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## Assia Djébar and the Algerian Woman: From Silence to Song

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*University of Mississippi. Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College*

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Assia Djebar and the Algerian Woman:  
From Silence to Song

Mary Maher

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for completion of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.  
The University of Mississippi

Oxford, Mississippi  
Spring 2010

Approved

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Advisor: Dr. Sarah Lincoln

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Reader: Dr. Judson Watson

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## DEDICATION

To my wonderful advisor, Dr. Sarah Lincoln,  
Who is brilliant, patient, and such good company

To my readers, Dr. Anne Quinney and Dr. Jay Watson,  
For their encouragement and enthusiasm

To my parents, Brian and Barbara Maher, and siblings,  
Who lovingly support all of my daydreams and efforts

To the Honors College faculty, especially Dr. Debra Young,  
Who have been generous and loving everyday for the past four years

To Mr. Jim Barksdale,  
Who has fostered my education in Oxford and around the world

To Adelina Sánchez Espinosa,  
Who first introduced me to Djébar during my study in Granada, Spain, and who works  
tirelessly and passionately as a Mediterranean women's activist

To Assia Djébar,  
Whose voice not only laments the traumatic experiences of Algerian women but whose  
heart breaks for all of Algeria in her work

## ABSTRACT

MARY MAHER:

Assia Djebar and the Algerian Woman: From Silence to Song  
(Under the direction of Dr. Sarah Lincoln)

This thesis examines the work of Assia Djebar in terms of its context, content, and objectives. Djebar's writing is lyrical and captivating, yet its grounding in experience gives her words a quality of truth and wisdom. To fully understand the function of her work and the significance of its content, the context in which Djebar writes is momentous. Outlining a brief history of the Algerian woman's experience gives a practical understanding of the individual and collective struggles of Algerian women. The violent and unique participation of women in the Algerian War of Independence and their subsequent insignificance under the patriarchal rule of the new nation warrant exploration into the science and philosophies of trauma. An understanding of trauma and healing through testimony elucidates Djebar's own ambition to create a community of testimony amongst Algerian woman, both for individual healing and for a collective restoration to Algerian history.

A explication of her film *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* and her collection of short stories *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* demonstrates her grasp of theories surrounding history and trauma; more importantly, they show her understanding and empathy for the Algerian women's experience. Djebar's texts have been circulating the hope, encouragement, and healing to all readers who read her words or hear her voice.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ALN	National Liberation Army
FIS	Islamic Salvation Front
FLN	National Liberation Front
GIA	Armed Islamic Group
UNFA	National Union of Algerian Women

*“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... Talk among ourselves and look. Look outside, look outside the walls and the prisons!”*

Assia Djebar

## OVERTURE

*“This world of women, when it no longer hums with the whisperings of an ancillary tenderness, of lost ballads—in short, with a romanticism of vanished enchantments—that world suddenly, barrenly, becomes a world of autism. And just as suddenly, the reality of the present shows itself without camouflage, without any addition to the past: sound has truly been severed.”*

*Assia Djebar*

### I. The Voice of the Algerian Lament

Two women dance victoriously in the streets of Algiers in the final scene of *The Battle of Algiers*. They wave Algerian flags in their defiant fists. The older of the two was a “fire carrier” or urban bomber during the Algerian War of Independence; she whirls and twirls, leading men and women of the Casbah<sup>1</sup> in a demonstration against French soldiers. Despite the defeat of the National Liberation Front (FLN<sup>2</sup>) in Algiers, this celebratory demonstration suggests that the greater victory of complete independence of 1962 is yet to come. The woman rushes against the soldiers who push her back into the crowd behind her, but she does not yield. She dances freely and courageously before both French policemen and Algerian men alike. The woman taunts the French with an Algerian flag and yet wears no veil, the symbol of Algerian women’s resistance to the French. By denying the right of French presence and by wearing her head bare in the street, she represents only her own person.

The voices of the two women are lost in the beating of Algerian drums and in the squall and ululations of the crowd. In this final scene, they dance triumphantly but mutely. A French male voice is taped over the footage and gives a brief history of the

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<sup>1</sup>The Casbah is the Arabic quarter of a city. The Casbah of Algiers is particularly connoted in the context of Algerian history because of its importance during the Algerian War of Independence.

<sup>2</sup>Front de Libération Nationale

end of the Algerian revolution that is to follow in two years time; subtitles reinforce the man's message.

*The Battle of Algiers*<sup>3</sup> has been praised for its accurate and authentic depiction of the Algerian War of Independence. Indeed, the silence of this woman accurately depicts the condition of post-war Algerian women. Furthermore, this sacrificing of the women's voices to the rumbling of the greater Algerian nation is a prelude to the painful regression of their citizenship from unveiled to veiled, from light to shadow, from street to harem-home. This muted fire carrier has tragically been the legacy of Algerian women.

Assia Djébar, a young journalist at the time of Algerian independence, returns the voice to this silenced woman through her literary and cinematic career following the war. Mirrored in her own transformation from silence to speech, Djébar testifies to the experiences of Algerian women that are lost in their severed voices. Her literature and film "keeps women's speech and oral history safe from the danger of extinction, for the danger of a definitive cultural silence" (Budig-Markin 898). Through testimony, Djébar restores the traumatic experiences of Algerian women to history and transforms their silences into healing through testimony.

Assia Djébar chooses the traditional Algerian lament as her medium to testify to the women's years of silence under both colonial and postcolonial rule. The Algerian lament is a traditional song of loss sung by women. These songs of sorrow have been both whispered and wailed throughout the countryside and the cities of Algeria. During

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<sup>3</sup>*Battle of Algiers* was the winner of the 1966 FIFRESCI Prize and Golden Lion Award of the Venice Film Festival, the 1967 winner of Best Cinematography, B/W, Best Director, and Best Producer for the Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists, a 1967 Academy Awards nominee for Best Foreign Language Film and in 1969 for Best Writing, Story, and Screenplay Written Directly for the Screen, the winner of the 1968 Kinema Junpo Awards for Best Foreign Language Film, and the 1972 winner of the United Nations BAFTA Award (Cinema Politica).

the recent past, these laments have mourned the death of a loved one or the trials of a seven-year revolutionary war from 1954-1962. In her film *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* and *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*, Djébar focuses these lamentations on the women themselves, allowing women to grieve for themselves by making them the objects as well as the subjects of the lament.

The Algerian lament is both isolating and unifying: the lyrics bemoan individual suffering, yet it welcomes a chorus to support its testimony. Its hypnotic rhythms find a common cadence in the experiences of loss for Algerian women. These testimonial songs restore women to the memory of their nation, thereby restoring them to Algerian history. The community of sharing and memory created by Djébar's work encourages Algerian women to participate in this testimony for both individual and communal healing from the trauma of war and of neglect.

Djébar's use of laments as an artistic trope renders structure and authenticity to her work. The laments provide structure and organization to *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* and *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*. These same laments give authenticity to her work in their honesty and in their tradition; this authenticity of speaking *next to* or *very close to* the women of Algeria not only gives the element of truth to her words but also her right to speak them (Donadey 889). The lament has long been a tradition in the history of Algeria. It provides an outlet for the expression of hardship and sorrow to women who have traditionally had a less public voice than men. By choosing the lament as a common theme in her work, Djébar is finding a place for her literature in Algerian history. Her laments are a "refusal to allow memories to disperse" (Stora 81).

They testify to the forgotten strength and resilience demonstrated during the Algerian War of Independence by women and, in doing so, restore the women to history.

## **II. Understanding Djébar**

Assia Djébar's unusual upbringing and education granted her an extraordinary position as a woman of both the Orient and the Occident. Her unique perspective enables her to write both sincerely and fairly about the struggles of Algerian women. Assia Djébar was born Fatima-Zohra Imalayen on June 30, 1936, and grew up in the coastal town of Cherchell near Algiers. Djébar's father, a primary school teacher, sent her to a French colonial secondary school in Algiers at a time when many of her female peers were veiled and taken home (Minnesota). Djébar returned home to her family during the summer breaks until she studied at the university level in Paris; she was the first Algerian woman admitted to the exclusive college *École Normale Supérieure* (Mortimer, "Reappropriating" 223). The quality and extent of her education were unique for an Algerian girl; it was the gift of her teacher-father, who, though grounded in traditional Islamic practice, thought that higher education was valuable for women. This paternal gift, however, distanced Djébar physically and developmentally from the traditional lifestyle of her mother (223). She was not privy to a traditional harem or harem-style home life.

During the early years of the Algerian War of Independence, Djébar joined the 1956 students' strike in France. Of course, her family in Algeria was affected; the French burst into her mother's home and destroyed Djébar's books. Her brother was imprisoned in France for his involvement with the resistance. During the later years of the war,

Djebar worked as an investigative journalist for the *El-Moujahid*, the newspaper of the National Liberation Front (FLN), the Algerian revolutionary militants. She traveled to Tunisia and Morocco to interview Algerian refugees (Liukkonen). After the war, Djebar returned to reconnect to her maternal roots and to work at the University of Algiers (Britannica).

Djebar wrote her first novel *La Soif* in 1956 but did not publish it until 1957. Fearing her father's displeasure, Djebar chose the pseudonym Djebbar, meaning "one who praises Allah." As fate would have it, *La Soif* was published erroneously under the name Djebar which means "one who heals" (Minnesota). She has since published poetry, essays, fiction, film, and plays. Djebar trained as a historian and has been a faculty member of the University of Rabat, the University of Algiers, the director of French and Francophone Studies at Louisiana State University, and the Silver Professor of Francophone Literature and Civilization at New York University. Djebar has been elected to the Académie Royale de Langue Francaise de Belgique and is the first Maghreb<sup>4</sup> writer elected to L'Académie française. Djebar won the 1996 Neustadt Prize for Contributions to World Literature, the 1997 Marguerite Yourcenar Prize, the 2000 Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels, and has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature several times (Liukkonen). Her writing is not only prolific but is widely translated and read as well. Djebar has been a pioneer in the frontier of women's literature in a part of the world in which a woman's word has seldom been heard and almost never recorded.

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<sup>4</sup> Maghreb is a term that describes the unique culture of North African countries Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia whose culture has been derived from Andalusian, French, Berber, and Muslim influences.

## II. Introduction to Djébar's Texts

My first chapter explains why Assia Djébar's work is important for Algerian women. The significance of Djébar's voice cannot be properly assigned without understanding the context in which she writes. The description of "The Algerian Woman's Experience" elucidates the historical and legal evolution of these women to their present condition. Borrowing from Djébar's historical novel *Children of the New World* and her essay "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound," this chapter illuminates the realities of their traumatic past and present. A second section, "A Forgetful Nation," is designed to place the experience of the Algerian woman in a greater theoretical context of history and representation in order to understand the implications of non-representation suffered by Algerian women. "Trauma and Testimony," my final section in this chapter, extends psychological explanations of trauma theory to support the objectives of communication and testimony in Djébar's work.

My second chapter explores Djébar's first film, *La Noubia des femmes du Mount Chenoua*. The women of the Mount Chenoua countryside mourn their losses during the war and their sense of isolation and betrayal that follows. This film focuses on the lives of women in the countryside surrounding Mont Chenoua. These women are the daughters, mothers, and wives of deceased or wounded National Liberation Front militants or were militants themselves. Leila, Djébar's protagonist, interviews these women to explore their forgotten histories and to reconnect with the past of her homeland. Through the individual laments of local women, Leila accesses hushed memories of the war and pieces together history of fragmentation and trauma. Through the healing transmission of testimony, Leila reaches an understanding of her war

experiences and finds a new peace in the war-torn countryside of Algeria and a new hope for the women of Mount Chenoua.

My third and final chapter examines Djébar's renowned short story collection, *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*. The laments of this novel focus on women scarred by the hardships of the war and their attempts to quietly cope with their experiences. Of this collection, I explicate two specific short stories: "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment" and "The Dead Speak." Through narration of intertwined lives, several women share their individual stories of betrayal and loss. Together, these stories convey the essence of collective trauma that veils Algerian women. While dealing with the traumatic experiences of the war, these women of Algiers realize that the conditions of postcolonial Algeria have largely not improved from revolutionary times. The restriction of rights and movement stifle the women in their homes; the singular acknowledgement of male sacrifice during the war undercut the sacrifices made by women throughout the Algerian War of Independence.

By addressing the condition of women so thoroughly and eloquently, Djébar gracefully transverses postcolonial literature, women's literature, and trauma literature. In a world progressing towards broader liberties and dialogue across nations, genders, and experiences, the passing of wisdom through any one of these literary paradigms is celebrated. Assia Djébar's comprehensive and empathetic grasp of the human experience—particularly the Algerian woman's experience—and her ability to communicate this experience moves literature into action and words into song.

## HISTORY IN PRACTICE AND THEORY

*“I did not ask for anything, not for a pension nor even for a needle. We worked for the sake of God and for our beliefs. But now, to tell the truth, I regret it. I regret my daughters.”*

*Fatma Bedj of El Asam,  
who lost three children in the Algerian revolution*

### The Algerian Woman’s Experience

Algeria has an extensive history of foreign invasion and occupation, including the Phoenician-Carthaginians, the Romans, the Vandals, the Byzantine empire, the Arabs, the Turks, and lastly the French (Stora, *Algeria* 2). Traditionally, the fathers, husbands, and sons of Berber families would engage the invading enemy while the women and children waited in a protective haven such as a village or cave. The revolution against the French is only the latest chapter in a long history of women’s suffering, a suffering left largely unrecorded.

Documentation of the initial French invasion of Algeria in 1830 was recorded by the French. The siege of Algiers was illustrated in thirty-seven accounts for a more thorough record—thirty two are in French, two are in Arabic, and none of them were made by women<sup>5</sup> (Donadey 885). French military letters during the bloody colonization campaign contain almost no evidence of women, except for a body count after Marshall Bugeaud’s fiery massacre in the cave near Mount Chenoua. French military records from 1845 tell that the entire population of Oued Riah<sup>6</sup> villages—men, women, and children—were herded into a cave and set ablaze in this massacre (Budgin-Markin 900). According

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<sup>5</sup> The remaining three illustrations are not accounted for by Anne Donadey.

<sup>6</sup> A Berber tribe in Algeria

to the Staff Colonel Pelissier, the women chose to remain with their husbands even after the fires were lit (900). Other French officers' records account for the rape and subsequent slaughter of Algerian women. These rapes were "perpetrated as an act of dominance" in front of parents and husbands (Salhi 2).

Following defeat and humiliation by the French, the women became a symbol of the conflict of power between the native Algerians and the French colonial government. The haik<sup>7</sup> became a patriotic symbol for Algerians as it hid Algerian women from the French gaze and culture and claimed them for their husbands and families alone. The veil became a conundrum: in the Algerian male's efforts to assert authority in his own life, the women became "the colonized of the colonized" (Salhi 2). Thus, Algerian women were doubly imposed upon by both French and Algerian authorities. Up until 1954, Algerian women were excluded from public life, had no political rights, could not vote, and were 95.5 % illiterate (Amrane-Minne 62). Only 16% of women over the age of fifteen were unmarried, 3% of women worked outside their homes, and twenty-two women attended the University of Algiers (Katschera).

Because Algerian men maintained a sense of control by dominating women from within the culture, the French targeted these women to gain a foothold in Algerian society. As the tension between the Algerian colonized and French colonists escalated in the decades preceding the 1954-1962 Algerian War of Independence, the French began encouraging veil removal in order to liberate these "Fatmas"<sup>8</sup> from patriarchal oppression. The political aims of such propaganda were, of course, to undercut the social

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<sup>7</sup> The haik is the white Algerian veil that covers a woman's head, face, and the body down to her ankles. I will use the term veil interchangeably with haik; make note, however, that the haik provides significantly more coverage than a simple veil that covers the head.

<sup>8</sup> The French gave native Algerian women the generic name of Fatma which became synonymous with housemaids (Salhi).

powers of patriarchal Algerian society rather than to create a truly egalitarian society. In this tension, however, women remained passive victims of either party.

The revolution commenced under the command of the National Liberation Front. Violence began in large cities such as the capital Algiers under the guise of terrorist tactics. Women both in cities and in the countryside quickly demonstrated their support for the FLN by becoming active participants themselves. Algerian historian Benjamin Stora accounts for this transition to action: Algerian women joined the struggle for independence in an attempt to “invert their positions as victim[s]” by fighting and taking for themselves and their country the autonomy that had been withheld from them during colonial rule (Stora 80).

The decision to directly involve women in the revolution was not taken lightly by nationalist leaders; joint participation in the war effort meant joint participation in French punishment, including imprisonment and torture. However, the leaders recognized that the evolution of warfare in cities required women’s participation for success. Therefore, nationalist leaders recognized the importance of women’s involvement, not as a “replacement product, but as an element capable of adequately meeting the new tasks” of the revolution (Fanon 172). Of the first 1,010 moudjahiddines<sup>9</sup> in the FLN, forty-nine were women. Initially, the women involved in the resistance movement were wives of militants, but gradually divorcees and young, unmarried girls joined as well. In fact, 74% of female militants were younger than twenty-five and 50% were younger than twenty. Most of these young women joined the resistance without the consent of their parents (Salhi 3). Of the 10,949 women militants reported by the FLN, 2,388 fought with the

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<sup>9</sup> Moudjahidine is a gender neutral term which means freedom fighter in the context of the Algerian revolution (Salhi 3).

National Liberation Army<sup>10</sup> in active combat (Salhi 3); 20% of these active women fighters were killed in combat (Amrane-Minne 67).

Two-thirds of women participants were members of a civil resistance responsible for supplies and refuge (Amrane-Minne 62). These numbers, however, greatly under-represent women's participation because the civil women militants listed on the FLN register are the nuclei of entire support and supply networks composed of women. Women who previously lived relatively cloistered lives within their homes were now responsible for the success of crucial missions both directly and indirectly.

Rural women composed 78% of women's participation (Turshen 890). These rural militants informed the local women of the political situation, provided means to better hygiene, cooked, nursed wounded moudjahiddines and trafficked information as well as arms. Women remained in the home to offer cooking, sewing, and refuge to both men and women fighters or traveled in bands of guerilla fighters, nursing without medicines, performing operations without anesthesia, and cooking for the guerilla fighters.

Although rural women were indispensable to the success of the revolution, urbanite women were especially renowned for their cunning and bravery, especially in the capital city of Algiers. These women manipulated French attempts to "European-ize" them by dressing in European-styled clothes to enter the European quarter. Under military siege, these female "fire-carriers" had greater freedom of movement into and out of the Casbah. These bombings were especially challenging for the French because the

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<sup>10</sup> The National Liberation Army (ALN) was the active combatant branch of the National Liberations Front (FLN) (Salhi 3).

same women who appeared to be supporting the French (by not wearing the haik) were actually working to destroy them:

Carrying revolvers, grenades, hundreds of false identity cards or bombs, the unveiled woman moves like a fish in the Western waters. The soldiers, the French patrols, smile to her as she passes, compliments her on her looks are heard here and there, but no one suspects that her suitcases contain the automatic pistol that will presently mow down four or five members of one of the patrols. (Fanon 181)

These unsuspected women detonated bombs in strategic locations such as crowded cafes or the AirFrance airport waiting room of the European quarter.

Urbanite women used the haik to their advantage as well. Underneath the cover of the haik, women learned to transport weaponry such as machine guns and bullet rounds while looking as if they are carrying nothing. At check points, the women would have to display empty hands for passage. As Frantz Fanon wrote, she is proven innocent by her bare hands, and yet “bombs, grenades, [and] machine gun clips...are bound to her body in a system of strings and straps” (Fanon 184). Due to the history of tension between the French and the Algerian male and the taboo of touching an Algerian woman, these women could not be frisked by French police at checkpoints. Therefore, they were able to move supplies, medicines, money, ammunition, and weaponry into and out of the Casbah as men could not. These women also acted as look-outs, guides, and accomplices to their male counterparts (Amrane-Minne 65).

A new co-dependence between Algerian men and women revolutionaries was established. For example, before a militant would attack a French police officer or soldier, a veiled woman would walk ahead of him carrying the gun or weapon of choice to and from the site of the murder. The woman-accomplice was responsible for herself, the weapon, the timing of the attack, and in essence the life of the male militant.

Algerian women showed resolute support of the revolution and loyalty to their menfolk. Djamila Briki tells of this extreme solidarity when she recounts the imprisonment of her husband Yahia in the infamous Barberousse Prison. Because Yahia and fellow inmates continued to call prisoners to prayer despite the administrations forbiddance, they were denied family visits. At the time, Djamila was twenty-two, a mother of three, and had never walked outside her home alone. She helped organize a women's demonstration outside the prison gates. This group of demonstrating women—of similar situation to Djamila—were imprisoned themselves for three months and in this way were able to see their husbands and sons (Amrane-Minne 66).

Constant anxiety hounded Algerian women even if they were not directly enlisted in FLN activity; “fear infiltrated everything” (Djebar, *Children* 40). Algerian mothers and wives constantly feared that their husbands and children would not return home from a mission or that family members would be taken in for police interrogations. Djebar addresses this sense of helplessness and uncertainty in *Children of the New World*: Ali leaves his wife Lila to join guerilla fighting in the hills. Another wife Cherifa feels emotionally isolated from her husband. She shares his apprehension and supports him in his work but feels their communication beginning to crumble. In the meantime, both wives are responsible for maintaining the appearance of calm.

During the war, the revolutionary government passed laws in recognition of women's efforts in order to attract more women to the revolutionary front. In 1957, one law recognized twenty-one as the legal coming of age of both men and women; another made mothers the legal guardians of their children should the father die. In 1958, women gained the right to vote. In 1959, an edict demanded that all marriages be recorded in the

state civil register and made a minimum age of eligibility: eighteen years for boys and fifteen years for girls. With independence, this edict became law and enforced marriages and repudiations were declared illegal (Amrane-Minne 76).

Women participated in every aspect of the war, suffering torture and imprisonment. The French punished male and female FLN members equally, without regard to gender. According to Djebbar, “harems melted for a while into so many Barbarousse<sup>11</sup> prisons” as practically all urban women guerilla fighters were captured and tortured (“Severed” 144, Amrane-Minne 67). An estimated 2,200 women moudjahiddines were tortured by the French, some to death (Turshen 891). In Djebbar’s essay “Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound,” she addresses the torture such as electrocution and rape. She says that rape in the prisons and during interrogations “cause[d] a painful upheaval, experienced as trauma by the whole of the Algerian collective” (150).

Although the FLN embraced women’s participation pragmatically, the liberation front did not accept women as equals ideologically. In the FLN/ALN handbook of 1956, women are mentioned in a single paragraph. This “Women’s Movement” paragraph is the last movement listed and is preceded by movements of rural people, workers, the young, intellectuals, tradespeople, and craftsmen (Amrane-Minne 67). In this paragraph women’s duties in the war are outlined: to provide moral support to male fighters, to give instructions in dealing with provisions, to provide refuge to male fighters, and to aid the families of moudjahiddines, prisoners, or detainees (68). The “Women’s Movement” paragraph does not include the non-traditional functions of combat, nursing, or strategizing in urban and rural warfare which women were already participating in.

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<sup>11</sup> The infamous Barbarousse Prison of Algiers was the central headquarters of imprisonment and gained a reputation as the most feared.

After the war, the actions of the FLN reflected the attitude of the patriarchal society: Women's rights were not a priority. In the Tripoli Program of June 1962, a plan to transition the FLN from a revolutionary movement to the single political party of the state, the women's paragraph is, again, "hardly noticeable" (Library of Congress, Armane-Minne 68). Women's attrition from political life continued; in the first National Assembly 10 of 194 members were women, all participants in the war. In the second National Assembly meeting, 2 of 138 members were women. By the third president, Amhed Ben Bella, no women served on the National Assembly. Women who were interviewed about their absence in the Assembly said they were worn out by the seven-year war and that they trusted their war comrades that had gained government positions to ensure that the liberty they won together would be guaranteed for all.

A heavy silence fell over Algerian women for almost ten years. One militant explains this silence, saying "I [was being] blindly nationalist...In 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" (Salhi 6). Djebar admits to a period of silence, as well, saying she was hesitant to voice her misgivings about the war for the sake of national unity (Liukkonen).

Women trusted in the camaraderie built between men and women during the war (Salhi 7). They believed this trust would be reflected in the legal and social foundations of the new republic; Hélié -Lucas says in an effort to guard from Western forces "our own rightist forces exploit our silence" (Salhi 6). Like Hélié-Lucus, women, however,

have since become disillusioned by the government's betrayal in the legal and social discrimination that eventually culminated in the Family Code of 1984. One of the first women active in the war, Fatima Benosmane is regretful of the lack of political pressure by women. "We gave them nothing to make them appreciate our achievements," she says (Amrane-Minne 68).

Although women's representation waned in the National Assembly, the Constitution of 1963 (and later the Constitution of 1989) promised gender equality. Article twenty-eight states that "citizens are equal in the eyes of the law, without there being any discrimination because of birth, race, sex, or any other condition or circumstance, where personal or social" (Armane-Minne 69).

Article thirty reiterates this by naming all institutions as active enforcers of this equality. Institutions are to "ensure equality in the rights and duties of all citizens, male and female, by suppressing the obstacles which hinder human development and stop the active participation of everyone in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country" (Armane-Minne 70). Article thirty should ensure the right to work, the right to equal pay, and equal opportunity for all professions. Algeria in practice, however, showed a great "gap between official discourse and what actually [took] place in society" (Salhi 5)

Having been separated from home for so long, the moudjahiddines were ready to return to normalcy, "never imagining what was in store for Algerian women" (Turshen 893). The women militants were granted unprecedented responsibility and freedom of movement during the war. One ex-mujahidat, Mme Houria Imache Rami, commented, "We were all equal in the war—it was afterward that our citizenship was taken away

from us” (Turshen 893). Trusting the ideals of the revolution, women believed that their common revolutionary past would serve as a “platform for development and societal cohesion” in the formation of the Algerian republic (Salhi 5).

However, other female militants did experience a gradual though tangible segregation towards the end of the war. One says that, “Our domestication didn’t start in 1962, it happened before independence; even during the war, the FLN started eliminating women from the maquis<sup>12</sup>, sending us to the borders or abroad. That’s when our role was defined, when we were excluded from public life” (Turshen 893). For example, Malika Zerrouki, who began working as a field nurse at fifteen, was directed to walk with a group of girls to the Tunisia boarder. There they were locked in a cellar by fellow FLN fighters (Kutschera). Even before the War of Independence was over, the FLN began sequestering the freedoms of women.

The betrayal of the women fighters was not limited to politics. Women militants had difficulty integrating back into society. Nurses were forced out of jobs and into their homes. Teaching school became the most accepted, though not encouraged employment for women (Turshen 892). Many women never married because they were considered tarnished by rape or close interaction with other men during war (Turshen 893). Other militant-wives were forced back into the privacy of the home by their husbands. Fatma, for example, endured some of the most brutal torture tactics used by the French and three years in their detention camps. After the war, she was not allowed outside; her husband did not permit her to walk in the street until she was almost fifty (Kutschera).

Furthermore, many militant wives were repudiated by their comrade-husbands. During the war, many couples were married in the mountains in a more egalitarian

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<sup>12</sup> Bands of guerrilla fighters

manner than traditional marriage customs allowed for. Once the war had concluded and men were granted positions in the government, they would divorce their comrade-wives and marry younger women whom they deemed more presentable and suitable for their new positions in society. One woman war veteran says, “This was very common. In fact, it was the norm” (Salhi 5). Bitterly, she says, “How long it will take us to outwit them, just as we outwitted the French, I don’t know. Not very long, I hope” (5).

During the war, urban moujihaddines nearing arrest would take refuge in the countryside; there, they would teach illiterate women and children to read and write (Turshen 891). Baya Laribi was one of these refugee-teachers. She was horrified when she returned after the war and found these women in the same “shocking conditions”—impoverished, illiterate, and subservient (Kutschera). In another testimony, FLN supporter Halima Ghomri says, “The independence? Nothing of what I had hoped for was achieved. I had expected that my children would be able to have an education but they did not get it...Nothing has changed. Everything is the same” (Kutschera).

In an effort to maximize the little freedom women did acquire, they began sending their daughters to school, sharply increasing school enrollment; girls accounted for 40% of students in schools (Salhi 5). These women were quick to share any benefit of change with their daughters in hopes for greater change in the future.

Although the FLN became the sole party of the Algerian republic, postcolonial Algeria split into two ideological factions within this party (Amrane-Minne 73). The liberal faction wanted the promotion and integration of women into the government program. The FLN conservatives called for a renewal of cultural authenticity centered on Islamic cultural values. Furthermore, they recognized women’s participation in the war

only in their efforts against European acculturation and nothing more (Salhi 4). The FLN conservatives sought a return to the original order—first and foremost returning women to the home and veil “from the age of ten to forty or forty five” (Djebar, “Severed” 139). These Muslim fundamentalists saw women as repositories of traditional culture (4). Fundamentalists want “absolute power over society, and they have understood perfectly that such power passes throughout control of women’s sexuality, which Mediterranean patriarchal society facilitates” (Tushen 904). These fundamentalists named themselves the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), reminiscent of the National Liberation Front (Turshen 897). The FIS saw their patriarchal platforms as a “last line of defense against the loss of national identity” though Djebar sees these efforts as the crystallization of their obsession to maintain a sense of power (Tushen 902, “Severed” 140).

Over the decades following independence from the French, the FLN party made concessions (particularly concessions in women’s rights) to appease the FIS and to maintain a seat of power (Armane-Minne 72). Ait Hamou says that the Algerian government has “many times made compromises and sacrificed women’s rights and safety to keep peace with the fundamentalists...and safeguard their interests...in power” (Salhi 8). Historian Stora supports this statement saying that “in the twenty years following independence, religion was used as an instrument to contain possible advances in the secular and democratic currents, and, above all, as a weapon for the legitimation of power” (5). This trend of sequestering women’s rights culminated in the Family Code of 1984, which according to Meriem Bellala, president of SOS Women in Distress, “enshrine[d] the downfall of Algerian women and their children (Mammeri). The official

political movement for this code started as early as 1963; less than a year after independence, a pilot-study of the Family Code was under way (Amrane-Minne 70).

The same government that quietly investigated a code that would negate women's rights in 1965 established the National Union of Algerian Women (UNFA) in 1962 (Salhi 8). Women showed their enthusiasm for such an organization by marching 10,000 strong in number in the streets of Algiers on International Women's Day, much to the surprise of Algerian men (Ottaway 127). In April 1964, UNFA spoke at the Economic and Social Commission meeting on behalf of women, calling for "equal responsibilities for women militants at every level of the party, an end to polygamy, regulated daycare for children, new adoption laws, and new laws concerning legitimacy" (Tushen 893). However, during the meeting, neither FLN nor UNFA actually brought these issues up for discussion or attempted to return to them (893).

Again, the official discourse of the nation only pretended to properly address women's rights. In fact, the UNFA was non-responsive on several fronts. Salhi says that "the UNFA never attracted feminists nor did it reach out to the masses whether in urban or in rural areas. It remained a formal state organization which did not work for the interest of women in a country where much was needed to be done amongst the masses of illiterate and often ignorant female population" (4). As time would tell, the UNFA was not only affiliated with the FLN government, it was controlled by the government and did not act without its approval. In 1965, Colonel Houari Boumedienne overthrew Ben Bella in military coup. Although he initially promised the integration of women into society, he, too, conceded with the fundamentalists. During his tenure, Muslim fundamentalists were allowed to harass women they deemed inappropriately dressed and threaten

working women (Salhi 5). The repressive tenure of Boumedinne, his successor Yamina Bettahar Chali, and those who followed into the 1980's and 1990's reinforced the UNFA's fringe function (Turshen 895).

A precursor to the Family Code, a 1980 ministerial decree prohibited women from traveling abroad without a man. Women's response to the decree was so explosive that the government revoked it in the same year (Salhi 5). Nevertheless, the next year President Chali attempted to pass the Family Code through the Popular Assembly (Amrane-Minne 69). Five hundred women demonstrated in front of the National Assembly bearing a 10,000-signature petition against the code. The assembly manipulated the disorganization of their cause and said that the women could make their own amendments within four days; the disorganization of leadership and immaturity of this proto-feminist group led to division and bickering within the group (Salhi 6). Of course, the women were unable to find a united front on the amendments and none were offered (6).

Enraged at their betrayal by the government, these women organized a sit-in at the UNFA office in Algiers. A UNFA spokesperson replied that "Algerian women were not aware of their rights and had, therefore, nothing to discuss" (Salhi 5). Bouthaina Shaaban attests to this devastating response saying, "[The] UNFA is an official organization; that is why it doesn't do anything which the government might dislike" (Salhi 6). This insulting blow to the women's movement from its supposed ally triggered the modern feminist movement in Algeria. Women split from their association with the ineffective UNFA (6). Finally, the ex-moudjahiddines broke their spell of invisibility and united with the younger generation of women. To the younger generation, these previously invisible

fighters were closer to fiction than fact; they had not been heard from for a decade. “The old [moudjahiddines] joined...for the first time. Thirty of them decided to join the fight against the government that betrayed them” (Salhi 6). The ex-militants said to the young, “How dare they throw this rubbish at us again! You have to fight, my girls. You just have to fight, even against the men closest to you. The battle has to be fought and won” (6). From this moment, they called every Algerian woman from all generations to join the battle against patriarchal oppression. Immediately the women formed two groups: the Algerian Association for the Emancipation of Women and the Committee for the Legal Equality of Men and Women. The women petitioned the minister of veterans and the minister of justice (6). Together they demonstrated in the streets, carrying banners that declared, “No to Silence! Yes to Democracy!” and “No to the Betrayals of the Ideals of November 1, 1954<sup>13</sup>!” (6).

The passing of the Family Code on June 9, 1984 as law number 84-11 exposed secret negotiations between political and religious leaders. The passing of the Family Code into law showed “the government’s willingness to sacrifice women’s rights in order to stay in power” (Tushen 904). Khalida Messaoudi calls the code a history of “crimes against women” (894). The Family Code legalizes the significant regression of women’s rights since the war of independence.

The Family Code’s main provisions include the requirement of the consent of a wali<sup>14</sup> for marriage contracts (article 11); women cannot divorce their husbands, and if they do, they lose legal rights to all alimony (Men, however, can divorce without stipulation.) (article 54); women are defined as procreators making it their legal duty to

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<sup>13</sup> November 1, 1954 was the first date the FLN launched organized, guerrilla attacks on the French in Algiers.

<sup>14</sup> Male sponsor for marriage

breastfeed their children and care for them until adulthood (article 48); women must obey and respect their husbands and their husband's family; women can only work with their husband's permission (article 39); women are given custody of their children until their sons are ten and their daughters are married; if a woman has no guardian, a male family member can support her only if he can (In this way, women and their children often end up homeless on the street or in the slums should the husband not want to support an extra household and if the wife's family cannot support her, too.); women are not permitted to take their children abroad or place them in certain school activities without the father's signature (article 52); polygamy is institutionalized for men to have up to four wives (article 8) (Salhi 7). A Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man (Men can marry without discretion) (US). The children of a Muslim man are born Muslim without consideration of the mother's religion (US). Wives under 18 cannot travel abroad without their husbands' permission (US). Inheritances are split two-thirds to the male inheritor and one-third to the woman inheritor on the basis that men must provide for their families and women do not; it is also worth noting that women often do not have control of their assets in a marriage (should they have any control at all) (US). In this code, women are assigned and limited to the roles of daughters, mothers, and wives; in essence, the Family Code "codifies women's subordination to men" (7).

Djebar comments on the disparity of the Family Code through the realities of tradition five years before the legal coding of these laws. In her 1979 essay "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound," Djebar attacks the social customs that breed mistrust and mistreatment within the family. For example, "in the relationships of brothers and sisters," she says, the sisters are "disinherited to the advantage of the males in the family"

(146). Djébar calls this familial betrayal “another face of that immemorial abuse of trust, of that alienation of material goods and bed and board” (146). Inheritance law not only psychologically wounds female family members but also leaves them at the mercy of male relatives for financial support. The patriarchal family betrays even the rights females are granted. Although women are granted the right to deny a husband, the traditional process of the marriage contract denies her this voice, making the wedding “night of blood also a night...of silence” (141). According to Djébar<sup>15</sup>, marriage has always been “one of the greatest powers of [patriarchal] Arabic society” (145).

Women activists were enraged with hushed legalization of these social codes. Feminists hailed it “a holdover from the colonial period” (Turshen 902). Women gathered one million signatures in protest and took to the street en masse (894). These demonstrations were the first true women’s demonstrations since independence twenty years before. Hélie-Lucas says that under the repressive regime in power, “Usually any kind of demonstration is just crushed, but this time we had in the front line six women who had been condemned to death under the French, so the police didn’t beat them” (6). Despite valiant efforts the code was not repealed.

In the meantime, the FIS and its armed branch, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), continued to pressure the FLN and harass women. FIS members personally imposed veiling, the segregation of boys and girls, and prohibited physical education for girls (Turshen 897). More and more concessions were given by the FLN until single party politics was ended violently and FIS was legalized in the 1989, much to women’s terror (Turshen 900). The savage civil war that ensued escalated from “bombing, village

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<sup>15</sup> The following chapter will discuss Djébar’s commentary on traditional marriage contracts in greater depth.

massacres, beheadings, abductions and rape...[to] organized femicide” (Salhi 8). Absolute terror and chaos ruled the country. Lists of women to be killed were nailed to doors of mosques (8). The FIS targeted those with jobs in government or shops of their own, hammams often closed, and teachers were beheaded in front of their students if they dared to go to school (Turshen 897). Divorced and widowed women were targeted; pregnant women were torn apart, their fetuses smashed (Salhi 8). Kahalida Messaoudi calls their targeting of women an “obsession with women” which reveals the underlying “gender issue” of the fundamentalists’ platform (Salhi 9). Women’s bodies were mutilated; their genitals were amputated. Women were kidnapped as war booty and lived as sex slaves and temporary wives of the ‘emirs’ in FIS terrorist camps (Salhi 8). Women were theoretically allowed to refuse a man in marriage but in actuality had no control (Tushen 898). As temporary wives of FIS, these women lost the few rights that legal wives had and could be disposed of without any sort of provisions or consideration (Tushen 898).

Despite threats of danger, women took to the streets in 1989 when the FIS was legalized as a second party. The FLN finally repealed their one-party tolerance platform in a new constitution in a last effort to maintain power (Tushen 900). On April 20, 1990, FIS members marched to President Chadli’s office to support application of the Sharia which would further curtail women’s rights, discouraging them from working outside the home, and separating administrative services, public transport, and benches for men and women (Turshen 897). Interestingly, some women called the Fissistes supported the FIS; they believed that if they married into the terror system that they could be protected, rather than victimized, by it (Tushen 901). One victim, fourteen-year-old Fella Zouaoui,

did not find any such protection within the system. In a raid organized solely for her kidnapping, Fella was taken from her home by Khaled Ferhah whose posse murdered her entire family. After she was given to Ferhah's emir for the first week of raping the virgin-girl, Ferhah thought Fella would be assigned to him after the emir had satisfied himself. However, his comrades were jealous and would not permit him to have her alone. Ferhah attempted to kidnap Fella, again, and was killed by his outfit. Fella was dragged back to the Ferhah's camp where she was tied, spread-eagle to an iron gate, gang raped daily, stabbed repeatedly, had an eye gouged out, and stomped on. After twelve days, Fella was able to reach a sword and cut her body in two, finding relief only through death (Turshen 900).

In December 1991, Fella's same Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) took power. In January 1992, women were the first to stage a massive demonstration to openly oppose the FIS as government. These women demanded a cancellation of the election because many of the women's votes were taken by the FIS through proxy vote (Salhi 9). These women claimed that fundamentalism was not only a threat to women but to society as a whole (9). During these demonstrations women showed photographs of terrorism victims and took turns courageously testifying to the gang rape that so many women had been subjected to (9). Women spoke out about their horrific traumas despite the taboo on sexual issues and abuses.

In 1994, however, the FIS government issued a fatwa<sup>16</sup> that licenses any Muslim to kill any girl not wearing a hijab<sup>17</sup>, making the extensive covering of the hijab mandatory. Uncovered women were considered "legitimate murder targets" (Turshen

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<sup>16</sup> A fatwa is a religious commandment based on scholarly legal decisions

<sup>17</sup> A hijab is a scarf that hides head, neck, and a full length robe.

898). Girls and women such as seventeen-year-old Katia Bengana were ambushed and murdered coming to and from school if they refused to cover their heads and bodies.

Before her brutal murder by strangers, Katia told her mother, “Even if one day I will be assassinated, I will never wear hijab against my will. If I wear something it will be the traditional dress of Kabylia, rather than the imported hijab they want to force on us”

(898). Katia is one voice remembered of too many that were unheard before and after they were slaughtered.

A second fatwa legalized the kidnapping and temporary marriage that had been running freely though illegally up to 1994 (898). Under the FIS control of the law system, women could not work outside home, be political leaders, play sports, mingle with men in public, wear makeup, perfume, or fitted clothes (898). In essence, Algeria became the new torturers of Algerian women.

Algerian women openly defied FIS decrees when able. For example, in the same year as the fatwas previously mentioned, women refused to join an FIS-initiated boycott of schools; women bravely escorted their children to school to stand alongside teachers despite the murder of teachers and burning of schools (Turshen 902). Again despite another FIS boycott on voting, women proudly were the first to vote in the 1995 presidential elections (902). Realizing the length and costs of the battle, one brave Algerian woman said that the Family Code and the codes of the FIS are “our prison...I am fighting for women’s rights...but not for me, not even for my daughter; I hope that my granddaughter will have full rights and respect” (Turshen 903).

The adoption of a new Constitution of 1989 to establish a multiparty political system also allowed other associations to operate legally. While FIS was claiming

political ground as a second party, women also took advantage of this freedom; eventually, thirty women's organizations developed. These include "SOS Women in Distress," "Equal Rights for Men and Women," "The Triumph of Women's Rights," "The Defense and Promotion of Women" and "The Emancipation of Women" (Amrane-Minne 73). Associations such as "The Voice of the Women" and "Cries of Women" attracted media attention for the feminist movement by means of demonstrations, pamphlets, radio shows, television programs (although television programs are still strictly monitored by the government) (72). These women's rights and crisis organizations sought to peel back the taboo on women's issues such as rape that were discussed open during the revolutionary war. During the war, "the words that named [rape] became...an explicit and unanimous condemnation. A barrier of words came down in transgression" to castigate the French ("Severed" 144). Since that time, a barrier of words re-established the taboo. The sole goal of "20 ans, Barakat!"<sup>18</sup> is to repeal Family Code which was, itself, a taboo subject until the turn of the millenium. Women's organizations such as "20 ans, Barakat!" are using new methods such as the internet to reach out to women at home and continue seeking new outlets for communication amongst women in Algeria ("Singing").

As women's outreach grew, there were heavy costs of life for their bold demonstrations: in August 1997, one hundred to three hundred men, women, and children were massacred in the city of Hai-Rais; in September of that same year, three hundred to five hundred were massacred in Bentalha because of anti-FIS sentiments.

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<sup>18</sup> "20 ans, Barakat!" translates "Twenty Years is Enough!" which refers to the twenty years of life under the Family Code. The name also echoes the slogan "7 ans, Barakat!" which was an anti-violence campaign when fighting broke out among Algerians after seven years of violence with the French ("Singing").

In 1999 Abdelaziz Bouteflika was elected president on promises to bring peace and stability to the terror-torn country. He also promised to include women issues into his economic reform program. He believed that the nation was not ready for drastic changes in the Family Code but hinted that minor changes would come into effect.

Finally in 2004, an amendment was made to the Family Code which feminists hailed as a small victory (Mammeri). Article fourteen allows a wife to divorce her husband without his agreement; article seventy-two guarantees a mother money to support herself and their children (Mammeri). The requirement of the wali was officially retained in the amendments although it has been weakened (US). Many women immediately divorced their husbands with the passing of this law (Mammeri).

Time, however, has shown this amendment to be a deceptive victory. Lawyer Ahmed Khababa says that although it is “designed to strengthen family ties, the new code has turned the futures of thousands of families to tragedy in a very short time” (Mammeri). The problem, Mammeri says, lies in article eight of the amendment. Article eight gives the conditions for polygamy: The first wife must be notified of her husband’s intention to marry a second wife (before notification was not necessary). The problem has become that few men abide by this law; most circumvent the law by turning to extramarital affairs. If a husband does not want to provide the money for an extra home after a divorce, he will simply not tell her of his other relationship. Many men wait for the pregnancy of the second, illegal wife to tell the first wife of his second relationship. Husbands then demand a judge validate his second marriage regardless of his first wife’s response. This demand is met 100% of the time (Mammeri).

To compound the difficulty of a wife divorcing her husband, a judge decides the amount of support money the wife and children will receive. Judges very often knowingly set the amount below the average price of rent. This forces wife and children into the streets or, at best, back into her parents' home (Mammeri).

Likewise, the child custody amendment has become "a means to justify a frequently unsavory end." If the husband has legal custody of the children, he does not have to pay rent for his ex-wife. Therefore, he will demand custody of the children in order not to pay to support them, even if they still live with their mothers (Mammeri). If the mothers are given custody of their children, permission from the father is still required for travel abroad and for educational decisions (US).

Therefore, although the 2005 amendment was "hailed...as a victory," the practicalities of abuse and circumvention of the law absolutely negates any sense of progress for women. In fact, president of SOS Women in Distress Meriem Bellala says that "the new code enshrines the downfall of Algerian women and their children" (Mammeri). Her organization, among many in the feminist movement, work tirelessly for the amendment's repeal.

Algerian President Bouteflika and his predecessors have been conservative, though honest, in keeping his promises of integrating women into the work place. The Ministry Delegate for the Female Condition and for the Family has been established to ensure legal rights for women (although the title sounds like being female is, indeed, a handicapped condition). In 2004 a law was passed that prohibits sexual harassment. However, discrimination in the work place is still common (US). Considering that 50% of today's university students are female, the 20-23% female component in the workforce

appears low. Although there are still pockets of social pressure against education for girls, especially in rural areas, girls have a higher rate of graduation than boys, 38.5% compared to 36%.

Even so, common law still rules the Algerian family. According to a study by Algeria's Minister for Families and Women Nouara Djaâfar, 50% of women simply do not know their rights and are uninformed about changes in the Family Code (Mammeri). Especially in rural Algeria, not only are new legal rights enforced, they are unknown.

Spousal abuse is a widely common in Algeria, yet according to a 2004 study with the cooperation of the Ministry of Justice, several women's associations, and the National Institute of Public Health, 70% of abused wives refuse to file a complaint against their husbands. Perhaps both social pressure as well as the lengthy process negates these complaints: According to article 264 of the Penal Code, only if a women is incapacitated for fifteen days or more and presents a doctor's note does she qualify to file charges of battery against her husband. Interestingly, the Penal Code does not account for spousal rape at all. In this instance, the societal pressure of taboo almost completely prohibits legal action for women (US).

Although improvements to the "female condition" are slow, women's associations strive to continue progressing towards an egalitarian society. Associations such as SOS Women in Distress encourage women to break these taboos to find justice and healing. SOS Women in Distress offers judicial and psychological counseling for abused women. SOS has many rape-crisis centers, but these centers are limited by their lack of resources (US). The overarching goal of women's organizations such as SOS is to encourage

women to speak out above and beyond social taboos to begin a dialogue to recognize these problems and resolve them.

## **II. A Forgetful Nation**

Women of Algeria played an essential role in the formation of their independent nation. Their cause prevailed, yet these women have not shared fully in the victory. Why has their participation in the republic been marginalized? Ernst Renan, a mid-nineteenth century French philosopher, explores the idea of historical oversight in his essay “What is a Nation?” In this essay, he attempts to identify the factor that determines a nation and concludes that common history creates a nation. More specifically, Renan argues that a common memory of history creates a nation. Renan says that “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common; and also that they have forgotten many things” (Renan 11). The combination of common memory and collective amnesia allow a people to bind themselves together. Only by erasing memories of division such as massacres and wars can a people feel united; he sees this amnesia only positively.

Frantz Fanon, one of Algeria’s most influential war commentators, is guilty of such forgetfulness, even during the war. Fanon projected a voice for women in his 1959 “Algeria Unveiled” but spoke only for the benefit of FLN morale. At the time of the essay’s publication, Algerians were sustaining the fifth year of revolution; Fanon wrote to rally the FLN and justify the sacrifices made by its people.

In “Algeria Unveiled,” Fanon envisions a new, proactive Algerian woman working in concert with the FLN. Immediately, Fanon recognizes the veiled woman as

the crux of the struggle between the colonizer and the colonized. The French measured their control over colonized Algeria by the loyalties of the Algerian women; according to the Arab Bureaus, the French assume the attitude, “Let’s win over the women, and the rest will follow” (Fanon 163). By affirming the importance of women and their rights in society, the French hoped to gain the favor of Algerian women. The French promised that by removing the traditional haik and embracing a European lifestyle, women would be freed from their subjugation in Algerian society. In this way, the French hoped to become their heroes and models, and Algerian culture would be destroyed. A small minority of women did unveil. The French were encouraged by these women and thought that the “Algerian woman would support Western penetration into the native society” (167).

However, this pressured alliance backfired: French pressure for the freedom of unveiling actually “strengthened traditional patterns of behavior” for the majority of Algerian women (173). Women responded to this pressured assimilation with “an attitude of counter-assimilation, of maintenance of a cultural, hence national, originality” thus affirming their loyalty to the Algerian people (184). In response to the French pressure, women rebelled and made veiling a visible support for their native Algeria.

Frantz Fanon’s “Algerian Unveiled” brought a heightened awareness to the importance of women in the formation of Algeria as an independent nation. In his efforts to assert and support the cause of the revolution, however, Fanon does not recognize the conundrum of the veil; the veil shows resistance to the French presence in Algeria, but it also oppresses women. Women were forced to choose between their colonial oppressions or patriarchal ones.

An example of historical tunnel vision is the subtle oversight of women in his published clinical observations “Colonial War and Mental Disorders.” His conclusions of this publication support the cause of the FLN. His patients at Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital, both French and Algerian, were referred after administering or undergoing torture treatments. Although this publication exposes the colonial injustices in Algerian society, the distress of women is not sufficiently addressed. Inadvertently Fanon’s “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” shows that although women give their loyalties and risk their lives for the emerging Algerian nation, they are not rewarded with post-traumatic stress treatment or other care. Medical attention given to Algerian women in Fanon’s text focuses primarily on their childbearing capacity rather than the capacities they adopted as active, Algerian revolutionaries.

Of the total eight specific cases published, five of the patients were Algerian men, two were French policemen, and one was a French woman. None of the cases focused on the symptoms or post-traumatic stress disorders of an Algerian woman. It is clear from the case information that Algerian women suffered great tragedies. They were not, however, offered the same treatment as the French population or the Algerian male.

For example, in Series A, Case No. 1, an Algerian male militant is impotent and secondarily depressed. An Algerian man goes into hiding after a mission goes awry; consequently, his wife is raped because she would not disclose his possible accomplices. She says she has been shamed and that he may repudiate her. He is referred to Fanon because of his frustration with his guilt-ridden impotence during extra-marital sex. The husband is being treated for guilt-triggered impotence rather than the raped and tortured wife. The wife provides a colorful, sorrowful background to the patient’s plight.

However, the husband is receiving treatment and the violated wife is not; the rape of the loyal wife is merely discussed in the course of the man's treatment.

These silenced voices of traumatized women find strength and healing in Assia Djebar. Djebar gives these silent Algerian women a voice to testify to their personal traumas. Directing *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoa* in 1976 and publishing *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* in 1980, Djebar has followed the evolution of the women through the Algerian Revolution and beyond. Rita Faulkner argues that Djebar modernizes Fanon's concepts of Algerian women and corrects his predictions that did not come to fruition. Because Fanon died in 1961, he was not able to witness to formation and progression (and regression) of the Algerian republic and the woman in it. In effect, Djebar's *Women of Algeria in Their Apartment* updates "Algeria Unveiled" by focusing on the lives of postcolonial woman rather than women idealized and objectified during the revolution.

Indeed, Algerian women's experience with forgetfulness has been isolating rather than uniting. Algeria officially recognizes the efforts and sacrifice of women in the war. For example, they are included among the casualties honored at the national shrine, Monument des Martyrs. Certain female characters are nationally revered for their sacrifices during the war. However, these remembrances are merely superficial when their rights are stripped away. This lack of practical respect is exemplified in the adoption of the Family Code to the national constitution. Women's restricted rights and their "inferiorization in the distribution of social and political roles" stifle their voices in the nation they fought to create (Writing, 82). Khalida Messaoudi says that she knew that "this text [the Family Code] was going to structure the entire society from that point on.

For [her], the whole business [of passing the Family Code] had really opened [her] eyes: the traitor was the Algerian state” (Salhi 7).

Djebar claims that Algerian women have been traumatized by the violence and the anxiety of the war; this trauma is compounded by the lack of practical recognition and respect in the law and in the home. Lacking a voice to properly share their testimony, these women are not allowed to properly heal from their traumas. Their absence from history—their lack of voice for testimony and for their rights—doubly traumatizes these women.

Thus, Algerian women’s experience with national forgetfulness is of betrayal rather than of unity. One Algerian man Patha Chaterjee says that “the story of nationalism is necessarily a story of betrayal. Nationalism confers freedom only by imposing new controls, denies a cultural identity for the nation only by excluding many from its fold, and grants the dignity of citizenship to some because others could not be allowed to speak for themselves” (Salhi 7). The silence of the women’s voice in history has allowed these “new controls” and exclusion.

Although women are honored in the official history of the Algerian War of Independence, they are forgotten in the law. After the war, the patriarchal society sought stability and normalcy and curbed women’s recent empowerment. Through historical oversight, Algerian patriarchal society “restores prestige, confidence, and pride to [the men] who have felt humiliated and wronged [by the French]. In Algeria the Islamists [fundamentalists of this society] have consciously reactivated, reformulated, and reinvented memories of the war for independence” (Turshen 907). Algerian society chose to forget their participation in the fight for a stable state. These women must be

returned to history and to equality under the law if they are to be “return[ed] to significance” to themselves and to their nation (Felman 50).

The message of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” insists that Djébar speak on behalf of the “subaltern” women of Algeria. Djébar replaces the politically motivated voice of Frantz Fanon with a voice that belongs to an Algerian woman. More importantly, her voice speaks *with* the Algerian woman. The subaltern, or subjugated woman of the revolution, must be spoken for; however, the patriarchal voice of the history cannot give the most accurate account of these women because of its biases and predispositions to the patriarch. This issue of historical accountancy leads to “the unrecognized contradiction within a position that valorizes the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual, is maintained by a verbal slippage” (Spivak 275). The conundrum of voice echoes that of the veil: “Both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (287). The subaltern Algerian woman has been forgotten in history and in law by the patriarchy of the society they liberated. Without representation “the subaltern woman will remain mute forever” (295).

Fanon and other male figures who come to represent the actions and essence of a time, unfortunately, construct this new subjugation of women in history. Fanon, himself, was a non-Muslim, a foreigner, an FLN militant, and a man; consequently, his attempts to speak *for* Algerian women were stifled by other conscious or subconscious agendas of the patriarchal society. Fanon, however, is not the only representation or

misrepresentation of Algerian women. In fact, men have written ninety percent of all literature about the Algerian revolution (Stora 79). Thus, the “description of the world of war [and therefore women during the war]... remains the privilege of the men who made it” (79).

As demonstrated in the brief chronology of the Algerian women’s experience or in emotionally-charged passages of Fanon’s “Algerian Unveiled,” Algerian women have been spoken for and silenced but are never allowed a voice. “The subaltern cannot speak” concludes Spivak (308). Therefore, “the female intellectual as intellectual [such as Djebbar] has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish” (Spivak 308). As an educated Algerian woman, Djebbar must testify to the experience of Algerian history. Her education and position allows her to “unveil” an Algeria that has never before been seen or heard—a woman’s Algeria.

### **III. Trauma Theory**

Cathy Caruth, editor of *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, compiles biological, psychological, and comparative literature studies to create an integrated understanding of trauma theory. Her understanding of trauma fortifies Djebbar’s own observations and conclusions of Algerian trauma. Caruth defines trauma as “confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schema of prior knowledge” (Caruth 153). According to world-renowned experts in trauma theory Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, the ease with which the situation is integrated into “existing mental structures” depends on the familiarity or at least the similarity of past experiences (160). “Frightening or novel experiences may not easily fit into existing cognitive

schemes and either may be remembered with particular vividness or may totally resist integration” (Van der Kolk 160). Prior knowledge allows easier integration of an event into memory; events that completely resist integration are stored differently.

The most obvious trauma for Algerian women would be the open warfare of the revolution. Considering the determination of the Algerian revolutionaries and the firm grip of the French colonists, the atrocities of the Algerian War of Independence were particularly brutal. The colonized turned to terror tactics. In the city, women were important to the success of these terrorist missions as depicted in *The Battle of Algiers*. Women bombed the European quarters or trafficked weaponry both in and out of the Casbah of Algiers. If captured by the French police, these women along with those providing support or refuge to FLN militants suffered the same punishments and tortures as men along with the addition of rape. As noted earlier in Fanon’s “Colonial War and Mental Disorders,” even women not directly involved with the FLN became victims of the French police. For example, wives whose husbands were missing but were not directly involved in the FLN resistance themselves were raped and tortured for information.

According to Caruth, the paradox of trauma is that the traumatic memory can be both inaccessible and irrepressible (in its reoccurrences). A flashback of the event is “the truth of an event and the truth of its incomprehensibility” (Caruth 153). The event’s “elision of memory and the precision of [its] recall” indicate that the event did not fully register in the victim’s consciousness during its occurrence.

Similarly, a victim’s loss of memory or uncertainty of an event is not due to the limited access of amnesia. Amnesia is not responsible for the gaps in memory; in fact,

the suspended memories are “too accessible in their horrible truth” (Caruth 6).

Traditionally, indirect or limited access was thought to be the main source of psychosis.

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) studies recognize that overwhelming access is an important source of psychosis, as well. Caruth says,

For the attempt to understand trauma brings one repeatedly to this peculiar paradox: that in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness.” (Caruth 6)

The suspended memory can neither be placed within the schema of previous experience nor can it be processed normally to expand the schema of knowledge to include it. The magnitude of the violence of the war was too great to process or come to understand immediately.

Freud also theorizes about this unprocessed memory. He says that the victim of such a memory “is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience, instead of...remembering it as something belonging to the past” (Van der Kolk 167). In this way, the victim remains constantly victimized by the event. “Trauma stops the chronological clock and freezes the moment permanently in memory and imagination, immune to the vicissitudes of time” (177). It forms a suspended memory, a constant re-experiencing of the traumatic event. In this way, Algerian women (along with Algerian men) suffered from the unforeseen brutalities of the revolution even after it ended. Through obsessions and flashbacks or apparent amnesia, the immediate trauma of the revolution continued.

Djebar also describes a more subtle form of trauma for Algerian women. In an essay, “Notes on Trauma and Community,” Kai Erikson calls this insidious trauma “collective trauma.” His general definition of collective trauma elucidates Djebar’s

application of it to Algerian women. Interestingly, in Djébar's assessment, the war of colonization is not the source of this trauma; postcolonial rule is the culprit. Djébar "creates a female counterhistory that destabilizes the sharp [historical] break between colonization and decolonization by foregrounding the process of continual [female] resistance and of collaboration" against both French and patriarchal powers (Donadey 891). The overall shift from self-assertion and action against the French into submission under postcolonial patriarchal rule has had a traumatizing effect on these women.

The Algerian War of Independence gave to women "a changed sense of self and a changed sense of relating to others" (Erikson 194). These women were empowered by their participation in the making of their nation and were later stripped of that empowerment, representing a secondary trauma. Historian Benjamin Stora argues that since independence in 1962, women's "inferiorization in the distribution of social and political roles offers them the temptation to take refuge [again] in the genre of personal story" (Stora, "Writing" 82). By organizing her thoughts and her experience for the purpose of narration or testimony, the Algerian woman restores a "personal history" to herself. For Djébar, the personal story of the Algerian woman is her lament. This restoration of individual history resonates with the histories of others and cumulates in the common memory of a people, as Renan describes it: The Algerian woman is restoring herself to national history.

Again, this resurrects the idea of Renan's "What is a Nation?" By failing to recognize the same bravery in women and allowing their testimonies to be told (therefore remembered), Algeria is forgetting these women's efforts and denying their right to history. Because 90% of war-related literature has been written by the men of this strict

patriarchal society, documentation of Algerian women's wartime experiences has been neglected, and therefore largely lost to history (Stora, "Writing" 79).

Thus, Erikson defines collective trauma as:

a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma." (Erikson 187)

This notion of collective trauma is appropriate for describing the sustained experience of the war's effects on the war generation and the generations that followed.

Laura Brown's essay "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma" also supports the idea of collective trauma. She names Erikson's collective trauma insidious trauma for her own purposes. Brown says that insidious trauma damages not necessarily the physical or the obvious mental health of a woman but "damage[s] the soul and spirit" (Brown 107). Using Brown's interpretation of insidious trauma, trauma over long durations of time must cause problems of greater depth than the disrupted menstrual cycles and puerperal psychoses of Fanon's "Colonial War and Mental Disorders."

Brown insists that living in a culture where oppressive behavior is considered normal traumatizes women. She refers to the trauma caused to a minority or oppressed group by the majority culture. Brown argues that this insidious trauma "can spread laterally throughout an oppressed social group...when membership in that group means a constant lifetime risk of exposure to certain trauma" (Brown 108). The environment of high anxiety, torture, and the following silence traumatized women even after French defeat, including those who may have escaped more visible scars of war. The oppressive

environment for women did not end, however, with Algerian victory. The FLN quickly reinforced the same stifling restrictions on women with the intention of maintaining stability in the state.

In addition to the “horizontal” spread of trauma that Brown describes, there is also a fundamental trauma handed down through generations. Thus, trauma moves not only horizontally through the generation that lived through the war but also vertically to the generations that followed. In the generations that follow, this trauma may not “have the quality of suddenness” but it certainly has similar effects.

Dori Laub specializes in the post-traumatic healing of Holocaust victims. From clinical testimonies of his patients, Laub attests to this generational trauma. He says his Holocaust patients often attempt to shield themselves “from knowing and from grieving, a loss they could henceforth only relive as haunting memory in real life, at once through the actual return of the trauma and through its inadvertent repetition, or transmission from one generation to another (Laub 67). When a victim of flashbacks reacts to them in the present, this re-enactment of the event or rather of the emotional response to the event becomes its *enactment* to a younger generation. In such an environment, trauma poisons the development of those around him or her and can affect secondary parties.

Laub says that for healing to occur, a trauma victim must give a testimony or narrative of the event. This testimony will ultimately help integrate a traumatic event into the “schema of...knowledge.” Van der Kolk and van der Hart agreed that “traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language” (176). Only when the event becomes a “narrative memory” by becoming understood by

the victim does the recall of the event stop. The traumatic event is therefore never fully experienced or digested because there is no understanding on which to place it:

The trauma requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure...the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory...allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one's own, and to others' knowledge of the past." (Caruth 153)

Simply put, healing requires testimony; testimony allows the story to be externalized through the telling and sharing the experience with another. This telling sets it into the structure of a narrative which provides a time and place for the traumatic event. By externalizing the incompletely processed experience in a narrative form, the event is anchored in a time and place, giving it a beginning and an end; the victim does not have to perpetually relive this experience. The event has been anchored into a schema that can be understood in terms of time and place.

Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel writes, "If someone else could have written my stories, I would not have written them. I have written them in order to testify. And this is the origin of the loneliness that can be glimpsed in each of my sentences, in each of my silences" (3). For Wiesel, testimony is not only necessary to heal, it is a responsibility to history, to those with similar experiences, and to those who have not experienced the event. The burden of testifying is two-fold: a witness must bear the trauma of the event and its psychological consequences. The witness must also give an account of his or her traumatic experience to claim its significance in history and in turn claim his or her significance to society. The event may be documented, but the *experience* is equally important and equally true. A testimony shares this experience but most importantly ends trauma's cycle of wounding within a victim and within her society.

Because Algerian women are not allowed to participate in public dialogue (dialogue beyond their familial, feminine spaces in the home) about their traumatizing experiences in the war and cannot practice the same rights as men, they have not had the same opportunities to heal; their testimonies have not been told. Silenced Algerian women are still suffering the traumas of the past along with the injustices of today.

Van der Kolk and van der Hart also recognize the narrative process as a socializing process. Because traumatic memory is a solitary activity with no social element, the victim feels isolated and can become increasingly isolated through flashbacks and “fixations” on the traumatic event. The narrative process re-socializes the victim and functions as an “appeal for reconnection” (Van der Kolk 163).

The Algerian woman will find a community with a similar story; her voice will be answered with a chorus. In his essay “Notes on Trauma and Community,” Kai Erikson tells about the “form of fellowship on the strength of [a] common bond” of a traumatic experience (187). He continues by saying that a traumatized community “can supply a human context and a kind of emotional solvent in which the work of recovery can begin...in the gathering of the wounded” (Erikson 187). Djébar’s laments call Algerian women to a similar community of healing.

Algerian women who suffered in both colonial war and in the forgetfulness of the postcolonial times look for an outlet of healing through testimony. These women seek peace within themselves and a return to their place in history. Assia Djébar is this voice. She speaks not *on* these women but *with* them. Her film *La Noubia des femmes du Mont Chenoua* and her short story collection *Women of Algiers in Their Apartments* provide the voice to testify, lament, and await a chorus of voices in reply. Assia Djébar

intervenes for her Algerian sisters. Finally, a voice is raised for Algerian women—her voice.

**DJEBAR'S *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua***

*"I imagine you, the unknown woman, whose tale is handed down from storyteller to storyteller; now I, too, take my place in the unchangeable circle of listening. I re-create you, the invisible woman, ancestress of ancestress the first expatriate."*

*Assia Djébar*

*La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, Djébar's first film, explores the daily lives of Algerian women in the postcolonial world. Djébar creates a lament in the form of a nouba, a classical Andalusian symphony. Through the medium of film, Djébar integrates both audio and visual elements of a lament into a symphony of the experience of Algerian women. Through song, silence, and interviews, Djébar documents the struggles of these women in the postcolonial world. Djébar's *La Nouba* is revolutionary, though subtly so, because she records a woman's voice in a patriarchal world where women are silent and because she films their memories and experiences in a world where they have been forgotten.

*La Nouba* is framed by the story of Leila, the protagonist of this docu-fiction, who returns to her childhood home in the Algerian countryside to rediscover her maternal roots and the suffering that these women endure. Leila mirrors Djébar, herself a native to Chernell, the central town of the Chenoua countryside. Like Djébar, Leila discloses that she was separated from the traditional maternal world in pursuit of higher education. The rift from the woman's traditional world of the harem and veil grew when she attended college abroad and was later imprisoned for revolutionary activity. The fragmented presentation of Leila's past is representative of her fragmented memory but makes a

complete biographical history difficult to assemble. As she explores, Leila shares in the histories of these women from her home; similar to Djébar, she recognizes that because of her absence she returns partly foreign. “I am a stranger in my own home,” Leila admits. Through the movements of the musical lament, Leila slowly unearths the history of her homeland and the Algerian War of Independence through interviews with the women.

Djébar approaches the lives and stories of these women curiously but objectively. Her film allows both an exterior view of Algerian women through Leila’s interviews with local women and an interior view as we follow Leila on her journey towards healing. In this way, Djébar seeks individual and collective healing through testimony. Djébar says, “My film is not a difficult film. What I ask of the viewer is some effort” (Bensmaïa 877). Unlike the raw emotion and trauma of Fanon and Portocorvo, the audience must *listen* to their stories. Through listening to their testimonies, access is allowed into their memories and into their traumas; in turn, these traumatized women begin to heal.

Like the history of Algeria, the word “la nouba” is the hybridization of many cultures and has more than one meaning. The Arabic translation of la nouba is an Andalusian symphony with particular rhythmic movements, but in Algerian and Moroccan dialects it means “turn” (Khannous 44). Djébar’s French introduction of the film defines *La Nouba des femmes* as “histoire des femmes (qui parlent ‘à leur tour’)” which translates as “history of women who speak in their turn” (44).

The rhythmic movements of the nouba gives structure to Djébar’s film. The symphony is composed of four parts: “Meceder,” “Btaihi,” “Derj,” and “Nesraf.” A musical overture “Touchia” opens this main body of the song. Together, the overture and

the body are framed by a prelude “Istikhbar” and a finale “Khlass” (Bensmaia 882). These beginning and ending movements are the most traditional laments because of their straightforward combination of lyrics and music.

The pieces of the nouba are fragmented shots of the landscape, interviews with women, and musical pieces. Due to its fragmented nature, the collective narrative of the nouba is woven from these smaller narrative pieces. The litany repeats, “I was no longer seeking anything, but I listen/ I listen to memory in tatters.” The fragmentation of the film mirrors the psychological fragmentation of memories through interviews, flashbacks, and silences. The broader narrative is Leila’s discovery of historically unrecorded war stories and memories of the Mont Chenoua women. The narrative threads give life to the structure of the nouba. The nouba is more than a chronological account of the war. It encompasses women’s experience of the war and their attempts to heal through testimony.

Paradoxically, Djebbar found that the traditionally reserved nature of the women of Mount Chenoua was quickly swept aside in their eagerness to tell their experiences of trials and courage. Djebbar says

So it was in a silent Algeria,/ old women whispering by night/ and these stories because/ wonder in the dreams of children/ and history was revisited/ by this fire, in broken words/ and voices searching for one another.../ The dead are martyrs for the revolution. (*La Nouba*)

By connecting with these “old women whispering by night,” Djebbar hopes to inspire a community of women, who sharing memory through “broken words,” seek to heal their broken, traumatic pasts.

The lament is appropriate because it is a mourning song traditionally sung by Algerian women. In the public sector, the woman’s voice is scarce, but in a lament, her

voice resonates in the emotion that her experience evokes. Djébar said, “For me filmmaking is not abandoning the [written Arabic] word for the image, but creating a sound image. It is a return to the source via language” (Mortimer, “Quartet” 11). The sound of the Algerian woman’s voice is the source sought.

The poetry of these intertwined movements in the *nouba* provides an outlet of expression for these women. Without the music or words of the *nouba*, the camera shots would lose important thoughts and emotions of the women. As Holocaust survivor Paul Celan says, “The language was not lost but remained, yes, in spite of everything” (Felman 28). He says that grief cannot be properly expressed in prose, and in this way justifies the necessity for song or poetry after a traumatic experience. Similarly, Djébar depends on the lament to express the anguish of traumatized Algerian women. The lament as song gives an emotional perspective of the women and divulges the thoughts and memories behind their silent gazes. The silence of these women is not caused by amnesia but rather by constant flashbacks of traumatic events. The inability to articulate experience through ordinary language is, at the same time, a symptom of trauma and a perpetuating element of trauma. Therefore, the camera lens cannot relay their thoughts and experience alone. The lament is a means of accessing the traumatic event. By this access, language externalizes an event in order to reemerge from the repetitive re-wounding of trauma.

Celan also emphasizes the importance of silence in post-traumatic poetry. He says that “one of the truths hardest to demonstrate is that music is not just the ‘Art of Sound’—that it must be defined rather as a counter point of sound and silence” (Felman 37). The juxtaposition of sound and silence is not necessarily the communication of pain

and the non-communication of pain. Rather, silence is the manifestation of trauma and emotions that have yet to be healed. Supported by modern trauma theory, Celan sees pain in silences, as well: “The breakage of the verse enacts the breakage of the world” (Felman 25). The multitude of silences throughout the film, including music unaccompanied by voice, speaks of society’s suffocation of women’s war memories.

The “turn” suggested by one translation of “la nouba” also include Djébar’s turning from third cinema to fourth cinema<sup>19</sup>. Third cinema is the “cinema of decolonization” which in itself is revolutionary (3). It subverts the colonizer’s control of pop-culture values and propaganda with the values and messages of the colonized. Djébar revolutionizes cinema to a new dimension; her creation of “fourth cinema” is driven by the perspective of colonized women and includes their participation (Khanna, 34). Her fourth cinema has a “conscious feminist and political sensibility, for it captures the voices and gazes of women who shared in the making of Algerian history and culture” (Khannous 46). Djébar’s cinema recognizes “places where women have lived for all time and invested their presence, places that traditional cinema have never been able to reconnoiter... It is a matter, above all, of making a topography of feminine places, the map of a continent as yet undiscovered, at the same time as inventing a new chronotype: that of feminine time(s)” (Bensmaïa 878). It critiques both the colonizer and male-colonized; the oppression of Algerian women does not end with the victory of Algerian independence in 1962, but continues in a self-governed Algeria. *La Nouba des*

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<sup>19</sup> Khanna classifies cinema into four classes: first cinema is commercial cinema that reflects the values of the ruling class for the consumption of all. Second cinema celebrates decolonization but uses the conventional techniques of first cinema and is therefore unable to move past the underlying ideology and consumerism of first cinema. Third cinema is also the cinema of decolonization, but in it the “camera is a weapon” of war (124); third cinema “resists the cultural imperialism of first cinema hegemonic consumerism” but in masculine representation (106). Lastly, fourth cinema integrates the representation of the subaltern in colonial and postcolonial experience (124).

*femmes du Mont Chenoua* testifies that “nationalism used women’s revolutionary labor and returned them to the patriarchal household structure in the aftermath of independence” (Khannous 45). Djebbar uses her film to acknowledge this oppression and return women to full citizenship in the Algerian republic.

Djebbar says that women’s cinema “begins with the *desire for the word*. As if ‘to film’ means for women a mobility of voice and body, the body not gazed upon, but unsubmitive, retrieving its autonomy and innocence” (Mortimer, “Quartet” 12). In an interview, Djebbar recalls when she first said the word “action,” “I was overcome by a new emotion. As if, together with me, every woman in every harem whispered ‘Action’... Theoretically you have equal rights, but ‘inside’ only, confined, in your own quarters” (De Jager 857). She names both French colonialism and the post-colonial patriarchy as the culprits of women’s oppression and silence.

Director Gillo Portocorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* is the third cinema’s most popular and authentic depiction of the Algerian War of Independence (Tirana). In Algeria, “with its multiple languages and its high illiteracy rate, film and radio provide different technologies of nationalism in which one can see reflected, as in a mirror, the desire to create a homogenous Algerian national identity” (Khanna 107). The fighters’ passion for freedom while at the risk of death caught on film and the victorious outcome of the war feed into the patriotism and unity of the new Algerian republic. The film uses a black and white, grainy screen that is similar to that of a newsreel to appear as original documentary footage rather than cinematic entertainment (109). In this way, the film helped spread “official nationalism that privileges the masculine in filmic representation” which was adopted as the new national image (113).

For example, after the Casbah is bombed by the French police and Algerian men dig out the bodies of their Casbah neighbors, women line the rooftops and balconies for wailing and lamentations. However, rather than hear the ululations<sup>20</sup> of the women's mourning songs and shrieks, a symphony by Italian composer Ennio Morricone overlays their voices. Consequently, these women are absolutely silent; this very scene creates the space and the need for fourth cinema. Djebbar focuses on the very voices that are silenced in Portocorvo's *Battle*. Djebbar finds powerful emotion in authentic Algerian ululations rather than fabricated sorrow in foreign sounds.

Literary critic and theorist Ranjana Khanna also finds *The Battle of Algiers*'s representation of Algerian women lacking. She claims that Djebbar's *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* restores the female experience to the screen. Khanna is critical of a scene in which three Algerian women are featured. These three women agree to cooperate with the FLN after the French bombing of the Casbah. The metamorphosis of the Algerian women into seemingly Europeanized women is one of the most famous scenes of *Battle*, but also one of the most misleading. While they change their clothes, apply makeup, and cut and dye their hair, no words are exchanged. The original scripted dialogue amongst the women is removed (Khanna 132). Only the beating of the traditional Algerian drum can be heard which is somewhat reminiscent of the dramatics of Frantz Fanon's "Algeria Unveiled" essay. When the women receive instructions and bombs for their missions, the music is switched, again, the "somber hymn-like Western

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<sup>20</sup> Ululations are an extremely high-pitched yodeling or wailing cry to express extreme emotions of joy or sorrow; they are most often associated with Moroccan and Algerian women.

classical music” of Ennio Morricone (115); this reinforces the idea that the moment of highest intensity or importance must be upheld by the sounds of a foreigner and a man.

The use of the mirror in the scene is also indicative of women’s misrepresentation in *Battle*. For the majority of the transfiguration scene, the camera films not the women but the reflection of the women in the mirror. The actual women are hardly filmed at all. In this same way, Fanon saw the Algerian woman through the “lens” of the revolution rather than seeing the woman as her own agent. Khanna says that “the omnipresence of the mirror gives the effect that we are entering into the consciousness of the three, who are also symbols” (116). On the contrary, the women do not give access to their inner thoughts during the silence. The audience only enters into the crafted perception (mirror reflection) of the male cinema (116).

Djebar decided to work in televised cinema for the same reasons that colonial and patriarchal powers did: a televised film would require neither literacy nor a trip to the cinema to give women access to each other’s lives and losses (Khanna 125). Interestingly, “although *La Nouba* was funded by RTA [Radio-Television-Algerien], it was shown only once to great disapproval as it was thought to give a disrespectful and limited view of male war veterans” (125). It also noteworthy that Algeria’s sole television channel (as well as national radio stations) was directly controlled by the president (Gafaïti 55). Apparently, the revolution of Djebar’s fourth cinema was not well received by the politically revolutionary third cinema.

Although Djebar may have displeased the traditionally masculine cinema, she was careful not to recreate the sense of orientalism<sup>21</sup> that had previously dominated Algerian

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<sup>21</sup> Orientalism is the interaction with the “other” that creates the illusion of barriers rather than exploring to gain a sense of understanding of the other. This “occidental” view of the other nurtures a sense of

cinemas during colonial times. Djebbar intentionally “turns” from foreign film direction to native perspective. She respects Muslim-Algerian tradition during the entire filming of *La Noubia* by never invading the private spaces of women inside the home or filming an unveiled woman of child-bearing age. The film shows both very young children and old women. The faces filmed across the countryside and in family courtyards are prepubescent, young girls and post-menopausal elderly women of Mount Chenoa “who are free from Muslim society’s restrictions upon women’s enclosure” (Mortimer, “Reappropriating” 220).

There is, however, a very obvious lack of adolescent and middle-aged women in the film. Djebbar’s “camera skillfully acknowledges interdiction by capturing glimpses of veiled women slipping into the shadows of a doorway as well as houses with their windows shut tight” (Mortimer, “Reappropriating” 220). Actually, Djebbar’s only indoor footage shoots actors. Djebbar wants to capture the lives of Algerian women; however, unlike her predecessors who represented Algerian women through stolen glances such as French painter Delacroix<sup>22</sup>, Djebbar respects the customs and space of these Muslim families. Djebbar is painfully aware that she is almost a “stranger in [her] own country” (*La Noubia*). In her attempt to reject the intruding eye of the colonist, Djebbar cannot support this same voyeurism. Djebbar acknowledges these women by filming their haiks as they float down the street or into a compound, yet she is unobtrusive. Although she finds the tradition of hiding of women oppressive, she respects the women who abide by it.

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voyeurism into the realm of the other; it “constructs the colonized as a frozen image of otherness without history” (Khannous 44).

<sup>22</sup> Delacroix and his two famous renditions of *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* are analyzed more fully in my following chapter, “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment.”

As she films, Assia Djébar also respects the women as well as the family traditions. Her interviews with the women out the Mount Chenoua countryside are in a Berber dialect of Arabic. To maximize the audience of the film, Leila gives a summary of the story in French while the interviewee is speaking. The superimposed French voice is heard yet does not overwhelm or dub the Arabic one. In this way, Djébar does not claim to speak for Algerian woman but rather to speak “with” or “very close to” the voice of the Algerian woman as they share their war and post-war experiences (Donadey 889). Djébar is not seeking to *veil* the women’s speech with her own but communicate and share their voices. Djébar’s cinema gives women the opportunity to speak in film or have their history documented. Finally in *La Noubba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, the cinema and television audience can directly hear the actual voices that oriental and patriarchal cinema have previously overwritten or silenced.

Djébar uses *La Noubba* to “turn” from the masculine, electrifying war re-enactment exemplified in *The Battle of Algiers* to feminine spaces in the wake of the war. Juxtaposed to *The Battle of Algiers* and Djébar’s other postcolonial publications, *La Noubba* is especially surprising and poignant. Rather than visual flashbacks of violence, rape, and torture, Djébar films open landscapes and quiet courtyards. The wildly traumatic War of Independence and the patriarchal oppression that followed are not lost in this film, however. These traumas become integrated into everyday life. The dramatics of Fanon’s metaphorical psychoanalysis and Portocorvo’s “camera as weapon” are missing, yet the women’s voices and gazes are present and authentic (Khanna 124). The women, themselves, and the stories of their past are the instruments of drama.

The four movements that make up the body of the nouba allow different women a “turn” to testify. These movements personalize the sorrow expressed in the nouba. The film opens to Leila’s story. She acts on Djébar’s behalf by interviewing the women of Mont Chenoua. In doing so, she holds the fragments of the nouba together. Her presence and her repetitious laments throughout the film adhere the fragments of interviews, music, and images together. Leila fulfills the role of narrator because the camera lens sees as she would see and focuses either on her gazing out or the horizon to which her gaze looks.

In the first scene Leila is introduced with her back to the camera and to her husband. She says, “I speak, I speak, I speak...I do not want to be seen. I do not want [my husband Ali] to look at me” (*La Nouba*). Djébar uses the very first shot of the narrative to symbolically “turn” her back on the patriarchal gaze of her husband and the traditionally patriarchal gaze of cinema that would focus on the experience of the husband. Immediately, the feminine focus of the film is established. In this first scene, Leila moves past her husband and approaches the window to gaze out towards the horizon. The camera pans from the dismal interior of their fragmented home and marriage to the bright outdoors. This movement towards the outside world sets the tone for a film spent largely out of the home and into the community in search of collaborative healing through the testimonials of the Mount Chenoua countryside.

It is evident, though not explicit, that Leila is granted certain rights of movement that other women lack. Having been abroad and then imprisoned for a total of fifteen years, Leila is not accustomed to the female limitations of the traditional Algerian home. Instead, she navigates the countryside veil-less to interview other women in their own

domains. Of course, her husband Ali is injured and temporarily confined to the domestic sphere. In his state of immobility, Ali has the same feelings of stifling imprisonment that Leila has already expressed. He is frustrated because he is unable to maintain his roles as husband-lover when he cannot enter the bedroom because of his wheelchair and as husband-provider when he is still too fragile to work. Leila uses this time alone for her own recovery and reconciliation to the trauma suffered by her homeland and her maternal roots as she ventures out, able-bodied, from her home.

Djebar returns to the window motif throughout her work. The window is a woman's connection to the outside world. This "outlet" is used antagonistically—through it the woman watches but is also watched. There is a strong sense of "being watched" in the film; Leila suffers from feelings of suffocation and entrapment and constantly gazes out into the outside world to escape the growing claustrophobia of her home. Djebar constantly directs the women's gaze towards the horizon on the sea or countryside and away from the hearth and the bedroom.

These gazes both into and out of the home provide a rare view of Algerian feminine spaces in film. Djebar creates a map of the countryside by "making a topography of feminine places." In what Bensmaïa calls the "esthetic of the fragment," Djebar uses the camera lens to break the dimensions of time and space (878). Djebar establishes the psychological life of her women characters by compiling fragments in a "geodetic" survey: filming fragments of the geographical or architectural places where traumatic events had occurred (878). Djebar shoots public squares, homes, courtyards, and countryside with the testimonials that provide the history of these landscapes; by doing so, the audience is privy to the "abyss of memory" with which these landscapes are

haunted (Bensmaïa 880). In this way, the fragmented landscapes of Algeria parallel the fractured memories and lives of these women. Both the land and the women have witnessed the atrocities of war and have remained silent. The secrets and struggles of the dead are literally buried within its soil.

Ali and Leila's bedroom scene is not a traditional cinematic bedroom scene at all. Leila tucks their child Aisha into her bed and falls asleep herself. Ali approaches the room but because of his wheelchair he cannot make the step up to enter the room. Rather, he sits in the doorway and stares desirously at Leila. She is entirely unaware of his needs and desires. Leila, on the other hand, is facing problems invisible to Ali as well. Leila suffers from nightmares of violent deaths and rows of guns. "The marriage disintegrates in "the wife's inability to bury the past...coupled with the husband's inability to act" and his frustration in his lack of control (Mortimer, "Reappropriating" 218). The lack of communication in the household stifles their relationship.

Later scenes extenuate the lack of communication. On a trip to the ruins of a tomb constructed for a Roman wife, Ali is able to walk with crutches. He approaches Leila and sits near her, but she wanders away from him, meditating on her experiences in the war that she has yet to share. Her hesitation for communion with Ali seems more reasonable in light of the trauma still unshared. Her inability to share her traumatic experiences with Ali in ordinary language suggests that Leila, herself, is fraught with disturbing flashbacks and has yet to flesh out her own testimony.

Leila continually repeats a litany to herself: "I was fifteen [at the time of the revolution], but I had a hundred years of suffering." The repetition of this litany becomes chorus-like in the film; perhaps this repetition and skewed sense of time shows how the

wounding of a traumatic event continues over and over again in the mind of the victim. Her painful memories are without the borders of ordinary time because she has yet to fully integrate them into understanding. Leila's lack of communicating her experiences only prolongs these woundings. Leila, however, feels she must share in the communal memory of the women of Mount Chenoua first. Through her probing, she hopes to create an accurate account of women's participation in the war and restore the voice to these silenced women. Through the healing medium of the voice, Leila hopes to create a community of testimony that will ameliorate the isolated suffering of these women.

Basic communication is absent in Leila and Ali's marriage. Djébar uses this marriage to demonstrate that the post-colonial home is divided by "walls between people" and "walls between hearts" even in a marriage of well-intended spouses (*La Noubia*). These walls are built by a lack of communication. Leila talks of a glass house she longs to build. In this transparent home, men might learn to look at women the same way outdoors as they do indoors. Her glass home would not have these "walls between people," or, more importantly, walls between their hearts. Leila realizes that even a glass house would not cure marriages. Veiled or unveiled, she says that "all women are watched" (*La Noubia*).

Zoulika's legend is one of the other major threads of the noubia. Her husband had led the resistance against colonial rule but was captured and executed by the French. In 1955 and 1956, she stepped into her husband's position and organized the resistance in the city of Chernell and its surrounding mountainside of Chenoua. The people called her both "mother" and "the anarchist." After a long struggle, Zoulika was surrounded by French jeeps and tanks; a wailing crowd is drawn into the streets. She chastised them,

victoriously saying, “Why are you crying? See all this turmoil is because of a woman!” Zoulika was tortured, killed, and left in a public square. The mutilation and display of Zoulika’s body is directly traumatizing to the people of Chernell. In the night, her body was stolen and buried in the forest both for her honor and to ease the consternation of the townspeople.

This epic tale is graphically and proudly told to Leila by an elderly woman of Mount Chenoua who lived in Chernell during the murder of Zoulika. During this gruesome telling, a barbed-wired window is shown for one moment and then a trickling Roman fountain is filmed for the remainder of the story. The incongruence between the soundtrack and the image in this scene is striking. The remnants of an ancient Roman occupation are a reminder of the centuries of colonialism in Algeria; the ills of colonialism are no new hurt for Algerian women. When Zoulika asks why the townspeople are crying, she was recognizing that women had become crucial to the birth of the Algerian nation. She is triumphant in her participation in the movement towards freedom and hopes that women’s heroism be honored and retained through her legend.

Cherifa is another thread of Djébar’s nouba. The image of her sitting in a tree is the first image of *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoa* although her story is not introduced until later. Leila met her in prison. Cherifa was thirteen when the Algerian War of Independence broke out. She joined the mountainside resistance along with her brothers. Her brother was shot next to the tree in which she was hiding. She stayed in the tree for two nights until the French left the area. She climbed down and was the first to the body of her brother. During the course of the seven-year revolution, her husband

and three sons were taken from her and eventually killed, along with the brother murdered before her young eyes.

Since Leila's time in prison, Cherifa has been released. Leila, however, cannot bring herself to visit Cherifa; Leila says that the wounding from her long-term anxieties and traumatic events are too terrible to witness. Cherifa's image is especially significant to Leila because Leila is on a quest to find out the fate of her own brother<sup>23</sup> Zulika who disappeared during the war. Eventually, she finds an old woman from the mountainside who tells her of his sorry demise: He was tortured and killed by the French. This is the twelfth casualty in her family, including her mother.

The haunting image of Cherifa in the tree is replayed throughout the film as a reminder of the steady continuation of her trauma and its long-lasting effects. Other repetitive images function similarly, for example Roman aqueducts, the Roman wife's tomb, and military watchtowers. These ruins go unused in present-day Algeria, centuries after Roman expansion or Algerian revolution; Djébar, however, is aware of their imposing presence. She inserts their video clips throughout the film, although they could otherwise seem disconnected. Leila wonders about the ways to entomb a woman—a physical tomb to idolize and objectify her body like the Roman tomb, the white haik as a symbolic burial shroud, the emotional entombment of a silent marriage that builds a “wall” of non-communication, or even the unmarked tomb of moujihaddat Zoulika. In this archeology of the allegorical landscape, Leila searches for testimonies that will unearth these buried memories and muted voices of the women that live there.

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<sup>23</sup> Djébar's brother was imprisoned in France during the war for revolutionary activities (Minnesota). Here is another example of Djébar's pseudo-autobiography.

The ruins of the Roman Empire and the revolution are reminders of colonization and repression. But repression, injustice, and surveillance persist for half the country's population. Watchful eyes are still present in Algeria: Djébar says "all women are watched," with and without the veil, inside or outside the home. Clips of women walking in haiks are also repeated throughout the film. The repetition of these images allows the image of the haik to be categorized with the repetitive images already mentioned, Cherifa in the tree, Roman ruins, and soldier watchtowers. In this way, Djébar infers that haiks are the ruin of past colonialisms, as well. Like the soldier watchtowers that dot the countryside, these haiks are left from the Algerian revolution; they are, however, still in daily use although their function as an anti-French statement has been eradicated.

Finally, Leila fully reconnects with Algerian women in a cave scene at Oued Riah (Dondey 890). By choosing to film this reconnection with women of Mount Chenoua in the same caves that a previous generation were suffocated and burned in, Djébar creates a "superimposition of different eras," connecting all generations of Algerian women; this cave scene creates "feelings of continuity between diverse women's struggles" throughout history (890). Djébar recalls the continuity of the suffering and sacrifice of Algerian women by creating parallel scenes: Leila lights candles alone in remembrance of her female ancestors set ablaze in the same cave (890). By doing so, Leila hopes to re-establish this community of female understanding through practices of commemoration and mourning. The women, in turn, welcome her back to the maternal roots of her native land.

The gathering in the cave is reminiscent of past conflicts such as the initial French conquest and colonization of Algeria in 1830. Women and children would gather in

these underground spaces to hide from the enemy while their husbands, sons, and fathers would fight the enemy above ground. Here, the women would wait and pray in communion with one another. They were sheltered from violence and the making of history yet were still subject to it and wounded by it.

Leila is shot pacing the cave alone and says, “One day, here, the enemy asphyxiated you by fire. Alive.” In her essay “Rekindling the Vividness of the Past: Assia Djébar’s Films and Fiction,” Anne Donadey refers to a specific incident that may have inspired Djébar’s cave scenes. On June 25, 1845, Marshall Bugeaud, commander of French troops in Algeria, set aflame these same caves, killing 1,500 men, women, and children of the Chenoua mountainside. According to Staff Colonel Pelissier, the women chose to remain with the men in the caves even after the fires were set ablaze outside (Budgin-Markin 900). This scene, though only alluded to in *La Noubia*, allowed Algerian women to make their own decision to surrender their loyalties and live or embrace a united Algerian community. They chose to give their loyalty and their lives to this union.

A scene of a lively gathering of women from across the countryside of Mount Chenoua parallels Leila’s lonesome memorial. Despite the horrific past of this cave space, these women light candles for a celebration. Music plays; a woman steps into the center space to dance and a child mimics her movements. By participating in the celebration of her heritage, this dancing girl represents Djébar’s hope for future generations. She is able “return to feminine space and to the female collectivity” (Mortimer, “Reappropriating” 219). Djébar reconnects to her lost Berber roots and to her native land in this image; the dancing duo, young and old, embrace this haunted space and give it new life.

After this scene of “female collectivity,” Leila reflects on a boat ride along the rocky coastline. Her reconnection “concludes with a solitary outward journey...alone in a fishing boat, sail[ing] out to sea...She leaves behind both the house that conveyed unhappiness [in her marriage] and the women of Mount Chenoua who helped her move past painful memories” (Mortimer, “Reappropriating” 219).

Throughout *La Nouba*, the sea has been a source of meditation for Leila. The Mediterranean is a crucial element in both the first scene and in the last. Initially, we see Leila scanning the horizon for a glimpse of Europe, perhaps thinking of her Paris education as a means of escape. Yet, when Leila sails along the coastline at the end, she says, “The sea [is] rising, not to leave but to return.” When Leila says, “I’m not looking for anything. I just remember that I was looking,” Leila is, in fact, searching for a reconnection with the women of Chernell and the land. In the end, Leila looks not to the sea for answers but into Algeria itself. Leila continues, saying, “I am not looking for anything, but I listen. It is for you that I would like to listen.” She is listening for the testimonies that would bring healing for herself and to the women and reconcile them to the land and history of Algeria. After her interviews with the women of Mount Chenoua, Leila finally finds peace in their testimonies within herself and within the land.

The finale of the lament “Khllass” ends with this verse (Khannous 58):

O Queens of Chenoua  
Accept my greetings  
Your heart has been distraught  
From the sufferings of the past  
Every evening  
Every morning  
You who understands the symbols  
My song speaks always of freedom  
I intercede for all the martyrs  
So that the others would not be oppressed

The sick woman will recover from her woe  
She will say “I am liberated”  
To the confined women  
We have justified the veil  
But now  
Begins the day of freedom. (*La Nouba*)

In this final verse of the nouba, Djébar interjects her own ideas. She speaks directly to the women of Mont Chenoua, calling them “queens” of their native land. This simple and endearing address is more than an ode to solidarity—it is a celebration! These women are no longer subjects to a foreign crown. They are the makers of their own nation.

The “symbols” that these women understand are the silences that are laden with memory and embedded within their laments and within the land. As suggested by Laub and reiterated by Celan, the silence testifies to the presence of a painful memories and not the absence of them. In these silences the memory is relived, and Algerian women are re-wounded “every evening” and “every morning.”

Djébar follows these mournful lines with lines of hope: “My song speaks always of freedom/ I intercede for all the martyrs/ so that others would not be oppressed.” When she says this, she testifies to her dedication to listen and share the women’s experience on an intimate level. By sharing their war stories as well as the hurt inflicted by the forgetfulness of the patriarchal state, Djébar breaks the cycle of re-wounding memories. Finally, in solidarity with other women, “the sick woman will recover from her woes,” rather than perpetually relive them.

Up to this point Djébar is recounting history, or perhaps one of the first to properly *account* for the women’s bravery and sacrifice during the Algerian War of Independence, that piece of forgotten history. But in the last five lines of the nouba,

Djebar “turn[s]” from the past and fixes her gaze on the future: “She will say ‘I am liberated’/ To the confined women/ We have justified the veil/ But now/ begins the day of freedom.” Having been liberated from French colonialism in 1962, *des femmes du Mont Chenoua* along with all the women of Algeria can be liberated from all oppression. Djebar suggests that the veil be removed. She is careful not to condemn the veil as useless—the women’s war stories would have taught her the utility of the veil. Yet, she insists that the beginning of a free Algeria means the end of the veil’s function. The veil is no longer needed to hide weapons, bombs, or men; its means have been justified and exhausted. She calls for the end of veiling and thus the end of patriarchal oppression. Djebar calls this final unveiling the true “day of freedom.”

The final scenes of *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* occur back inside the home. The grandmothers of Chenoua whisper the stories of their Berber clan to grandchildren who listen intently. In her first novel, Djebar addresses these whispering women:

I imagine you, the unknown woman, whose tale is handed down from storyteller to storyteller; now I too take my place in the unchangeable circle of listening. I re-create you, the invisible woman, ancestress of ancestress, the first expatriate. I resurrect you during that crossing that no letter from any French warrior was to allude to. (Fantasia, 189)

Djebar re-“turns” to the oral history that Algerian women have held dear. Again, her final words of this lamenting *nouba*, calls these women into the light of day and invites them to share their testimonies proudly. Once more, “Your heart has been distraught/ From the/ sufferings of the past/ Every evening / Every morning/...But now/ begins the day of freedom!” Djebar shall turn suffering into healing through the testimonies of *des femmes du Mont Chenoua* and the invitation to all women of Algeria to join them.

## **DJEBAR'S *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment***

*“Every woman has a voice, for even her silences speak volumes, speak for herself, speak for and of all the generations before her, of those women whose sounds were indeed severed, truly and traditionally imposed by the patriarchy.”*

*Marjolijn de Jager*

### **I. Introduction to Djebbar's *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment***

*Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* is Djebbar's most renowned publication, read widely across the United States and Europe. This collection of short stories provides a glance that is both rare and accurate of the lives of women in postcolonial Algeria. The characters of the short stories introduce the quiet traumas and subtle sufferings of individual women; the collection as a whole, however, communicates the collective trauma of Algerian women. The individual experiences of the characters are representative of the common sense of loss, betrayal, helplessness, despair, and sorrow. The trauma traditionally associated with colonialism finds no resolution in the postcolonial world. Djebbar communicates the truth of these traumas through the testimonies of her fictional characters. Through narrating the lives of her characters Djebbar finds the theme of healing for Algerian women will come through testimony.

*Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* was published in 1980 in France where its 15,000 copies sold out instantly (Virginia Press). *Apartment* was translated into English in 1992 and is now widely circulated across the United States. The collection, however, has yet to be translated into Algeria's native Arabic tongue (Liukkonen). Djebbar has been criticized for writing in French, but she has said that the standard Arabic tongue of

the patriarchy does little justice to the “feminine tones, uttered from lips underneath a mask...an excoriated language, from never having seen the sun, from having sometimes been intoned, declaimed, howled, dramatized” (*Apartment 1*). Another practical reason for writing in French is that in French Algeria, colonial administration only recognized French as the official language. During Djébar’s school years, French was the language of education; students were discouraged from studying written Arabic (Weltman-Aron 490). Djébar’s primary literate language is French. After completing *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* in 1978, Djébar said that “reality no longer appears through ‘the eyes of the French language’ but through the ‘voice-eyes’ of Algerian women. Thus, Djébar confide[d], ‘this...work somehow cleansed me of any unease I had felt with respect to the French language’” (Huughe 871). Since that realization, Djébar has used French as a tool of communication rather than as an obstacle to it. She has, in fact, developed a writing style so tailored to the purpose of her literature that she has crafted an idiom of her own. Lyrical run-on sentences, halting fragments, slippages of the Arabic vernacular, and irregular punctuation “mark the halting and circling of mental processes” of her distressed characters (Zimra 211)

Although Djébar writes in French, English translations serve as a vehicle for a larger audience. As an Algerian woman writing in French, Djébar, herself, writes in translation. Although, at first, Djébar had reservations about writing in translation, she feels that the silences and faint murmurings of the Arabic-male tongue find substance and strength in her French writing because she sees Arabic as a language of the patriarchy. Djébar scholar Budig-Markin has said, “Oral transmission has preserved history to a certain point; writing carries further its promise to make the individual and collective

voices of the past speak, even through they may have been silent in the past as well” (Budig-Markin 903). In this same way, English “carries further [writing’s] promise” of recording history by broadening the audience of that history and thus broadening the memory of that history. English translations provide another avenue and audience for the testimonials of Algerian women. Dr. Marjolijn De Jager loyally translates Djébar’s literature. De Jager teaches at the Center for Foreign Languages and Translation at New York University and focuses on francophone translations. Her translation of Djébar’s *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* was praised for its authenticity and integrity by the American Literary Translators Association as one of the best literary translations of 1992, the year of *Apartment’s* English publication (De Jager 856).

Though it is surprising that Djébar’s *Apartment* has yet to be translated for complete circulation in her native Algeria, perhaps national censoring has also discouraged steps towards translation for full circulation. After the War of Independence, the media was used as a “means of propaganda, an instrument of state control of the citizens’ opinions” rather than an outlet of information (Gafaïti 51). The Algerian press has been censored directly or indirectly well into the 1990’s (58). In fact, in 1996 “reading committees” were assigned to each printing house for systematic censorship by the national government (58). Given that censorship exists “as an enunciation of power in the sociopolitical discourse that organizes the public sphere,” it may be reasoned that Djébar’s stories which are critical of the stasis of Algerian society were unwelcome at the printing houses (60).

Djébar’s title *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* invokes Eugene Delacroix’s two renditions of his own “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment.” Delacroix painted

his 1834 version of “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment” from memory after his return from North Africa. During his short stint in Algiers, Delacroix visited the home of Monsieur Poirel, a rich Algerian privateer newly humbled to the power of French colonists. Poirel permitted Delacroix into the women’s quarters, the harem, of his home, an invitation never before extended to a foreigner. Delacroix was both amazed and enamored and promptly began painting the scene he remembered on his return to France. In the painting, three women and one servant share the space. Two women sit next to a hookah, and the other reclines a few feet away. The fabric of their clothes as well as the tapestries and draperies of the room are bright and exquisitely detailed (“Severed” 134, 135).

In his second 1849 “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment,” Delacroix recasts the same scene. In *Algeria Cuts*, Ranjana Khanna suggests that the second rendition was painted because the first began to decay. In his second portrayal, however, Delacroix revises significantly. The same four characters, three wives and servant, are distanced from the viewer and from each other. Much of the room (as well as the women) become lost in the shadows (Khanna 141). The distance and shadow of the women accentuate the sense of orientalism, “otherness,” and voyeurism. The detailed fabrics and expression of the women fade into the unknown of oriental otherness. In this way, Khanna argues if the 1834 “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment” was painted as a memory, the 1849 version “is about the process of forgetting” (142).

This romantic forgetfulness of detail and nearness—a detail and nearness which suggest intimacy with the women—suggests that Delacroix remembered the sense of seclusion and forbiddance but forgot the women themselves. This common forgetfulness

(which indeed becomes common to Europeans due to the popularity of these paintings) reflects Renan's theory that common forgetfulness as well as common memory formulates history for France. This history of seclusion was then re-enforced into Algeria's idea of history during the French colonial domination of Algeria. Thus, these paintings record the "history from which the archetypal image of the feminine body has been expelled" ("Severed" 147). Gradually, Algerian women have so faded underneath the shadows of seclusion and eroticism in the harem-turned-veil that they have been forgotten.

Now, in her "Severed Sound, Forbidden Gaze," Djébar says that only a "hesitant sketch" remains of Algerian women's culture (147). Delacroix's progression of isolation and silence that destroyed the sense of community in his 1834 "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment" has continued into a modern silence. She says that "songs once sung by young girls on their verandas, quatrains of love from the women of Tlemcen, magnificent funereal threnodies from the women of Laghouat, an entire literature that, unfortunately, is becoming further and further removed" until all sound is severed ("Severed" 147). Djébar's collection of short stories, her own version of "Women of Algiers in Their Apartments,"<sup>24</sup> restores the voices to these Algerian women. Djébar's modern Algerian women have not only been silenced by the voyeuristic eye of colonialism but also by the obsessive eye of the postcolonial patriarchy. This double silencing is especially traumatizing because of the brief stint of freedom and voice that

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<sup>24</sup> Although not essential to the dialogue that Djébar's literature creates with Delacroix's paintings of the harem, Picasso's series of "Women of Algiers" is too pertinent this trans-medium conversation to ignore. In her "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound" postface, Djébar admires his "glorious liberation of space" of his harem—or rather anti-harem because its "its door is wide open and the light is streaming in" (*Apartment* 149). Khanna says that the "context of war causes them almost to burst out of their frames, out of their apartment" (*Algeria Cuts* 154). In these paintings, the women are literally nude to symbolized their "denuding" without their veils. Djébar sees these nude bodies not only as "signs of an emancipation" but also as the "women's rebirth to their own bodies" ("Severed" 150).

FLN leaders (later leaders of the Algerian patriarchy and government) praised and encouraged.

In the short story named “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment,” Djébar’s protagonists consist of three women, Sarah, Anne, and Leila, and one servant figure Fatma—characters that directly mirror Delacroix’s paintings. Three<sup>25</sup> of these women suffer the traumas of the revolution against France, but all four women suffer underneath the weighty and isolating realities of postcolonial rule. In this story, along with “The Dead Speak” and four other short sketches, Djébar repaints these women with words, restoring their dignity, removing the shadows of forgetfulness, and breaking down the walls of silence of the harem, the veil, and of history. By creating a collective story of Algerian women through the compilation of individual stories and characters, Djébar calls all Algerian women to testify to their own experience. Through an interchange of testimony and laments, women will finally be able to shed their traumas while sharing, acknowledging, and documenting their Algerian experience in a common memory—or as Renan sees it, in history. Armed with their laments, these women use their voices to confront the injustices and disparities of life as Algerian women. In essence, Djébar restores these women to history through the testimonies that *Apartment* bears witness to and begins healing the betrayals of their forgetful nation.

Laments form both the essence and the structure of Djébar’s *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*; these laments break the silence of Delacroix’s 1834 and 1849 “Apartment.” The laments give the short story collection a stylistically musical organization, including an overture to the collection as well as interludes during the short stories. Overture is French for “opening” (Merriam-Webster). On an elementary level,

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<sup>25</sup> Anne is French and was abroad during the seven years of revolution.

Djebar's overture provides simply an opening to the rest of her story collection.

However, the content of her overture suggests a deeper meaning. In essence, her overture both explains her task to "barely speak next to, and if possibly speak very close to" the voices of Algerian women and also her understanding of this necessary challenge. "For at least ten years," Djebar says, "I have been affected by the extent to which speaking on this ground [of women, war, and equality] has become one way or another [due to sexual and political taboos], a transgression" (2). In this overture, Djebar demands of herself that she "craft words out of so many tones of voices" for the unveiling of the Algerian women, the raising of her voice, and the opening up of the woman's world in postcolonial Algeria. By unveiling Algerian women's voice, Djebar hopes to begin a dialogue of testimony that initiates the process of healing for these traumatized and marginalized women.

This dialogue begins in the traditional speaking role of an Algerian woman: the lament. Traditional laments are embedded throughout the short stories, giving the stories authenticity as well as the stories behind a traumatized woman. The laments function dually in Djebar's fiction: They mourn the lives of women while explaining what, in fact, is tragic about their past experiences. Particularly important are the two laments "For a diwan of the water carrier" and "For a diwan of the fire carriers" that appear in the short story "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment." Djebar uses the equivocation of Divan and Diwan<sup>26</sup> to her advantage. One of their meanings is a Muslim council or the room in which the council is held (Khanna 163). The council for Djebar's "For a diwan of the water carrier" includes the [Muslim] women of the hammam; the chamber of this council would be the hammam, itself. In the lament "For the diwan of fire carriers," this

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<sup>26</sup> Divan and diwan are two spellings of the same concept.

council would extend to all the female fighters who carried concealed bombs and fire arms during the war. Divan and diwan are also the name of an Arabic style couch (163). This couch refers to Delacroix's 1834 rendition of an Algerian harem in which one of three wives reclines on a low lying couch or divan which references the book's title and its implications<sup>27</sup>. The definition an "Arabic collection of poems" is perhaps the most obvious due to the lyrical verses that follow the divan and diwan titles (163).

The lament structure of *Women of Algiers in Their Apartments* is similar to the nouba-lament that organizes and features Djébar's film *La Nouba of the Women of Mount Chenoua*. In fact, Djébar has said that *Apartments* was written as the literary "counterpart to her first film [*La Nouba*]" (Huughe 871). The short stories of *Apartments* evoke the same feelings of fragmented stories that collectively form a whole. The medium of literature rather than audio-visual, however, demands a more ordered temporal presentation of the stories for comprehension. This temporal order is clear even in the titles on the table of contents, "Today" and "Yesterday". Despite the ordered sense of time, Djébar maintains the sense of fragmentation within the boundaries of time: Within her stories, some of Djébar's characters lose touch with the temporal world in dreams, delusions, and hallucinations. These separations from time provide an outlet for subconscious thoughts of despair or rebellion that otherwise could not to be expressed publicly.

Djébar's inclusion of both past and present parallels her weaving together of past and present in *La Nouba*. This parallel is especially interesting in light of the differences it creates. The disruption of the seemingly peaceful present with violent memories of the past in *La Nouba* signifies the ongoing trauma and suffering that the women experience,

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<sup>27</sup> The title "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment" will be further explicated later in this chapter.

despite the passage of time. The past and present are more clearly defined in *Apartment*; however, the differences between them are subtle in comparison to the reoccurring flashbacks of *La Nouba*. In a book composed of words, Djébar manages to write silences through physical and psychological reminders of the past such as scars or the inability to verbalize the trauma of an experience. Unexplained scars and heavy silences are described but are not explained. The lack of explanation of a woman's behavior or feelings that precedes a breakthrough in communication is evidence that the silences are, indeed, heavy. In this way, post-traumatic suffering is evident. The lack of testimony is representative of the lack of healing. As accounted for in trauma theory, outward silence can be the manifestation of inward turmoil and traumatic experiences that have yet to be properly processed or healed.

The subtleties between past and present also demonstrate that although the past is not violently haunting the present, there has been little change or progress between past and present. Although the graphic details of torture and murder are lost in the shift from *La Nouba* to *Apartment*, the stasis of the condition of Algerian women is beautifully shown due to this very subtleness. Between the twenty years that Djébar wrote the first story in 1959 and the postface of 1979 (twenty years that includes Algerian victory and independence), nothing seems to have changed in the lives of these women! The stories may very well have been written at the same time; the stories of "Today" could very well be the stories of "Yesterday."

Another noteworthy difference between *La Nouba* and *Apartments* is that the individual stories of *Apartments* are not temporally interwoven as they are in the *La Nouba*. However, they are undoubtedly a unit. Rather than repeating scenes as in the

film to interweave the stories, Djébar uses themes and character relationships as the common threads of *Apartment*. Just as a musical theme is created from variations of the same melody, Djébar's themes of oppression, trauma, silence, and speaking are reverberated in tales of exile, death and mourning, arranged marriage and repudiation, torture and scarring, domestic abuse, and veiling meld these individual lives together under the common umbrella of the life of women in postcolonial Algeria.

Djébar redefines Delacroix's issue of the gaze in a verbal rendition. Because Djébar is working in the medium of literature rather than visual arts, the idea of the gaze must be found amidst the speaking and silences of the text. The silences and hesitations within *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment* can also be more difficult to recognize than in Djébar's *La Noubia* in that it lacks the audio element. In *Apartment*, silences must be filtered through the very words of the text. Yet, the book provides other advantages that a narrative film cannot. Each female protagonist narrates her own story; thus, she shares with the reader her most intimate thoughts. The intimacies of thoughts or private spaces (such as a mind or a hammam) are shared with the reader by the women experiencing the thought or space. Delacroix's intimate gazes, on the other hand, are those stolen by a Frenchman; the foreignness of his voyeuristic gaze is compounded even further by his gender. Intimacy of this level is crucial in a text primarily about silence and the inner turmoil that it veils.

Likewise, intimate spaces are also shared without reservation. In the film *La Noubia*, Djébar tactfully films only post-menopausal women and pre-pubescent girls to avoid a voyeuristic gaze. As mentioned previously, women of child-bearing age are filmed only when wearing a full haik in the street. Because *Women of Algiers in Their*

*Apartments* is a text-based medium, Djébar allows her reader into the innermost realms of an Algerian woman's life; Djébar's protagonists are all in their middle to late twenties. The short stories are set within the homes or apartments of women and even follow them into their baths at the hammam. In this way, women's bodies are literally unveiled—"denuded" as translated from Arabic. The woman is allowed to testify through her scar. Outside of this intimate space, the woman would normally be shrouded. Among other women in the hammam, this woman can bear witness to the remnants of her torture by the French without suspicion of promiscuity or impropriety. At the same time, the reader may gaze upon her scar, acknowledging her traumatic past, without the guilt of voyeurism or eroticizing her body. In this way, Djébar's literature creates a space for true testimony and common memory outside sexual taboos that would otherwise stifle this "denuded" space.

## **II. Short Stories from Djébar's *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment***

### **A. "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment"**

The first short story of "Today" is "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment." Written in 1978, this story is set in Algiers, fourteen years after Algerian independence. Djébar's two female protagonists still suffer silently from the traumas of the war but eventually find an encouraging audience in each other to listen to the unshared experiences from which they never healed. Sarah, Djébar's protagonist, is an ex-bomb carrier for the FLN and torture victim of the French police.

The first scene of the short story begins in the dream of Sarah's surgeon-husband Ali. In his dream, his wife Sarah struggles in a torture chamber. Her face has been

blindfolded and “thrown backward, hair pulled back” (5). Ali notes that the blindfold is white rather than black. “She is not condemned,” he thinks, “She must have put it on herself” but is “trying to rip it off” (5). Although she is flailing in the white blindfold, there is absolute silence, “the gasps stuck in her throat like a fishbone” (5). Her head pulled back silently, Ali calls her a “distant statue that’s going to float backwards, always backwards” (5). Ali attempts to call out her name to “prevent the sacrifice” but “what sacrifice?” he asks (5).

This white head-covering represents the white haik of Algeria, the veil donned by Algerian women during the war as both a symbol of Algerian solidarity and a guise of weaponry. Perhaps Sarah, who would have voluntarily worn the haik to execute FLN missions, is not struggling to remove the now useless cloth. Her head is being pulled “backwards” in the dream, in semblance of the regression of women such as Sarah since the end of the war. Sarah, a bomb carrier and urban fighter, would have enjoyed independence and responsibility during the war; successful urban warfare would have depended on brave women such as her. Now the independence of moudjahiddines such as Sarah is still being sacrificed to society, but for what good? Even Ali, the unconscious dreamer, cannot comprehend the reasoning behind this “blindfolding.” Perhaps this blindfold blinds him, as well. While Sarah wears the blindfold, Ali cannot truly *see* Sarah as a subject rather than an object or as a citizen rather than a sacrifice for citizenship. Ali’s inability to stop the progression of the dream as well as his inability to comprehend the reason behind Sarah’s sacrifice perhaps symbolizes his own inability to communicate with Sarah about her traumatic experiences or demonstrate to Sarah his intention to help her heal while maintaining his proper patriarchal position in society.

Ali's dream takes him suddenly into the countryside where a nurse tries to start a motor; a goat bleats in the background, circling back to the idea of a sacrifice. Lindsey Moore invokes the celebration of the sacrifice of Eid<sup>28</sup> when discussing the bleating goat of the dream (59). Ali's dream returns him to an operating room, but he finds it is not his own. Sarah is stretched out on the operating table; all is silent except for the goat bleating. Sarah, "blindfolded, holes where the eyes should be," begins to whimper. Suddenly, the "motor begins to run dangerously, the 'gene'—the generator is wired," and Ali jumps up awake (6).

The coupling of Sarah's whimpers with the sounds of the sacrificial goat reinforces the idea of Sarah's body as a sacrifice. The inference of the goat's replacement of Ishmael<sup>29</sup> suggests that Sarah, too, is a mother-sacrifice that replaces the sons of a nation (Moore 59). As the "dangerous 'gene'" whirls and Ali fears for his wife Sarah, Djebbar invokes the generator as tool of choice for genital electrocution, suggesting that Sarah was a victim of the French's notorious genital electrocution among their other tortures.

Later in the story, Sarah herself refers to this sacrifice. Sarah discovers that women's liberation lies in their testimony and freedom to speak and communicate. The moment that women find their voices "is the moment...that Ishmael will really wail in the desert: the walls torn down again by us will continue to surround him alone!" (51). Women will begin in voices of "sighs, of malice, of the sorrows of all the women they've kept walled in...The voice that's searching in the opened tombs" (50). Sarah no

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<sup>28</sup> The sacrifice of Eid (Eid Al-Adha) is a Muslim holiday which celebrates Abraham's obedience to God. Rather than sacrificing his son Isaac, God allows Abraham to sacrifice a goat and spare his son (Id al-Adha). Interestingly, Sarah was the name of Abraham's first wife and Isaac's mother.

<sup>29</sup> Ishmael is called Isaac in the Judeo-Christian context.

longer accepts the idea that women must sacrifice their right to citizenship and memory on behalf of country or patriarchy. The open tombs that Sarah refers to are the harem spaces that entomb Algerian women—spaces enveloped by silence, cement, or cloth. This theme of tombs also echoes the Roman ruins, soldier watchtowers, and haiks of Djébar's film *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenona*. This same isolated silence was visualized in Delacroix's harem as the women grow farther apart from each other, from the viewer, and from the light of day. Djébar concludes in both *La Nouba* and, here, in *Apartment* that communication through testimony must shatter the entombing walls that sacrificed their voice.

Sarah of Ali's introductory dream is the central protagonist of the short story. Sarah's interactions and movements through the day form the primary narrative. Sarah's story is only one thread of many; her character provides a context into which other character threads can be woven. In this way, Sarah's character gives structure as well as depth to the overall story. Similar to Leila of *La Nouba*, Sarah is enthralled with "women's songs of times gone by" (17). In fact, Sarah professionally pursues the history of women's voices as a musicologist. She transcribes and translates the recordings of traditional laments of Algerian women. In one recording "without any accompaniment, two women [are] humming words, sometimes hesitant, as if their memory would momentarily falter" (17). This image of two women communicating together is echoed throughout almost all of Sarah's interactions with the other women characters Anne, Fatma, and Leila [a different Leila than the protagonist of *La Nouba*] in "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment." This communication between women creates a community

that begins healing individual trauma as well as collective trauma. This community of testimony restores the women's experience to common memory and history.

Sarah's tormented past is first introduced in the hammam by her fellow bather Anne. Anne asks her if her "wide, blueish scar" is a burn. Sarah does not respond. Rather her mind drifts back to the time when "women were under attack by submachine guns, white veils with bloodstained holes" and silently mourns her "squandered youth" (34). Although Sarah's suffering is lost to Anne, the trauma that she still experiences manifests in her heavy silence. Only the reader is privy to her thoughts through Sarah's narration.

Later in the day, a fellow ex-moujihadat Leila speaks aloud of her own trials during and after the war. Sarah weeps at her intimate confession of suffering and says, "Be quiet, my darling, don't talk anymore!... Words, what good are words?" (45). Unable to come to terms with her past, Sarah refuses to share it. Leila chides her saying, "On the contrary... I've got to speak, Sarah! They are ashamed of me. I've dried up, I'm the shadow of my former self.... You.... Even then, they called you the silent one... They never knew the carefully listed details of your own tortures. Afterwards... they thought you were left with just a few scars, they never knew" (45). With her comrade's encouragement, Sarah admits that she struggles to verbalize the traumas of her past. With these words, Sarah "undid her blouse, her face still wet with tears. She uncovered the blue scar that started above one of her breasts and stretched down her abdomen" (45). This scar represents the physical remnants of a torture session. The particular cut of the scar has special significance: The lower part of the cut resembles a vertical cesarean section. In this way, Sarah is depicted as the birth mother of the Algerian nation. Her

own sacrifice and bloodshed as a *moujihaddat* violently brought the Algerian nation into being. Yet, Sarah has symbolically been repudiated by the “fathers” of the nation and no longer has legal rights to her nation-child.

Just as the two women singing in her musicology studio are sometimes “hesitant, as if their memory would momentarily falter” (17), Sarah, too, relies on the accompaniment of her fellow ex-fighter to find the words to testify her experiences; finally Sarah, “the silent one” speaks. Interestingly, when Sarah discloses her most traumatizing experiences, she tells not of the cause of the scar across her abdomen nor of the genital mutilation suggested by Ali’s dream; rather, Sarah shares the psychological trauma of learning about the death of her mother while in jail. Not only does this first admission emphasize the existence of “scars they never knew,” but it also shows that trauma is not restricted to wartime and physical suffering; the life of sorrow that she describes is actually that of her mother. “My mother,” she weeps, “Her life in which nothing happened. One tragedy: she had me, no other child, no son, no one else. She must have lived in fear of being repudiated” (48). Because her mother failed to produce a male heir for her husband, she failed as a wife by society’s standards. At his time in Algerian history, women were not allowed to initiate divorce from their husbands, but husbands were free to repudiate their wives with or without reason, especially a reason as grievous as lacking a male heir. Sarah recalls her mother working as a slave in the house, silent for entire days. In the evenings when her father returned from work, “[her] mother would arrive carrying a copper bowl full of hot water and she’d wash his feet. Meticulously” (49). Sarah resigned herself never to wash anything like that in her life and begrudges herself that she did not stand up for her mother against her father or even

her mother's expectations. "That's how my mother died: silently, following a simple chill. I understood then that she would never have her revenge. And I was truly unable to accept it" (49). Her mother did not suffer the tortures of Barbarousse prison as Sarah had, yet she was a prisoner of domestic and societal expectations; she suffered the fear of repudiation and abandonment each day.

From the day she heard of her mother's death, "it was as if, with every movement [Sarah's] body ran into the walls. Silently [she] was shrieking...The others noticed nothing but my silence" (47). Sarah became, like her mother, a voiceless prisoner, never speaking out against injustices and never healing from them. In "Translating Assia Djébar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement: Listening for the Silence*," Marjolijn De Jager suggests that "in [Djébar's] collection of stories, every woman has a voice, for even her silences speak volumes, speak for herself, speak for and of all the generations before her, of those women whose sounds were indeed severed, truly and traditionally imposed by the patriarchy" (857). Sarah realizes through her mother and her own experience of silence that, just as Leila advises, "[she's] got to speak" (45). Through Sarah's epiphany of the importance of testimony, Djébar's core objective of "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment" is revealed: to testify to the lives of Algerian women and to encourage still more testimony amongst women. Sarah says,

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... Talk among ourselves and look. Look outside, look outside the walls and the prisons!...The Woman as look. The Woman as voice... Not the voice of female vocalists whom they imprison in their sugar-sweet melodies... But the voice they've never heard, because many unknown and new things will occur before she's able to sing: the voice of sighs, of malice, of the sorrows of all the women they've kept walled in...The voice that's searching in the opened tombs. (50)

Through Sarah, Djébar calls for deconstruction of both traditional harems and modern harems—isolation in the home and underneath the haik. Similar to Leila of *La Noubia des Femmes du Mont Chenoua*, Sarah calls to release the voice of women from the tombs of isolating walls, veils, wounded bodies, and silence. Algerian women must verbalize their traumas in the “voice of sighs, of malice, of the sorrows of all the women they’ve kept walled in” in order for them to heal. She calls for the restoration of the gaze and the voice to women.

Fatma is another important thread that runs through “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment.” She is Djébar’s translation of the servant figure in Delacroix’s paintings. Djébar mentions once that her given name is Hadja, but as her character endures a lifetime of suffering that captures the Algerian woman’s experience, she assumes the name and identity of Fatma<sup>30</sup>. In this way, her one character represents an endless number of Algerian women. Fatma is the water carrier and masseuse of the hammam. While Sarah bathes at the hammam, the reader is allowed to gaze into this intimate, feminine space. Fatma lives in a realm of the anti-harem: It is a space separated from the gaze of all men. Women’s bodies lie bare and sensual, yet they are not objectified or eroticized. Here women communicate, sing, and lament; here, their voices intermingle.

While in Fatma’s hammam, women gossip about a village in which “peasant women have broken the faucets [in their apartments] so they can go to the well everyday” and maintain their connection with the limited but essential women’s community. One woman of the hammam comments, “What wouldn’t I break, inside of me or outside if

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<sup>30</sup> Fatma [Fatima] is a generalized name for any or all Algerian women (Salhi 2). It is both a proper name and a pejorative noun, originating from the French colonial colloquialism for Arab women and housemaids (“Severed” 157).

need be to get back to the others?" (32). Through this casual hammam chatter, the importance of this women's haven is reinforced.

While these women of Algiers pity these village women in conversation, women of similar circumstances of isolation share this very same hammam space. Anne, a Frenchwoman, is unfamiliar with the extreme isolation of women in a traditional home. Yet, she is able to recognize a sadness of the song of one of the women. When asked what she is singing, Anne is told that she is improvising a lament but that "it's more than that she's consoling herself" (30). The hammam is the only place she is allowed to go outside of her harem-like home. This is true of many women in Algeria today, both women that fought the French and then were denied the freedom of movement and women that never gained that freedom.

Fatma, though quietly carrying, scrubbing, and massaging, has a story of her own. At thirteen, Fatma is given by her father in marriage to a stranger in another town for the price of two beers. Abused and overworked by her new in-law family, she runs away to a city and works as a weaver by day and a prostitute by night. As her looks fade, she becomes the water carrier of a local hammam, bringing boiling water to the bathers and massaging their limp bodies for tips. As Sarah and Anne leave the hammam, Fatma falls and hurts her hand, the instrument of her livelihood. She is rushed to the hospital in an ambulance and falling in and out of consciousness, Fatma composes a lament of her own: "For a diwan of the water carrier."

In this lament composed of poetry, hallucinations, and biography, Fatma testifies to her own woes and sorrows. Despite her battles against circumstance, her courage and

fortitude, she remains the outcast of society, catching the brunt of every blow to women, to all Fatmas:

“Asleep, I am the one asleep and they are carrying my body off...”  
Only words, prehistoric words, unformed words of strident white, words that oppress no long while these hands ... beat the rhythm that follows the panting of devout bathers... From here on in, naked like this, I circulate, I soar, and I will not be a mummy, I am a sovereign...  
I the woman, all the voices of the past are following me in music, uneven song broken cries, words in any case unfamiliar, multiple words that bore through the city...  
“I am—am I—I am the unveiled one...”  
From the depths, a geology of wasted words, fetus words, swallowed up forever, will they escape, black wing sheaths, will they awaken to splinter me when I no longer, never again, wear a mask on my face outside  
“I am—am I—I am the Excluded One...”

The frayed stanzas are regrouping, where to determine the language Arabic women utter, long uninterrupted interior sobs that stream forth in sad accompaniment, blood-streaked losses of rebirth of the menstrual cycle, gaping memories of harems of decapitated subservient janissaries, where white washed walls rock with new sounds, lacerated words, all around me... An uncertain voice in pain, out of breath because it has to find itself:  
“Is it me—me?—It is me they have excluded, me whom they have barred  
It is me—me?—me they have humiliated  
Me whom they have caged in  
Me whom they’ve sought to subdue, their fists on my head, to make me drown while standing straight... me within the marble halls of mute distress, me inside the rocks of silence of the white veil.” (38, 39)

By means of her name, Djébar uses the extraordinary inclusiveness of Fatma’s character to function dually. The essence of this character not only counteracts the exclusive nature of the gender separation of society but also creates a sense of solidarity for women despite the isolating experience of living as a woman in Algerian society.

Fatma feels this solidarity in the hammam. In both the hammam as well as in her lament, Fatma creates a chorus out of her singular actions and solitary lament. Her hands “beat the rhythm that follows the panting of devout bathers” (38). In the hammam, Fatma creates a communal environment amongst the bathers; she senses something

lyrical about the bodies of the bathers and is aware that the hamman is an outlet for many otherwise silenced women. Though the story that she tells in her lament is her own, she speaks of experiences common to all women. “I the woman, all the voices of the past are following me in music, uneven song broken cries...” (38). Within her solo, Fatma creates a chorus that all women, past and present, participate in. Fatma’s character reaches out beyond the obvious traumas of war heroines and verbalizes the traumatization of everyday women like herself—all wives, daughters, and workers of the night and day. She finds her life after the war virtually unchanged.

Like so many young Algerian girls, Fatma is married at thirteen to a stranger twice her age. Djebbar directly comments on the disparity of the marriage contract in her postface “Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound.” One of the few, through possibly most important, rights of an Algerian girl is the right to accept or veto a groom’s proposal of marriage, herself. The Koran requires that the father ask the daughter during the marriage ceremony (145). However, Djebbar says that this right is circumvented in most Muslim regions because “the young girl may not be seen uncovered [in the traditional ceremony] in order to utter her acquiescence (or her nonacquiescence)” a male representative called an ouali speaks for her (145). This practice often leads to illegal, forced marriages. If an ouali is not present to speak for the bride, her “yes” may be expressed in silent tears because of supposed “modesty” in front of the male witnesses. Thus, Djebbar concludes that “the only word the woman must pronounce, this yes to submission under the pretense of propriety...through the ambiguity of silent tears [leaves] her word deflowered, violated, before the other deflowering, the other violation intervenes” (145). An Algerian girl’s voice is stripped even from the few rights that she

is granted. Fatma, the “every woman” of Algeria, is a victim of an illegal marriage; she is bartered for the price of two beers. Her account of married life includes the harsh realities that so many young Algerian brides experience such as spousal abuse or abuse from the husband’s family. Fatma escapes her marriage in hopes of a better life. Like those who risk leaving the harem-home, Fatma find only more humiliation and exclusion outside the home.

The harsh realities of Fatma’s lament make it beautiful. She uses this lament to lash out against “the marble halls of mute distress” that the haik imposes. Fatma’s lament emphasizes the isolation of veiling. “Naked” she “soar[s]” through the city in an ambulance. She promises to never again be a “mummy” and “wear a mask on [her] face outside” (38). The repetitions throughout the lament reiterate these assertions: “I am the Excluded One...It is me they have excluded, me whom they have barred” (39).

When she says she is “asleep...and they are carrying off [her] body,” Fatma affirms the importance of the body. In a literal sense, she is being transported to the hospital in an ambulance; she sees this as an echo of arranged marriages, or veiling that erases the woman’s presence, and even the gradual fading of women’s bodies into the forgetful shadows of Delacroix’s “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment” paintings. In opposition to both Delacroix and the postcolonial world, Fatma uses the same female body that society has excluded and eroticized as a source of inclusiveness and familiarity for women. The cycles of a woman’s life—of births, menstruation, and deaths—becomes the lyrics of the lament. Fatma’s voice uses the realities of the hidden body not only to break the silence imposed upon her (and thus all women) but to reclaim the female body as a presence as well.

Once Fatma arrives at the hospital, an important shift is made: Rather than returning to the frightening operating room-torture chamber that Sarah's husband Ali introduces in his dream, Fatma experiences a changing Algeria that she has never seen. Her surgeon is female—the only female surgeon in Algiers. In contrast to the terrified stasis of Sarah's mother, this modern, educated woman is *making* something happen in her life. The white cloth tied across her face is neither a tool of French torture nor an imposed haik. The white cloth is an operating mask that she ultimately “remove[d]...and, looking weary, smiled at them” (46). Like Djébar, this empowered woman has removed the symbolic clothes of both French and Algerian oppression and is now healing other women.

Leila is another important female character. In contrast to the apolitical Fatma, Leila was one of the most infamous bomb carriers or “fire carriers” of the National Liberation Front. She was called “the great Leila, the heroine” (21). She is most poignantly representative of women who were given a clear voice and great responsibility—along with great consequence. Her efforts along with her torture were spread as nationalist propaganda—Leila was the embodiment of Fanon's prototypical liberated women of his “Algeria Unveiled.”

During the course of the short story “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment,” a friend finds Leila locked up in a mental institution, and he whisks her away. Somehow, Fanon's unveiled woman of liberation who was jailed and tortured by the French has been isolated in a psychiatric hospital not only for the traumas of torture but also because Leila has tried to speak out against the silencing of women's speech and the re-institution of sexual taboos. Leila tells Sarah, “Everywhere they've announced that I'd been

tortured... Tortured with electricity, you too know what that's all about!" (Sarah is a victim of genital electrocution, too.) (44). During the war, discussions of rape and genital mutilation were used as battle cries against the French in the FLN's newspapers and legal interventions. After the war, however, openness about women's issues regressed into the opaque veil of social taboo. Djébar notes in her postface "Forbidden Gaze, Severed Sound":

What words had uncovered in time of war is not being concealed again underneath a thin covering of taboo subjects, and in that way, the meaning of a revelation is reversed. Then the heavy silence returns that puts an end to the momentary restoration of sound. Sound is severed once again. (150, 151)

In Leila's efforts to continue the social revolution of gender equality beyond the banners of Algerian liberation, she is condemned by the very society for which she suffered. The subjects that defined her heroism now banish her from that society "despite that fact that during those eight years [of war and imprisonment] she was not only permitted nonconformism but encouraged to speak, to act, on behalf of freedom and at the risk of imprisonment, torture, at the risk of her own life" (De Jager 857). When Leila weeps with Sarah, she weeps not over memories of torture but over the trauma of losing her right to speech. In a delirious fever, Leila recites a lament of her own, "For a divan of the fire carriers":

Where are you, you fire carriers, you my sisters, who should have liberated the city... Barbed wire no longer obstructs the alleys, now it decorates windows, balconies, anything at all that opens onto an outside space....  
In the streets they were taking pictures of your unclothed bodies, of your avenging arms in front of the tanks... We suffered the pain of your legs torn apart by the rapist soldiers. And it is this that the sanctioned poets evoked you in lyrical divans. Your turned-up eyes... no, worse... Your bodies, used only in parts, bit by little bit... The bombs are still exploding... but over twenty years: close to our eyes, for we no longer see the outside, we see only the obscene looks, the bombs explode but against our bellies and I am—she screamed—I am every woman's sterile belly in one! (39, 44)

Leila mourns the abused bodies of women; she moves beyond the “body” of hurt experienced by women as a whole. Rather, Leila specifies pieces of the body “used only in parts” which accentuates not only the excruciating pain of a fragmented body but also the pain of fragmented camaraderie and trust (44). She holds both Algeria and France accountable for this fragmentation of body and psyche. The trauma caused by the French “rapist soldiers” extends “over twenty years” by Algerian society—Algeria “used [the women’s bodies] only in parts for the furthering of Algeria, yet never for liberation of these women as a whole. “The bombs are still exploding,” Leila says, but now, these bombs explode against the bodies of Algeria’s women: covering their once free, “avenging arms” with haiks and hushing the voices that speak against taboo—present psychological trauma compounds the physical traumas of the past. Leila cries out that her sterility is an effect of torture such as genital electrocution. Furthermore, Leila, like Sarah, is a mother of the Algerian nation, too. When the nation she birthed strips her citizenship and leaves her post-traumatic stress untreated, Leila no longer shares in the life of the nation. She sees herself and her nations as barren of life or development.

Anne is another one of Djébar’s central characters, though she is a far cry from the other “birth-mothers” of the Algerian nation. Anne accompanies Sarah for the majority of “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment.” Although she is not a native Algerian, she, too, is crucial to Djébar’s reinterpretation of Delacroix’s paintings. She is the daughter of a French magistrate born in Algeria and grew up with Sarah before the violence preceding the Algerian revolution began; since that time she has lived in France. Upon her return to Algeria, Sarah acts as her guide, her translator, and her friend. The morning that follows Ali’s dream in the beginning of the story opens with Anne’s

emergency call to Sarah. Ali grumbles when Sarah's concern for Anne takes priority over his breakfast when Sarah rushes to her friend's need.

Sarah's arrival to Anne's apartment is an especially ironic tribute to the title of the short story and thus to Delacroix's paintings, as well. Anne has just unsuccessfully attempted suicide by overdosing on medication. This image of Anne as a "[woman] in [her] apartment," vomiting up the pills of her failed suicide and Sarah stroking her hair destroys the notions of "otherness" in the original image of "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment." In stark contrast to the increasing isolation of Delacroix's women, Djébar's women share the space intimately: touching the other, soothing the other, talking to the other, and sharing the struggle of the other. The "veil" of serenity and distance between the women as well as distance from the women as objects is striped by the sense of urgency and intimacy.

Anne explains her suicide attempt to Sarah. When she came out to the deck on the boat ride over the Mediterranean, everyone was looking at the white city...[she] was crying without even knowing it, and when [she] did realize it, the only words that came to [her]...were 'My God, I've come here to die!'" (8). Anne feels herself entering into the isolated "otherness" of Delacroix's painting as she approaches the port of Algiers.

As a French woman "in [her] apartment" in Algiers (and even more so as a French woman in the hammam as the story progresses), Anne demonstrates that the French objectivity of colonialism is no longer the main source of oppression in Algeria. Her presence as a Frenchwoman struggling with thoughts of suicide "in [her] apartment" highlights the shifting of oppression to the Algerian hands of the patriarchy. This patriarchal society, fortified by the conservative laws of the FLN single-party

government, recreates the essence of Delacroix's silent harem. For Anne, a French woman accustomed to a more egalitarian lifestyle, life in the silent harem is equivalent to death. Anne's entrance into the "silent harem" lifestyle of Algeria accentuates the importance of women's communication within this society; Taboos on communication and mobility leave "women with nothing but one another, and other women are then the only ones with whom and upon she can begin to experience with the sound of her own voice" (De Jager 857). Sarah's presence is crucial not only because she literally saves Anne's life but also because the walls of communication must first be broken between the women in the harem.

At the end of Anne's confession scene, Djebbar continues to reinterpret this women's space. Sarah throws back the curtains, doing "what she has been wanting to do since the story began" (8). "No!" Anne cries as she retreats from the window and covers her eyes, "I can't bear the light!" (9). Here, Sarah reverses the passivity of the former "Women of Algiers." Rather than fading into the growing shadows, she rises to find a window and exposes the room to the light of the outside world; she unveils Anne from the shadows as she is too weak and weary to do so herself.

At the end of "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment," both Anne and Sarah have made important discoveries about the art of testimony and the value of solidarity. The last scene of the short story mirrors the final scene of *La Noubia* when Leila is gazing upon the Algerian coast line from a boat. Similarly, rather than returning to France, Anne decides to remain in Algeria. "I'm not leaving!...I'm not going anymore!" declares Anne at the airport (51). As in *La Noubia*, the tormented Anne realizes that her focus must be *living* in Algeria, and not dying there. In one movement, Sarah and Anne destroy any

remnants of the isolation of Delacroix's paintings: They embrace. Walking away from the airport, both women hum in harmony and happiness. One woman suggests that they "take the boat together...not to go away, no, to gaze at the city when all the doors are opening" (52). "What a picture!" she cries, "It will make even the light tremble!" (52). Both Sarah and Anne stand together in this light of day, celebrating this communion of voice, freedom, and future.

The resolution of the silence and shadow of Delacroix's paintings "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment" culminates in the embrace shared by Sarah and Anne. The physical contact of one body with another counteracts the feelings of growing isolation in Delacroix's paintings. This intimacy also demonstrates the solidarity built between these women through testimony of trauma and the healing of disclosure.

The bodies of Algerian women bear the physical memories of trauma in scars and sterility. Djebbar notes that during the Algerian revolution "carriers of the bombs, as they left the harem, chose their most direct manner of expression purely by incident: their bodies exposed outside and they themselves attacking other bodies.... In fact, they took those bombs out as if they were taking out their own breasts, and those grenades exploded against them, right against them" ("Severed" 150). This embrace of the body at the end of "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment" is appropriate for a story that moves women's bodies from veil to denuded, from the shadow of the harem to the sunlight of the street, and from silence to sound.

## **B. "The Dead Speak"**

“The Dead Speak” is the primary short story in Djébar’s “Yesterday.” It is set immediately after the end of the Algerian revolution. Hassan, a fighter of the mountains, returns to his grandmother’s home after five years of absence. “The Dead Speak” demonstrates how easily the women’s experience in the war becomes overshadowed by the tribute to the male’s wartime experience.

Hadda called Yemma, a dying old woman, has waited silently for five years for the return of her grandson Hassan from the mountain fighting. Hassan returns, and almost immediately Yemma dies. Her funeral rituals are narrated in three sections by Aïcha, Hassan’s repudiated cousin and Yemma’s former housemate, Saïd, Yemma’s loyal friend from her village, and Hassan himself. A fourth voice is woven into the narrations: the voice of the dead. This blending of these narrations constitutes the body of the “The Dead Speak.”

Gossip amongst the neighbor women and hired mourners<sup>31</sup> sketch the first images of a difficult home-life during the war. “It’s these five years of waiting that have killed the old woman” they say (76). Aïcha, the repudiated and homeless niece, and her son Amine waited with her. Aïcha, too, has been worn down by life. Murmurs of her plainness, her repudiation, and her poverty captures the sadness and weight of her days. Aïcha means “the first name of an open flower” yet she “has been broken and wilted since time immemorial” (75). She was pressured to marry by her family’s fear of her spinsterhood, “twenty-eight and still unmarried!” (94). She married a man already knowing the marriage was doomed. Her “hot-head” husband spat on her and repudiated her after two months, time enough to conceive a son (82). After staying with her mother-in-law, Aïcha has lived the past five years with her aunt Yemma, her only living relative.

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<sup>31</sup>Women of the community are hired to mourn and lament the dead during their funeral rituals (Ahmed).

The voice of the town singer, a blind woman, rises above her practiced chorus of mourners. As the singer utters her laments, she becomes “like the obscure mother of them all,” calling every mourner to lament not only the dead but also those who continue the cycle of the living. Her voice is the

voice that anchors itself to all the separations of umbilical cords, that resonates at all the seventh day after births, that ululates at the fortieth day after deaths, which at the secret of every wedding night would introduce the sudden, the strange note of lament covered with virginal blood, the troubled terror before the solace of resignation, calm at last. (85)

Her voice is the “voice of all mothers mute with powerlessness, contemplating the misfortune of their descendents” (85).

Aicha remains silent as she listens to this voice. She does not join in their chorused laments but understands that “they are the ones who chronicle the flow of days and of destinies. The official speakers. Without any need for slander. Out of simple concern for giving an account” (78). Aicha sees this account after death as the only validation of a woman’s life; it chronicles of sadness and suffering. As the women’s laments continue, Aicha finds an alternative refrain from within, one that is unexpected and even frightening “I have neither law nor master” (88). “But why?...why?...Am I rebelling?” she wonders (90). She attempts to move past the verse but it continues resurfacing. She falls into the rhythm of another voice, the voice of the dead, which urges her to break away from this cycle of living that, in Aicha’s experience, has been the slow, painful process of dying. Her voice is weak but tries to break this cycle of the living dead.

Saïd’s narration is a reflection on Yemma’s life story and his interactions with her. Saïd builds the image of an austere but noble woman who won for herself a

matriarchy despite two husbands, one assassinated and one given to drunkenness and prostitution. She moved to Algiers but made regular pilgrimages back to her native village where she was indeed treated as a noble. She was called Yemma, “my mother,” by all in the city and the village (Webster).

Over time, Saïd became the advisor of her estate, her land lawsuits, and her dealings with the village. During every weekly appointment, Yemma would say, “You shall tell him” (109). When Hassan finally returns, Saïd’s detailed development of Yemma’s unusual triumphs over her bitter circumstances are undercut by his seeming lack of interest. Silently, Saïd admonishes Hassan for his stoicism thinking, “Did you know her, do you know that...untamed heart underneath that gnarled body?” (109). Despairing, Saïd tells him nothing and returns to the mountain village. In his disgust with the young-man-turned-hero, Saïd does not realize that in his silence even he has become one of “witnesses already forgetful, already denying but feeling the weight of their common forgetfulness” (79). During his narration, Saïd hears the voice of the dead but does not speak for it; ultimately this voice is lost.

Even neighbors in the city notes Hassan’s disillusionment with Yemma’s death. They whisper that “Hassan, the heir, considered 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” (110). Hassan has eyes only for the bodies of his fighting comrades; he has a memory only for their loss. Brooding, he thinks, “It was before [the war] that death required so much display!” (112). He resents his grandmother’s death because its ceremony and ritual distracts from—for him—more important losses.

While the gravedigger finishes his duties, Hassan bitterly thinks, “A noble work...[I] could have made the suggestion: ‘—brother, give me the shovel, I too know how to...I know!’” (111). Hassan spends this moment pitying himself more than marking the grave as a tribute to his fallen friends. The irony of this scene is that the women surrounding Yemma’s grave have suffered equally though differently. Only one scene before, Aicha discloses the tragic lives of the women at the wake. For example, the sister-in-law who sits “with a blank stare” underneath her white haik watched “her husband of fifty years and her two sons fall in the small courtyard of her own house” (77). This woman knows loss intimately, yet she makes no heroic nor dramatic pronouncements. Though experienced in loss, Hassan appears arrogant and immature when juxtaposed to this woman. Djébar describes Hassan leaving the cemetery “as if it belonged to a house of which he had been host” (113).

His sense of entitlement and access to the dead is undercut by the fact that he does not hear the voice of the dead as Aicha and Saïd do. Hassan walks home, worrying about “what was to be done” with Aicha and her son Amine, a question never posed by Yemma (112). When Hassan lies down to rest, he notes a framed embroidery of Abraham, his son, and the angel Gabriel. As opposed to the sacrifice of Eid referenced in Ali’s dream in “Women of Algiers in Their Apartment,” Hassan sees no goat in the embroidery. This reflects his image of sacrifice: Hassan sees only the issue of sacrifice of Ishmael just as he sees only the tragedies of his male comrades. The goat that is ultimately sacrificed is lost in his gaze; similarly, women’s sacrifices and tragedies during the war are lost in his gaze.

Again, the voice of the dead takes up its lament:  
Old Hadda...Her burial: a minor fact, the

undertow of a half-consumed world, after the war and even more with the swell of the beginnings of peace. Old Hadda: when she was born, in an earlier century, in that village where the sharecropper Said still lives, a generation of defeat had populated that corner of the earth...Algeria... One place on earth where at times (five years, or ten, or fifty...) the somber arrow of time digs in, sharpening hearts and flesh.

A burial of no importance, surely, but there is the gloom of an impoverished cousin, there are the daydreams of a sharecropper in a procession, while the witnessing glances are focused on the grandson alone. In this heart reigns an arid expanse. Worse than oblivion.

Still the dead speak. The old woman's voice murmurs to Aicha, touches the sharecropper's memory with loyalty. What does the man, toward whom Hadda's last hopes were directed, notice of all this? Nothing. (115, 116)

Despite the voice that fills his room, Hassan hears nothing and falls asleep in the silence.

The next week's speeches memorialize the heroes of the war and speak of the future glory of Algeria. Hassan's speech pays tribute to the dead, "all those dead buried beneath the underbrush, dead in battle, massacred" (117). "All the dead that would have lived," he called them. The three thousand that gathered in the square receive his words with respect and enthusiasm. The women listening stand only at the back of the square, underneath a white sea of veils, but their ululations are heard across the city. Aicha hears them, too, from the cemetery overlooking the city. She, too, is memorializing the dead. Hassan talks about "the dead that would have lived" (117). Aicha hears these dead speak yet is crushed by the silence of the *living that would be dead*—the women already wearing haiks as symbolic funeral shrouds, buried under traumatic experiences that their

countrymen would have them forget. These dead stand at the back of the square, searching for an outlet of expression.

The fact that the collection “Yesterday” follows Djébar’s “Today” suggests a dual regression: the daily lives of modern Algerian women highlight their lack of progress in the Algerian nation while implicating the past as the culprit of the present. Because women were not allowed to testify their war experiences—and therefore impress themselves into the memory of their nation—their memories have been compromised though their memories have not.

## FINALE

*“The language was not lost but remained, yes, in spite of everything.”*  
*Paul Celan*

Critically speaking, outside limitations inhibit the dispersion of Djébar’s message of healing and restoration. National censorship of television and print severely limit her audience. While Djébar’s work circulates through the United States and Europe in French and English translations, Djébar’s words struggle to reach her target audience: Arabic or Berber-speaking women within Algeria. Cruelly ironic, the women who are most sheltered, illiterate, and oppressed in Algeria’s patriarchal society are most denied exposure to her liberating laments.

Djébar, herself, is acutely aware of these limitations. In her essay “The Eyes of Language,” Djébar addresses her attempted escape from and return to these painful realities:

You always negotiate with your country, but you do it badly. You want to leave it, and yet you do not want to leave it; you want to forget it and not forget it, to curse it and to sing its praises... Yes, you accept to live as far away as possible... until you rediscover your own land at the end of your wanderings... look[ing] once again at this country, at its drama, at its blood, to contemplate its treachery, its martyrdom, and ... its malediction.

Despite the challenges and turmoil implicit in addressing the Algerian woman’s experience, Djébar holds herself responsible to speak until their voices are ultimately restored to the Algerian nation.

Although final equality for Algerian women is yet to be won, the campaigns of women’s organizations to break the taboo on women’s issues show that Assia Djébar’s

efforts have not been in vain. Her words began the restoration of the voice to Algerian women; this voice testifies to their traumatic experiences and returns them to significance in the present and in the past. Djébar has restored the song to the muted fire carrier of the final scene of *Battle of Algiers* and transitioned this voice to the present day through her laments. In 2003, a modern Algerian lament named “Ouek dek yal qadi” (translated as “What Came over You, Judge?”) was recorded by twenty Algerian women from different backgrounds. This lament was written and produced in Paris, France, by an Algerian women’s organization named “20 ans, Barakat!”<sup>32</sup> (translated as “Twenty Years is Enough!”<sup>33</sup>) (“Singing”).

This modern rendition of the Algerian lament was written for the twenty-year anniversary of the Family Code. The video was made to inform and entertain every generation with its upbeat and fast-moving rhythms. The verses of the song are sung by individuals or in duets, and the chorus is made up of dozens of women and girls. Footage of women marching and celebrating in women’s rights demonstrations is shown along with the women singing in the studio. Flashes of veiled women and girls are also shown. In one shot, a woman speaks into a journalist’s microphone from beneath her veil. The last moments of the music video reflect back to muted fire carrier of *Battle of Algiers*. In this final scene, an old woman ululates. She knows her voice is finally heard; she looks into the camera and smiles.

The lament was distributed on the radio, French television channels, and the internet, finding its way into many Algerian homes. This political music video rallies

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<sup>32</sup> “20 ans, Barakat!” echoes the slogan “7 ans, Barakat!” which was an anti-violence campaign when fighting broke out among Algerians after seven years of violence with the French (“Singing”).

<sup>33</sup> “20 Years is Enough!” refers to the twenty years of life under the Family Code.

women to “come out of the dark” and demand the rights they had won for themselves in the Algerian War of Independence. They cry out to the Algerian government, saying:

What came over you, Judge?  
Why are you afraid of me?  
I weather all the storms.  
My words carry no venom.

Our words rise here today because women have no rights.  
I’m telling a story of what the powerful have done,  
Of rules, a code of despair, a code obsessed with women.  
Women come out of the dark  
After twenty years of trouble.

With the Family Code our wings are clipped.  
We aren’t asking for any favors.  
History has spoken for us.  
Judge, stop pursuing an unfounded fear.  
Write that I want to experience my dignity now.

Inspired by these words, the younger generation has reinvigorated the “20 ans, Barakat!” organization and is revitalizing the efforts to repeal the Family Code. To create an inclusive environment, women of every regional accent were invited; Berber, Arabic, and French languages are included; and men<sup>34</sup> enter into the final verse of the song. The inclusiveness of this lament was designed to strengthen the Algerian woman’s sense of community and affirm Algerian unity. Since the release of the music video, changes have, in fact, been made in the Family Code<sup>35</sup>. Women are hopeful for greater change now that the taboo of speaking out for women’s rights has begun to break.

Assia Djebbar breached the silence that veiled the women of Algeria. The testimony encouraged by Djebbar inspired a community of solidarity and healing for these

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, of the fifteen men invited to participate only four accepted. Caroline Brac de la Perrière, director of “20 ans, Barakat!” admitted that the men invited were generally not supportive, but she felt that in hope of a united future, men should participate (“Singing”).

<sup>35</sup> As discussed in “The Algerian Women Experience” of chapter one, these 2005 changes to the code are problematic in practice for the Algerian women.

traumatized women. With a courageous voice, Djébar shatters the shackles of taboo by addressing the realities and injustices of life as an Algerian woman. With the voice of the Algerian lament, Djébar calls women out of the invasive shadows to the light of the Algerian day—from the harem-home to the public forum, from the veil to the nude, from trauma to testimony, from the abyss of forgotten memory to history in the making. Her work returns Algerian women to significance. Without Djébar's efforts to restore the voice of women throughout Algerian postcolonial history, Algerian women could not have transitioned from silence to song.

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