

**Women of Algiers in their Apartment:  
A Study of Community in Exile**

An Honours Thesis for the Department of International Literary and Visual Studies

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## **Dedications**

To my loving grandparents,  
Without whom none of this would be possible;

To my past self, Laura circa Sept. 2015,  
who naively decided to write a thesis –  
You have no idea the ordeal you are about to put yourself through.

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# Introduction

Born in Algeria, of Arabic descent, but educated within the colonial French system, Assia Djebar was a writer whose texts focus on the female experience during and after Algerian independence. In her work, Djebar captures the lives of Algerian women and reveals their personal and emotional struggles, challenging colonial and nationalist narratives of what women's lives should be. In examining short stories written by Djebar both before and after Algerian independence, I discuss the theme of inner exile as a result of colonial and patriarchal oppression. I define inner exile as the loss of community membership, such that one is banished from the homeland while remaining within one's territorial borders. Inner exile can arise as subjects are prevented from full participation in their community, or when the society around them is altered and loses familiarity.

In the discussion of women as subjects who have experienced both colonial and patriarchal oppression, I demonstrate that the inner exile of women is in fact a doubled experience. Thus, I argue that for Djebar's Algerian women, exile manifests through isolation from greater society, second-class citizenship, and an exclusion from the national narrative. Furthermore, I question the possibility of a homeland for Algerian women, and exhibit the importance of feminine space in Djebar's writing. Finally, I analyze Djebar's use of women's memory and oral tradition as a way of creating community within exile, and explain how this female community serves to alleviate the suffering of women.

I decided to analyze my topic through Djebar's writing specifically because of her own identity as a female, post-colonial writer in exile. Djebar's personal struggles as a writer have included the post-colonial challenge of writing Algerian stories in the colonizer's tongue, while giving voice to a female perspective on pain of persecution by patriarchal authorities. In this way, Djebar's background reflects exactly the twofold condition of inner exile that I discuss.

Since I argue that the greatest factor of women's inner exile has been the exclusion of their voice from the national narrative, I found it most apt to analyze a text that addresses the female perspective, especially as presented by a female writer who could herself identify with the state of inner exile I describe. I chose the collection *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* because of its singular focus on the female experience; in exhibiting the most private of female spaces and the most intimate moments of women's lives, the collection provides a clear picture of women's condition of doubled inner exile.

In writing this thesis, it was my goal to embrace the interdisciplinary spirit of ILVS and use my training in both political science and literary studies to analyze issues of post-colonialism and feminism. Thus, I have juxtaposed non-fictional texts by Djébar, Edward Said, and Frantz Fanon alongside the literary works from Djébar's collection of short stories. In doing so, I wish to demonstrate how literature and political theory act as mirrors for each other, presenting different perspectives on the same historical events (in this case – the events surrounding the condition of Algerian women before and after independence). While I understand that fiction does not necessarily reflect reality, I believe that the creation of literature can act as a means of hope by demonstrating an ideal to strive for. Not only is storytelling used as a motif for the building of community among fictional characters, but Djébar's own storytelling can be seen as a greater effort to inspire empathy in her readers, and in so doing, to motivate them to make change. Therefore, through the depiction of female solidarity among fictional characters, Djébar's literary work can be interpreted as offering a possible resolution to women's suffering.

# Chapter 1: The Pains of Exile

## Defining Exile

The Oxford Dictionary defines exile as “the state of being barred from one’s native country, typically for political or punitive reasons.” Historically, exile was indeed used as a form of punishment in which one was expelled from one’s native land. Those banished into exile would be explicitly refused permission of re-entry, threatened with imprisonment or execution upon return. While such banishment is no longer used regularly as a form of punishment by the state, millions of people today are still forcibly displaced by circumstances such as war and political instability. A basic distinction may be drawn between those compelled to abandon their homes by decree of the state, by judicial sentence, or by fear of persecution or prosecution, and those who emigrate by choice in search of opportunity. Those who flee their homes know there is no other option – to remain or turn back home would only bring death.

In his book *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said describes exile as the “unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home.”<sup>1</sup> Expounding on Said’s description of exile, John Barbour<sup>2</sup> adds to this idea of leaving the “true home,” explaining that to be in exile is to be constantly aware that one is out of place. Barbour adds that the experience of exile revolves around “a pivotal event of departure” and “a present condition of absence from one’s native land.” Thus, he explains, exile involves orientation, being pointed toward a distant place and time, and also disorientation, feeling lost and at odds with one’s immediate environment.

If we take the above definitions of exile, it is interesting to note that the idea of exile is always tied to that of native land, a tangible, physical space. Sociologist Anthony Smith

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, “Reflections on Exile,” in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, *Convergences: Inventories of the Present* 26 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 173.

<sup>2</sup> John D. Barbour, “The Consolations and Compensations of Exile: Memoirs by Said, Ahmed, and Eire,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 706–34, doi: 10.1093/jaarel/lfr007.

provides an explanation for the connection between territory and “homeland,” establishing a process he calls the “territorialization of memory.”<sup>3</sup> During this process, the land acquires special moral significance by serving as the location for important memories handed down through generations of an ethnic group. The land thus comes to be viewed as “the unique and indispensable setting of events and experiences that moulded the community.”<sup>4</sup> As a location becomes a “repository of historic memories and associations,” it is transformed into a historic land - a homeland.<sup>5</sup> Smith’s “territorialization of memory” thus explains why departure from the homeland is such an emotional and painful affair: the loss is more than that of a physical space, rather, it is the loss of one’s history, meaning, and memory. With this understanding, we can see that “homeland” does not only refer to physical territory, but to a broader concept that nurtures and solidifies notions of identity, specifically ethnic or group identity. This group identity, if not grounded in a common ethnicity, religion or language, is grounded in shared ideals, and a shared vision of the society it is trying to create. Therefore, “home” does not necessarily signify a place of origin, but rather one of community, familiarity, and belonging.

If we consider “home” to be more than just a shelter or place of birth, we can see that exile is an experience of not only physical displacement, but of psychological uprooting. Sarah Forsdyke links the idea of exile with that of community, determining exile to be “any separation from a community to which an individual or group formerly belonged.”<sup>6</sup> Since “home” itself is an intangible concept, we must consider a broader definition of exile, wherein physical separation from geographical territory is not of primary importance. In fact, Forsdyke describes a kind of “inner exile,” in which one becomes exiled while remaining within one’s territorial borders; this exile is the result of a loss of certain attributes of community membership, such

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 134–35.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 269.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada, 1991), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Sara Forsdyke, *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy: The Politics of Expulsion in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 7–8.

as political rights or belief in communal norms.<sup>7</sup> In this way, both Smith and Forsdyke relate the concept of “home” and banishment to issues of group identity and participation, rather than literal departure from a physical territory.

### **Colonialism as Exile**

In understanding a broader interpretation of homeland, we can see how the experience of colonial occupation is inherently one of exile. Not only is territory confiscated and repurposed, spurring the physical displacement of native populations, but indigenous populations also face inner exile through disenfranchisement, second-class citizenship, and forced cultural assimilation. In discussing the Algerian context, I analyze the theme of inner exile in three ways: first, exile from the nation-state through exclusion from the national narrative; second, exile from the self through loss of innate, native identity; and third, exile from the community through loss of political membership.

Firstly, regarding exclusion from national narrative, it is evident that as colonial subjects, native Algerians were effectively exiled from their homeland without leaving its borders, as their nation was appropriated from them and claimed as the creation of another. Native Algerians came to be caught in a contradictory idea of belonging – on the one hand, although they were French subjects, the European settler population forced the French government to enact restrictive naturalization policy that prevented them from gaining French citizenship. On the other hand, Arab and Berber populations were no longer considered true “Algerians”, but were referred to simply as the “Muslims.”<sup>8</sup> During the colonial period, the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>8</sup> Juliette Minces, “Women in Algeria,” in *Women in the Muslim World*, ed. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 160.

term “Algerian” came to refer exclusively to European settlers;<sup>9</sup> native Arabs and Berbers were thus stripped of their Algerian identity and denied a nation to call home.

In addition, as Jonathan Gosnell demonstrates, supporters of colonial activity insisted that Algeria was a creation of French institutions and influence. Colonial forces claimed that a geographic space called “Algeria” did not exist before the French gave it shape and named it. Even the name of Algeria itself was purported to have been taken from the 1830 surrender of Algiers.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the national narrative of Algeria was warped to exclude native Algerians from their own history.

Secondly, regarding forced the loss of national identity, “Muslim Algerians”<sup>11</sup> were forced to abandon their own culture and assimilate to an imposed idea of “Frenchness”. Describing education reforms under French rule, Gosnell explains that Muslim students were made to experience the erasure of their own culture and history. On top of being denied their national identity and representation, “Muslim Algerians” also found themselves forbidden by law to study their native Arabic in public schools.<sup>12</sup> The teaching dispensed in these schools was addressed only to the students of European origin, such that even Muslim students would be made to adopt the foreign French language, celebrate French national holidays, and exalt French heroes instead of Arab, Muslim ones.<sup>13</sup> In addition, students’ learning of history would focus more on the ancient Roman inhabitants of North Africa, rather than the Arab populations that succeeded them.<sup>14</sup>

Frantz Fanon also establishes this problem of colonial erasure, stating that the colonial occupation of territory precludes any possible freedom, independence, or agency of the

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan K. Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness in Colonial Algeria, 1930-1954* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Placed in quotations to differentiate them from European settlers

<sup>12</sup> Mincec, “Women in Algeria,” 160.

<sup>13</sup> Gosnell, *The Politics of Frenchness*, 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

colonized subject. He writes that “it is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction.”<sup>15</sup> The colonial agenda is inherently one of obliteration – not only does it “[hold] a people in its grip” and “[empty] the native’s brain of all form and content,” but “by a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, through colonial occupation, “Muslim Algerians” were forced to abide by a dominant language and a culture that was not their own, and become part of a society that had been perversely transformed. By “disfiguring” and “destroying” the past, the colonizing forces re-wrote local history in a way that erased the roots of the native population, roots that determined national, ethnic, and cultural identity. The colonized “Muslim Algerian” was therefore forced to adopt an identity that was alien and imposed; this is not only an exile from the home that was once familiar, but an exile from the very self.

Thirdly, regarding the loss of political membership, we can see the idea of inner exile to be true when considering how “Muslim Algerians” were marginalized, disenfranchised, and treated as second-class citizens. Those who were displaced by colonial conquest were forced to become labourers and servants for survival.<sup>17</sup> As economic disparities grew, so did the social rift between the settler and the native, while a doctrine of discrimination emerged to justify such economic and political stratification as a natural order. Without any representation, “Muslim Algerians” were denied any form of political participation.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, racism and prejudice served as obstinate barriers for them in reaching any position of power or influence. Unable to function as full members of colonial society, “Muslim Algerians” were hence excluded from the nation while still remaining within its borders.

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<sup>15</sup> Frantz Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Grove Press, 1994), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 148–49.

<sup>17</sup> Rabeya Khatun, “Analysis of the Causes of the Independent Movement of Algeria,” *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 6 (2014): 81.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus, for “Muslim Algerians” living in their ancestral lands, the concept of home was still something out of reach. Living in a usurped nation, without means or recognition of community membership, they were essentially removed from the homeland. The theoretical homeland can be interpreted as something that was, a state prior to colonial occupation, or something yet to be, only existing upon the creation of an independent nation. Without leaving the borders of what was now French Algeria, those native to the land were already banished into a state of inner exile.

### **Patriarchal Oppression as Exile**

For women, the experience of inner exile was even more profound - not only did they have to suffer colonial oppression, but they were also marginalized and restricted by their own, Algerian community. Traditional Algerian society consisted of a world where men assumed all responsibilities, and where the eldest male made the decisions for all the family. Within this world, Islam was at once law and religion, a code that regulated life both inside and outside the home. Even though traditional society was based on rural values, its structure remained unbroken even when Algerians were displaced to the cities as land became insufficient to support them, and as repression in the countryside became particularly heavy.<sup>19</sup> The patriarchal tradition created a deeply-rooted form of repression in Algerian society, even beyond that of colonialism, placing women in a state of double-subjugation. This subjugation created a doubled experience of inner exile for women, as subjects of both colonial and patriarchal society. Their inner exile can be seen in their rejection from their community, their physical separation from greater society, and their lack of political membership.

In traditional society, women had an inferior status from birth; their existence was unwelcomed and unwanted, let alone truly appreciated in the community. From birth, the girl

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<sup>19</sup> Mincec, “Women in Algeria,” 165.

would experience rejection; within her own family, she would be viewed as a problem rather than an asset. By the time the girl became strong enough to work effectively for the family, social norms would demand that she be married into another group, such that her contribution to the family would be lost.<sup>20</sup> This made her worthless in the eyes of the family; not only was the girl a financial burden, but she represented a constant danger to the family, as she might bring shame at any moment by losing her virginity before marriage. The honour of the whole family was intricately linked with the woman's sense of "modesty" and "docility". So great were social pressures and the fear of premarital intercourse that girls were forced to live cloistered lives from an early age; except to go to the well, to the baths, to the doctor, or to the fields in the country (for lack of male labour), women would be entirely confined to the house.<sup>21</sup> Treated as goods and chattel to be protected and controlled, women were not respected as members of the family.

Outside of her own family, the married woman would still never be fully accepted by her in-laws. The woman's role was to be the timid and docile servant of the male, progressing from a position of submission to her father or her elder brother to that of her husband, never becoming an independent being. To gain any real position in her new family, the woman would need to give birth to a son. Through a son, she might eventually gain a voice in the community.<sup>22</sup> All her life, the woman would be indoctrinated with such expectations; the more sons, the greater a woman's reputation and authority. Otherwise, she remained in a position of servitude, undervalued and unappreciated.

In this way, the inner exile of Algerian women is inherent to a cycle of tradition - girls would be raised to have an inferior status, and if a woman brought boys into the world, her

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<sup>20</sup> Alf Andrew Heggoy, "On the Evolution of Algerian Women," *African Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (1974): 451, doi:10.2307/523644.

<sup>21</sup> Minces, "Women in Algeria," 165.

<sup>22</sup> Heggoy, "On the Evolution of Algerian Women," 451.

sons would grow to adopt authoritarian male gender roles. From birth, the woman would be rejected rather than accepted by her own community, and would even experience literal, physical separation from the society of which they were supposedly citizens. Algerian houses generally open on private courtyards surrounded by high walls; these protective walls were meant to keep danger out, but they also kept the woman pent-up within. The isolation of the cloistered woman limited her contact with the outside world, and consequently, the consciousness she had of her situation. Hence, despite existing as Algerian persons, women were never truly incorporated as full, functioning members of society. Women did play a relatively important role in the family, but they did not have any capacity to participate at all in the wider society outside the home.<sup>23</sup> A woman's role was precisely to obey, keep house, and procreate, a role that did not include any capacity for political membership in the greater community.

If home is a place of community, familiarity, and belonging, then it would seem as though Algerian women were fundamentally denied access to the "homeland" of greater society. As the "colonized of the colonized,"<sup>24</sup> Algerian women were doubly imposed upon by both French and traditional Algerian authorities, excluded from the societies of both. Without even leaving the confines of their own homes, women were forced into a state of inner exile, never guaranteed any sense of security or belonging in their community.

### **The Double Exile of Women**

The twofold experience of exile imposed upon Algerian women is perhaps best demonstrated in Djébar's essay "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound" – the post face to her collection of short stories, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*. In this essay, Djébar discusses

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<sup>23</sup> Assia Djébar, *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 165.

<sup>24</sup> Zahia Smail Salhi, "The Algerian Feminist Movement between Nationalism, Patriarchy and Islamism," *Women's Studies International Forum* vol. 33, no. 2 (March 2010): 2, doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2009.11.001.

the painting whose title she has chosen for the title of her own collection – *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, by French artist Eugene Delacroix. Djébar aims to provide a reflective background on the Algerian female experience, establishing the Algerian woman as a subject under the double-subjugation of both colonial and patriarchal authority.

Serving as both social commentator and art historian, Djébar uses the development and evolution of the painting itself to trace a deepening understanding of women's situation. In the first section of the essay "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound," Djébar presents Delacroix's first contact with the harem, describing the scene as it opens up before him. As Djébar details the painter's fascination with and rendition of the scene, she questions the motivations and inspirations behind his work: "This abundance of rare colours, these new-sounding names, is that what arouses and thrills the painter? ...by what shock, or at least by what vague stirrings was the painter seized? This heart of the half-open harem, is it really the way he sees it?"<sup>25</sup> In other words, it is unclear whether the painter's amazement stems from true appreciation or understanding of the scene. Is the image presented one of truth, and does it register the more profound realities of the female experience?

While writing from the painter's perspective, Djébar nevertheless makes explicit his position as a viewer – he is colonizer, intruder. Even as an artist, Delacroix remains a representative of the colonial conquest. Djébar explains that the man who agreed to allow Delacroix to enter his home was *chaouch*, an Algerian under the employ of (and therefore subservient to) the French colonial administration. Djébar adds that only two years earlier, prior to France's colonial conquest, the painter would not only have been forbidden this view, but he would have had to risk his life to witness this scene. Therefore, Delacroix's gaze upon the

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<sup>25</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 135.

Orient is inextricably linked to the colonial conquest; his “adventure” is an intrusion, his perspective one of a voyeur and a thief.

From Djébar’s description of the painter’s process, it is evident that Delacroix’s perspective is one driven by Orientalism, a concept defined by Said as “the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny and so on.”<sup>26</sup> Orientalism creates a perspective that imagines, exaggerates and distorts the conception of Eastern, or “Oriental” cultures, rendering them into created spaces of mystery, eroticism, exoticism, and danger.

With his foreign eye, Delacroix’s first instinct is to create an exotic fantasy rather than a truthful, historic representation. He is on what Djébar calls a “journey to the Orient,”<sup>27</sup> an Orient that, “so near and of his own time, offers itself to him as a total and excessive novelty.” At the time of his arrival in Algeria, Delacroix has just come from touring Morocco, a place that, to him, has already been “revealed as the place where dream and its incarnation of an aesthetic ideal meet, the place of a visual revolution.”<sup>28</sup> It is exactly as he had envisioned, only “washed clean of any association with sin” that he had made for previous works of art. Delacroix’ artistic inspiration is hence suggested to be one that comes from a fetishizing of the exotic; the Orient under his brush is the realization of a perverse imagination.

In recreating Delacroix’s first sight of the harem, Djébar demonstrates clearly his Orientalist gaze - his immediate reaction is one of wonder, amazement, and fantasy. The image of the harem is at once mysterious, dream-like, and alluring. Delacroix crosses a “dark hallway” at the end of which, unexpectedly, and bathed in an almost “*unreal* light” (emphasis mine), the

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<sup>26</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 5.

<sup>27</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 134.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

harem opens up before him. He sees women and children “waiting for him,” “surrounded by mounds of silk and gold,” an unbelievable scene of extreme, visual richness. The artist himself is described by a witness of the account as being “as if intoxicated by the spectacle he had before his eyes.”<sup>29</sup> The first thing he notes in his sketches are the specifications of colours, the detail of costumes, strange references that baffle his eyes in a visual feast. Delacroix’s experience with the harem is an “ephemeral experience,” the souvenirs he collects are “traces of a dream”. His efforts to replicate the image of the harem becomes “a fetishist compulsion,” driven and augmented by the certainty that the unique experience of witnessing this scene will never be repeated.

It is no wonder, then, that the resultant painting, created in 1834, is one that precisely reflects the Orientalist perspective. The three women in in the painting lounge in rich costumes, waiting for their man as they pose with a sensual idleness. Surrounding them is a background of detailed rugs, tiles and mosaic walls, the luxurious room of a plush, private harem. Full of sexual connotations, the image is at once erotic and exotic, full of mystery and allure. At the same time, however, it is important to note that the creation of such an exotic and fetishized picture of the Orient supplants the Oriental subject into a fabricated universe, a story that does not reflect reality. This false representation becomes how people perceive the Orient; in this way, not only is the colonized subject expected to assimilate to a foreign culture, but the creation of Orientalist imagery imposes an entire persona upon them, displacing the colonized subject from the narrative of his own history. Thus, as victims of misrepresentation, Delacroix’s women of Algiers are exiled from their own self-image, from their own world.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 134.



*Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, Eugène Delacroix (1834)



*Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, Eugène Delacroix (1847)

In discussing a second version of Delacroix's *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, Djébar demonstrates a new rendition of the same scene that is darker and more haunting. While the composition remains almost identical, the whole meaning of the painting is changed. The second painting, created fifteen years after the first, depicts several changes: the lush detail of the room is lost and the walls are bare, darkened by heavy, oppressive shadows. The angle of the view is widened and the women have been centered, creating an effect that distances the women from the viewer. The single source of light that shines upon them has been rendered less ethereal and more artificial, a haunting and unreal glow. The tapestry lifted by the servant woman is no longer a teasing veil that hides the sensual, but a sinister barrier that isolates the women from the rest of the world. Gone is the erotic allure of the first painting, in its place is cold desolation. As such, the women are "suddenly less sultanas than prisoners,"<sup>30</sup> entrapped by darkness and solitude.

The element of confinement emphasized in the second painting shows the women to be separated, and therefore exiled, from society. Their expressions doleful and vacant, the women are described by Djébar as remaining "absent to themselves, to their body, to their sensuality, to their happiness." Conservative, patriarchal traditions have trapped the women literally and symbolically in the harem, such that, not only are they denied physical access to the space outdoors, but they are expelled from any form of participation in greater society. This "absence" from the women's own selves can be read as a form exile – cloistered and without agency, women cannot even inhabit their own flesh, over whose very movements they have no control. Their bodies, their will, and their happiness are not their own, but rather the prize of another.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 136.

In this way, the “women of Algiers in their apartment” are depicted as victims of both French colonialism and Algerian patriarchy, doubly vulnerable to constraints and confinement. On the one hand, these women have been forced into inner exile by colonial forces, their nation rendered unfamiliar by foreign occupation, their image and identity distorted into an Orientalist delusion. On the other hand, the women are also banished from and by their own patriarchal community, such that they are exiled from their own image, their own flesh, and their own lives, all of which have been wrested from them and forced into the command of another.

The twofold, inner exile of women is made further apparent through the characters of Djébar’s short stories. The first example is Fatma, the water carrier in the title story “Women of Algiers in their Apartment”. As she is overcome by a series of flashbacks, remembering the hardships of her life, Fatma repeatedly refers to herself as “the Excluded One”, and describes exactly the ostracism of inner exile while she laments: “Is it me they have excluded, me whom they have barred....me they have humiliated...Me whom they have caged in...me whom they’ve sought to subdue...”<sup>31</sup> Through her flashbacks, we realize that despite spending most of her life under French occupation, her personal difficulties have mainly stemmed from patriarchal oppression. Her family was evidently impacted by French colonial forces, as her father was a collaborator who had assimilated to and sided with the French. However, Fatma herself is more clearly a victim of patriarchal society in particular, as her father “gave [her] up for two bottles of beer in a garrison town,”<sup>32</sup> marrying her off as a thirteen-year-old child bride into an abusive family. Upon running away from her in-laws, she fell into prostitution to survive, before continuing a life of servitude as a water carrier at the bathhouse. What is of note is that from colonial occupation, the war, to independence, Fatma’s situation has never changed

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.,39

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 42.

for the better, demonstrating that, beyond colonial oppression, the biggest challenge she has faced is that of patriarchal tradition.

The great-grandmother in the short story “Nostalgia of the Horde” recounts a similar childhood, also having experienced the difficulty of being a female in the home. As a child bride, she was expected upon her marriage to toil from dawn till dusk with household chores, slaving away with baking, cooking, weaving, and cleaning. She speaks of the abuse she endured from sisters-in-law who governed her with a punishing strictness, and from a husband who beat her to the point of bloody injury. What is particularly of note is the incident of her husband throwing a stone used for ablutions at her head. Ironically, despite using a blessed object to inflict harm, the husband went back to “praying imperturbably” as the stone cut open her skin.<sup>33</sup> For a female, even the most profane debasement is entirely normalized.

The great-grandmother further relates a story of Mma Rkia, an old woman from her own childhood, whose experience demonstrates clearly the twofold aggression inflicted upon women by colonial and patriarchal society. In this account, Mma Rkia gives birth “during those days of constant fear,” just as the French were invading and occupying her town. Even among deadly threats presented by “the noise of the carnage and the bullets” outside, the more heinous crime of the moment is Mma Rkia’s birthing of a daughter, a female “only good enough for the race of slaves.”<sup>34</sup> It is Mma Rkia who is cursed by her sister-in-law for producing a girl, and not the French invaders for the actual violence they enact. As the baby girl dies immediately after birth, Mma Rkia is convinced that the sister-in-law’s curses were what killed her daughter. The infant’s death can thus be interpreted as a murder by patriarchal expectations, demonstrating how traditional society rejects and suffocates females, denying them the ability to freely exist.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 129.

Thus, Djébar demonstrates that even as colonial oppression warps the concept of the motherland, continued patriarchal customs further disenfranchise women on what is perhaps an even more profound level. In “Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound,” Djébar shows how Delacroix’s women have been placed under double-exile just as the colonial period begins. Not only are they exoticized as Oriental subjects, but they are also eroticized by a male gaze that reduces them to mere sexual objects. Djébar’s own characters, such as the grandmother in “Nostalgia of the Horde,” Mma Rkia, and Fatma, continue to experience the same form of double-repression and subsequent inner exile, even though they were all born in different and have lived through different periods of political upheaval. By creating characters across time periods who experience the same form of oppression, Djébar frames the issue of women’s inner exile as an inter-generational problem, demonstrating how women are caught in an unchanging pattern of subjugation.

## Chapter 2: Lies of Liberation

### A Failed Homecoming

In earlier sections, I demonstrated how colonial institutions forced native Algerians into a form of inner exile. As their nation was usurped, “Muslim Algerians” were expected to assimilate to Western culture and foreign ideas, such that they were alienated from the society that was once their homeland. Existing national identity was warped by French forces, and “Muslim Algerians” were relegated to second-class citizenship with no means of political participation. In light of this exclusion from society; independence can thus be seen as a homecoming, with the liberated nation-state as the new homeland for Algerians. Upon gaining independence, native Algerians could re-establish the nation as a place of belonging and familiarity, reclaim the historical narrative of the nation, and recover their rightful status as full members of society.

The nationalist movement of Algeria was primarily driven by the National Liberation Front (FLN), an Algerian socialist party that continues to influence the country today. The Algerian revolution for independence commenced on November 1 1954, a day that became known as the *Toussaint Rouge*, or “Red All-Saints Day,” when guerilla fighters of the FLN carried out a series of attacks against military and civilian targets throughout Algeria; the war continued until Algeria was liberated in 1962. The complex conflict of the war was characterized by guerilla fighting, terror attacks, and the use of torture by both sides.

When French repression became more severe and effective, male revolutionaries were forced underground or out of the country; women were then depended upon to take up the roles of their absent male counterparts. Women both in cities and in the countryside quickly demonstrated their support for the FLN by becoming active participants themselves, making huge contributions to the war effort as intelligence agents, nurses, and even fighters. In town,

they served more evidently as bomb-carriers; hidden by the veil and considered by authorities to be too bound by tradition to participate in revolutionary activity, women were rarely suspected or searched. The participation of women became crucial, especially as every Muslim man became suspect either of belonging to the FLN or of aiding it with provisions or information.<sup>35</sup> The total number of women involved in the conflict, as determined by post-war veteran registration, is numbered at 11,000, but it is possible that this number was significantly higher due to underreporting.<sup>36</sup> An estimated 2,200 female FLN members were imprisoned and tortured by the French, some to the point of death, proving the huge risks women undertook to perform great acts of bravery.<sup>37</sup> Algerian historian Benjamin Stora accounts for women's transition to action as an attempt to "invert their positions as victim[s]" by fighting for and taking back the autonomy that had traditionally been withheld from them.<sup>38</sup> For Algerian women who had suffered twofold oppression under both colonial and patriarchal forces, liberation would have meant even more so an end to inner exile, as women helped create a new nation that would accept them. They believed that through shared ideals of the liberation efforts, their common revolutionary past would serve as a "platform for development and societal cohesion in the formation of the Algerian republic."<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, the homecoming of liberation was not a homecoming for all: even though female militants were granted unprecedented levels of responsibility and movement during the war, once independence was won, the FLN continued enforcing patriarchal traditions in the newly-established nation. Conservative values towards Algerian women, their

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<sup>35</sup> John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation*, Second Edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 162.

<sup>36</sup> Gerard J. De Groot and C. M. Peniston-Bird, eds., *A Soldier and a Woman: Sexual Integration in the Military*, *Women and Men in History* (Harlow, England ; New York: Longman, 2000), 247.

<sup>37</sup> Meredith Turshen, "Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War: From Active Participants to Passive Victims?," *Social Research* 69, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 891.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Stora, "Women's Writing between Two Algerian Wars," *Research in African Literatures* 30, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 80.

<sup>39</sup> Zahia Smail Salhi, "The Algerian Feminist Movement between Nationalism, Patriarchy and Islamism," *Women's Studies International Forum* 33, no. 2 (March 2010): 5, doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2009.11.001.

bodies, and their agency prevailed, such that the inner exile of women was sustained even after independence was won.

The regression of women's status was practically immediate upon liberation as, the summer of 1962, amidst the jubilation of newly gained independence, FLN militants would roam the streets intimidating single women. A woman accompanied in public by a man other than a relative was liable to be forced into marriage or jailed if she refused.<sup>40</sup> The vast majority of women who wished to be independent and find salaried work would be rapidly labelled and rejected by society, and those who were employed were relegated to subordinate and menial labour, working as maids, hospital attendants, or secretaries.<sup>41</sup> Women's attrition from political life continued as they had no representation in the FLN National Assembly, and even by the time of Djébar's writing in the mid-1970s, family law remained just as restrictive as before the Algerian war. The veiling and confinement of women was still prevalent, and many women never married as they were considered tarnished by rape or close interaction with other men during war. Other married militants were forced back into the privacy of the home by their husbands.<sup>42</sup> In response to the relapse of women's condition, Mme Houria Imache Rami, an ex-militant, commented that "We were all equal in the war – it was afterward that our citizenship was taken away from us."<sup>43</sup>

Because women trusted in the camaraderie built between them and their male counterparts during the war, they believed that this trust would be reflected in the legal and social foundations of the new nation. In hopes of national unity, women were hesitant to speak out against the erosion of their rights. One militant explains, "I [was] blindly nationalist...In

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<sup>40</sup> Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation*, 229.

<sup>41</sup> Juliette Minces, "Women in Algeria," in *Women in the Muslim World*, ed. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 166.

<sup>42</sup> Turshen, "Algerian Women in the Liberation Struggle and the Civil War," 893.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

Algeria, many of us...kept silence for ten years after independence, not to give fuel to the enemies of the glorious Algerian revolution; by so doing we have merely given those in power time to organize and strengthen, allowing them, amongst other things, to prepare and enforce discriminatory laws on women.”<sup>44</sup> In this way, Algerian men came to replace the colonizer in the dominant-submissive social system, only now women were no longer left with any recourse to fight.

The main reason for this regression was that the majority of Algerian militants had no specific goals beyond independence, and had not concretely planned for the transformation of society. Minces points out that traditional mentalities are the most difficult aspect of society to modify – armed struggle can only change conservative society when the struggle itself is inherently supported by a modernizing and revolutionary ideology. While “exalting self-identification,” this ideology of the struggle must also be able to distance itself from traditional, social and cultural conservatism.<sup>45</sup> In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Saïd argues that nationalist dialogue in a post-colonial context often results in a neglect of internal inequalities and injustices. He writes that in focusing in anti-colonial sentiments, the culture of resistance espoused by nationalism becomes a “panacea” for not dealing with problems such as economic disparity, human rights abuse, and “the capture of the newly independent state by a nationalist elite.”<sup>46</sup> Illustrating Saïd’s claim, Leela Gandhi further explains that a singular focus on colonial racial politics inevitably leads to the “double colonization” of women – the “third world woman” thus becomes a “forgotten casualty” of both imperial ideology as well as patriarchal traditions exerted from home and abroad. The question of postcolonial, particularly feminist,

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<sup>44</sup> Salhi, “The Algerian Feminist Movement between Nationalism, Patriarchy and Islamism,” 6.

<sup>45</sup> Minces, “Women in Algeria,” 164.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 217.

theory, is thus as Kirsten Holst suggests - "which is the more important, which comes first, the fight for female equality or the fight against Western cultural imperialism?"<sup>47</sup>

The FLN had a dream of an independent country and society; however, the anticipated new nation would be one structured by norms that had otherwise been devalued or destroyed by colonization. Minces explains that the FLN's goal was to "recapture an organization of society that had never been challenged, despite the historical upheavals provoked in particular by colonization."<sup>48</sup> In other words, instead of acknowledging the irreversible impression that colonialism had made, albeit one of pain and suffering, the revolutionary ideology adopted a stance of denial, erasing history in the name of rejecting all European influence.<sup>49</sup>

Hence, with this nationalistic focus, there was no real expectation on the part of the FLN to elevate the status of women. Minces claims that although European women were envied by many young Algerian women for their freedom of movement, the European example was to be rejected and not imitated; European women were not truly "respectable" according to Arabo-Islamic traditions. Algerian women were seen as bastions of pre-colonial Muslim culture, a culture that the nation-state needed to protect and preserve; because of this, they were never to emulate their European counterparts. Therefore, the participation of women in the struggle was only meant to aid in accelerating the process of decolonization; after the war, women were simply expected to return to traditional roles of domesticity, and subsequently, to their immutable state of inner exile.

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<sup>47</sup> Kirsten Holst Peterson, "First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths (Taylor & Francis, 2006), 235.

<sup>48</sup> Assia Djebar, *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 164.

## A Situation Unchanged

In her collection of short stories, Djébar makes evident the fact that independence has brought no change for her characters. In particular, she highlights the continued practice of cloistering, and the resultant exclusion and sequestering of women from greater society. In the process, Djébar further emphasizes that the root of this lack of change lies in patterns of tradition. For example, in “Women of Algiers in their Apartment”, Djébar makes a comparison between the privileged women in the city who cannot leave their homes, and the poor women who must go out before dawn to clean the glass offices of civil servants before the work day begins. Those who are cloistered are “not even in a courtyard, just in a kitchen where they sit on the floor, crushed by the overcrowding....water too regularly cut off, smell of children's urine, scoldings, sighs...no more terraces, no more openings of sky above a feeble fountain, not even the soothing freshness of worn-down mosaics...” In contrast, the working women seem to be afforded some form of freedom, going about their job "with their heads still held high, slowly lifting their headdresses,” all the while exchanging “ironic comments on their respective floor managers.”<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Djébar makes it clear that in reality, even these seemingly “free women of the city” have never left the patriarchal tradition – they are still subservient to men, cleaning offices where men work; furthermore, as they go home, they “dream of the oldest son who will grow up, who will surely also become one of those floor managers: they will finally be able to close their door and in their turn supervise the young girls in order to keep them sheltered between their walls.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, despite their relative freedom of movement, it is evident that these working women are still trapped in the mentality of a patriarchal system; the cycle of tradition touches women across generations and social classes, as all women dream of

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<sup>50</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 23.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

sons, sons who they will valorize for perpetuating a social structure of inequality. In this way, there is ultimately not much difference between the poor and the privileged

Sarah imagines a world in which women would have been “made deaf instead of invisible,” such that instead of being cloistered upon womanhood, they would be ritualistically deafened, their ears equipped with “enormous barriers” forever. No man could approach them or even attempt to be heard by them, as doing so would be a “crime of honour.” No one at all would be able to reach out to them or connect with them, so that “all they'd make out would be their interior gurgling until such a time as they reached old age and could no longer bear children.”<sup>52</sup> Sarah’s vision of the deafened women is simply a reflection of the reality around her, even in a post-independent city. The barriers against the women's ears would only be physical manifestations of the social barriers that women already face, isolated and stripped of agency until their purpose as child bearers finally ends. Just as the cloistered women of reality have no means of connecting with greater society, Sarah’s deafened women would experience the same sort of solitude, the only sounds they could access being their own “interior” noises – a mad “gurgling” indicating the inability to make sense or communicate, even with oneself. Thus, it is suggested that these cloistered women are not only facing exile from the greater outside community, but also from their own psyche.

Another character, the water carrier, declares explicitly that throughout periods of colonialism, war, and independence, her life situation has remained one of exclusion, destitution and struggle; the only thing that has changed is her increasing age. As a woman, particularly a woman of a lower caste in society, she has never been able to find a place of equality or acceptance in her community. Even as independence celebrations once erupted around her, with “houses open, jubilant streets,” she has remained unable to rejoice, thinking

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<sup>52</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 19.

upon the reality that she continues to be “old” and “hungry.”<sup>53</sup> For her, there has never been any prospect of an end to inner exile, as she bemoans, “Yesterday in the street they were singing of hope, but me, I am invaded only by the lament: ‘I am - who am I? - I am the excluded one...’”<sup>54</sup> Her only claim to identity is through a rejection by society; as the Excluded One, her experience as a woman continues to be firmly rooted in her enduring exile.

Djebar demonstrates the confusion and disappointment felt by women in face of their unchanging condition. The story “Day of Ramadan” presents two sisters, both of whom have experienced different forms of imprisonment during the war. Nfissa has spent the war as a political prisoner, kept in the confines of a cell; Nadja, however, has also been kept in prison “right here, in this very house” that seems “so wonderful.”<sup>55</sup> This imprisonment is suggested to be due to the strictness of the patriarch: during the last two years of the war, the father had made Nadja stop her studies, and has continued to keep her from working post-independence. Watching the domestic scene around her during her family’s celebration of Ramadan, Nadja cannot come to terms with the fact that nothing has changed for women since independence: “All that babbling, eating cakes, gorging oneself before morning, is that why we’ve suffered bloodshed and mourning?” She protests tearfully, explaining how she thought “that all this would change, that something else would happen.”<sup>56</sup>

The narrator and protagonist of the story “There is no Exile” expresses similar frustration. Even though this story was written in 1959, the text already suggests a future that is “totally black,” where the situation of women would not change despite promises of political revolution. The narrator and her family are literally exiled from Algeria, having moved to France to escape the violence of the war. However, despite their distance from the homeland,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 122.

the traditions of their society have travelled across the Mediterranean with them. Betrothed by her family without her consent, the narrator cries in despair and questions why her position as an Algerian woman should remain the same even when her family is in a different environment. "What difference does it make...they were all talking about the present and its changes and its misfortune...of what possible use is it to be suffering like this, far away from home, if I have to continue here as before in Algiers, to stay home and sit and pretend...Perhaps when life changes, everything should change with it, absolutely everything."<sup>57</sup>

The title of the story thus suggests that true distance from patriarchal society is not possible for Algerian women; Djébar ironically demonstrates that "there is no exile" for these women, as there is no form of physical exile that could detach them from the gendered stipulations of the country they were forced to leave. The inner exile of these women from their community continues, even within the greater narrative of geographical displacement.

Thus, Djébar reveals that contrary to promises of liberation, the factors of women's inner exile persisted even beyond independence. Regardless of their contributions to the liberation effort, women were still undervalued and marginalized, maintaining an inferior status in their community. Furthermore, with renewed practices of cloistering and veiling, women were once again sequestered from the political sphere. Finally, subject to oppressive family law, and disenfranchised without political representation, women continued to be denied political participation. Therefore, women never became full members of their nation.

### **Falsehoods of the Revolution**

In 1956, the FLN's losses among male combatants had reached a critical point, so that in the interest of maintaining ranks, the participation of women in the war was finally

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<sup>57</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 72.

formalized. In 1959, Frantz Fanon published his polemic, *A Dying Colonialism*, championing the revolutionary nature of the Algerian struggle for independence. In particular, the essays “Algeria Unveiled” and “The Algerian Family” discuss the role of women in the revolution, glorifying the new participation of women while attributing it as a necessary and expanding pattern of radical change in the future nation of independent Algeria. In Fanon’s vision, the liberation of women is one with the nationalist project of Algerian liberation; the very fabric of social relations would be irrevocably modified by the war as sons and daughters, husbands and wives alike joined in the revolutionary efforts. All would be unified and equalized under the shared dream of independence.

However, Fanon was to die of leukemia in 1961, a year before the realization of long-awaited Algerian independence. His death meant that he was unable to witness the post-colonial reality that would prove his predictions wrong, as the country became a one-party, Islamicized, bureaucratic command state, with women thrust back into “traditional” roles. Much has been written about how gendered vision, one based on the masculine nation, shaped Algeria's revolution and the FLN’s actions once it took power. Fanon’s glowing, heady imaginings of the female revolutionary have proven to be no more than romantic idealism.

Djebar, eleven years younger than Fanon, was twenty-three at the time of the publication of *A Dying Colonialism*, and in fact collaborated with Fanon at the time as a writer of his revolutionary newspaper *El-Moujahid*. It is assumed that Djebar was familiar with Fanon’s ideas regarding the revolutionary woman for she worked closely with him, and even mentions him in one of her autobiographical novels, *Le blanc de l’Algerie*, where she recounts her friendship with him and his wife Josie, and pays homage to him and his commitment to the Algerian struggle.<sup>58</sup> Yet having outlived Fanon and witnessed the condition of women in post-

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<sup>58</sup> Assia Djebar, *Algerian White*, trans. David Kelley and Marjolijn de Jager (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2000), 91.

independence Algeria, Djébar has been able to present a vision of reality that Fanon lacked. Indeed, contrary to Fanon's passionate discourse regarding the revolutionary nature of the liberation efforts, Assia Djébar denounces the "inflated use" of the term "revolution" – "I never use that term; I call it the Algerian war."<sup>59</sup> Her perspective marks the rift between the ideal and reality, "between a revolution that never quite bore the fruit of hope, and a war that bore bitter fruit."<sup>60</sup>

A juxtaposition of Fanon and Djébar exposes two main falsehoods upheld by Algeria's revolutionary rhetoric: the first is the myth of the glorified revolutionary woman, whereby women are misrepresented by a glorified image that neither accounts for their true sufferings nor addresses the rightful treatment they should receive for their war efforts. Like Delacroix' Orientalist painting of exoticized and eroticized women, the portrait of the revolutionary woman appropriates the woman's image while dismissing the reality of her experience. The woman's perspective is thus erased, her narrative replaced with fantasy as a fabricated persona is imposed upon her.

The second falsehood is the devaluing of women's wartime experience. Djébar demonstrates an invalidation of women's understanding of the war, even though they have endured just as much suffering and loss as their armed male counterparts. By focusing on the female perspective, Djébar reveals that throughout colonial occupation, revolutionary struggle, and liberation, Algeria's national narrative has been written through a masculine lens. This male narrative is one of exclusion, as it silences the voices of women despite the fact that they were equal participants of history.

By revealing these two falsehoods, Djébar's work demonstrates how women once again faced inner exile as their voices were banished from the narrative of the nation-state, a narrative

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<sup>59</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 195.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

that further alienated them from their true selves. In this section, I make a comparison of Fanon's ideals presented in "Algeria Unveiled" against the post-independent reality endured by the women in Djébar's accounts. I further demonstrate how, as depicted in Djébar's texts, the oppression of women remained the same post-independence, and the very memory of their participation in the war was erased. In doing so, I make the argument that, if the new independent Algeria was to be the new homeland, women were then effectively exiled once more from the nation they had helped to create.

### **The Myth of the Revolutionary Woman**

Writing in different times and with very different perspectives, Fanon and Djébar have presented opposing portrayals of Algeria's female revolutionaries. While Fanon presents a rousing image of the revolutionary woman, Djébar's work dismantles his romanticism and idealism, demonstrating how the image of women was appropriated to further masculine objectives, both before and after the war. Acknowledging that Fanon and Djébar are writing in differing contexts of political theory and literary fiction respectively, a juxtaposition of both writer's perspectives still makes for a valuable analysis of the rift between revolutionary ideals and the disappointing post-war reality. First is Fanon's depiction of the revolutionary woman:

In "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon argues that the struggle for liberation would repurpose and redefine the role of women, forcing society as a whole to undergo significant social change. In particular, he describes how the veil, originally a form of traditional dress for women, was transformed into a symbolic political instrument. For the French, not only was the veiled woman a mysterious and eroticized figure, but as a symbol of tradition, she also came to be viewed as the final refuge of Algerian culture and identity. The unveiling of the woman was thus a way of "converting the woman, winning her over to the foreign values," and thereby

“achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of deconstructing Algerian culture.”<sup>61</sup> For the FLN, the adoption and preservation of the veil became a reactionary means of cultural resistance, a way of thwarting French efforts to capture not only the land of Algeria, but the hearts and minds of its inhabitants.

The veil and the female body have thus been politicized, transformed and “re-patterned” by revolutionary participation. Fanon’s subject is a woman who can defy tradition to veil or unveil herself at turns, depending on the needs of the revolution. The revolutionary women Fanon describes includes both those who dress as European women to avoid French suspicion, as well as those who donned to veil to conceal bombs, or to signal their opposition to colonial rule.<sup>62</sup> The decision to go veiled or unveiled is a function of the revolution, to which the woman is an active and willing participant. The revolution, in Fanon’s opinion, has thereby allowed her to control and re-purpose her own image. Liberated and empowered, she has “re-learned” and “re-established” her body “in a totally revolutionary fashion”.<sup>63</sup> She is now a being of grace, freedom, and confidence, embodying and enjoying a new self-image that Fanon calls “the new dialectic of the body and of the world.”<sup>64</sup>

Fanon’s revolutionary woman is described in a language of freedom, ease and confidence; there is nothing restricting her or her cause. Unveiled to better serve the revolution, her exposed body is a source of empowerment rather than anxiety. “Carrying revolvers, grenades, hundreds of false identity cards or bombs, the unveiled Algerian woman moves like a fish in the Western waters...the shoulders of the unveiled Algerian woman are thrust back

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<sup>61</sup> Frantz Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” in *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Grove Press, 1994), 39.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

with easy freedom. She walks with a graceful, measured stride, neither too fast nor too slow. Her legs are bare, not confined by the veil, given back to themselves, and her hips are free.”<sup>65</sup>

Holding in mind Fanon’s radiant image of the female revolutionary, it is then all the more unsettling to contend with Djébar’s post-war portrayal of the same woman. In contrast with Fanon’s writing, Djébar’s language is rife with images of violence and horror. In “Women of Algiers in their Apartment”, Leila delivers an ode to her fellow female ex-militants, lamenting, “We suffered the pain of your legs torn apart by the rapist soldiers...Your turned-up eyes...no, worse...Your bodies, used only in parts, bit by little bit.”<sup>66</sup> Sarah, who also fought, remembers the war as “that period of fire and guns, white veils with bloodstained holes,”<sup>67</sup> a time when she “squandered her youth...in prison crammed together with other adolescent girls.”<sup>68</sup>

From Djébar’s writing, we realize that the body of the revolutionary woman is in no way the free and easy form that Fanon extols. Rather, it is a broken, burdened body that has been exploited and violated. Leila and Sarah have both experienced imprisonment and torture for their participation in the war, and bear brutal scars that are both physical and psychological. Leila has been left with an “emaciated body” of “hunched shoulders,” “scrawny arms,” and a “head all angular and corpse-like.”<sup>69</sup> Sarah, too, is marked by a “wide, bluish scar” that runs across her chest and abdomen, her scarred flesh “showing the old wounds that Leila would recognize.”<sup>70</sup> At the time of the story, Leila now suffers from madness, drug addiction, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Sarah too is plagued by memories of trauma, “carrying [her] own prison around inside [her]” long after her years as a political prisoner.

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<sup>65</sup> Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” 58.

<sup>66</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 44.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

Where Fanon champions the woman's new participation as something that will liberate and empower her, the reality that Djébar's women face post-independence is one of sustained pain and trauma. The "heroine" figure of power and freedom is hence a fabrication, with the women themselves unable to voice the truths of their experience, or expose the physical and mental scars that they bear. That is not to say that those who participated in the war were not heroic, or to suggest that these women are weak. What Djébar's women demonstrate is that the reality they survived and still live isn't acknowledged; in fact, they are even less empowered before the war, because they are now crippled by traumas they cannot even express.

Ultimately, Fanon's writing is but a projection of his own blinkered perspective; his text is one *about* women, but it does not reflect or address the actual situation of women, nor does it take their needs into account. For example, in writing about Algeria's struggle for liberation, Fanon never outright condemns patterns of sexism in Algerian society; rather, he simply describes them as facts of tradition. While acknowledging the imbalance of the sexes, he declares the perception of women's oppression as a racist stereotype upheld by the colonizing forces.<sup>71</sup> In defiance of the colonialist's image of the oppressed female who has been kept in "alleged confinement" and maintained in a "perpetual infantilism," Fanon presents woman's situation as one of choice, a choice necessarily made in the name of the revolution. Fanon writes, "The Algerian woman's ardent love of the home is not a limitation imposed by the universe...The Algerian woman, in imposing such a restriction on herself, in choosing a form of existence limited in scope, was deepening her consciousness of struggle and preparing for combat...What was essential was that the occupier should constantly come up against a unified front. This accounts for the aspect of sclerosis that tradition must assume."<sup>72</sup> Thus, he

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<sup>71</sup> Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," 65.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

suggests that an excessive resistance to change is needed, even at the expense of women's rights, if only to demonstrate a form of cultural defiance towards colonial narratives.

Fanon places too much faith in spontaneity and redemptive violence; he posits that violent revolution will put an end to the violence of colonialism, and that the mere fact of revolution will automatically right all imbalances. The nation will embrace its female population as equal members of society, as they have now proven their agency and their strength through participation in the struggle. Regarding repressive traditions affecting women's condition, Fanon writes that "all these restrictions were to be knocked over and challenged by the national liberation struggle...The freedom of the Algerian people from then on became identified with woman's liberation, with her entry into history."<sup>73</sup> Fanon's idealistic faith in the automatic improvement of women's rights post-independence is best summarized by the following statement:

*"This woman who, in the avenues of Algiers or of Constantine, would carry the grenades or the submachine-gun chargers, this woman who tomorrow would be outraged, violated, tortured, could not put herself back into her former state of mind and relive her behavior of the past; this woman who was writing the heroic pages of Algerian history was, in so doing, bursting the bounds of the narrow world in which she had lived without responsibility, and was at the same time participating in the destruction of colonialism and in the birth of a new woman."*

In contrast, Djébar shows that this "birth of a new woman" was not to be; as female militants who survived the war, Sarah and Leila express the irony of celebrating the women who served as revolutionaries. Sarah thinks of those who served as bomb carriers, honouring them yet bitterly acknowledging the lack of change these "fire carriers" were able to bring for

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 107.

the women who survived. "Where are you," she asks, "...you fire carriers, you my sisters, who should have liberated the city?"<sup>74</sup> The post-independence reality remains one of oppression - "Barbed wire no longer obstructs the alleys, now it decorates windows, balconies, anything that opens onto an outside space."<sup>75</sup> Due to the lack of attention given specifically to women's liberation, the forces of domination have simply shifted from the colonial authorities to the patriarchal leaders of society, leaving women in an unchanged system of gendered disparity. Djébar's women reveal a continued a state of inner exile: cloistered once again and denied political membership, these women continue to be separated from greater society, prevented from participating in the new nation they had helped to create.

As such, even while glorifying the woman revolutionary, Fanon's romantic writings in *A Dying Colonialism* are ultimately more exploitative than empowering. In fact, Fanon's work is no different from Delacroix's portrayal of "Women of Algiers in their Apartment"; just as the Algerian woman was once exoticized and eroticized by the Orientalist gaze, the female body has once again been manipulated as a visual and cultural metaphor; under revolutionary rhetoric, the Algerian woman now represents the purity and protection of the nation-state. Leila recounts how female militants were exalted as icons of the revolution, such that "In the streets they were taking pictures of your unclothed bodies, of your avenging arms in front of the tanks", and "sanctioned poets" evoked them in the propaganda of "lyrical divans."<sup>76</sup> In doing so, Leila demonstrates how the revolutionary woman has been placed on a pedestal, not for a true acknowledgement of her suffering, but rather to celebrate the masculine war her image has been appropriated to represent. Like Delacroix's women of the harem, the revolutionary woman has been displaced into an image and narrative that is not her own.

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<sup>74</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 44.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

This appropriation of the woman's image continues beyond independence in Djébar's "Women of Algiers in their Apartment." Just as Delacroix created the painting of women in the harem as a projection of colonial fantasies, and Fanon used the portrait of the revolutionary woman to transmit his own romantic ideals, the painter of the story also uses the image of women's suffering to express his own bitterness, particularly in a self-congratulatory way.

On the surface, it appears as though the painter is a champion of women, a man who does not only despise colonialism but who understands the problem of women's exploitation. In his opinion, hatred is suckled "with the milk of our exploited mothers... it's not only colonialism that's at the root of our psychological problems, but it's the belly of our frustrated women! When we're just fetuses, we're already damned!" Women and their suffering are the subject of his work, as he creates portraits of women, "gaunt mothers with accusing eyes."<sup>77</sup>

However, it is unclear whether this painter truly cares for women in a way that at all empowers or benefits them. Upon meeting Leila in a madhouse, he assumes that the psychiatrists have imprisoned her and that he must rescue her. Even though there is no evidence in the text to suggest that she had been mistreated or abused by the psychiatrists, the painter sees it as a great injustice that Leila was locked up in an insane asylum: "the great Leila, the heroine," who he suggests has been forgotten for her bravery and contributions in the war. "She was depressed, she passed out, so what? Condemned to death at age twenty, after that years, and again they lock her up? What gall!"<sup>78</sup> Yet, although the painter believes that he has "rescued" Leila from the madhouse, it is unclear in the text whether Leila left the asylum of her own accord. What is evident however is that she does need medical attention; she is in a constant state of delirium, she is a drug addict, and is suggested to suffer from PTSD, experiencing nightmares and flashbacks from her time during the war. It is entirely the painter's

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 21.

own personal opinion that he can best care for her, and he decides to marry her because he is “the only male around here who refuses to lock a woman up on any account.”<sup>79</sup> such that as long as she stays with him, “she can count on being able to take off safely.” Nevertheless, his plan for marriage is not one that he has discussed with Leila, let alone a plan that she has consented to. It can thus be interpreted that rather than marrying Leila for her own good, he is doing so to bolster his own ego. Furthermore, even though he believes that he is the only one who can truly look after Leila, the painter is shown to be unable to even take care of himself – he is an antisocial drunk who fails to integrate into society.

It is evident that the painter does not truly understand the nuances of the female condition. Not only do we see this in his treatment of Leila, but also in the way he talks to Sarah when her stepson, Nazim, runs away from home due to a poor relationship with his father. Even though the painter is close friends with Sarah’s husband Ali, he never asks Ali to take better care of his son. Instead, the painter tells Sarah to resolve the situation, saying that she is the only one who can bring him back. Sarah was not even the one who raised Nazim, and yet because she is a woman, the painter categorizes her automatically into a maternal role, expecting her to bear the full brunt of childcare. Thus, for all his ranting about Leila being mistreated as a national hero, he himself has reduced Sarah (an equal heroine of the liberation efforts) to restrictive pre-war gender norms.

Therefore, if we consider the painter and his art in the shadow of Fanon and Delacroix, we can see that his character is in no way a true advocate of women. He continues the trend of projecting his own male expectations onto women, misguidedly believing that he knows what is best for them rather than letting them make choices for themselves. He sees women as downtrodden, but never actually does anything to empower them. In this way, the painter does not actually see women to be individuals with agency, as evidenced by his attitude towards and

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

treatment of Leila. By expecting the women around him to be either perfect heroines or silent mothers and wives, he continues to deny women a platform to assert themselves.

Taking into account the contrast between the portrayal of women, and truth of their experience, we can see how the image of Fanon's revolutionary woman is but a continuation of male fantasies. The discrepancy between this fantasy and reality proves how women were ultimately *utilized*, albeit willingly, as auxiliaries and adjuncts to men in the war.<sup>80</sup> While their involvement was sincere and courageous by its own merit, they were only considered participants on the basis of replacement, that is, "in the capacity of wife, sister, or daughter of this or that man".<sup>81</sup> Even when women were made into "national heroines", it was for reasons of propaganda. In post-independence Algeria, women were still neglected as citizens despite their contributions in the war, arousing only defiance or irritation when they tried to make themselves heard. Hence, as they are torn between the two contradicting narratives of revolutionary promise and the post-war reality, women find themselves exiled from their true selves.

### **Women's Wartime Experience, Discarded and Forgotten**

After the war, as women were relegated back to domestic roles and second-class citizenry, a single question lingered – were women ever seen as equals to men? As Leila asks, "Were there ever really any brothers?"<sup>82</sup> In her broken state, she faces the notion that she has been abandoned by her "brothers" after the war, realizing that post-independence, the social identities of women as fighters and revolutionaries were no longer compatible with their traditional roles as mothers, daughters, and wives. Djébar demonstrates that, even while

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<sup>80</sup> Mincec, "Women in Algeria," 162.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>82</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 45.

women like Leila and Sarah have suffered intense forms of torture, their sacrifice goes unrecognized and unappreciated by their brothers-in-arms, as Leila herself is confined to an asylum and her fellow combatant, Sarah, is returned to the traditional moulds of motherhood and wifehood that were established for her at birth.

Evidently, the achievement of independence did not change much in the condition of women, and national liberation was not a liberation for all. The supposed camaraderie between revolutionary women and their brothers-in-arms women was revealed to be no more than a false sense of solidarity.

The fact is that Algeria's national narrative has been written through a masculine lens, such that after the war, women faced a new form of exclusion as they were denied recognition in the narrative of the new nation. Despite their sacrifice, women ceased to be acknowledged or respected. Those who did not participate as revolutionaries still suffered through the violent turbulence of the war, but the experience of these women is nonetheless largely forgotten in the nation's historical narrative.

In her short story "The Dead Speak," Djébar contrasts the mourning process of both men and women in face of death; in doing so, she exposes the dismissal of women's perspective, even as they have suffered just as much if not more loss than their male counterparts. The attitude of Hassan, one of the protagonists, shows how the woman's voice is entirely excluded from the male-espoused narrative of the war. Hassan only has memory for the loss of his male comrades; the women around him do not exist in the same capacity, even as they, too, experience the misery of war alongside him. It is clear in that in the eyes of the young man, women's suffering is overlooked, and their tenacity is unremarkable.

Hassan, a "national hero," has returned to the house of Yemma Hadda, his grandmother's home, after 5 years of fighting in the mountains, only for her to die soon after his arrival. Even though he was the apple of his grandmother's eye, Hassan's grief is directed

only towards the loss of his brothers-in-arms, such that even his neighbors take note of his lack of interest towards his grandmother's death. Hassan is resentful of his grandmother's funeral, thinking, "It was before [the war] that death required so much display!"<sup>83</sup> To him, the ritual and ceremony of the funeral undermine what he considers more important losses.

At Yemma Hadda's funeral, it is evident that the women surrounding her grave have suffered just as much if not more loss and pain as Hassan; Aïcha, Yemma Hadda's niece, discloses the tragic lives of these women, many of whom are widowed, such as the woman who sits "with a black stare," whose husband and two sons "fell in the courtyard of her own house."<sup>84</sup> These women have had intimate experience with death, even though they make no heroic or dramatic pronouncements of it. All of them have lived through "all these years that founder, these years murdered under the jolts of war."<sup>85</sup> And yet, in the eyes of Hassan, their loss is still less significant than what he has gone through in the death of his comrades. In his own mourning, Hassan carries a sense of arrogance and entitlement to grief, especially when juxtaposed with the women around him, finally leaving the cemetery "as if it belonged to a house of which he had been host."<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, Hassan's self-importance in his bereavement is undercut by the fact that he does not hear the voice of the dead as other characters do. Aïcha and Yemma Hadda's friend Saïd are still touched by their remembrance of the old woman, such that "still the dead speak," and this voice of the dead – Yemma Hadda's voice – still "murmurs to Aïcha, touches [Saïd's] memory with loyalty." Meanwhile, Hassan, "the man toward whom Hadda's last hopes were directed," notices nothing.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>87</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 116.

The contempt for women's pain continues beyond Yemma Hadda's funeral. After liberation, Hassan joins a group of leaders giving speeches to the city about "the new order to be established, about the society bruised but free at last to begin its reconstruction."<sup>88</sup> Hassan, in his own speech, pays tribute to "all those dead buried beneath the underbrush, dead in battle, massacred" – "all the dead that would have lived."<sup>89</sup> At the rally, the women in the audience are literally marginalized from this narrative of the nation, as are placed in the very back of the crowd. Furthermore, even though they too have lived through the war, and are technically members of this society, their role is but as listeners, and not as speakers or leaders. Nevertheless, they are so numerous in the crowd that they are described as a "moving expanse of white veils,"<sup>90</sup> and their response to Hassan's eulogy is so fervent that their ululations are heard across the city. Even as Hassan describes "the dead that would have lived," he is forgetting the living who would be dead – the women around him who are buried in their own traumas. In spite of attempts to exclude them and demean their suffering, these women, too, are memorializing the dead.

Through Hassan's point of view, Djébar thus reveals how the experience of women, especially in war, becomes overshadowed and even erased in the masculine narrative of history. The exclusion of the female perspective not only exiles women from the present society of the new nation, but it banishes them from the story of its past. This is made further apparent in the treatment of Yemma Hadda's life story, wherein her inspiring courage and her value to her community are dismissed, simply because her triumphs do not fit into a traditional narrative of masculine achievement.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

In the event of his grandmother's death, Hassan considers himself "heir to nothing, not to any wealth, not to land, only to the word of those who had died, his companions whom he had been forced to bury in numbers too large to count in the course of his recent tumultuous past."<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, despite his lack of regard for his grandmother, it is shown through the accounts of other characters that Yemma Hadda was a noble and kind woman who, even in the most desperate times, nurtured and protected her family and many others from her native village. It is because of this that she was called Yemma, meaning "my mother" by all in the city and village. The character of Yemma Hadda is presented as a symbol of Algerian dignity, a figure of austerity and strength despite countless her sufferings. In this way, Hassan is not at all an "heir to nothing," but an inheritor of rich history and nobility.

The story explains that during Yemma Hadda's life, Saïd had made a promise to tell Hassan of his grandmother's life story. However, when Hassan finally returns, Saïd's testimony of Yemma Hadda's unusual triumphs over her bitter circumstances is undermined by Hassan's lack of interest. Silently, Saïd admonishes Hassan for his indifference, thinking, "Did you know her, do you know that...untamed heart underneath that gnarled body?"<sup>92</sup> In despair and disgusted with the young man, Saïd decides to tell Hassan nothing, returning to his mountain village. However, in doing so, Saïd does not realize that his silence has made him one of the "witnesses already forgetful, already denying but feeling the weight of their common forgetfulness." Saïd hears Yemma Hadda's "voice of the dead", but he does not speak for her; ultimately, her voice is lost.

The treatment of Yemma Hadda's life story demonstrates the lack of regard for the unique experience of women. Their hardships and their triumphs go unappreciated as the female perspective is silenced. Although Yemma Hadda didn't participate in the war, we learn

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<sup>91</sup> Djebar, *Women of Algiers*, 110.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

that in her life she outlived two husbands and survived their abuse, even deciding to go against social propriety and leave her second husband when he mistreated her. She was not only able to exceed all odds and take control of her own possessions, but use them to care for those around her. And yet, all that she was able to achieve is overlooked and disrespected as an unworthy legacy. As the men who outlive her fail to embrace and pass on her story, her voice becomes erased from the annals of history. Hence, Yemma Hadda serves as an example, showing how women have been robbed of the validity of their experience. In this way, women have been exiled from their own history as the nation-state chooses to adopt another narrative – a narrative of masculine glory.



## Chapter 3: Community in Exile

As second-class citizens of a society affected by both colonial and patriarchal domination, women of Algeria have endured a twofold condition of inner exile. This double-exile has meant for women a historical pattern of abuse and oppression: under colonial rule, women lived through violence against their people, their history and their culture as the French usurped their nation. This violence continued through the war of independence, as women underwent the trauma of torture, displacement, and the loss of loved ones. At the same time, under patriarchal oppression, women suffered political disempowerment, imprisonment through cloistering, and domestic abuse by both male and female members of the family. Fraught with strife and pain, the pattern of women's inner exile seemed an indefinite suffering, sustained despite the promises of liberation. Nevertheless, even without a discernable resolution to the struggle of women, Djébar shows how the pains of exile can be alleviated through a "community in exile," where women find comfort and solace in each other, and support each other through a shared understanding of womanhood.

In this chapter, I explain how Djébar creates community for women in inner exile via the following ways: firstly, by showing the real, natural connection among women and the beauty that comes of it; secondly, by showing the need for and the significance of female spaces; and thirdly, by showing how shared memory functions as a means for women to reclaim their place in the narrative of the nation-story.

### **Community among Women**

#### **i) Connection despite differences**

In her critique of Djébar's collection *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, Jane Hiddleston negates the possibility for unity among Djébar's characters, arguing that Djébar

attempts, but ultimately fails, to create a sense of collective identity and community among Algerian women. The reasons to which Hiddleston attributes the impossibility of Djébar's task include, firstly, an overwhelming diversity among Algerian women; this diversity is found through in the women's distinct class backgrounds, their varying ethnic backgrounds (Djébar's characters include women of Berber, Arab, and European descent), and their resultant linguistic differences. Secondly, Hiddleston claims that because the traumas experienced by Djébar's women have been so horrific, there is no straightforward resolution to their suffering; as such, women's memories of the war of independence prevent them from moving on and reaching a secure or meaningful sense of closure. Standing out as unsettled episodes of personal anxiety and anguish, these memories are "presented not in the form of a complete history but as a series of incomplete, allusive flashbacks." Therefore, Hiddleston argues that there is no unified, collective narrative of women's experience, "since each testimony is a fragment that resists incorporation into a broader meaningful structure."<sup>93</sup> Hiddleston re-iterates her belief in the absolute fragmentation among Djébar's women, writing that, "although at the end [of *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*] the narrator triumphantly expresses the hope that the text might liberate women from their history of oppression...the collection, despite its apparent aims, will not be an uncomplicated description of a specified community, but a suggestive indication of the indeterminacy and dynamism of postcolonial Algerian women."<sup>94</sup>

Contrary to Hiddleston, I argue that the lack of a unified, collective identity does not preclude all possibility of community. While the women are presented as having extremely diverse backgrounds and experiences, they nonetheless find common ground, and are shown to care for and nurture each other. It is important to note that Djébar does not present a perfect image of women living in absolute harmony. Rather, the collection *Women of Algiers in their*

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<sup>93</sup> Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar.*, 61.

<sup>94</sup> Hiddleston, *Assia Djébar.*, 56.

*Apartment* is an exercise in navigating all the complex, overlapping problems that women face, due to not only their gender but also their varied experiences and personal background. As a writer, Djébar offers hope through solidarity among women, demonstrating the beauty of community and support.

In her short stories, Djébar has demonstrated a natural sense of connection among women despite the differences in their backgrounds and circumstances. This connection is shown to be the result of shared experiences, such that time and again, Djébar's women are able to empathize with and provide help to each other through a mutual understanding of womanhood.

For example, in the story "Woman of Algiers in their Apartment", Sarah, a woman who drives and who is free to circulate in the city, is able to empathize with a cloistered woman who she does not know but sees every day. Upon leaving leaving her workplace every afternoon, Sarah sees the same woman in an orange skirt appear on a balcony, dancing and lifting her child into the air. As Sarah drives through the city, she cannot manage to forget the unknown woman: "Is she locked up that she thus takes revenge, by this gratuitous burst of frivolous dancing...or is it the child who demands space, freedom?"<sup>95</sup> Even though she does not know this woman and has never interacted with her, Sarah obviously still feels a certain level of connection with the woman in the orange skirt. Furthermore, this woman prompts Sarah to empathize with the numerous others who are also confined to their homes, who do not even have access to a courtyard, living lives so different from Sarah's own experience of relative liberty.

Sarah's friendship with Anne also shows her instinctive connection to other women, even those whose circumstances differ drastically from her own. Although Sarah and Anne were playmates as young children, they eventually grew up apart as Anne was taken back to

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<sup>95</sup> Djébar, *Women of Algiers*, 23.

France with her family. The two women could not be of more different backgrounds, with Anne being a Pied-noir, and Sarah an Arab woman who fought for Algerian independence with the FLN. However, Sarah still comes immediately to care for Anne after her suicide attempt; with Anne's first word on the phone as she calls for help, "it was as if a flash of anguish had shaken"<sup>96</sup> Sarah, prompting her to drop everything and rush to Anne's apartment. Even as a French woman who has not experienced the same colonial or patriarchal oppression as Arab women of Algiers, Anne's depression is suggested to stem from her marital troubles as an "abandoned woman in distress."<sup>97</sup> Sarah, in her own way, is able to support Anne through a similar experience, as she too experiences a sense of isolation and disconnectedness in her own marriage, feeling as though her husband were "closed off to her, as if he were hiding secrets beyond [her] suspicion."<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, Anne's depression is an emotional state that Sarah herself knows well, having lived through years of imprisonment, torture, so that "silently [she] was shrieking" from her own war-induced traumas.

Sarah's compassion for other women is further demonstrated at the end of the story, when she paces and smokes nervously, "feeling herself come out of the tensions that had accumulated these past days in which nothing had actually happened, at least not to her."<sup>99</sup> These "tensions" include Anne's suicide attempt, Fatma's hospitalization, and Leila's mental breakdown. While none of these dramatic events have happened to Sarah personally, the stories she has witnessed resonate with her own experiences of loss, violence, oppression and isolation. Like Leila, Sarah has experienced the traumas of war and torture, just as she has experienced Anne's depression and isolation in marriage. The struggles of individual women are hence no longer singular experiences, but rather the subject of shared concern.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 47.

In the story “There is No Exile,” Djébar’s characters continue to demonstrate an affinity for each other through a mutual recognition of death. The son of the Smain family is killed in a car crash, and upon learning of their neighbor’s loss, the women of the narrator’s own family become overcome with grief. Even though the loss is not directly their own, such tragedy is something that each of the women is familiar with. The narrator recounts that upon hearing the cries of mourning coming from next door, “all three of us, my two sisters – Aïcha, Anissa, and I – recognized it by the way in which the women received it: it was death.”<sup>100</sup> In particular, the narrator’s mother is so overcome with feeling that, moaning, her face distraught, she “[beats] her chest spasmodically....uttering little stifled cries, as when she was about to get sick.”<sup>101</sup> Through a shared understanding of grief, the women of otherwise unrelated families thus find a point of connection in their empathy for each other.

In the same story, the narrator and another Algerian woman, Hafsa, exhibit a strong rapport despite having radically different backgrounds. While the narrator is a young, uneducated widow, Hafsa is relatively empowered, independent woman who works as a French tutor. However, despite their opposing life situations, Hafsa is still able to commiserate with the narrator’s pain in being betrothed against her will. Even as the narrator thinks to herself that “Hafsa is too knowledgeable for me,”<sup>102</sup> Hafsa herself is able to inspire the narrator to believe in the possibility of solidarity among Algerian women: the narrator recounts that “[Hafsa] repeated *we* very often with a note of passion. She said that word with a peculiar vehemence, so much so that I began to wonder toward the end whether that word really meant the two of us alone, or rather other women, all the women of our country.”<sup>103</sup> In this way, Hafsa is shown to recognize the narrator’s circumstances, even though they do not mirror her own;

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 72.

this understanding brings comfort and support to the narrator, further demonstrating the existence of and need for community among women.

**ii) Community as a necessity**

Having demonstrated the beauty that arises from a sense of community among women, Djébar also establishes an opposite image, showing the meanness that occurs when women themselves become perpetrators of the patriarchy. This is evident, for example, in the experience of Fatma as the “Excluded One”, whose abuse is driven by both male and female sectors of society. After being married as a child bride, she experiences nothing but bitterness from her sisters-in-law. Instead of welcoming her, they put her to work, harass her to get pregnant, and insult her. This cruelty is the result of her status - as a female newcomer to the family, she is a threatening presence, a new competitor for male attention, a new mouth to feed, and someone “unworthy” in the eyes of a mother-in-law who cherishes her son above all.

Later, when Fatma is injured in the baths, her employer, the proprietress of the baths, begins to “throw a fit of hysterics” in response.<sup>104</sup> However, this distress is not prompted by the fact that someone has been hurt, rather, it stems from the proprietress’ concerns that she will have difficulty finding a replacement to take over Fatma’s work. Despite the years of her service, the proprietress does nothing to help the injured woman. The proprietress’ lack of compassion inspires “helpless hatred”<sup>105</sup> in Fatma; this is but another injustice in a long history of abuse. The proprietress’ behaviour is also induced by a male-imposed idea of hierarchy, her callousness partly a reaction to Fatma’s lower status as a self-made, single woman with a history of prostitution.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

What Fatma's experience indicates, then, is that the traditional, patriarchal social structure is damaging not only to relations between men and women, but also to relations among women themselves. For this reason, it is all the more important for women to embrace and take advantage of the power and strength that they can bring to each other through mutual support. As shown through the above examples, Djébar's female characters already show a natural urge to care for each other; in this way, even when women cannot eradicate the roots of their troubles (such as patriarchal oppression or the trauma of war), the female community they create for themselves still serves to greatly alleviate their suffering. In other words, even while there is no clear picture of how an ideal "homecoming" can be achieved for women in their inner exile, the possibility of and the necessity for a "community in exile" is nevertheless made clear.

### **Solidarity in Suffering**

In the story "Women of Algiers in their Apartment", women demonstrate solidarity for each other by providing comfort and nurturing. As characters such as Sarah, Leila, Anne and Fatma exhibit forms of physical and psychological damage, they are shown to actively seek the care and attention of other women over that of men. In fact, the male characters of the story prove to be irresponsible and inept caregivers; thus, Djébar's women are shown to be the primary and the best sources of healing and support for one another. The solidarity among Djébar's characters further demonstrates the possibility of solace within women's state of inner exile.

#### **i) Physical Healing:**

In the story, women's suffering often manifests as physical injury and pain. Djébar's characters offer medical care to each other, even saving each other's lives. For example, when

Anne in “Women of Algiers in their Apartment” has attempted suicide, Sarah comes immediately to care for her, saving her by helping her purge out the pills that she has taken. Later, Sarah also enlists the help of a friend, Sonia, to help to care for Anne. Sonia, never having met Anne before, is nonetheless happy to help, coming immediately to Anne’s aid as the “promised neighbour.” Instinctively bringing tea and flowers to Anne, she announces amicably that she would like to get better acquainted.<sup>106</sup> In this way, both Sarah and Sonia demonstrate a very natural aptitude for alleviating the pain of their fellow women.

In addition, when Fatma breaks her hand in a work-related accident, Sarah and Anne take her to the hospital, where she is treated by the only female surgeon in the city. The surgeon attending to her wears a white surgical mask and a white lab coat, garments that, while serving as a medical symbol, also evoke the image of the white *haik* – a distinctly feminine symbol. The female surgeon’s medical uniform thus also doubles as a “uniform” for womanhood, showing the solidarity she displays in her healing of another woman. The nurturing character of women is made even more apparent in contrast with a male doctor’s attitude towards the injured Fatma - as Fatma expresses fear and apprehension towards being anesthetized and operated upon, this doctor’s response is to scoff at her beliefs rather than reassure her, and to tell her to “get up and leave if [she] want[s].”<sup>107</sup> Fatma’s healing is thus entirely credited to the support she receives from women; not only is her hand treated, but because of it she can continue to work and earn a living. The solidarity among women is finally best illustrated when, after a successful operation on Fatma’s hand, Anne and Sarah meet the surgeon in the lobby of the hospital. In this lobby, “where the nurses were taking a boisterous break, the surgeon had just removed her white mask and coat and, looking weary, smiled at [Anne and Sarah],” indicating to them the success of the surgery.<sup>108</sup> This lobby is therefore depicted as a place of

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

female camaraderie, with women working together, helping each other, and celebrating their successes together.

**ii) Psychological Catharsis:**

Beyond physical pain, the suffering that Djébar's characters suffer is also psychological. This is particularly true in the case of Leila and Sarah, who have both been psychologically damaged by their experience of imprisonment and torture during the war of independence. In their trauma, Djébar shows that only catharsis women can find is through communication with each other, even as the men around them know of their situation and misguidedly fail to help them.

For Leila, the figures of care and guardianship take the form of women – even as she is under the painter's care, as I have demonstrated earlier, this male figure does not serve as a genuine caregiver. In fact, Leila's sources of comfort are all female. As she lies in her most fragile mental state, Leila listens to the same record over and over again, soothing herself with the music of Meriem Feki, an old Jewish songstress whose “melancholy voice used to console the melancholy voiced used to console the women languishing on the patios in earlier days.”<sup>109</sup> Through this music, there is thus a sense of connection not only to the female voice, but also to the many other women before Leila who have had to experience similar suffering, and who have reached out to the same source for comfort.

Furthermore, in the delirium of her drug withdrawal, Leila hallucinates that her “disappeared aunts and grandmothers” are “weeping over her, over her dismantled memory.”<sup>110</sup> As Leila's female ancestors, these weeping women, like Meriem Feki, also represent an intergenerational pain. Therefore, even as Leila is being “cared for” by the male painter, the

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

figures of protection that she herself reaches out to are ultimately female figures who understand the collective experience of women's pain and trauma.

Similarly, the only comfort Sarah can find is through her connection with other women. Even as Sarah's husband Ali knows of her history with torture, and in fact, even has vivid nightmares of her being tortured by electrocution, not once in the story do the married couple discuss Sarah's inner turmoil. Instead, Sarah feels disconnected from Ali and is unable to communicate with him, finding that "a man is always opaque."<sup>111</sup> Sarah thus carries her hurt around with her in silence, a "voiceless prisoner"<sup>112</sup> to her trauma. In contrast, when Sarah is with Leila, she is able to communicate her pain even without talking. As Leila opens up about her mental breakdown, Sarah first struggles to find the words to express her own pain. However, she is finally able to connect with Leila by baring her scarred flesh, showing the old wounds that Leila would recognize. Embracing Leila and pressing her scars against Leila's own broken body, Sarah demonstrates an acknowledgement of the violence they have both experienced, expressing a message of unity in their hurt.

In this moment of connection, Sarah "look[s] for words, like a deaf-mute, words of love, informal words, but words in what language, like grottos of whirlwinds of tenderness."<sup>113</sup> Ultimately, however, these words are not needed - Sarah becomes overcome by a "purely sensual rush," and feels an outpouring of compassion for Leila. As she "[runs] her fingers over [Leila's] forehead, the arches of her eyebrows, she would have liked to start licking that face and so weep over her, crush her emaciated body with warm vehemence."<sup>114</sup> Therefore, even without words, Sarah finds a common language with Leila that is primal and innate, communicating and commiserating their shared pain.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

## **The Sanctuary of Female Spaces**

In “Women of Algiers in their Apartment”, Djébar depicts intimate female spaces as sanctuaries where women can temporarily escape the restrictions of patriarchal tradition. Within the refuge of these spaces, women are unconditionally welcomed by those around them, such that they are able to connect with each other as equals. They are thus afforded the freedom to let down their guard, discuss their grievances, and find support from each other. These sanctuaries serve as a vital setting for the fostering of female community, creating an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion in the midst of the inner exile that women otherwise experience.

### **i) The Orchard:**

The first of these feminine spaces is the orchard of Sonia’s family home; in one scene of the story, there is a gathering among female friends and family, drawing women of all ages and background to the orchard. The diverseness of those present is made apparent by the fact that “round or thin hips were visible,” indicating the great variance in the ages, and subsequent stages of physical maturity, of the women present. Among the women at the gathering are traditional housewives like Sonia’s mother, educated girls like Sonia, and even young professionals like Baya. Through this diversity, the orchard is presented as a very accepting atmosphere; even Anne, a foreigner and a stranger to the family, is warmly welcomed by Sonia’s mother, who expresses great pleasure in hosting her.

The space of the orchard is distinctly female, not only because it is occupied entirely by women, but also because there is a strong sense that men simply are not welcome here. Upon learning that some male member of the family, “no doubt a male cousin,” had “come to watch the girls dancing in the dark”, a young girl laughs that “[the men are] the ones who hide!”

while another comments that “it's so nice and quiet [in the orchard], far away from the men.”<sup>115</sup> Hence, in this feminine refuge there exists a community created by women for women, allowing for a feeling of safety and security. In this feminine refuge, women are free to do as they please. For example, a little girl, “armed with a stick”, throws herself into a “Turkish farce”, a “cruel shaking” that depicts “a master of the house beating his four wives.”<sup>116</sup> While it is sad that even young children are aware of the reality of women’s lives, the child’s play demonstrates that the space of the orchard provides women the safety and freedom to not only criticize, but make a mockery of those who oppress them.

The open-air environment of the orchard reflects the freedom that the women experience while they are there amongst themselves. Young girls dance among the trees; as “laughter crisscrosses between [them]” in the joy of their movement.<sup>117</sup> The act of dancing itself is a reclamation of the body; while normally veiled and cloistered, the women in the orchard regain their freedom of movement, and thereby their control over the self. The liberation women experience in the orchard is further shown by the image of Sonia wearing her hair loose and standing with “her shoulders bare, laughing.”<sup>118</sup> As Sonia has both literally and figuratively let her hair down, she does not expose her body in seduction, but out of a sense of comfort in her own skin. In this way, her unveiled figure expresses a bold defiance of tradition, demonstrating instead a powerful spirit of confidence. “Munching on a lemon as big as a grapefruit,” Sonia claims the fruit of the orchard the way one should claim the fruit of life – as her own for the taking.

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

ii) **The Baths:**

Like the orchard of Sonia's home, the baths are depicted as a gender-segregated space, reserved entirely for women. This space is presented as an important place of community – as Baya explains, “many women can only go out to the baths;”<sup>119</sup> the baths therefore provide them their only refuge from the cloistered life of conservative Muslim society. The communal space of the baths is shown to be so precious to women that those in rural areas are breaking all the faucets in their modern homes, just so they may continue seeking out the sanctuary of the public baths. These modern houses, with their modern facilities, only serve to continue the confinement of women; with modern plumbing to wash at home, women may no longer receive permission to go out to the baths. Commenting on the lives of these rural women, Baya asks incredulously: “How were the new houses built for them? Closed in, every one of them, locked in upon herself....Is that how they live in the *douar* (the village)?”<sup>120</sup> In agreement, another woman exclaims, “What wouldn't I break, inside of me or outside if need be, to get back with the others? To get back to the water that streams, that sings, that gets lost, that sets us all free, if only bit by bit.”<sup>121</sup> For the rural Algerian women smashing their faucets, the need for female community has reached a point of desperation, confirming the importance of safe spaces for women.

In the sanctuary of the baths, women are described as being equalized in their nudity. Stripped of everything, they come to the baths without pretense. Because of this, they are able to connect with each other on a genuine and sincere level, their nakedness offering honesty and truth. As they sit, “all of them rosy, looking alike,” the women find themselves becoming more lighthearted. This allows them to open up to each other, so that “conversations or monologues [unroll] in gentle, trifling, worn-out words that [slide] off with the water, while the women [lay] down their everyday burdens, their weariness.”<sup>122</sup> By denuding them, the space of the

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 31.

baths facilitates women to bare themselves even further to each other, allowing them to find catharsis in sharing their most intimate stories.

It is important to note that the nudity in the baths is presented without eroticism. Instead, the way women's bodies are described is truthful, depicting maternity, age, and even pain. Even when the beauty of the women is evoked, it is not done in sexual way. Thus, the naked bodies in the baths tell the histories of the women themselves. For example, the wrinkled, knotted body of the water carrier shows her age, her experience, her strength, but also her weariness. In addition, by Anne's unease at being naked, the water carrier can tell that Anne is a foreigner, "despite her black hair and particularly her somewhat weary smile, her resignation, which made her look like a woman of this city."<sup>123</sup> By simply looking at Anne, the water carrier is already able to discern her struggle. The pain women experience is thus apparent upon their naked bodies, taking form in tired expressions, scars, injuries, and swollen feet.

Djebar's realistic, unromantic portrayal of the female form is in direct contrast to the male fantasies presented by Delacroix, Fanon, and the painter discussed in earlier chapters. Contrary to the male perspective, Djebar is able to depict the bodies of women as they are, tangible and human. Unlike Delacroix' "women of Algiers", or Fanon's revolutionary woman, Djebar's women of the baths are not exiled from their bodies; rather, these physical bodies are themselves evidence of all that the women have been through.

### **The Map of Memory**

In Djebar's writing, tradition functions as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, conservative values perpetuate the oppression of women, trapping them in an enduring state of inner exile. On the other hand, when manifested within female communities, traditions and customs are shown to serve as a point of connection among women, allowing them to find a

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

sense of community, and therefore relief, in what is otherwise a condition of isolation and exclusion. As discussed in previous chapters, one of the main factors behind the inner exile of women is the erasure of their perspective in the dominant male narratives of society. What Djébar achieves in her texts, then, is to demonstrate how women utilize their role as keepers of tradition to establish links between the past and present. The memory of women becomes a map, allowing women to retrace their story along generations; therefore, even when the narrative of the nation becomes a warped male construction, women are able to use their collective, cultural memory to resituate themselves in their understanding of history. In “Women of Algiers in their Apartment,” the idea of tradition is often referenced as “folklore.” For the sake of analysis, I divide this understanding of folkloric tradition into forms of language and customs. Furthermore, I demonstrate that through the sharing of testimonies, women are able to not only establish links to their past, but forge new ones among each other, thereby reinforcing a sense of female community.

#### **i) Women as Keepers of Folklore**

Firstly, women, not men, are shown to be the keepers of language. For example, Sarah’s husband Ali only speaks colloquial Arabic, even though he is an educated professional. It is up to Baya, his female colleague, to translate his own son’s letter to him. In contrast, Sarah is in the midst of a project to study and record the oral tradition among women of Algiers; in this way, she uses the words, the voices, and the folksongs of women as means of connecting the present to the past. This oral tradition is largely a lost and ignored tradition, one that Sarah is therefore working to reclaim and preserve. The songs that Sarah transcribes are ones that she herself remembers from her own childhood, songs that her aunts and cousins would sing as they performed their household chores. Hence, even as Sarah records the names of the women singing on her cassette tape, she is able to access her own family history through the music,

and place familiar faces to the lyrics she is listening to. On the other hand, the one male singer mentioned in the story is simply named “Old Man,” such that even as he is “the most popular singer of Algiers,”<sup>124</sup> he remains an unknown and anonymous figure. Furthermore, the songs of the “Old Man” are described as “broken folklore,”<sup>125</sup> suggesting that perhaps men are not the ones to carry on tradition. While the songs of women are shown to evoke deep and innate feelings of connection, the music of the “Old Man” is described as being jumpy with irregular breaks, the singer himself “beat[ing] the acceleration of the time at his own choosing,” with a “chorus of senile voices” following his singing with difficulty. A comparison of male and female folksongs can thus be seen to represent how male narratives have, as discussed in Chapter 2, altered the record of history. The male voice is not only erratic and unsteady, but the “senility” of the chorus further suggests an idea of broken consciousness. Therefore, it is the female voice that preserves memory, and offers a connection to the past.

Secondly, women also act as the bearers of tradition through their customs, preserving the beauty of their culture just as men are shown to unwittingly warp it. This is demonstrated in “Women of Algiers in their Apartment,” as Sonia’s mother and father hold opposing attitudes and opinions regarding the customs of their son’s circumcision. The mother celebrates the advent of this event, rejoicing that “[on] the eve of the circumcision of our youngest - may God preserve him for us! For his protection and his future happiness, we’ll put a bit of henna on his hands.”<sup>126</sup> The henna is described as the “flaming red paste of Paradise,” used to bless the boy in the ceremony. Commenting on this tradition of henna, Sonia explains that “folklore, thus preserved within the family as jam would be, reassures us.”<sup>127</sup> The role of women is therefore not only to uphold tradition, but within the particular practice of circumcision they

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

serve as protector, invoking the blessings of God and the essence of Paradise itself to bestow happiness upon the young boy. Tradition is viewed as a source of comfort, of sustenance, a staple in the house just as jam would be.

At the same time, the father reacts with disappointment to his son's circumcision. He is unhappy about the fact that his son is to be circumcised by a doctor, and not by "the ceremonial sacrificer of earlier days", who generally would be "the man with the quickest knife in the village."<sup>128</sup> Instead of feeling relief that his son will be circumcised by a medical professional in a safe and sanitary way, the father reminisces about the traditional but seemingly brutal methods of circumcision, where "ten, fifteen, twenty little boys would have to be stained with blood in just one afternoon." Looking back wistfully on the old ways, the father exclaims with a sigh – "Days of celebration that have disappeared!"<sup>129</sup> In this way, the imagery of tradition evoked by each sex is vastly different: on the one hand, the women continue to celebrate and preserve the best elements of their folklore, perpetuating customs of protection and good fortune; on the other hand, not only does the man feel a loss of the same tradition, but the customs he yearns for are ones of bloodshed and violence against young children.

## ii) **Salvation in Shared Stories**

Throughout Djébar's collection of short stories, the oral tradition of women is shown to be a locus for female community. The sharing of women's testimonies becomes means for them to reclaim their voice in the nation's historical narrative. For example, in "Day of Ramadan," the women of the story share their memories of fasting for Ramadan during various years; each fast that they remember is attached to a certain period of their lives. One woman associates a fast during autumn with her childhood at age eight;<sup>130</sup> another woman recalls a

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

more recent fast during the war when she was a prisoner to the French. The day of Ramadan thus becomes a key to the past, allowing the women to establish a timeline of history through their shared memories. With this timeline, the women are able to re-establish their own narrative of events, even as male records devalue their experiences and attempt to erase their voice from the nation-story. Similarly, in “Nostalgia of the Horde,” the young girls of the story gather around their grandmother, who recounts tales of her own experiences, as well as the experiences of her ancestors. The life story of this grandmother, and of her elders before her, are thus passed down through generations as a form of collective memory among women. The preservation of testimonies allows for a kind of adhesive among women, drawing them together not only in the process of storytelling, but also in the creation of shared understanding among each other.

As Sarah states in “Women of Algiers in their Apartment” – “For Arabic women I see only one single way to unblock everything: talk, talk without stopping, about yesterday and today, talk among ourselves, in all the women's quarters, the traditional ones as well as those in the housing projects. Talk among ourselves and look. Look outside, look outside the walls and the prisons!”<sup>131</sup> In other words, the way for women to come to terms with their historic and everyday oppression is to talk to each other and find their voice, speaking with a perspective that is their own instead of one that has been projected upon them. In so doing, they may acknowledge and express all that they have experienced for generations, and finally reclaim their past and their collective, safe space. Only then may women find release from their physical and psychological prisons.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 50.

## A Message of Hope

By demonstrating how women form connections with each other despite the differences in their life circumstances, I have shown that the tendency for unity among women is not only natural, but necessary - in solidarity, women are able to serve as beacons of support to each other in face of patriarchal oppression; yet if women themselves choose to become perpetrators of patriarchal traditions, they are just as capable of enacting cruelty upon one another. It is for this reason that female spaces are of great importance in Djébar's writing, as they serve as the setting for fostering supportive female community. As bearers of tradition and memory, women are finally able to utilize the community around them to reclaim their place in history and in the narrative of the nation. In this way, female community not only relieves the struggle of women in exile, but it helps them push back against their exclusion from the greater, male-dominated society.

"Women of Algiers in their Apartment" thus ends on a note of hope, promising a brighter future for women in their solidarity. In the final scene, Sarah and Anne leave the airport together as Anne changes her mind about leaving town and decides that she will not be moving back to France after all. This is in direct contrast with her attitude at the beginning of the story, when she expresses the fear that she has come to Algeria to die, that despite Algeria being her birthplace, she does not recognize the place at all. While in the beginning Anne feels alone, depressed from her abandonment by her husband, by the end of the story she has found a community in Sarah, Baya, Sonia and all the other women that she has met. Throughout the story, in the feminine spaces of Sonia's family home, the baths, and the hospital lobby, Anne has been welcomed despite being regarded as a foreigner, and is thus no longer a true "outsider". As an observer, she has witnessed the support and care that women provide for each other; at the same time, as a participant of these feminine spaces, she herself has experienced first-hand this warmth and nurturing.

It is with sense of solidarity that Sarah and Anne walk away from the airport; at this final point of the story, Djébar has omitted the names of the two characters, so that they are simply two women, walking side by side in unison. Together, they anticipate a brighter future, pledging that “One day we'll take the boat together...Not to go away, no, to gaze at the city when all doors are opening... What a picture! It will make even the light tremble!” This vision is one of promise, suggesting liberation instead confinement; in the image of doors opening to the women, not only is it implied that they will be able to finally leave their personal prisons, but there is also a suggestion of opportunity and possibility. In this way, Anne's decision to stay in Algeria is not only an act of solidarity, but a message of hope – hope of happiness in the home she has found among her community of women.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to challenge traditional definitions of exile, and so establish how a state of exile can take form without physical expulsion from a geographical territory. Having defined the concept of “inner exile” as a state of exclusion rooted in disenfranchisement, I sought to examine the theme of inner exile in Assia Djébar’s work, interpreting her characters as experiencing a double state of inner exile due to domination by both colonial and patriarchal forces. Juxtaposing texts by Fanon and Djébar, I continued to explore the idea of national independence as an end to the inner exile of colonialism. This led me to conclude that liberation did not represent a true “homecoming” for all, as women faced a new form of exclusion; despite their sacrifice in the war efforts, not only did women suffer a continuation of their subservient condition, but they were granted neither recognition nor voice in the narrative of the new nation. Finally, using Djébar’s literary texts as a model, I offer the example of female community in Djébar’s stories as a form of relief to the pains of women’s inner exile.

I believe that by analyzing political and literary texts side by side, I have brought a unique perspective not only to the understanding of exile, but also to the study of Djébar’s short stories. However, I acknowledge that there are certain areas in which this project is inadequate – having reached the end of my writing, I realize that what started as an endeavor in post-colonial studies ended up being more a discussion of feminist literature. Thus, I understand that beyond addressing post-colonial theory, an examination of feminist literary criticism is lacking for a more thorough analysis of my topic.

I also understand that in studying Djébar’s texts, the theme of “inner exile” should be further explored in the context of broader Algerian national identity. Considering that Assia Djébar herself is a post-colonial, feminist writer whose work has explored tensions of national identity in terms of language, culture, and memory, a more well-rounded exploration of “inner

exile” in terms of Djébar’s writing would have involved greater discussion of colonial rule, especially in terms of the linguistic, cultural, and socio-political tensions that have persisted throughout the development of the independent Algerian nation. Therefore, a continuation of this thesis should include a study of Djébar’s novel *L’amour la fantasia* (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*); just as I have addressed issues of disenfranchisement and exclusion from historical narrative, *L’amour la fantasia* aims to dismantle colonial narratives of the conquest of Algeria. In this book, Djébar provides the Algerian perspective of historical events, weaving together alternative records such as oral histories and personal letters to call attention to the forgotten atrocities of the French, and thereby re-establish the Algerian voice in the narrative of French colonialism.

Nevertheless, I am confident that I have succeeded, within the limits of this thesis, to answer the major questions raised at the beginning of my research. I have determined new ways of comprehending the concept of exile, and I have applied this understanding to gain an original interpretation of Djébar’s *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*. Moreover, I have demonstrated the value of literature in not only understanding political history, but in offering possible solutions to social problems through the cultivation of empathy. Thus, I believe that I have adequately utilized my interdisciplinary academic background to bring together varying perspectives on the same historical issues within political and literary texts.

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