.

Both authors depict an extremely similar sequence of events in their narratives, which involves a young girl's body being assaulted by the gaze of others. This eventually leads this young subaltern girl to realize her silenced position. It also shows how such subalterns are tricked into thinking that they can pass under the dominant gaze by having a French education and being under a tolerant enslavement. If we align this with the authors' previously mentioned endeavors, the idea of masking and then unmasking oppression becomes of great importance as it anticipates the obliviousness of not just the characters but also the readers and anyone who is unable to see that the narrative can be controlled. Nevertheless, the authors ensure that the readers know that no subaltern woman can go throughout her life without realizing her subalternity. This is furthered by presenting Isma and Lina, who are systematically conditioned to forget about their cultural heritage, and thus severed from their communities and left to feel incomplete. Apart from this, Djébar and Morrison observe that the subaltern female characters they study, Isma, Lina and Florens, all have an unstable and discontinuous relationship with their mothers. They explain that because there is no connection between these characters and their mothers, in other words, they never taught them how to be women, nor recounted their history for them, they find themselves relying on a deceitful version of oppressive powers. Evidently, this puts an emphasis on the relationship that needs to be fostered between women in order for them to be able to fight off this hypocritical version of silencing and carry on the tradition of keeping history.

In addition, Djébar and Morrison return to sexual violence as a silencing factor in subaltern women's lives. They, however, evade providing explicit details, aiming to underscore the act and its consequences over the gnarly details. It should be noted that Djébar

takes this opportunity to discuss an important issue in her community, child brides, by presenting her grandmother's story. She broadens the perspective, showing that sexual violence encompasses sexual coercion as well, which usually goes unnoticed. Ultimately, we can conclude that the authors present a doubly colonized subaltern woman who is suffering the consequences of varying hostile ideologies.

After establishing women's silenced positions, Djébar and Morrison engage with the rewriting of history by reconfiguring their agent positions. They debunk history by utilizing semi-autobiography and neo-slave narratives, respectively, as bases that would allow them to blend genres and bend time to reach their ends. Before further addressing her/story writing, they emphasize that her/story is both women being silenced and having a voice, and reemphasize that in order for us to have a her/story that is encompassing, both need to exist within it.

In effect, literature and history merge as they question the latter. This is accomplished by having writer ancestors and writer descendants. To explain more, in the case of Djébar, her alter ego protagonist, Isma, faces a life-changing problem that compels her to return to her home country and to seek validation in her history. She does so by conducting an archival historical research and by gathering anecdotes and stories of the women around her. Along the course of her venture, she discovers an ancient woman ancestor who had managed to have her own ethnic language be preserved in her tomb. Isma's discovery brings her peace and relief as well as a reconnection with her roots as she realizes that the connection that links her with her female lineage has not been completely severed. In a slightly different light, Morrison also presents a character, Florens, who endures a shocking event. This leads her to record every single moment of her life, aiming to leave evidence behind her. From this, we can perceive that there is a correlation between the authors' comprehension of writing her/story, seeing that Djébar designates a character to

find evidence of her/story, while Morrison writes a character who will leave this her/story. In an interesting parallel, Morrison writes an ancestor while Djébar writes descendants, although both chose to go back so far into history to dig for and authenticate her/story. Certainly, the concept of writing is so embedded in both of these novels that even the female characters are desperate to write their stories away from forgetfulness, especially since it aids in regulating their identities that are under constant threat because of power structures.

*So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* become a site in which her/story writing is attained through Djébar's and Morrison's presentations of subaltern women's resistance. They write women who are inherently defiant to sexual violence. These women are not broken down by their trauma. What is more is that the unexpected motherhood that comes out of this trauma is depicted as an enjoyable space where violated subaltern women heal their psychological trauma through gaining control over their bodies by loving their children.

On another note, the authors present education as a crucial stepping stone in women's familiarization with writing their her/stories. The education of a subaltern woman allows her to gain knowledge, refine her own knowledge and write about them, leaving a mark behind. This would also indicate her entering an agent position that could further enable her to become a voice not only for herself but also for others.

On a different note, the relations that group women are introduced as fleeting acquaintances and longstanding ones. Djébar highlights empathy as a feeling that outweighs political conflicts. Likewise, Morrison explores a friendship that transcends race and class, Lina's and Rebekka's, only to show its eventual collapse because one party is the subordinate of the other. In her context, Morrison challenges the possibility of creating stable relations with women of different racial and social groups. For her, political and racial issues are so deeply rooted in women's intersectional identities, making it difficult to relate to one another.

Consequently, Djébar's rendition of empathy becomes not as stable because it does not take place over a long period of time between the women.

That said, Djébar and Morrison maintain women's sacred connection by delving into storytelling and cultural practices. These two spaces bring women together, allowing them to recount and preserve each others' histories. As a matter of fact, in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, storytelling and cultural practices emerge as border-transcending, almost universal phenomena, because of the shocking similarities between some of the told stories as well as the practiced traditions, despite of the distinct contexts of the novels. The main implication of this is the possibility of the existence of these particular feminine practices that continue to support women and their her/stories across borders.

The last point to address is experiencing love and desire as a way of defying silencing and hybrid identities. Because of such incompleteness, various female characters, mainly Isma and Florens, seek love and desire in order to complete themselves, or regain agency. However, Djébar and Morrison dispute this notion by demonstrating the disillusionment they are met with from interacting with their male counterparts. This is distressing as these women face being silenced once more; nonetheless, this study had concluded that agency is flexible and continuous, so as long as the subaltern woman is resisting her silencing, entering and exiting agency is tolerable and effective when rewriting a diverse and comprehensive her/story. Indeed, Isma and Florens find agency once more by embarking on a self-affirming journey where one conducts historical research and the other starts history.

Ultimately, *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* are validated as feminine writing, which is reflected in the organization and themes presented above. In fact, in these particular novels, Djébar and Morrison even discuss and provide their rendition of a female language, arguing that it facilitates their expression of subaltern women-related themes.

As it appears, Djébar's and Morrison's interest in the subaltern woman stayed the same from *Fantasia* and *Beloved* to *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, with slight differences and adjustments made to fit the change of times and to keep their writing fresh and appealing. Indeed, one of the major aspects in all four novels are the contexts because they are the motivating elements of this analysis; they bring these authors together and then differentiate them from one another. On this matter, we can verify that the socio-cultural and historical background remained constant throughout the four novels, sustaining the formulation of events and characters, and influencing the writing directions taken by the authors. Within the backgrounds, we were also able to identify colonial rule and its remnants, slavery and patriarchy as the major disruptive systems. We note, however, Djébar forgoing the representation of colonial cruelty to focus on its aftermath in postcolonial Algeria in her second novel, aiming to emphasize postcolonial Algeria as equally damaged as colonized Algeria. Morrison, unlike in *Beloved*'s antebellum setting, also attempts to exhibit the prevalence of slavery from its outset in *A Mercy*. In this light, Morrison's and Djébar's writings spread across their respective histories seeking to cover every piece of regarded or discarded history, searching for, excavating and reimagining subaltern women. In fact, their masking and unmasking of oppression maneuver persists as they inform their readers repeatedly, and over the course of years and decades, that the triggering oppressive forces are still an evasive constant in subaltern women's lives. Undoubtedly, Djébar and Morrison employ this notion to protect their writings from irrelevant notoriety on the one hand, and to convince their readers of the unreliability of history on the other, that any narrative can be meticulously controlled by those who have enough space and privilege to exert their power.

We also consider the clear difference in the portrayal of silencing, especially sexual violence. In *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, sexual violence was graphic and had extreme consequences like infanticide and the damaging of motherhood, while in the other two

novels, sexual violence was rebranded and details became non-existent. This observation is particularly notable as it valorizes the social and political framework of Algerian and African American women and illuminates the severity of the impact of sexual violence. It also suggests Djébar's and Morrison's desire to find novel ways to explore old themes, especially as sexual violence remains a constant in her/story. So, they continue to write about it, whether explicitly or implicitly.

Aside from that, we remark Morrison and Djébar writing a defiant subaltern woman who dispels subalternity as a fixed identity, determining it instead as an unfixed position in *Fantasia* and *Beloved*. Concurrently, we note the flexibility of agency written by the authors, making it also an unfixed position for the subaltern woman in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*. In this regard, subaltern women are far from static, silent and vanishing entities. This dynamic nature of their experiences warrants the existence of a history that properly represents them, which is why Morrison and Djébar shift their representation of education from learning in an oppressive space to a need for writing oneself into freedom.

As for culture and storytelling, their representation remains a major principle of her/story and the role of women's bodies. Having said that, we have discovered that, in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, Djébar and Morrison veered towards representing a transcendent perspective of these two themes. The manifestations of these practices appear barely distinct against their striking similarities, which casts them in a universal light, while also rallying them under the label of transcendent feminine practices.

Among all four books, some themes were presented distinctly. Favoring identity affirmation through having a name to be called by in *Fantasia* and *Beloved* became finding love and completeness in *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy*, and catering for subaltern women's psyche shifted from having descendants of trauma find happiness in small things

to returning to the traumatized themselves and offering them motherhood as significant source of delight. We also witness the abandonment of music as a theme, as no grounds for comparison were made available for it by the novels, Morrison's specifically, who chose a somber and dissonant path of representation of her/story in *A Mercy*.

Feminine writing is another aspect that was found to be a constant within all four books, whether stylistically or thematically. In fact, Djébar and Morrison relinquish the stealth and cautiousness of admitting to using feminine writing in *Fantasia* and *Beloved*, for a forward confrontation that speaks of a female language that is unlocked through connecting with one's female lineage and history.

Because examining the writing and rewriting of her/story is the main concern of this study, the authors' pursuits changed form, from using ghosts to real people to written records to having ancestors interact with their descendants, acclimating to their social and cultural landscapes. Djébar and Morrison excel in the plethora of ways they found to represent her/story. Their efforts stand as evidence of the possibilities of change that are usually ignored within historical discourse. We should acknowledge that Morrison aimed for a more historical quest in her second attempt, which proved to facilitate her addition of other women, like native, mixed-race and even white women into her narrative.

One last point to consider is that although the genres Djébar and Morrison write in are different, with one writing semi-autobiographies and the other Neo-slave narratives, they find themselves entering a historiographic metafictional realm that blurs fiction and history. Indeed, under this umbrella genre, their narratives find a point of meeting that represents the personal and collective her/story and literature of the subaltern woman.

We come to the conclusion that Djébar and Morrison come out of writing *Fantasia*, *Beloved*, *So Vast the Prison* and *A Mercy* with a strong conviction that silence is a helpful

tool of revision, as it allows them to listen for women's muffled voices, which, in turn, allows them to access the positions from which subaltern women resist oppression. From their narratives, we are able to find their positions of silence, their positions of agency and thus a her/story, written in the feminine, that carries both. This is achieved by means of various techniques and records (mainly women's bodies) that allow for the construction of these optional comprehensive sources that future generations can consult.

All in all, this study determined the efficacy of the methodology used, and how it may be of assistance in forwarding her/story, subaltern studies and the grouping and analysis of diverse women authors' works in future research. It also hopes that her/story will become a common concept that is generally recognized in theoretical studies. In addition, insights gained from this comparative study aim to contribute to the idea that subaltern women should no longer be seen as silenced and homogenous entities. Finally, future studies should consider the theoretical assumptions that could arise from studying the harmony between Crenshaw's, Spivak's and Cixous' theories and their application to literary texts. We also propose an inquiry into the depiction of men and masculinity within her/story writing, as a way to investigate whether such a representation would differ from that of men writing about women in history and literature. As far as the comparative aspect of this research, after comparing the literary texts of an Algerian woman writer with those of an African American one, exploring a comparative analysis that includes literary texts focused on women from the East of Asia or Asia, in general, becomes an interesting suggestion for the broadening of one's understanding of her/story globally.

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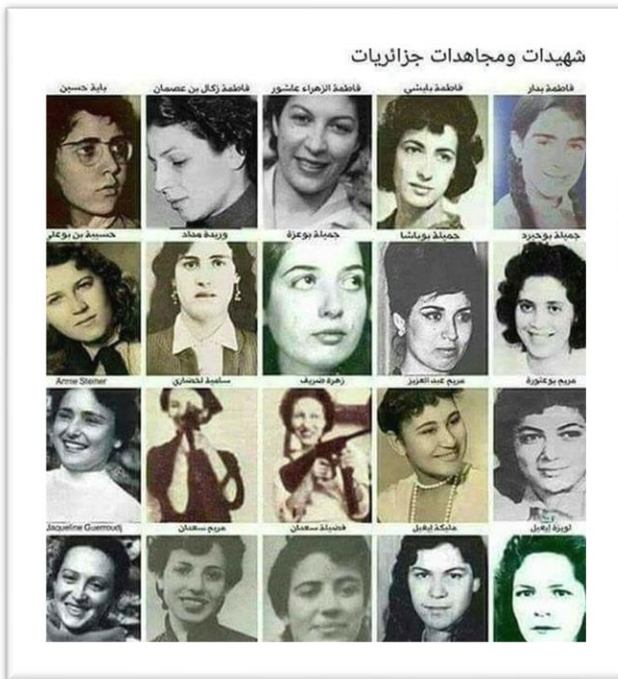
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# **Appendices**

## Appendices

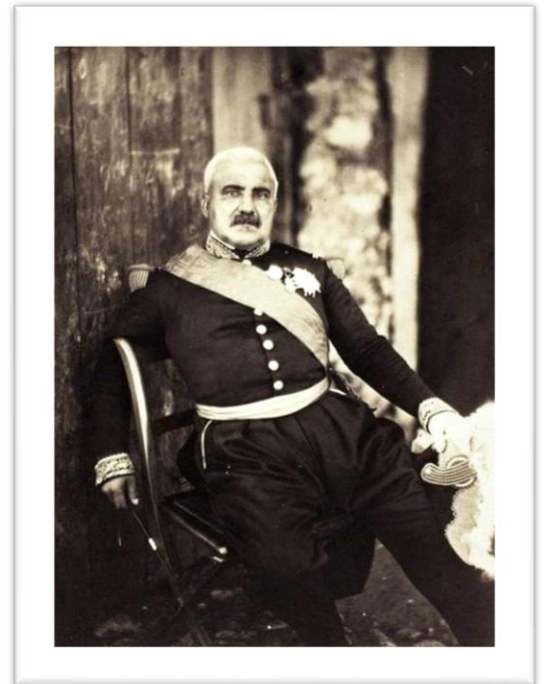
### Fantasia



Famous Algerian War heroines  
(<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/515732594826386469/>)



Eugène Delacroix's  
Women of Algiers in Their Apartment (1834)  
(<https://histoire-image.org/etudes/femmes-alger-leur-appartement-delacroix>)

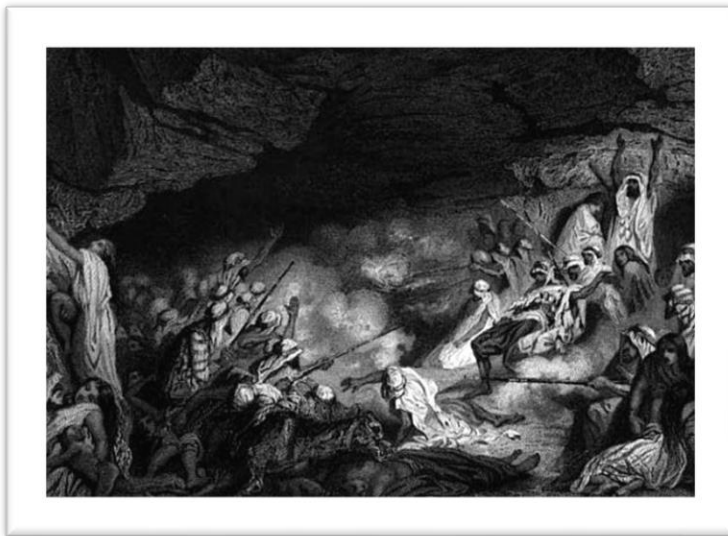


Aimable Pélissier  
([https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aimable\\_P%C3%A9lissier#/media/Fichier:Aimable\\_Pelissier.jpg](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aimable_P%C3%A9lissier#/media/Fichier:Aimable_Pelissier.jpg))



A depiction of Chikh Boumaza and his troops displayed in Mudjahid National Museum in Algiers

([https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/ba/Cheikh\\_boumaza.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/ba/Cheikh_boumaza.jpg))



An Etching of the asphyxiation of the tribe of Ouled Riah in the caves of the Dahra

By Tony Johannot

([https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enfumades\\_d%27Alg%C3%A9rie#/media/Fichier:Les\\_Grottes\\_du\\_Dahra.jpg](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enfumades_d%27Alg%C3%A9rie#/media/Fichier:Les_Grottes_du_Dahra.jpg))

## Beloved



The Modern Medea (1867) by Thomas Setterwhite Noble

Inspired by Margaret Garner's story

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret\\_Garner#/media/File:Margaret\\_Garner.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Garner#/media/File:Margaret_Garner.jpg))

**Stampede of Slaves.**  
**A TALE OF HORROR!**  
An Arrest by the U. S. Marshal.  
**A DEPUTY U. S. MARSHAL SHOT.**  
A Negro Child's Throat Cut from Ear to Ear by its Father or Mother, and Others Wounded:  
**CORONER'S INQUEST.**  
Writ of Habeas Corpus Taken Out.  
**GREAT EXCITEMENT!**  
The city was thrown into much excitement yesterday morning by the information that a party of slaves, sixteen in all, had made a stampede from Kentucky to this side of the river. Other circumstances, however, which afterward

The verdict of Margaret Garner's trial

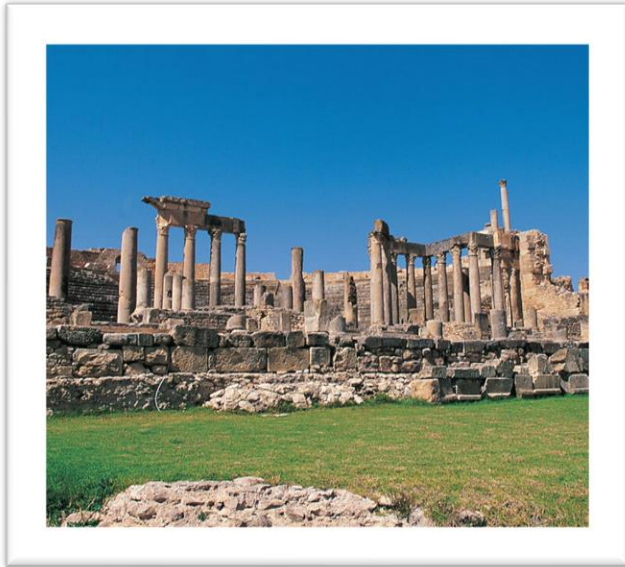
(<https://margaretgarner.weebly.com/the-trial.html>)

From the Cincinnati Gazette, Jan. 29.  
**ARREST OF FUGITIVE SLAVES.**  
**A SLAVE MOTHER MURDERS HER CHILD RATHER THAN SEE IT RETURNED TO SLAVERY.**  
Great excitement existed throughout the city the whole of yesterday, in consequence of the arrest of a party of slaves, and the murder of her child by a slave mother, while the officers were in the act of making the arrest. A party of seven or eight slaves escaped from Boone and Kenton counties, in Kentucky, (about sixteen miles from the Ohio,) on Sunday night last, and taking with them two horses and a sled, drove that night to the Ohio river, opposite to Western Row, in this city. Leaving the horses and sled standing there, they cross

An Excerpt detailing Margaret Garner's Case From February 2, 1856 issue of the Anti-Slavery Bugle

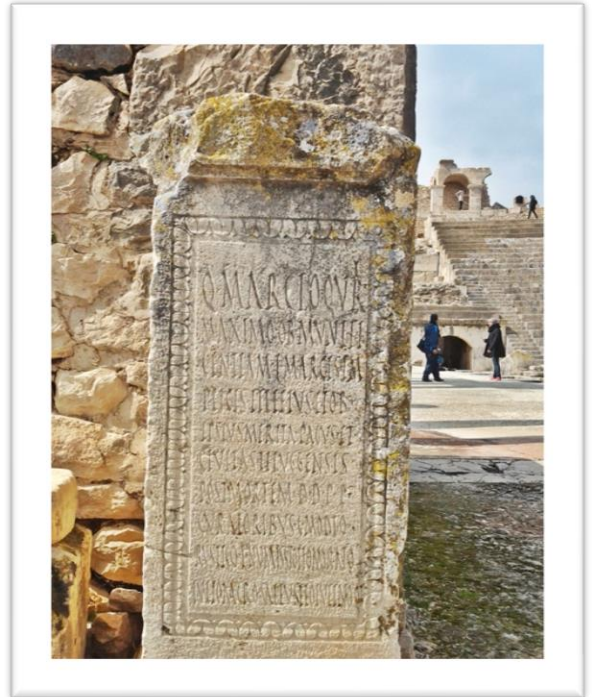
(<https://ohiomemory.ohiohistory.org/archives/876>)

## So Vast the Prison



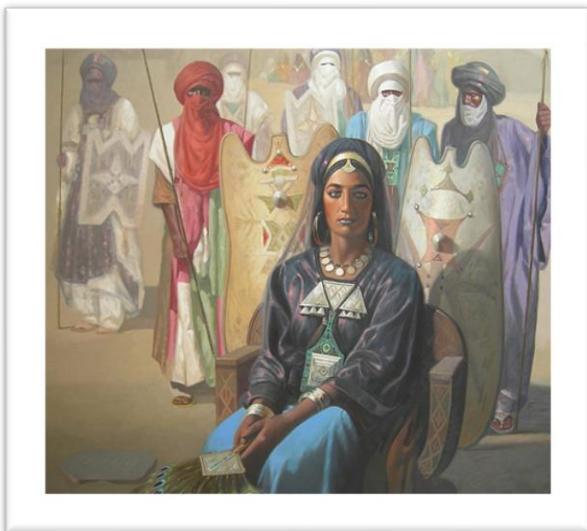
The Dougga

(<https://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/794/>)



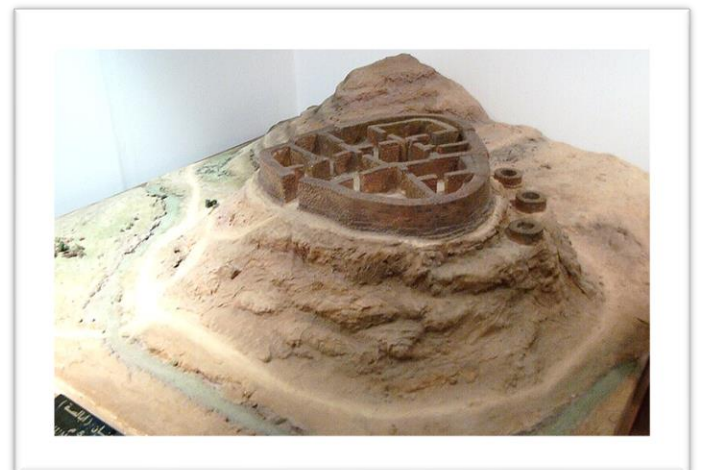
The bi-lingual writings on the stele of the Dougga

([File:Roman writings in Dougga Theater \(1\).jpg - WikimediaCommons](#))



Oil Painting of Tin Hinan by Hocine Ziani

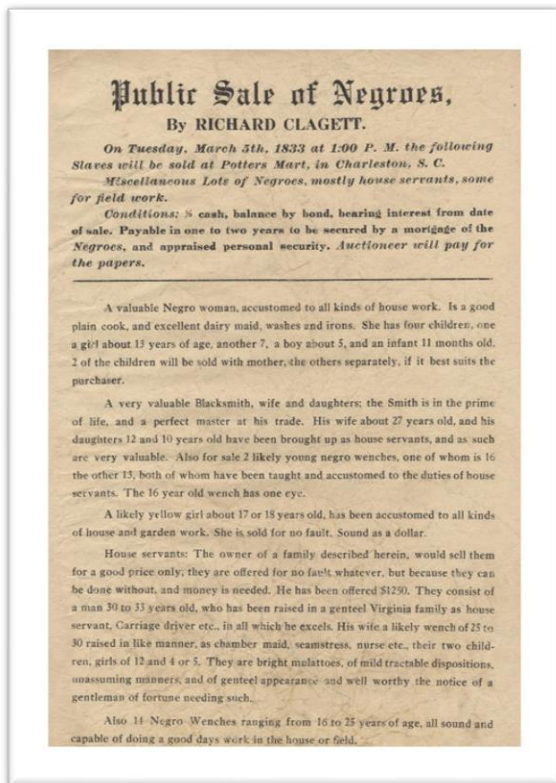
([https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin\\_Hinan#/media/Fichier:2 - La reine Tin Hinan, 125x150 cm, huile sur toile.jpg](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin_Hinan#/media/Fichier:2 - La reine Tin Hinan, 125x150 cm, huile sur toile.jpg))



A miniature of Tomb of Tin Hinan displayed in the Bardo Museum

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin\\_Hinan\\_Tomb#/media/File:Tombeau\\_Tin\\_Hinan.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tin_Hinan_Tomb#/media/File:Tombeau_Tin_Hinan.jpg))

## A Mercy



An example of a public sale  
pamphlet of slaves

(<https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/bro/id/250/>)

## Résumé

Les femmes écrivaines se battent depuis longtemps pour réintroduire les femmes réduites au silence et leurs expériences dans l'histoire et la littérature. Cette thèse propose de lier ces femmes à l'histoire et à la littérature en examinant les textes littéraires écrits par des femmes écrivaines postcoloniaux Assia Djébar et Toni Morrison, en particulier *Fantasia*, *An Algerian Cavalcade*, *So Vast the Prison*, *Beloved* et *A Mercy*. Djébar et Morrison, malgré qu'elles sont des milieux socioculturels différents, algérien et africain-américain respectivement, elles démontrent une ressemblance indéniable en écrivant sur les femmes subalternes qui ont subi la cruauté de patriarchie, (post)colonialisme et esclavage. Elles tentent de présenter ces femmes et leurs histoires dont l'objectif final de contester les conventions littéraires et l'histoire excluante. Donc, cette thèse engage une analyse thématique et comparative guidée par un féministe postcolonial cadre théorique qui concentre sur les théories de l'intersectionnalité et l'historiographie de subalterne dans l'exploration des femmes algériennes et africaines-américaines et leurs expériences dans leurs propres histoires et littératures. On aborde aussi le rôle des auteurs en examinant la qualité féminine de leurs écritures. Cette étude soutient que même si les femmes sont radiées de l'histoire, elles parviennent encore à préserver leurs histoires dans leurs corps, confirment donc une résistance à leurs oppressions multiples, et offrent aux femmes écrivaines la possibilité de découvrir leurs vérités et leurs voix enfouies, ainsi que les écrivent et réécrivent sous forme d'une version révisée de l'histoire et de la littérature appelé l'histoire des femmes ou 'her/story'. Cette thèse à révéler que l'intersectionnalité des femmes a mené à leurs oppressions multiples et subalternité dans la littérature et l'histoire. Néanmoins, on affirme que ces femmes écrivaines combattent cette problématique par la création d'une 'her/story' qui représente les plusieurs positions que la femme subalterne occupe, surtout les positions d'oppression et d'autonomie. Djébar et Morrison émergent comme des révisionnistes qui

écrivent les expériences et 'l'her/stories' individuelles et collectives des femmes subalternes en féminine.

**Mots-clés:** Femmes écrivaines algériennes, femmes écrivaines Africain-Américaines, intersectionnalité, her/story, subalternité, voix des femmes

## المخلص

لطالما سعت الكاتبات لإعادة تقديم وإدخال النساء الصامتات وتجاربهن في التاريخ والأدب. تهدف هذه الأطروحة، إذن، لربط هذه النساء بالتاريخ والأدب عبر دراسة النصوص الأدبية فانتازيا، موكب جزائري (*Fantasia, An Algerian*) *Cavalcade*)، واسع السجن (*So Vast the Prison*)، محبوبة (*Beloved*) ورحمة (*A Mercy*) للكاتبتين للأدب ما بعد الاستعمار آسيا جبار وتوني موريسون. بالرغم من أنهن من خلفيتان اجتماعية وثقافية مختلفتان، جزائرية وإفريقية أمريكية، إلا أنهن تبديان تشابها يصعب إنكاره وبالخصوص عند كتابتهن عن النساء التابعات اللاتي تخضعن لوحشية النظام الأبوي، (ما بعد) الاستعمار والعبودية. تحاول الكاتبتين تقديم النساء وتاريخهن هادفتين في النهاية لتحدي التقاليد الأدبية والتاريخ الإقصائي. لهذا تتخذ هذه الأطروحة تحليل موضوعي ومقارن مبني على الإطار النظري النسوي ما بعد الاستعماري الذي يستغل نظريات تعدد الجوانب وتأريخ التابعين كمحورين رئيسيين لاستكشاف تاريخ وأدب النساء الجزائريات والإفريقيات الأمريكيات. نتناول أيضا دور الكاتبتين عبر فحص استخدامهم للأسلوب النسوي في نصوصهم. تحاول أن تبرهن هذه الدراسة أنه بالرغم من أن النساء محذوفات من التاريخ إلا أنهن يحافظن على تاريخهن على أجسامهن مؤكدات بذلك قابليتهن لمقاومة الاضطهاد المتعدد، مع توفيرهن إمكانية الكشف عن أصواتهن وحقائقهن من طرف الكاتبات اللاتي يقمن بتسجيل وتنقيح هذه الحقائق على شكل نسخة معدلة من التاريخ تدعى بالتاريخ النسوي (*her/story*). كشفت هذه الأطروحة أن الجوانب المتعددة للنساء أدت إلى اضطهادهن المتعدد وتبعيتهن في التاريخ والأدب، ومع ذلك نؤكد بان الكاتبات النساء يقاومن عن طريق صنع تاريخ نسوي يمثل الوضعيات التي تشغلها النساء (المضطهدة والفاعلة). جبار موريسون، إذن، يصبحن مراجعتين منفتحتين وكاتبتين للتجارب والتاريخ الشخصي والجماعي للنساء التابعة بأسلوب نسوي.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** كاتبات جزائريات، كاتبات إفريقيات أمريكيات، تعدد الجوانب، التاريخ النسوي، التبعية، أصوات النساء

## Abstract

Women writers have long sought to reintroduce silenced women and their experiences to history and literature. This thesis, then, intends to link these women to history and literature by examining literary texts written by postcolonial women writers Assia Djebar and Toni Morrison, specifically *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade, So Vast the Prison, Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Djebar and Morrison, regardless of their different socio-cultural backgrounds, Algerian and African American respectively, showcase an undeniable affinity by writing subaltern women who have been subjected to the cruelty of patriarchy, (post)colonialism and slavery. They attempt to present women and their histories with a final aim to challenge literary conventions and exclusionary history. Therefore, this thesis undertakes a thematic comparative analysis guided by a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework that takes intersectional theory and subaltern historiography as its main focus when exploring Algerian and African American women's experiences within their respective histories and literatures. We also address the authors' roles by examining the feminine quality of their writings. This study argues that although women are written off history, they still manage to preserve it within their bodies, confirming thus a resistance to their manifold oppressions, and providing women writers with the possibility to unearth their buried truths and voices, write and rewrite them into a revised version of history and literature called her/story. This thesis revealed that women's intersectionality has led to their manifold oppression and subalternity within literature and history. Nonetheless, we assert that women writers contend this by crafting a her/story that represents the several positions subaltern women occupy, mainly oppressed and agent positions. Djebar and Morrison, then, emerge as revisionists who write subaltern women's individual and collective experiences and her/stories in the feminine.

**Keywords:** Algerian women writers, African American women writers, intersectionality, her/story, subalternity, women's voices

## Résumé

Les femmes écrivaines se battent depuis longtemps pour réintroduire les femmes réduites au silence et leurs expériences dans l'histoire et la littérature. Cette thèse propose de lier ces femmes à l'histoire et à la littérature en examinant les textes littéraires écrits par des femmes écrivaines postcoloniaux Assia Djebar et Toni Morrison, en particulier *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade, So Vast the Prison, Beloved* et *A Mercy*. Djebar et Morrison, malgré qu'elles sont des milieux socioculturels différents, algérien et africain-américain respectivement, elles démontrent une ressemblance indéniable en écrivant sur les femmes subalternes qui ont subi la cruauté de patriarchie, (post)colonialisme et esclavage. Elles tentent de présenter ces femmes et leurs histoires dont l'objectif final de contester les conventions littéraires et l'histoire excluante. Donc, cette thèse engage une analyse thématique et comparative guidé par un féministe postcolonial cadre théorique qui concentre sur les théories de l'intersectionnalité et l'historiographie de subalterne dans l'exploration des femmes algériennes et africaines-américaines et leurs expériences dans leurs propres histoires et littératures. On aborde aussi le rôle des auteurs en examinant la qualité féminine de leurs écritures. Cette étude soutient que même si les femmes sont radiées de l'histoire, elles parviennent encore à préserver leurs histoires dans leurs corps, confirment donc une résistance à leurs oppressions multiples, et offrent aux femmes écrivaines la possibilité de découvrir leurs vérités et leurs voix enfouies, ainsi que les écrivent et réécrivent sous forme d'une version révisée de l'histoire et de la littérature appelé l'histoire des femmes ou 'her/story'. Cette thèse à révéler que l'intersectionnalité des femmes a mené à leurs oppressions multiples et subalternité dans la littérature et l'histoire. Néanmoins, on affirme que ces femmes écrivaines combattent cette problématique par la création d'une 'her/story' qui représente les plusieurs positions que la femme subalterne occupe, surtout les positions d'oppression et d'autonomie. Djebar et Morrison émergent comme des révisionnistes qui écrivent les expériences et 'l'her/stories' individuelles et collectives des femmes subalternes en féminine.

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