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Senses of Vulnerability: Gender, Embodiment, and Dis-Orientation from the Algerian War to the War in Iraq

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

by

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September 2018

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VITA OF ALEXANDRA MAGEARU

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ABSTRACT

Senses of Vulnerability: Gender, Embodiment, and Dis-Orientation from the Algerian War to the War in Iraq

by

Alexandra Magearu

Senses of Vulnerability makes a contribution to postcolonial feminism and literary criticism by developing a feminist politics of the senses and by redefining the relationship between vulnerability and resistance as part of an extended reading of creative works emerging from transnational and transhistorical contexts such as the Algerian War, the "War on Terror," and the War in Iraq. I propose an exploration of feminist phenomenology, in particular the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Sara Ahmed, Alia Al-Saji, and Judith Butler, in relation to Francophone and Anglophone literary and cultural productions by Arab, Amazigh, and/or Muslim women such as Assia Djebar, Yamina Mechakra, Leila Aboulela, Mohja Kahf, Riverbend, Mona Haydar, and Amani Al-Khatahtbeh. The project deconstructs hegemonic appropriations of the notion of vulnerability, such as in the instrumentalization of Muslim women's rights in the service of imperial wars, and aims to shift conversations about vulnerability towards critical engagements with socially and politically induced forms of precarity and resistance at the intersection of colonial, patriarchal, and neo-colonial systems of power. Because the political life of the senses is crucial in this context, I explore the defamiliarization of the Islamophobic gaze, subaltern orality, the traumatic effects of sexualized torture and bodily pain, proprioceptive diasporic displacement, and the

disorientation produced by gendered racialization in Arab, Amazigh, and/or Muslim women's work. While acknowledging the embodied trauma and the social and affective consequences of experiences of racialization, this project also aims to foreground concrete poetic modes of dis-orientation employed by Arab, Amazigh, and/or Muslim women to counter, disengage, and shatter culturally racist, misogynist, and Islamophobic practices. Dis-orientation, in Mohja Kahf's understanding, is an aesthetic and political approach to creative work that undoes the Orientalist habits of seeing and the Eurocentric epistemological assumptions inherent in moments of gendered racialization and, more generally, in Islamophobic forms of representation.

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INTRODUCTION

Towards a Feminist Politics of the Senses: Vulnerability and Resistance in Arab and Muslim Women's Work

> "Living in London, I know that I am not alone in the experience of alienation; there are hundreds of thousands of us: people with an Arab or Muslim background living in the West and doing daily double-takes when faced with their reflection in a Western mirror." (Ahdaf Soueif)

One of the most crucial issues Arab and Muslim diasporic and postcolonial communities face in contemporary European and U.S. societies entails gaining access to the means of representation, whether this involves institutional, political, or cultural representation. Their reflection in "a Western mirror," as Egyptian author Ahdaf Soueif notes in *Mezzaterra* (2004), has been systematically distorted by cultural discourses rooted in classical Orientalist forms of representation, Eurocentric conceptions of modernity, and the articulation of cultural racism and Islamophobia. What is the effect of this form of cultural misrepresentation if not a hegemonic distortion of the order of the sensible? If senses of seeing, affective dispositions, and embodied orientations are structured according to dominant cultural and political discourses, then what sort of poetic and political strategies can artists, writers, and activists employ in order to counter negative representations of their communities? How do we acknowledge the lived experience of vulnerability felt by Arab and Muslim women, without contributing to a gendered and racializing discourse of victimization, but instead foregrounding the creative and political strategies of resistance engendered by precarity?

This project concerns itself with the cultural and political life of the senses, of vulnerability, and of affect, from the point of view of feminist cultural and literary productions that seek creative solutions to respond to the experience of alienation, and the subsequent embodied vulnerability felt by Arab and Muslim women in contexts of (neo-)colonial occupation such as French-dominated Algeria, and U.S.-occupied Iraq, and postcolonial and diasporic spaces in Western Europe and the United States. In this text, I will also explore hybrid forms of subjectivity, forged at the intersection of Arab, Muslim, Euro-American, and/or Amazigh cultures within a field of intertwined cultural influences and plural modes of being and belonging that foreshadows the possibility of what Ahdaf Soueif calls "mezzaterra:" "an area of overlap, where one culture shaded into the other, where echoes and reflections added depth and perspective, where differences were interesting rather than threatening, because they were foregrounded against a backdrop of affinities" (7)[1]. Indeed, most of the literary texts and cultural productions analyzed in this work testify to the existential complications of inhabiting plural and conflicting identities in political contexts based on the polarization of essentialized identities, "the Arab woman" or "the Muslim woman" versus the "modern, Western woman," amongst others. Following Frantz Fanon and Sara Ahmed's work on the psycho-affective effects of (colonial) power, I expand my inquiry to study not only the traumatic impacts of war, torture, colonial and patriarchal violence on women's lives and on their sense of selfhood, but also the alienating effects of diasporic disorientation, gendered racialization, and Islamophobia.

[1] For Ahdaf Soueif, the Egypt of the 1960s was a "mezzaterra" of cultural flourishing, in which the clear-cut distinctions between "Western" and "Arab" cultures had not been established yet. With the intensification of conflicts in the Middle East, particularly through Israel's continuous colonization of Palestine and U.S.-led imperial wars, the polarization of identities in the media and in politics has led to the gradual erosion of the "mezzaterra" (8-9).

REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSLIM WOMEN: FROM CLASSICAL ORIENTALIST TO NEO-ORIENTALIST NARRATIVES

The imagery of the veil in Euro-American cultural forms of representation has functioned as a metonymical signifier encompassing both the subjugation of women to a regressive and repressive political, cultural and religious order, *and* the promise of unrestrained, exotic delights. Algerian author Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem* (*Le Harem colonial: images d'un sous-érotisme* [1981]) has already unraveled the phantasmatic constructions of Orientalism through the prism of popular colonial postcards produced in the 1920s and 1930s, photographs of Algerian women either in an anthropological vein or images staged for the camera, in various eroticized postures, satisfying the scopic desire of a European male viewer. The colonial postcard straddles two spaces, according to Alloula, that which it represents and the exotic, imaginary space of eroticism. If the whiteness of the Algerian haïk functions as a form of blindness in the midst of the photographic image, "the absence of a photo, a veiled photograph" (7), to master the image of the "Algerian woman" then entails unveiling her, trespassing the private realm of the harem, uncovering her body and reconfiguring it within the semiotic vocabulary of the colonial gaze. The photographic fixation on the woman's body, adorned in elaborate dress and jewelry, placed behind bars in the enclosure of the harem or reclining in a luxurious and languorous somnolence, relies upon a long tradition of Orientalist paintings of odalisques.[2]

Western imaginaries have continuously foreclosed to Muslim women the possibility for self-expression specifically because of the powerful grasp that Orientalist and neo-

[2] For a further discussion of Orientalist representations of Algerian women in European paintings see Dobie (2001) and Yeğenoğlu (1998).

Orientalist fantasies continue to have upon Western societies. In her rigorous work on gendered Orientalism in *Colonial Fantasies* (1998), Meyda Yeğenoğlu clarifies that her use of the notion of "the Western subject" does not refer primarily to an essence or an identity present to itself, but to a process which constitutes particular social identities and, thus, to "a position or positioning, to a place, or placing, that is, to a specific inhabiting of a place called 'Western'" (3). For Yeğenoğlu, studying colonial and Orientalist discourses implies the study of the "Westernizing" and "Orientalizing" operations of culture, which constitute historically specific fantasies by which subjects imagine themselves as Western in opposition to Oriental others or vice-versa. In this sense, literary and cultural scholarship can emphasize and deconstruct the narrative-like structure of these essentialist operations of culture, the way in which these discourses grow both by word-of-mouth, similarly to oral histories, and through written sources or social performances, but derive their social strength from genealogies of representation of Western and cultural Others, from institutionalized discourses and practices, as well as from the manner in which global relations of power and foreign policies reshape and reorient these narratives towards political and economic gains.

Building on Frantz Fanon's discussion of colonialism in Algeria and Edward Said's well-known theorization of Orientalism[3], Meyda Yeğenoğlu inquires into the specific articulation of cultural and sexual difference in her analysis of the discursive work of colonialism and the proliferation of Orientalist fantasies about veiled women. Yeğenoğlu considers the scopic regimes that are established by the mechanisms of colonialism, specifically with regards to the fantasies or desires associated with unveiling Muslim

3 See Edward Said's *Orientalism,* specifically for his description of the Orient as both a representational and material production of European modernity (6). I will discuss Frantz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* at more length in Chapter One.

women's bodies, either in order to gain visual control over them or for the presumed goal of liberating them from their cultural and bodily enclosures. Studying a broad spectrum of European travel writing, Yeğenoğlu argues that the veil becomes a multifarious cultural object representing, within a colonial context, both the truth of the Oriental culture, its supposed essence, and the concealment of truth, the impenetrability of Orientals, their radical otherness (49-50). Within the regimes of modernity, in which power is linked to controlling spaces of visibility and transparency, the veiled woman does not only frustrate the conditions of visibility through her concealment, but reverses the domains of visibility by depleting the European subject of his domineering gaze:

> The loss of control does not imply a mere loss of sight, but a complete reversal of positions: her body completely invisible to the European observer except for her eyes, the veiled woman can see without being seen. The apparently calm rationalist discipline of the European subject goes awry in the fantasies of penetration as well as in the tropological excess of the veil. (43)

The veil and the multifarious meanings and potentials it evokes for the viewer disorients the European observer, whether he be erotically invested in the process of unveiling, or whether she be invested in removing the shackles of "backward" and "barbaric" Islamic traditions and Westernizing the Muslim woman. For European and American feminists such as Ruth Frances Woodsmall and Juliette Mince, Muslim women's veiling practices become paradigmatic for the narrative locating Muslim societies in a timeless and unchangeable past, out of touch with Western modernity:

> The metonymic association between the Orient and its women, or more specifically the representation of woman as tradition and as the essence of the Orient, made it all

> the more important to lift the veil, *for unveiling and thereby modernizing the woman of the Orient signified the transformation of the Orient itself.* (Yeğenoğlu's italics, 99)

The project of the emancipation of the Muslim woman, thus, coincides with the project of liberal humanism, rooted in conceptions of "progress," "individuality," and "freedom" specific to particular European traditions of modernity in which the sovereign subject has been delineated and defined consistently in opposition to a non-Western other.

miriam cooke [sic] has coined the concept "Muslimwoman" to refer to the manner in which gender and religion become inextricably bound within communities of interpretation in imposed identifications which Muslim women might or might not choose for themselves: "The Muslimwoman is not a description of reality; it is the ascription of a label that reduces all diversity to a single image" either connoted negatively in Muslim-minority countries or connoted positively in Muslim-majority countries, which are or have been under threat from non-Muslims. Both in Muslim-majority countries and in secular states, the style of dress of Muslim women, including their right to wear or not to wear a veil, has been often the focus of public debate and struggle, as it happened in Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and France, to name only a few political contexts. Particularly in countries in which Islamophobic sentiment has been intensifying, cooke argues that the Muslim veil functions similarly to race, as "a marker of essential difference that Muslim women today cannot escape" (104).

This implied cultural othering of Muslim women has been consistently enhanced over the past few decades not only by the declared goals of Euro-American political state maneuvers in the Middle East, but also by a growing media discourse, which tends to obsessively and voyeuristically focus on Muslim women's personal lives and their struggles within patriarchal communities. Fauzia Ahmad's research demonstrates that post-9/11 and

post-7/7 British political and media discourses about Islam and Muslims have tended to attribute a negative focus to Muslim-related stories, while conflating Islam itself with different Muslim people's attitudes and lives, and deploring the failure of multiculturalism in so far as the British Muslim community is seen as recalcitrant to proper integration (251). In this context, British Muslim women have become representative for the perceived "Muslim threat" to secularism and liberal Western values (258-259). In the United States, the media apparatus has considerably shifted after 9/11 and throughout the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq towards repetitive simplifications of a limited number of images which decontextualize the political, social, and cultural complexities of different Muslim countries, as well as the differentiated lives and conditions of Muslim women. There are persistent themes and motifs with regard to the depiction of Muslim women in U.S. media, as Ghazi-Walid Falah argues: Muslim women are represented as passive victims (as has been the case in representations of Afghan or Iraqi women) or as political militants (as has been the case in images of Palestinian women activists or, even, suicide-bombers). While the first set of images invites the intervention of Western powers to alleviate women's suffering, the second set of portrayals reproduces the image of an irrational Muslim world trapped within the grips of senseless violence (305-306). While these insistent images and discourses, so prevalent throughout Euro-American media outlets, produce either horror or fascination with a global Muslim world depleted of its difference and fluidity, the collective affect generated by the conflation of Islam and terrorism turns the attention towards Western Muslim communities, often regarded as responsible for the Islamization of society or, even, for being implicated in a growing anti-Western Islamic movement[4].

4 See also Elizabeth Poole's *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*, Elzani Elgamri's *Islam in the British Broadsheets: The Impact of Orientalism on Representations of Islam in the British Press* and

These forms of representation are also reproduced by a wealth of popular literature that utilizes the image of the Muslimwoman as a type of survivor-character, fighting to escape from oppressive Muslim contexts[5], and by an uncritical type of feminist activism, which regards the Muslimwoman as an indoctrinated and ideologically interpellated subject who must be emancipated.[6] These contemporary representations of Muslims and Muslim women are embedded in longer genealogies of Orientalist depictions of colonized women often tied to Europe's colonial history in Muslim countries, as well as the production of literary texts, travel writings, and anthropological or sociological studies taking as their primary focus the radical otherness of the Muslimwoman and her embeddedness in a mysterious Islamic culture, forever receding into the past.

Public spaces characteristic to particular societies or communities are not merely malleable assemblages of objects, infrastructures, architectural landscapes, and participatory subjects. They are historically—and geographically—specific environments produced, shaped, and modulated by dominant forms of representation, as well as by the circulation of affective objects, which carry collective meanings and attachments. As Sara Ahmed demonstrates, emotions[7] do not persist in individual bodies, nor are they merely produced at the level of the social, but they become linked to different objects that circulate socially.

Evelyn Alsultany's *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*.

5 The figure of the Muslimwoman appears in neo-Orientalist American popular fictions such as Jean Sasson's novels. See Dora Ahmad's critique in "Not Yet Beyond the Veil: Muslim Women in American Popular Literature".

6 See, for instance, Charlotte Weber's "Unveiling Scheherazade: Feminist Orientalism in the International Alliance of Women, 1911-1950" for a discussion of the international women's movement and its complicated relationship with the Middle East, and Reina Lewis' *Rethinking Orientalism: Women. Travel, and the Ottoman Harem* for an analysis of European women travellers' practices of Orientalizing Arab and Muslim women.

7 In affect theory, emotions are usually distinguished from affects in so far as they are individualized and brought to conscious awareness, whereas affect is that force which impacts upon the body without entirely entering consciousness. See Melissa Greg and Gregory J. Seigworth's collection, *The Affect Theory Reader*, for an elucidation of the relationship between emotions and affect. For Sara Ahmed, emotions structure affective economies, but cannot be fully located within particular individuals. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, she investigates the role of emotions such as pain, hate, fear, disgust, shame and love as they circulate socially by way of different objects and not necessarily through the movement of subjects.

Cultural objects "become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension" (2004: 11). The *hijab* is one such cultural object saturated with multifarious meanings, attachments, and affective intensities.[8] The veiled woman, then, participates differently in dominant European or U.S. environments structured in such ways that her presence, her movement, her posture, her gestures, and her attire become objects of intensified surveillance. Public spaces in majority Euro-American societies tend to be supersaturated with imaginaries and affective dispositions, which either create hostile environments for Muslim women, or limit and disorient their movements. Different discursive productions intersect in producing their bodies as contrasting and out of place. Discourses of secularism render practicing Muslims hyper-visible and, in some cases, pose restrictions on their practices and choices. Discourses of war, which rely upon the production of nationalist subjects and the demonization of symbolic minorities, mark Muslims as the primary threat to public safety and to national security in a clash-of-civilizations type of rhetoric. Neo-Orientalist imaginaries, which draw their symbols from intricate colonial histories, produce affective dispositions, which mark Muslim women as exotic, foreign, or inscrutable Others. One of the main goals of this project is to reflect on the manner in which Muslim women have been represented in collective Euro-American imaginaries and on the way in which Western Muslim communities have been considerably impacted as a result.

8 There are different concepts used to refer to the hijab in English and French contexts: *the Muslim veil, the headscarf, le voile, le foulard*. Here, I use the Arabic word *hijab*, or حجاب. Public conversations also refer to other terms describing different forms of covering: *the niqab, the chador, the burka* etc.

VULNERABILITY AND THE POLITICS OF THE SENSIBLE

According to Jacques Rancière, to become a political subject is to partake in "the distribution of the sensible," or those aspects of sense perception according to which different social positions and roles are allocated in the common. For Rancière, politics is intertwined with aesthetics, in so far as aesthetics refers not only to cultural production, but also to the social and political role of the senses in human societies. This is why, in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004), Rancière observes that "politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, about who has the ability to see and the talent to speak" (8). Being able to see, being able to speak, and, I would add, being able to move across borders or through the common, become intertwined with questions of access to the public space and to the means of representation. Yet what if the order of the sensible is displaced by the colonial production of knowledge, which overwrites and obliterates subaltern histories? And who is able to speak in contemporary globalized European and U.S. societies? What types of bodies are allowed to move freely through public spaces? And what ways of seeing are developed at the intersection of patriarchal representations, class divisions, and discourses of discrimination against immigrants, foreigners and minority populations? In order to engage with these questions, I propose an exploration of feminist phenomenology, in particular the work of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Alia Al-Saji and Sara Ahmed, in relation to Francophone and Anglophone literary and cultural productions of Arab, Amazigh, and/or Muslim women such as Assia Djebar, Yamina Mechakra, Leila Aboulela, Mohja Kahf, Riverbend, Mona Haydar, and Amani Al-Khatahtbeh,

I take a phenomenological approach to the study of the mechanisms of Islamophobia by relying on the work of scholars and philosophers who have analyzed the centrality of habits of seeing and rehearsed affective dispositions in the formation of racist social practices. To trace the lived experience of racialization, I engage different poetic and political strategies employed by Francophone Algerian and Anglophone Arab artists and writers in order to interrupt racializing habits of seeing and to give voice to subaltern women. I argue that a phenomenological analysis can contribute to the contemporary scholarship on the discrimination against Arab and Muslim women by giving visibility to the lived dimensions of racialization, including experiences of alienation and affective displacement, by inquiring into the habitual structure of the racializing vision, and finally by paying attention to the relationship between bodily disorientation and the production of spaces of marginalization. I hope to shed light on the mechanism of gendered racialization inherent in Islamophobia, by investigating how it implicates different types of bodies in its folds and how it relies upon the proliferation of multiple forms of patriarchy. While acknowledging the embodied trauma and the social and affective consequences of experiences of racialization, this project also aims to foreground concrete poetic modes of *dis-orientation* employed by Arab, Amazigh, and Muslim women to counter, disengage, and shatter culturally racist, misogynist, and Islamophobic practices. Dis-orientation, in Mohja Kahf's understanding, is an aesthetic and political approach to creative work that undoes the Orientalist habits of seeing and the Eurocentric epistemological assumptions inherent in moments of gendered racialization and, more generally, in Islamophobic forms of representation.

My use of the term *body* in this project is meant to refer to a phenomenological vocabulary which begins its investigation from lived, embodied experience. I use the term

body to signal the co-imbrication of consciousness and materiality in the production of the subject, and *not* in order to denote passivity, objectification or lack of agency. I also acknowledge that the reduction of the subject to pure embodiment, materiality and, by association, animality, is part of European colonial histories of racialization which are reliant upon an extensive philosophical devaluation of embodiment. The feminist and critical race phenomenologies I take my inspiration from subvert these Eurocentric assumptions and revalue the importance of lived experience. Although objectification can be a fundamental part of gendered and racializing mechanisms, and thus requires further investigation, I do not argue that all bodies are objectified at all times by virtue of their being bodies in the world. The body, in my understanding, is the locus of the unconscious, affect and proprioception, but also the instantiation of agency, self-knowledge, self-awareness and being in the world, as well as alongside others.

My understanding of the body is indebted to Judith Butler's thinking about vulnerability as both an existential state and a socially induced condition. In "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance" (2016), Butler builds on her previous work on vulnerability as a fundamental dependency on others in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) in order to rethink the relationship between agency and vulnerability. Considering the manner in which infrastructure and public assemblies can channel a collective sense of vulnerability towards a politics of resistance, Butler opposes the binary between vulnerability and agency, exploring instead how "vulnerability enters into agency" (25). Equally, my project explores the ways in which senses of vulnerability, such as the trauma experienced by Arab and Muslim women as a result of colonial violence and war, and the disorientation produced by being marginalized or racialized, can be made visible and

productively reconstituted through critical writing and political art in narratives that empower women and dispel stereotypical forms of representation.

Following Butler's philosophy of embodiment, I understand vulnerability to be not an individualized existential experience, but a sensorial and affective openness to the world and to others, which exposes the body both to injurability and violence, and to the possibility of intersubjective awareness and care. For Butler, vulnerability "characterizes a relation to a field of objects, forces, and passions that impinge on or affect us in some way" (25). It is thus a relationship to the ambiguous zone in which receptivity and responsiveness can no longer be distinguished, "a zone in which we are acted on by the world, by what is said and shown, by what we hear, and by what touches us" (23), and an environment on which we can also act and which we can shape (24). To be vulnerable means to be implicated in the world, embedded in a system of thick relationality, which links our own fragility to the ethical responsibility towards others. To be affected, one must be receptive to witnessing vulnerability and, thus, respond to the need for care, nurture, and shelter others may address to us. This also entails a politically radical view of the subject as exposed, through the openness of their senses, to being affected and formed by the world and her relationships to others. Vulnerability is a fundamental aspect of what Rancière called "the politics of the sensible," in that it is what makes participation in the common possible, but at the same time it also marks the ways in which certain types of bodies are excluded from the common. For vulnerability is not only the result of our own mortality, of illness, or of natural catastrophes, but it can be produced by socio-political mechanisms invested in securing the lives of certain populations at the expense of others.

Although vulnerability can be considered a fundamental ontological condition of living beings, it should also be noted, as Butler does in *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009), that populations and individuals are differently exposed to harm and violence depending on their position in global power dynamics. Here, Butler offers two intersecting terms to distinguish between these phenomena: while *precariousness* refers to the fact that living beings are susceptible to destruction, *precarity* "designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (25). Writing particularly in response to the developments of the "war on terror," the invasion of Afghanistan, the occupation of Iraq, and the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, Butler adds that war discourses regulate the affective responses of the population to the suffering of other vulnerable populations by rendering certain lives more grievable and worthy of protection than others. Thus, after September 11, a discourse of vulnerability with regards to the U.S. population was invoked in support of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and for the bolstering of nationalist belonging (40). Simultaneously, the vulnerability of the victims of these wars has been rendered invisible by its filtering through the multiple interpretative frames of war, whether media or political discourses in which Arab and Muslim lives are represented as less than human and thus, ungrievable. Butler writes that war "sustains its practices through acting on the senses, crafting them to apprehend the world selectively, deadening affect in response to certain images and sounds, and enlivening affective responses to others" (51). This is another important aspect of the political and cultural life of perception: the senses, like affect, can be instrumentalized for

ideological purposes, manipulated and shaped to function selectively through their habitual uses.

The blatant exception in the discourses about vulnerability and human rights employed throughout the "war on terror," is the often-invoked vulnerability of Muslim women, who must presumably be liberated from their own patriarchal cultures. As I will discuss later, discourses of vulnerability can become effective ideological mechanisms produced selectively to enforce the workings of empire—while the effects of imperial wars, including bombings of civilians and mass destruction of infrastructure are concealed, other phenomena such as Islamic fundamentalism and Middle Eastern dictatorships are foregrounded as the primary sources of vulnerability for women and children. This is why it is important to inquire into the relationship between the political misuses of discourses of vulnerability, the multiple socio-political forces that produce precarity for particular populations, and the forms of resistance that can be mobilized as a result of these dynamics.

Perception is layered (just as knowledge relies upon sedimentation) in that it entails not only an immediate encounter with reality, but also a set of learned behaviors and habitual actions that determine how certain types of bodies are registered, (mis-)recognized, and apprehended. The senses can be primed to perceive certain types of bodies to be more alike, familiar, and safe, while others can appear radically different or foreign, out of place, and threatening. This is why it is crucial to explore the relationship between the cultural narratives of war, Orientalism, and Islamophobia, and the structuring of the senses in racializing encounters. However, this project also investigates the disorientation of the senses as an effect of defamiliarization. Histories of sensorial habituation can be unhinged from their automatic functioning through alternative forms of representation. In Jacques

Rancière's understanding, to create political art means to subject your audience to the collision of heterogeneous elements, "two politics of sensoriality" clashing and redefining the subject in process (2009: 46). In other words, the world of the senses is not permanently foreclosed, but can be shaped and shifted through defamiliarization. This means that political art can open up the senses to their own potentiality, their capacity to function otherwise, and thus dis-orient or re-orient habitual affective practices. The creative work of Arab, Amazigh and Muslim women I will engage in this project offers different poetic strategies that defamiliarize habitual Orientalist modes of perception.

FROM DISORIENTATION TO DIS-ORIENTATION

Phenomenological theories of embodiment can inform our understanding of the existential displacement of experiences of alienation and disorientation, particularly in so far as they offer accounts of the importance of bodily awareness in relation to the world. In her crucial intervention in phenomenological inquiry, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006), Sara Ahmed brings classical phenomenology in conversation with feminist theories of the body, queer studies and critical race philosophy in order to ask how different bodies inhabit space and are oriented towards objects by virtue of the fact that they are sexed, gendered and racialized bodies. Essential to Ahmed is the question of orientation in relation to space, or, the manner in which bodily alignment (being "in line") allows certain bodies to extend into spaces which have already taken their shape, whereas it does not leave enough space for "out of place" bodies to do so (15). Her work challenges some classical

phenomenological assumptions according to which bodies are generally in alignment with themselves and distinct from objects, in so far as this conception universalizes the lived experience of embodiment. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for example, the separation between the body and objects is crucial to phenomenological inquiry. The body is distinguishable from objects through its capacity to gaze at and over objects and, thereby, establish its perspectival horizon (96). This perspective upon the world, or orientation towards objects, can only be possible through the alignment of the body with itself. Here, Merleau-Ponty deploys a concept popularized by classical psychology, the *body schema*, to refer to "the global awareness of my posture in the inter-sensory world" (102). The body schema encompasses one's perception of one's body in a holistic senses and ensures its situational spatiality: the relationship between different limbs, their movement and their position in relation to other objects form a general synthesis of the body and solidify the body in its distinctiveness from the objective world. Having an implicit sense of one's body schema means being orientated towards the world, being able to move freely through space and express one's own intentionality.

Sara Ahmed shows that this experience of one's own embodiment is the prerogative of a certain privileged bodily dwelling, while racialized bodies can often experience themselves in a rather more conflictual manner. Building on Frantz Fanon's well-known account of the lived experience of racialization in *Black Skin White Masks* (2008, [1952]), Ahmed argues that racism "'disorients' black bodies such that they cease to know where to find things—reduced as they are to things among things" (110). Fanon describes the manner in which the black man, navigating the space of the colonial metropolis for the first time, discovers that to be fixed by the white gaze is to be turned into an object amongst other

objects. By introducing a differentiation in the specificity of lived experience, Fanon shows how the racialized body is differently constituted by the socio-historical regimes of colonial power that exclude people of color from normative models of the human, limit the movement of their bodies in space and engender their alienation.

In her work on disorientation, Ahmed is concerned with the manner in which spaces become racialized through the production of whiteness that functions as a normative device governing the manner in which spaces become delimited and hierarchized. Whiteness has the privilege of public comfort "by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape" (2006: 135). Racialized bodies, on the other hand, experience what Ahmed calls *stopping devices* (2006: 139), blockages in their movement, obstructions, cessations of their comfort and ease, and their capacities for extending in space. As an example, Ahmed recounts a personal story of being delayed at New York airport customs because of her name:

> The name 'Ahmed,' a Muslim name, slows me down. It blocks my passage, even if only temporarily. I get stuck, and then move on. When I fly out of New York later that week, I am held up again. This time it is a friendlier encounter. I find out I am on the 'no fly list,' and they have to ring to get permission to let me through. It takes time, of course (2006: 140).

Her Muslim name locates her within a specific estranged and estranging heritage. This heritage finds itself out of place and out of tune with the dominant U.S. population which simultaneously conceives itself as inheriting and inhabiting national space at the expense of strangers and outsiders: "to inherit a Muslim name in the West is to inherit the impossibility of extending the body's reach" (2006: 142). Public spaces, such as highly securitized international U.S. airports, take the shape of the habitual practices of a particular society,

becoming structured by the more or less free circulation of white, citizen bodies and the blockage of foreign nationals, particularly Muslim and Arab bodies.

Disorientation, in Ahmed's understanding, is the experience that derives from the way in which racialized bodies lose their foothold in the world by inhabiting spaces which do not extend their shapes and in which they are rendered strange, invasive, unfamiliar, mere objects out of place (2006: 160). In other words, one of the fundamental operations of the body, in a phenomenological sense, that of finding one's orientation towards the world, is disrupted in the process of racialization. Disorientation has serious affective consequences registered as physical and psychological stress, which not only reduces the body's movement and what it can do in the world, but also diminishes the sense of self. In Ahmed's words, the body itself becomes "the 'site' of social stress" (2006: 140), with consequences that can affect the subject's self-image and her likeliness to partake in the world.

As I will show in this project through my readings of literary texts, memoirs, testimonies, and art works, the destabilizing consequences of disorientation can be understood not only as a form of alienation, but as a disarray or blockage of the senses. And if the capacity to use one's senses is fundamental to becoming a political subject[9], then the disorientation or deprivation of the senses is also a political act. In extreme forms, sense deprivation and the manipulation of the senses has been intentionally used as a political tool for distributing violence during interrogation and torture sessions, as the photograph of the

[9] I am here noting the centrality of sight and speech as modes of participating in the common, following Jacques Rancière's understanding of the distribution of the sensible. My intention, however, is not to make an ableist argument according to which only those endowed with their intact sensorial capacities can be or become political subjects. There are many ways in which people with disabilities can express their political intent and participate in the commons. Conventionally, however, having access to a political forum is often determined by different subject's abilities to make their voices heard. The ways in which systems of gendered, racial, and heteronormative discrimination deny the participation of certain political subjects by way of not allowing space for their voices, their narratives, and forms of representation is the direct issue this project addresses.

hooded man from Abu Ghraib shows. Yet sense deprivation can take other forms as well, such as through the epistemological violence of colonial education or colonial history writing, or the political distribution of precarity, which renders certain populations voiceless or invisible. In everyday racializing encounters, disorientation can often be experienced as a splitting of the subject's bodily image. Moreover, sense disorientation can be a feature of the diasporic, immigrant condition, particularly in so far as the subject is forced to reorient herself to an estranging and alienating geography and social order. I will explore all of these examples of sensorial disorientation with reference to a transnational selection of cultural productions by Arab, Amazigh and Muslim women, which offer intimate readings of these experiences of alienation and propose critical ways of engaging with them.

The diasporic context is particularly important to this project, as I will trace the relationship between Orientalism, Islamophobia, and disorientation across historical periods and national borders. In addition to studying the experience of Algerian women during the War of Independence, I will investigate the postcolonial conflicts confronting Arab and Muslim female immigrants or minorities in Western Europe and the United States. In this context, Esra Santesso has argued that, for Muslim women in Britain, the experience of disorientation emerges from their necessity to accustom themselves to a minoritarian position:

> Disorientation, in other words, is not a synonym for alienation or marginalisation, but rather a particular phase experienced by the devout Muslim woman estranged from her Muslim homeland and whose integration into Britishness depends on her ability to re-negotiate religious identity. To be more precise, disorientation does not only refer to the horizontal movement of crossing borders but also the vertical movement

> of repositioning from a major position (moral, cultural, ideological) to a minority one. (15)

Santesso marks the feeling of *disorientation* as an existential, lived experience which distinguishes itself from alienation and marginalization in so far as the body employs different types of mechanisms to re-orient itself in space according to the unwritten laws which govern the respective space. This is, however, not merely a conscious type of action, which solicits the subject's awareness. At times, it can have pure affective dimensions. The body's disorientation can be determined by its movement across different types of spaces in which one may encounter different types of affective resistances and acceptances, as well as confusions of perceptions and memories that are not always registered consciously and spontaneously interpreted by the subject.

But the question of disorientation merits further investigation, particularly because it can be considered from quite the opposite angle of the racializing mechanism. Commenting on Fanon's account of objectification, Nirmal Puwar argues for instance that it is not only the black body that can become disoriented in a predominantly white controlled space, but that the white gaze itself can be disrupted through the increasing presence of gendered and foreign bodies, immigrants and refugees or people of color in key social, institutional and public spaces. In this sense, Puwar adds, “a racialised episteme is interrupted” (42). If disorientation is a break in the body's habits, a spontaneous disalignment of the body from its position of self-certainty, then it can also be imagined as a displacement of the white body from its position of privilege and power through the interruption of the habits of the racializing vision.

This is a claim Alia Al-Saji encourages us to think towards in her comments on the ambivalence of hesitation (her own term for processes that approximate disorientation) in her essay, "A Phenomenology of Hesitation: Interrupting Racializing Habits of Seeing" (2014). Hesitation, in her understanding can represent a break in the affective infrastructure of racializing perception and can open the body to "the virtual multiplication of other ways of seeing, feeling, and acting – alternative routes to that of objectifying vision, routes that could lead to affective responsivity and critical awareness" (2014: 152). For this purpose, proximity and living with and alongside one another are crucial, as studies have demonstrated: those who know Muslims or have some degree of familiarity with Islam are less likely to experience Islamophobic sentiments[10]. Another important strategy entails the production of theoretical, poetic, artistic, or political frameworks that defamiliarize and disorient the habitual reactions of their audience.

In her non-fiction work on the portrayal of Muslim women in European literature, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (1999), Mohja Kahf deconstructs the evolution of the cultural and literary figure of the Muslim woman throughout the medieval era and beyond as it moves from the image of an exuberant and unwieldy termagant to the frail and vulnerable image of the veiled woman, enclosed behind the walls of an Oriental harem, blossoming with the promise of intoxicating sensual delights. Kahf's preoccupation, as she clarifies in her introduction, is less with Muslim women "with live cells and nerves and muscle tissue," but with the figure of "the Muslim woman" as she appears in the development of a particular Western narrative with "a genealogy and logic of its own, emerging from developments in Western representations of

10 See, for instance, the study published by Pew Research Center publish on September 9, 2009: http://www.pewforum.org/2009/09/09/publicationpage-aspxid1398-3/ (Accessed September 28, 2017)

gender, of the self, and of the foreign Other" (1999: 2-3). In other words, Kahf distances herself from both essentialist conceptions of the Muslim subject versus the Western subject, exploring instead the proliferation of discourses of representation which rely on similar practices of filtering, understanding and depicting the image of the inscrutable, yet desirable "Muslim woman." Her argument emphasizes that the rise of the image of the subjugated Muslim woman is deeply intertwined with the expansion of the British and the French empires of the nineteenth century, in which both the emerging conceptions of liberty in European thought, the changing perceptions about gender roles and femininity, and the strategic othering of Muslim societies collude in the creation of a powerful rationale marking the body of the Muslim woman as a symbolic field to be liberated and appropriated. The "question of liberty for Muslim women" also coincides with the "question of liberty in Western political discourse" (7).

Last but not least, Kahf argues that her goal is to accomplish the *"dis-Orienting"* of the familiar paradigm that emerges from the colonial rendering of the Muslim woman as one of the primary charity cases of the white man's burden (1999: 179). By playing on the presence of Orientalism in orientation, an association Sara Ahmed also notes (2006: 113), Kahf appropriates the question of disorientation as a rhetorical and creative device of writing back, against and beyond Orientalist representations of "the Muslim woman." In this work, I will explore the way in which Arab, Amazigh, and Muslim authors have expressed their own political voice through similar strategies focused on derailing dominant discourses by inserting subversive, counter-normative images within popular vocabularies and visual collections.

TRANSHISTORICAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXTS

This text is anchored in a comparison of two key historical moments that have contributed to the misrepresentation of Arab and Muslim women—the French colonial project in Algeria and the contemporary U.S.-led "war on terror—" and it is invested in outlining the continuities between classical Orientalist and neo-Orientalist forms of representation in discourses about Arab and Muslim women in Western Europe and the United States. I have chosen to foreground these contexts because of the transhistorical analogies in the function of French colonial power in Algeria and U.S. imperial power in Afghanistan and Iraq. Moreover, I believe that the colonial representation of Algerian women and the sexualized torture systematically employed by the French during the Algerian War represent historical precedents that illuminate some of the foremost ethical concerns raised by the U.S.-led "war on terror" and its human rights abuses.

In August 2003, five months into the U.S. occupation of Iraq, the Pentagon held a screening of Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1965) open to military personnel and civilians. The flier for the event read:

> How to win a battle against terrorism and lose the war of ideas. Children shoot soldiers at point-blank range. Women plant bombs in cafes. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sound familiar? The French have a plan. It

> succeeds tactically, but fails strategically. To understand why, come to a rare showing of this film. (quoted in Kaufman*, The New York Times,* par. 4[11])

The Battle of Algiers, which focused on an episode of the Algerian War in which the French colonial forces stifled an Algerian urban guerilla network, was considered exemplary for the purpose of understanding the unpredictability of guerilla warfare in recently occupied Iraq and the counter-insurgency measures the U.S. forces were to use to fight against the different Iraqi rebel groups forming in opposition to the occupation. Part of the counter-insurgency strategy of the occupation powers both in Algeria and in Iraq entailed depicting resistance movements and rebel groups as the primary terrorist element in a gesture that legitimized the violence of the state as the necessary force protecting order and ultimately ensuring peace. Additionally, torture became one of the central means by which the occupation forces gathered information in order to fight against insurgency. In *Torture and the Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad* (2008), Marnia Lazreg argues that "it is the ease with which torture has been practiced in violation of existing laws that ties the French experience in Algeria to that of the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan" (260). Although there are of course many historical and political differences between the French colonial project in Algeria and the U.S. occupation of Iraq, these intersections are indicative of discursive continuities in the justifications employed for occupation and for the use of torture.

In her work, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (2007), on the sexualized torture of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers at the Abu Ghraib detention center,

[11] In his article, "The World: Film Studies; What Does the Pentagon See in 'Battle of Algiers'?" published in *The New York Times,* Michael T. Kaufman details the fact that the event was suggested by the Directorate for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and drew a crowd of around forty officers and civilians: https://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/07/weekinreview/the-world-film-studies-what-does-the-pentagon-see-in-battle-of-algiers.html.

Jasbir K. Puar argues that Orientalist notions of sexuality function through transnational and transhistorical linkages "to create the Muslim body as a particular typological object of torture" (85-86). Employing examples of the sexualized torture of Algerians during the Algerian War as comparable to Abu Ghraib, Puar notes that "the supposed Muslim terrorist" is marked "as sexually conservative, modest and fearful of nudity […], as well as queer, animalistic, barbarian, and unable to control his (or her) urges" (86). Puar references the eroticized torture of male Algerian prisoners, but the striking difference of the Algerian context is the fact that several cases of female fighters, who were routinely tortured and systematically raped during interrogation sessions, became turning points in the debate about torture in mainland France, as I will discuss later in my analysis of Algerian fighter Djamila Boupacha's case. While cases of sexualized torture and rape of women went mostly underreported during the War in Iraq, they were highlighted during the Algerian War and were employed as strong arguments against colonial power.

When the photographs of the torture of Iraqis at Abu Ghraib were leaked to the press and caused a public scandal in the U.S. and the rest of the world, many were shocked by the fact that one of the guards responsible for torture was a woman (Lynndie England). This dispelled essentialist gendered representations of men as fundamentally predisposed to war and violence and women as inclined to pacification. Women could be torturers too and could take pleasure in the pain and abjection of other bodies because they benefitted from systems of imperial and racial oppression. This project does not idealize femininity as a transgressive or morally superior sphere for creative and political action. On the contrary, I acknowledge the cooperation of women and of feminism with colonial and imperial projects that have disadvantaged and displaced civilian populations across the world. My aim, however, is to

pay attention to the gender-specific experiences of vulnerability in times of war, particularly because legal and political vocabularies employed to refer to torture, conflict, and human rights abuses sometimes disregard the specificity of gendered lived experience.

Puar also notes that bodily torture should not be seen either as an exceptional event of the "war on terror," nor as a normalized development of imperialist violence. She claims that the torture employed at Abu Ghraib, although with its own specific intersection of race, gender, sexuality and empire, was only one element in a larger array of techniques of occupation and subjugation including 'shock and awe' bombings, terrorizing the civilian population through round-ups, interrogations and arbitrary detentions, assassinations, the use of heavy army weapons such as bulldozer and helicopter attacks against civilians, and other practices of intimidation routinely used as part of the invasion of Iraq (80). The staged acts of torture at Abu Ghraib reveal a particular type of haunting according to Puar, the haunting of an Orientalist phantasm in which sexual norms in the Middle East are approximated as eminently pre-modern and undemocratic. Once the Abu Ghraib photographs were unveiled to the U.S. public, some commentators claimed that the homosexual and feminized acts Iraqi prisoners were forced to enact were even more humiliating because of the taboo on homosexuality in Islam. As Puar and others have shown, this generalized view of Arab sexuality (based, amongst other sources, on Raphael Patai's book, *The Arab Mind*) was in fact popular amongst governmental officials and foreign policy experts and instructed U.S. military personnel while setting the stage for the torture and interrogation techniques used throughout the "war on terror:" "It is exactly this unsophisticated notion of Arab/Muslim/Islamic cultural difference—in the singular—that military intelligence

capitalized on to create what it believed to be a culturally specific ad thus 'effective' matrix of torture techniques" (84).

The historical similarities with Israeli occupation practices and the torture of Algerians by the French give shape to another type of phantasm, the Muslim body as a racialized, sexualized and gendered object of torture. According to Puar, not only do different types of bodies inform torture practices depending on the frames of recognition through which they are perceived, but torture "proliferates that which it names," it instantiates what is already expected from certain types of bodies (87). What Puar implies here is that the torture at Abu Ghraib (as in other historical cases) was a fundamental tool in the reproduction of Orientalist conceptions of the Muslim body, not only relying upon a set of stereotypes in its specificity, but also confirming and forcefully replicating these stereotypes in the process.[12]

Comparably, Marnia Lazreg has shown the way in which torture practices in Algeria were shaped in such a way that they attacked native culture deliberately, emphasizing humiliation through nakedness and sexualized violence, practices which were assumed to go against Algerian taboos and which aimed to re-socialize Algerians. On the one hand, stripping is a tool of sexualization, rendering the body of the colonized bare in their most vulnerable and intimate dispositions. On the other hand, stripping "tears up the prisoner's cultural garb, and assaults him with exposure to French culture assumed to be compatible with (the torture) of nakedness. The torturer's comment cuts through the political-military meaning of torture to expose its actual function as a tool of resocialization, even if

[12] In *Frames of War,* Judith Butler corroborates Puar's understanding of torture by claiming that the Abu Ghraib violence "was also a war to coercively produce the Arab subject and the Arab mind. That means that regardless of the complex cultural formations of the prisoners, they were compelled to embody the cultural reduction described by the anthropological text" (126).

momentary, of the native qua Arab into the ways of the colonizer" (123). The intervention of the French militarized state in maintaining Algeria French and warding off the growing movements of decolonization in Africa, involved systematically applying the revolutionary war theory (guerre révolutionnaire) of French army generals who had also fought in Indochina, according to Lazreg, Torture practices were an integral part of this doctrine of war, as were raids and arbitrary arrests, the relocation of entire Algerian villages to internment camps, mass rapes, and collective forms of punishment.

Another fundamental point of intersection this project takes its departure from is the use of colonial feminism in Algeria and in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the workings of empire, in order to win over public opinion and reorient affective investments towards supporting the war. In her foundational work, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots to a Modern Debate* (1992), Leila Ahmed defines colonial feminism as a type of feminism "used against other cultures in the service of colonialism" (151). By studying the representation of Muslim women in British discourses about colonial Egypt, Ahmed explores the manner in which the male Victorian establishment rejected feminist thought and development in Britain, while adopting the language of feminism in its colonies, particularly in order to "render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized people" (151). The veil became the main target of colonial attacks because it was employed to symbolize not only the reduction of Islamic traditional practices to the oppression of women, but also in order to mark the supposed backwardness of colonial cultures that needed to be set on the pathway towards modernization and progress.

Leila Ahmed's reading of colonial Egypt is informed by Frantz Fanon's essay, "Algeria Unveiled," published during the Algerian War in *A Dying Colonialism* (1965

[1959]). In this text, Fanon influentially notes that the Algerian veil becomes a central target of the colonial pacification of Algerian society by the French. The haïk, the traditional Algerian covering, had become one of the most visible markers of the cultural battle the French occupation forces led against Algerians. The logic of this ideological warfare involved winning over Algerian women to the colonial side through their unveiling, in Fanon's mimicry of this discourse: "If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight" (38). The situation of woman—freeing or liberating Algerian women—becomes a central cause as French organizations for the welfare of women multiply, while the discourse extends to branding Algerian men's behavior as medieval or barbaric for cloistering women. While the issues of confinement and imposed veiling certainly became points of contention for the postcolonial Algerian feminist movement, the colonial appropriation of these issues was oftentimes strategic and intertwined with a political agenda that aimed to assimilate and "Westernize" Algerian women as a means of obtaining control over the society as a whole.

In his book, *Burning the Veil: The Algerian War and the "Emancipation" of Muslim Women, 1954-1962,* Neil Macmaster details the media campaigns organized by French army propagandists through the heated political times of May 1958 during the war of liberation: Algerian women were used in radio broadcasts to call for the emancipation of other Algerian women through the removal of their veils and turning to their European sisters for support (122-123); ceremonies were held in Algiers in which Algerian and European women burned Muslim veils (128), and speakers were recruited such as Algerian student Monique Améziane and forced to remove their veils and give speeches about their own emancipation

in front of major crowds (134). Marnia Lazreg notes that Améziane did not wear the veil in her daily life, but was forced, during her speech, to adorn one and theatrically remove it: "Having never worn the veil, she had to fake liberation from 'tradition' that colonial generals wished to at once reify and jettison for the sake of dramatizing the triumph of modern France over archaic Algeria" (2008: 151) Améziane was in fact blackmailed with the fact that her brother, who was held by the French forces, would be tortured if she did not comply with the masquerade. These dramatic colonial spectacles aimed not only at making a point about the perceived regressive role of the veil and, implicitly, of Algerian and Islamic traditions, but also to manipulate the bodies and the affective dispositions of Algerian women for political gain.

The instrumentalization of Muslim women's practices of veiling in the French and British colonial civilizing missions bears significant similarities to contemporary imperialist and neo-Orientalist representations. Lila Abu-Lughod has repeatedly emphasized the fact that contemporary European and American incursions and interventions into foreign lands for security purposes or as part of a so-called "war on terror" have exploited the image of a universally oppressed, passive and submissive Muslim woman in order to justify neo-imperial geopolitical interests in Muslim majority countries (6-7). In fact, during the early developments of the "war on terror," the British Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Blair, and U.S. First Lady Laura Bush both made public statements condemning the treatment of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, suggesting that the only way in which Afghan society can be reformed towards democracy and equal opportunities for Muslim women would be through the forceful intervention of a U.S.-led coalition in the area (Haddad, Smith and Moore 32). While the problems Afghan women faced under the Taliban

regime were real and were indeed already confronted through the mobilization of different local women's groups[13], the pseudo-feminist and opportunist agenda of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan became immediately blatant to critics of the war. The discernible continuities in these histories of Orientalist representations of Muslim women reveal the undeniable force of social imaginaries in the transcultural reproduction of categories of social, cultural and racialized difference, which have consistently determined similar practices of exclusion and hierarchical social spaces.

The aim of this project is to shift the conversation from colonial, neocolonial, and imperialist articulations of feminism to postcolonial and transnational feminist thought. To engage with transnational feminism means to work against and beyond the universalism of some Euro-American forms of feminism that take for granted the condition of woman as determined primarily by gender oppression, in an effort to incorporate the insights of feminists of color and postcolonial feminists into thinking about the relationship between gender and other constructed markers such as race, religion, nationality, and class in globalized settings. I build on Chandra Talpade Mohanty's critique of "the production of the 'Third World Woman' as a singular monolithic subject in some (western) feminist texts" (61), in order to argue for an expanded and plural definition of feminism. By exploring the ways in which early European feminist discourses are reshaped in order to confront colonial power in crucial historical cases such as Gisèle Halimi and Simone de Beauvoir's defense of Djamila Boupacha, I will elaborate on the challenges of transnational feminist praxis for our current moment. Moreover, the work of Arab and/or Muslim feminists will inform my

[13] See for instance the work and advocacy RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) has been performing for the rights and protection of women since its foundation in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1977: http://www.rawa.org/index.php.

understanding of feminism as a relational and intersectional political framework in which gender is often already implicated in mechanisms of racialization, as well as in colonial or imperialist systems of power.

Chapter One engages with the challenges the postcolonial Algerian feminist writer faces in her attempt to uncover subaltern Algerian women's voices, muffled by Orientalist and nationalist forms of history writing and means of representation. The chapter first engages with the relationship between French Orientalist discourses about Algerian women and responses characteristic of Algerian nationalist discourse, such as Frantz Fanon's "Algeria Unveiled" and Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers,* which I read against oral ethnographies and interviews with former Algerian female fighters. Then, through a comparative study of two Francophone Algerian novels, Yamina Mechakra's *La Grotte éclatée* (1975) and Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1980), I explore the various forms of vulnerability experienced by women during the Algerian War. Both Mechakra and Djebar create multifaceted portrayals of Algerian fighters in an effort to trace the interconnected frameworks of colonial and patriarchal oppression, while developing a language of the senses as an alternative political vocabulary of emancipation for women. Besides investigating experiences of extreme violence at war, the chapter also explores other sources of disorientation (particularly in Assia Djebar's work) such as the alienation instantiated by colonial education, which complicates the postcolonial writer's task of re-writing subaltern histories.

Chapter Two addresses the systematic torture of Algerian prisoners by the French occupation forces in Algeria, with a particular emphasis on the specificity of sexualized torture in the reproduction of Orientalist conceptions of Muslim sexuality, and the discourses

about ethics, extreme war violence, and the body in pain, that informed public debates at the time. I explore at length Gisèle Halimi and Simone de Beauvoir's involvement with Algerian fighter Djamila Boupacha's case and the publication of their book, *Djamila Boupacha* (1962), which detailed the torture, rape, and subsequent trial of the young woman. I take this occasion to inquire into the ways in which both Halimi and Beauvoir's conceptions about Muslim societies are shaped by their involvement in anticolonial politics. Engaging with Beauvoir's work on colonialism and freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (148), I argue that the evolution of her views on Muslim women are representative of a considerable shift in her thinking informed by the priorities of developing an anticolonial discourse that does not victimize Muslim women. This chapter thus marks the transition from colonial forms of feminism to intersectional and transnational feminist frameworks with reference to the specificity of the cultural productions deriving from Boupacha's case. Last but not least, I explore the embodied vulnerability produced by the post-traumatic effects of torture through Frantz Fanon's psychiatric insights and Gisèle Halimi and Caroline Huppert's emphasis on the trauma suffered by Boupacha in *Djamila Boupacha* and the film *Pour Djamila* (2011), respectively.

Chapter Three marks the transition from colonial to postcolonial contexts through a comparison of two Anglophone Muslim novels, Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) and Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006), which explore the diasporic senses of disorientation and vulnerability experienced by their protagonists as a result of the anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain and the United States, respectively. In this chapter, I am particularly preoccupied with outlining a phenomenological exploration of cultural displacement by looking at the social conflicts and tensions felt by some Muslim immigrants

in Western Europe and the United States, in secular or partially secular environments, which render their bodies highly visible and out of place and impose limitations upon their movement. This chapter also considers the global production of discourses of Islamophobia prior to September 11 by noting the relationship between the media representation of conflicts in the Middle East, such as the Iranian hostage crisis and the Gulf War, and the growth of anti-Muslim sentiment in Western Europe and the United States. Both Aboulela and Kahf remark upon this phenomenon and their work is instructive to understanding the transhistorical and transnational connections in the proliferation of Orientalism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab racism from the European colonial era to the present moment.

Chapter Four addresses the production of the gendered racialization of Muslim women in the context of the "war on terror at home," by exploring the discrimination against Arab and Muslim minorities in the United States after September 11. Employing Alia Al-Saji's work on the habits of racialized seeing and on the relational construction of gendered racialization as part of Islamophobia, I study different cultural productions by Muslim Arab American women such as Sara Filali, Amani Al-Khatahtbeh, Mona Haydar, and Mohja Kahf, that unravel neo-Orientalist habits of seeing. These authors, artists, and activists employ intersectional feminist knowledge and anticolonial and anti-racist praxis in order to subvert the imperialist narrative that claims Muslim women's vulnerability is primarily a result of the patriarchal oppression inherent to Islam. By drawing parallels between sexism in different types of settings, including in Muslim minority communities and in dominant U.S. culture, and by deconstructing Islamophobic discourses, they provide resourceful poetic and political strategies for an informed transnational feminism.

Last but not least, the Epilogue revisits some of the fundamental questions of this

project through a reading of Riverbend's *Baghdad Burning* (2005; 2006), a collection of blog entries from a young Iraqi female blogger about the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. Through her deconstruction of Orientalist assumptions about Iraqi women and Iraqi culture, and through her attempts to establish analogies between shared senses of vulnerability, as experienced by Iraqi civilians, as well as by U.S. soldiers, Riverbend moves beyond the official discourses of the imperial state and provides alternative political frameworks for an understanding of vulnerability in relation to war and conflict. The project ends with several reflections regarding the incorporation of phenomenological insights, the politics of the senses, and the multiple meanings of vulnerability, in our transnational feminist thought and praxis.

CHAPTER ONE

Subaltern Voices: Representations of Algerian Women At War Beyond Orientalism and Nationalism

In her influential postcolonial text, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak takes to task the tendency of contemporary European critical theory to disavow the voice of the (post-)colonial subject and to overwrite the process of subject-production, rendering invisible historical and geopolitical specificity. The two different senses of representation, that of "'speaking for', as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation', as in art or philosophy" (from Marx, *vertreten* and *darstellen*), are conflated in the analysis of processes of subjectivation, enabling leftist intellectuals to speak in the name of subalterns and, by representing them, to represent themselves as transparent (70). The figure of the subaltern woman is doubly afflicted and muted by the mechanisms of distorted representation, as Spivak demonstrates through her reading of the discourses about *sati* in colonial India. This enables her to consider what gestures the elite intellectual can adopt to avoid "masculine radicalism that renders the place of the investigator transparent" (91). Spivak notes that, although an authentic and complete reconstitution of the voice of subaltern women is impossible, the postcolonial intellectual can subject the very process of speaking to and speaking with the muted voices of women to critical inquiry. In investigating the British colonial archive about *sati* in India, she argues that:

> one never encounters the testimony of women's voice-consciousness […] one cannot put together a 'voice'. The most one can sense is the immense heterogeneity breaking through even such a skeletal and ignorant account […] Faced with the dialectically interlocking sentences that are constructible as 'White men are saving women from

> brown men' and 'The women wanted to die', the postcolonial woman intellectual asks the question of simple semiosis – What does this mean? – and begins to plot a history. (93)

In other words, faced with the overdetermined representations of *sati* in both British Orientalist and Indian nationalist discourses, the postcolonial feminist scholar must interrupt and disrupt these narratives and inquire into their historically specific production. If one cannot fully put together the subaltern voice, at least the forms of representation that surround, mediate, and structure subaltern women's voices can be deconstructed and resituated, towards the making of alternative histories.

As Rosalind C. Morris argues, it would be a misunderstanding to read Spivak's conception of the silence of the subaltern as a historical absence produced by a colonial archive that can be simply remedied through retrieval: "Spivak endorses such retrieval, but she understands it to be a matter distinct from the question of theorizing the impossibility of subaltern speech as audible and legible predication" (2). To speak for the subaltern risks reinforcing the same imperialist ideology that reproduces the "third world woman" as a subordinated, censored, and silenced subject in need of being rescued. In order to avoid the pitfalls of these authoritative gestures of representation, Morris clarifies that the attempt of writing alternative histories should not remain fixated on uncovering an ultimate truth, but that it should instead recover utterances and interpretations of a particular subaltern location. These traces would not be free of ideology, nor would they reveal the authentic voice of the subaltern woman. They would instead "have made visible the unstable claims on truth that the ideology of masculine imperialism offered in its place" (3).

In this chapter I engage with the elision of Algerian women's voices in both Orientalist and Algerian nationalist narratives, and propose a comparative study of two Francophone Algerian novels, Yamina Mechakra's *La Grotte éclatée* (1975) and Assia Djebar's *Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade* (*L'Amour, la fantasia* [1980]), which offer more complex, intersectional, and diverse representations of Algerian women's engagement in the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). The history of the (male/colonial/nationalist) gaze, invested in fixating and reproducing dominant images of Algerian women, is subverted in Djebar's and Mechakra's writing through the attention given to the more elusive medium of women's languages. Both Djebar's and Mechakra's texts gesture towards the development of an alternative (female) language and history writing that takes into account the embodied, affective and gender-specific experiences of women. By incorporating multiple stories in their narratives, whether based on historical cases of female fighters (Mechakra), or derived through oral storytelling from female survivors of the war (Djebar), both authors reconstruct Algerian women's voices and their embodied experiences of vulnerability.

NATIONALIST REPRESENTATIONS OF ALGERIAN WOMEN

Frantz Fanon's essay, "Algeria Unveiled," was published at the height of the Algerian War in his book, *A Dying Colonialism* [*L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (1959)], and became an exemplary anticolonial text of the revision of the representation of Algerian women from Orientalist conceptions of gendered cultural difference to nationalist narratives about the role of women in the revolution. Arguably, Fanon's influential intervention in nationalist discourses gave way to further misrepresentations of Algerian women as symbols

of decolonization and embodiments of the newborn postcolonial nation, an image also popularized by Gillo Pontecorvo's film, *The Battle of Algiers* (1964). In this section, I will discuss the historical specificity of Fanon's writing, his phenomenological descriptions of the revolutionary, (un)veiled female body, and the particularity of his rhetoric in relation to the FLN propaganda about Algerian women. While acknowledging Fanon's insightful deconstruction of French Orientalism and colonial feminism, I will also refer to feminist critiques of his essay in an attempt to resituate his representation of Algerian women in relation to their depiction in the oral history work of Djamila Amrane and Natalya Vince and the literary work of Assia Djebar and Yamina Mechakra.

Frantz Fanon became involved with the liberation struggle during the Algerian War when he was working at the Blida-Joinville hospital in Algeria. Later, when exiled in Tunisia, he became the editor of *El Moudjahid*, the main FLN (Front de libération nationale) newspaper. Closely associated with the Algerian revolutionary movement, Fanon was well acquainted with the ideology and propaganda of the FLN and the more assertive role women took during the war. His book, *A Dying Colonialism*, should then be read in relation to the historical specificity of this context: the political urgency of the war of decolonization, including the formulation of a discourse of liberation emphasizing the necessity of a united gender-inclusive struggle. In the most influential chapter of the book, "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon explored the involvement of women in the liberation struggle and the effects their revolutionary stance had on the transformation of their bodies through unveiling and reveiling for revolutionary purposes, and at the social level, in so far as Algerian gender and family roles were potentially reshaped in the process. Perhaps too optimistically, he predicted that the revolution saw the birth of a new Algerian woman and reformed relationships

between men and women, wives and husbands, fathers and daughters. But Fanon did not live to see the independence of Algeria and the rather conservative women's rights politics the postcolonial FLN government later implemented.[14] Algerian sociologist Marie-Amiée Helie-Lucas claims, for instance, that "nationalism, socialism and religion were used as tools for the elaboration of anti-women state policy" after the war (111).[15] Yet, Fanon's emphasis on the incorporation of women in the revolution and his attempt to imagine a revolutionary nationalist feminism were arguably determined by the necessity to oppose Eurocentric conceptions of Algerian womanhood and the colonial feminism of French campaigns to assimilate and "Westernize" women.

Fanon was well aware of the instrumentalization of the veil in colonial propaganda campaigns and referenced these unveiling ceremonies when he wrote: "The occupying forces, in applying their maximum psychological attention to the veil worn by Algerian women, were obviously bound to achieve some results. Here and there it thus happened that a woman was 'saved,' and symbolically unveiled" (42). Every rejected veil reinforced the occupier's agenda according to which Muslim Algeria was a retrograde society that needed to be abandoned in favor of colonial protection and patronage (43). While Fanon's discussion of "the historical dynamism of the veil" properly situates and historicizes the multiple significations of the veil, it also ties the practice of (un)veiling to the teleological narrative of the revolution:

[14] Frantz Fanon died of leukemia in 1961, while seeking treatment in the United States, just one year before the end of the Algerian War of Independence. The one party FLN government that took power upon liberation (and has been holding onto it until the present day despite a devastating Civil War during the 1990s) took a number of political measures that restricted women's rights, climaxing in the passing of the Family Code in 1984.
[15] For a more detailed discussion than I can provide here of the roles of Algerian women post-independence, see also Woodhull (1993) and Lazreg (1994).

> In the beginning, the veil was a mechanism of resistance, but its value for the social group remained very strong. The veil was worn because tradition demanded a rigid separation of the sexes, but also because the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria. In a second phase, the mutation occurred in connection with the Revolution and under special circumstances. The veil was abandoned in the course of revolutionary action. What had been used to block the psychological or political offensives of the occupier became a means, an instrument. The veil helped the Algerian woman to meet the new problems created by the struggle. (63)

In a gesture characteristic of nationalist discourse, the unveiling of women is here identified with the unveiling of the whole nation, as Algerian women are located centrally at the core of the conflict between local traditions and the foreign occupation. The forms of revolutionary action Fanon describes throughout the essay were carried out by urban female guerilla fighters who, according to him, had to relearn their bodies in order to incorporate a newfound mobility and to disguise themselves in European clothing by removing their veils and mimicking the colonizers' appearance. This masquerade of assimilation, playing upon colonial differentiations between the traditional woman and the Westernized woman, allowed female fighters to move leisurely through checkpoints, carrying weapons, bombs or messages from the Algerian quarters into the French and vice versa. Not only was this gesture of resistance a fundamental reversal of the colonial project of assimilation, but also, in Fanon's words, it resulted in "an authentic birth in a pure state" of the revolutionary Algerian woman (50).

In "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon insightfully observes that Algerians developed a counter-assimilationist stance by opposing "the cult of the veil" to colonial attempts to

forcefully unveil women and, generally, to "Westernize" Algerian society (47). Pursuing Fanon's argument, Neil Macmaster and Toni Lewis trace the inversion of what they term "classic Orientalism," centered on the metaphor of unveiling, "a projection of European masculine fantasies" that "reflected French colonial hegemony, an invasion and sexual conquest of the space that Muslim society held to be most forbidden," through the postcolonial imagery of hyperveiling, "maximizing the social, cultural and political distance between the 'West' and 'Islam'" (122). While this argument does mark some of the counter-assimilationist tendencies of anticolonial nationalist movements in Algeria, it also homogenizes and reduces the practice of veiling or unveiling to political binaries, a theoretical analysis that erases the role and choice of Algerian women themselves and the multiplicity of desires, attachments and senses of the self which enable diverse women to veil, unveil, or reveil. In other words, this type of rhetoric contributes to the mystification of the use or the discarding of the Muslim veil as inevitably imposed from above, by different ideological mechanism, whether these are patriarchal, colonial or nationalist. This being said, the Algerian veil did become the direct target for propaganda of the colonial regime during the war as it happened in fraternization protests organized by the *pieds noirs* and the colonial authorities in which European women lifted the veil of Muslim women in symbolic demonstrations of liberation and solidarity.[16]

Frantz Fanon's highly stylized narrative of revolutionary womanhood in "Algeria Unveiled" was later adapted by Gillo Pontecorvo's portrayal of Algerian female fighters in his neorealist masterpiece, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), and became one of the most popular

[16] See Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, for a detailed account of the events of May 1958, punctured by the election of Charles de Gaulle and by massive demonstrations of the *pieds noirs* population in Algeria for *l'Algérie française* (291).

representations of the role of women in anticolonial revolutions (particularly for a Western audience). In one of the pivotal scenes of the film, the Algerian population of Algiers rises in protest after the Casbah is bombed by the French police, leading to numerous deaths.[17] Djafar, the leader of the FLN guerilla network in Algiers,[18] stops the flow of people before reaching the European quarters for fear that they would be slaughtered, and promises that the FLN will revenge them. The next scene transports the viewer to a room full of mirrors in which three Algerian women remove their veils, shorten their hair and dye it blonde, and replace their clothes with European-looking skirts and blouses. This takes place as a sort of ritual, without any words being exchanged between the women, only the intermittent and spasmodic sounds of war drums playing in the background (courtesy of Ennio Morricone's film score, an approximation of an Algerian musical theme). The sound of their voices severed, and obfuscated by the rhythm of the revolution, the three women are represented as infinite reflections of a circular gaze, as if the images they are reproducing add further distortion to their characters. Ranjanna Khanna notes that the metamorphosis of the women "takes place in a cocoon of mirrors, almost a film-set dressing room, where the image and the *imago*—the idealized image misrecognized in the reflection as self-completeness—are confused to such an extent that the question of what it means to be an Algerian woman becomes highly questionable, and is exploded or imploded" (116). The film represents Algerian women as voiceless images, smooth surfaces upon which Orientalist or nationalist fantasies and expectations can be projected. The transformation of the women, in which "they use their knowledge of European codes to trick the Europeans, putting their own

[17] The Casbah of Algiers was bombed by the French police on August 10, 1956, killing around seventy people, including women and children. This was one of the main catalysts for the bombs the FLN later placed in the European quarters.

[18] Djafar's character is based on and played by FLN revolutionary leader Yacef Saadi, who also contributed to the script for *The Battle of Algiers* and co-produced the film.

'looks' and the soldiers' 'looking' (and failure to see) to revolutionary purposes" (Shohat 300), eventually allows them to leisurely slip through checkpoints and pursue their mission, that of placing bombs in strategic locations in the European quarters. However, with the exception of a few moments in which they show hesitation, and thus give a glimpse of their internal emotional lives, the women's stories remain anonymous, their voices minimal and instrumentalized in the service of the revolution. This representation of the female Algerian urban guerilla fighters relies more on the nationalist discourse enunciated by Frantz Fanon, rather than on female veterans' accounts of their experiences of the war.

Fanon's analysis of unveiling generalizes the heterogeneous experiences of Algerian women, Arab, Amazigh, and/or Muslim, regarding veiling practices in an intriguing mixture of exoticization, psychoanalytical insights, phenomenological descriptions of habit, and speculations on revolutionary embodiment. Fanon refers to the "Algerian woman" in the singular thus creating a mythical archetypal construction of revolutionary womanhood. Based on psychoanalytical analyses of Algerian women's dreams, Fanon argues that, without the veil, the Algerian woman experiences an intensified sensation of vulnerability, of being bare and without protection, "she has an impression of her body being cut into bits, put adrift" (59). In other words, unveiling means to confront one's own fears, feelings of shame, and feelings of safety. The unveiling required by revolutionary struggle entails important risks and compromises. The existential displacement provoked by unveiling and by a newly-gained sense of mobility is so profound that it leads to a sense of disorientation in which the Algerian woman "commits errors of judgment as to the exact distance to be negotiated" and "has to invent new dimensions for her body, new means of muscular control" (59). The entrance into the revolutionary struggle thus involves undoing one's bodily schema, in a

phenomenological sense, and relearning new bodily habits: "The Algerian woman who walks stark naked into the European city relearns her body, re-establishes it in a totally revolutionary fashion" (59).

Despite the insightful critique of the colonial instrumentalization of Algerian women and the attempt to define the role of Algerian women in the revolution, however idealized, Fanon's descriptions of unveiling function as a re-exoticization of the Algerian female body, this time through a reversal of colonial Orientalism. Marnia Lazreg critiques Fanon, for instance, for focusing too closely on "the mystique of the veil" while disavowing the complex ways in which Algerian women navigated different types of identities and, consequently, erasing their contribution to independence (127). Furthermore, Anne McClintock notes that, despite Fanon's brilliant excoriation of colonial power's attempt to disrupt the sexual and familial order of Algerians through the "Westernization" of women, there is a troubling temporal break in his descriptions of the "historic dynamism of the veil" as if the veil had been a fixed and unchangeable signifier prior to becoming the colonizer's bone of contention. The revolutionary impetus of Algerian women is also depicted as being without a history and without complexity and seems to derive from the struggle for liberation and from women's relationship of subordination to the fedayeen, urban guerilla fighters.[19] Fanon describes Algerian women's coming into revolutionary consciousness as a historical singularity, "an authentic birth in a pure state" (50). Because Fanon is unable to explore women's agency as separated and divergent from national agency, McClintock argues, he

[19] The fidaï (plural: fedayeen; from Arabic: فِدائيّين) literally means someone who sacrifices himself for a cause and has been used to refer to the primarily male urban guerilla who carried armed attacks. As Djamila Amrane notes, the term the French authorities used to refer to guerilla fighters was "terroriste" (90-91), whereas Algerians referred to themselves as fedayeen to mark their role as freedom fighters against the occupation. Women were usually referred to as fidaïa (plural: fedayet).

"does not foresee the degree to which the Algerian Liberation Front (FLN) will seek to co-opt and control women, subordinating them unequivocally once the revolution is won" (368).

Finally, and maybe most importantly, both Fanon and Pontecorvo's representations of Algerian women are implausible because they rely on a misleading and historically inaccurate depiction of urban female guerilla fighters, who supposedly had to abandon their veils in favor of adopting a European appearance and mode of conduct. The assumption, here, is that the core of the Algerian woman is essentially Algerian (and Islamic), but that women's bodies can be further manipulated to reverse colonial expectations. The fidaïa becomes the dominant image of the Algerian female revolutionary and a symbol of the nationalist struggle, and consequently erases the stories of other Algerian women implicated in the struggle, including the many unmentioned women who fought with the maquis in the countryside or helped fighters otherwise through their dedicated care and assistance. The nationalist narrative also conflates Algerian women's dressing practices and the traditional Muslim veil. Not all Algerian Muslim women had the habit of veiling, particularly not in urban settings, nor amongst student groups.

The women portrayed in *The Battle of Algiers* who placed bombs at the Milk Bar, the cafeteria on Rue Michelet and the Air France terminal (this bomb malfunctioned) were Zohra Drif, Samia Lakhdari, and Djamila Bouhired, respectively.[20] According to Natalya Vince, "the women in the bomb network were students and young women who already dressed in 'Western' clothes, had been in contact with Europeans either in school or the workplace and, on the basis of crude judgements of their physical appearance, could 'pass' as Europeans without any dressing up" (82). The women were not necessarily disguising their appearance

[20] See for instance Alistair Horne's historical research detailing the events and the main actors of the Battle of Algiers in *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*, particularly chapter nine.

as much as they were disguising their political beliefs, a European appearance making them less susceptible to be stopped and searched by French soldiers.

In fact, as Djamila Amrane[21] showed in her ground-breaking oral history book based on national archival research and interviews with former fighters, *Les Femmes algériennes dans la guerre* (1991), the more intimate and personal perspectives of Algerian women themselves who were involved in the war had been mostly neglected and written out of history up to the point of the publication of her book. In her chapter on the Battle of Algiers based on interviews with urban guerilla fighters including Zohra Drif, Djamila Bouhired, Malika Ighilahriz and others, Amrane notes how essential women had become to the revolutionary mission with the increase in surveillance and the militarization of Algiers. Because the urban guerilla networks were immobilized given the extensive efforts of the French paratroopers, under the command of French army general Jacques Massu, women were often assigned jobs that involved the transportation of weapons and messages in and out of the Casbah.

Zohra Drif recounts that she and Djamila Bouhired had been hiding along with Yacef Saadi and other fighters in a house in the Casbah: "Nous vivions la même vie, mais sur le plan de l'activité, nous avions une vie plus intense qu'eux parce que nous pouvions nous déplacer voilées. C'est eux qui se retrouvaient cloîtrés!" (quoted in Amrane, 105-106). Drif here plays with the notion of cloistering, noting that the work of guerilla warfare in fact immobilized the men who were sought by the police, while it gave more space for movement

[21] Djamila Amrane, born Danièle Minne, was involved in the liberation struggle along with mother, Jacqueline Guerroudj, a woman of French descent and an FLN activist. Guerroudj was the first woman to be sentenced to death during the Algerian War. Her life was spared when her former teacher, Simone de Beauvoir, began a media campaign in France in her defense. Both Guerroudj and Amrane, who had been imprisoned, were released upon independence with the passing of the Évian Accords (1962).

to the women. To avoid recognition by the French police forces that had photographic dossiers of their suspects, some of the women would in fact put on the veil as a means of camouflaging themselves, as well as the messages or weapons they were carrying. This was a technique employed by both men and women, as one of the scenes in *The Battle of Algiers* also shows. In a similar vein, Djamila Bouhired adds: "Nous, le filles, avions plus de facilité à aller partout. Lorsqu'une mission se préparait, nous allions sur le terrain repérer les objectifs et notre avis était écouté. Nous faisions beaucoup de choses, les mêmes qu'eux et en plus nous nous occupions d'eux… Nous les avons portés sur notre tête" (quoted in Amrane, 106). While arguing that their advice and their work were respected and taken into consideration, Bouhired, like Drif, also marks the elided work of care that the female fighters performed as part of their tasks, in addition to the dangerous missions they were deployed on. In between the lines of the diplomatic statements of both Drif and Bouhired, one can read a certain degree of frustration with this unacknowledged aspect of their involvement in the war, the fact that they were also required to serve traditional female roles in the context of nationalist groups in addition to their already strenuous and dangerous roles as weapon carriers.

In *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (*Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* [1980]), Assia Djebar refers to women such as Drif and Bouhired, who fought as fidaïas in the War of Independence, as fire carriers (*les porteuses de feu*). In the eponymous short story of the collection, Djebar depicts the post-traumatic effects of the war endured by Leila, a former fidaïa who, neglected by the postcolonial government, was abandoned in a mental asylum due to her drug consumption. Leila evokes the fire carriers, who, like her, fought to liberate the city, but were afterwards returned to and locked in their homes:

> "look at the fingers, ordinarily painted with henna, usually the active hands of the mothers who have survived (face aflame to make bread and to be burned), the same fingers without henna but with manicured nails carrying bombs as if they were oranges […] 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!" (1992: 44)

While Djebar arguably homogenizes the experiences of female war veterans (Zohra Drif became an influential politician in the FLN government, for instance), equating the violence of colonial war with the patriarchal laws imposed by the postcolonial Algerian state, her dramatic depiction of the neglect and oppression endured by some female survivors makes an important point about the failure of the feminist ideals of the nationalist revolution. Just as Djamila Amrane and Natalya Vince note the lack of acknowledgement and recognition towards former female fighters, Djebar shows that the traumatic injuries of war are further deepened by the wounds inflicted by patriarchal violence. Through this gesture, she establishes an intersectional framework for analyzing the violence against Algerian women, a result of multiple and diverse patriarchal communities, colonial-era violence and Orientalism, traditional Algerian attitudes towards women, as well as nationalist appropriations of the image of the female fighter, which decontextualize and obscure the diversity of Algerian women's voices.

In what follows, I will study the portrayal of Algerian female fighters in Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Yamina Mechakra's *La Grotte éclatée*, in an effort to move beyond the binary paradigm that represents Algerian women either in an Orientalist or

a nationalist frame, and argue for a relational understanding of the social vulnerability experienced by women. Both Djebar and Mechakra reconstruct vivid portraits of Algerian female fighters in their novels, while paying attention to the specificity of different women's situations and their various strategies for navigating patriarchal contexts. The female figures that emerge from their texts cannot be reduced to a monolithic depiction of the "revolutionary Algerian woman," as each of these respective individuals express their desires and their roles in society in different ways. Djebar and Mechakra's personal experiences reveal the paradox of the postcolonial intellectual's struggles with writing in the language of the former occupier, while attempting to convey the subaltern histories of Algerian women in the plural languages of Algeria. This is why they gesture, at various points in their texts, to the necessity of creating a different language of expression, rooted in historical specificity, and surging from women's bodies and their settings.

ANTICOLONIAL AND ANTIPATRIARCHAL CRITIQUE IN YAMINA MECHAKRA'S *LA GROTTE ÉCLATÉE*

Yamina Mechakra's *La Grotte éclatée* (1979) explores the condition of Algerian women fighters and war survivors through the first person perspective of her main character, an orphaned woman who joins the maquis as a nurse. Her text is inspired, amongst other sources, by *Le Journal d'une maquisarde* (1959), a memoir published by an anonymous fighter in *El Moudjahid* during the war under the supervision of male FLN leaders. According to Chaour, "Yamina Mechakra reprend le personage emblématique pour le récit national algérien, de l'infirmière au maquis" (199). The paradigmatic nationalist discourse of

Le Journal is thus fictionalized and transformed into an anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal lyrical manifesto, which shows the interconnected links between the multiple forces that produced the vulnerability of Algerian women during the war. Furthermore, Mechakra's notion of freedom involves a privileging of nomadism that allows for the free movement of women, both physically, beyond the enclosed space of the home, and from the point of view of cultural identities. Although Mechakra's feminist work in *La Grotte éclatée* shows Algerian women's different and sometimes conflicting attitudes towards patriarchal norms, her protagonist notes that her vision of freedom entails having the right to mobility, being exposed to the natural world, and having the capacity to interact with living things. She describes forced cloistering as an experience that deprives the senses of their natural development and of participating in the world. In this context, Mechakra proposes a form of belonging that is not constrained by communitarian laws. While noting the tragedies of Algerians' uprooting by the colonial system, the author also recuperates rootlessness as a relational philosophy to the land and to community.

In his preface to Yamina Mechakra's novel, titled "Les Enfants de la Kahina," Algerian writer Kateb Yacine refers to the lyrical structure of the text as "un long poème en prose qui se peut lire comme un roman." Yacine also situates the novel in relation to the author's professional and personal histories. The text is not only the creation of "une femme de lettres," but the lyrical observations of a practicing psychiatrist and of a woman who has lived "une vie cruelle et tourmentée" (7). Born at the very beginning of the insurrection that led to the Algerian War, Mechakra later saw her father being tortured and killed by the French. The book is dedicated to her father—one line that foreshadows the search for

balance, hope and warmth her novel's protagonist also undergoes: "Toi le regard bleu dans lequel souvent je m'allonge quand j'ai peur et que je tremble" (9).

The blue of her father's eyes, notes Yacine, sends you to her native village, Meskiana, named after the Amazigh historical figure and heroine, Kahina, a seventh-century warrior queen who resisted the encroachment of the colonizing Muslim armies. By tracing Méchakra's heritage to Kahina, and representing the liberation fighters in her book as direct descendants of the Amazigh queen, Yacine enacts a political gesture: he not only marks a historical lineage of women's resistance for her female protagonist, but he also outlines the continuities in the resistance of the Imazighen against colonization,[22] whether Arab or French. In an effort to achieve national unity, the postcolonial FLN-led government of liberated Algeria enacted policies and reforms towards Arabization that erased and suppressed the varied Amazigh indigenous cultural expressions. The anti-governmental discontent rising amongst Imazighen people, especially amongst the numerous Kabyle group of northern Algeria, culminated in widespread protests and the solidification of the Amazigh identity movement.[23] Writing in 1978, right on the cusp of these political developments, Yacine purposely emphasizes the fundamental socio-political role Imazighen people have played throughout Algerian history, including in opposing French colonialism and contributing to the liberation of the nation. At the same time, Yacine draws an analogy between different imperialist manifestations of power in Algeria, the seventh-century Arab invasion of North Africa and the contemporary French invasion of Algeria. In their resistance

[22] The Amazighs, or Imazighen, are a set of interconnected ethnic groups indigenous to North Africa, some of whom were colonized and assimilated into Muslim culture to different degrees depending on the region, others who continue to practice their traditions and speak different indigenous dialects, the most widespread in Algeria being Kabyle, Shawiya, Chenoui and the Tuareg languages.

[23] For a detailed study of the emergence of Amazigh cultural consciousness, particularly amongst the Kabyles in Algeria, see Fazia Aïtel's *We are Imazighen* (2014).

against the Arab armies, Kahina's rebels most likely used the same cavernous passages and grottos as the maquisards fighting against the French, Yacine notes, demarcating the transhistorical extent of the anti-colonial struggle.

Indeed, the FLN insurrection against the French colonial forces began in the mountains of Aurès, home of the Chaoui people, on November 1st, 1954. This is the setting for Yamina Mechakra's *La Grotte éclatée*, in which an orphaned anonymous woman joins the guerilla army in the Aurès as a nurse and a freedom fighter and survives famine, the harsh winter cold, and the spectacle of human loss and destruction, alongside other liberation fighters, in the cover of a mountainous cave from 1955 to 1958. The narrative, told from the first person perspective of the woman, moves between poetic reflections about human vulnerability in conditions of utter deprivation and distress, and the events in the protagonist's life during her time with the maquisards and afterwards, as she struggles with the war trauma inflicted on her body and her psyche.

According to Djamila Amrane, approximately two thousand Algerian women, most of them under the age of thirty, joined the maquis, the anti-colonial resistance groups in rural areas, which organized primarily under the control of the FLN. Amrane notes that these women often went against the norms of their traditional Algerian families, who favored gender segregation for unmarried women, by joining male fighters in the mountainous areas where guerrilla resistance was growing, and living amongst them in severe conditions of starvation, cold, and forced marches. Known as *les maquisardes*, these Algerian women often served as nurses taking care of the many injured fighters and organizing improvised hospitals for those in convalescence; they also cooked for the fighters and joined their campaigns as combatants. Although most of them were not armed, some did carry a small

revolver for self-defense. Amrane adds that 10% of the *maquisardes* were arrested and 20% were killed during the war (2004: 32). Many of the women who were captured were subjected to interrogation techniques that often involved torture with electricity and sexual violence.

In *La Grotte éclatée*, the protagonist performs amputations, in the absence of anesthesia, using the rudimentary medical methods available in the hiding; she nurses and soothes the wounds of injured fighters and assists them as they exhale their last breath. This experience of being permanently in the wake of tragedy, as well as the personal losses she herself endures, enable the woman to undergo a transformation, becoming at the same time closer to the core of human vulnerability, and alienated from herself. Méchakra explores the traumatic effects of war on Algerian female fighters by following the psychological deterioration of the protagonist, who takes the path of exile in Tunisia after her time with the maquisards, seeking treatment for her clinical depression. The woman is haunted by hallucinations of her murdered child, who had been taken away from her in a napalm bombardment by the French army, which also destroyed the cave that sheltered the FLN fighters.

The narrator's gender specific experiences link her story to the story of many other Algerian women who intervene episodically in the text, whether through male fighters' perspectives or through the war survivors the protagonist meets in Tunisia in refugee camps. Mechakra is particularly preoccupied with outlining strategies of resistance for women within oppressive and seemingly irrevocable contexts. For example, the protagonist teaches Salah, a little boy in her care who had lost both of his legs, about the specificity of marriage customs amongst Algerians, particularly the cloistering of young girls and the dynamics by

which their marriages are arranged. Even if girls no longer leave the home after a certain age, when they visit the hammam and if they chance upon a young man they like, the narrator explains, they can usually appoint an older woman to inquire into the man's background and propose the marriage to his family: "derrière les murs et les portes, existe une force invisible; les femmes savent bien s'entendre entre elles" (77). Despite the fact that the marriage arrangement is carried out according to patriarchal customs, the daughter, the older woman and the mother can sometimes arrange matters according to their best interest.

And yet Mechakra is well aware of the tragedies of less hopeful stories and the toll that patriarchal control has taken on Algerian women's lives. When conveying Zelikha's story, an old childhood acquaintance, the protagonist deplores her confinement: "Zelikha ne connaissait ni les grands arbres, ni le chant de la colombe. Perdrix traquée par l'épée de l'honneur elle se dérobait à jamais au soleil […] cloîtrée au bout du dernier somme de sa ville" (131). The traditional separation of adolescent girls from society is critiqued here primarily for depriving Zelikha and other women like her of contact with the wealth and beauty of nature, thus taking away from the crucial development of world knowledge and of a form of sensibility attuned to the interconnectedness of living things. These, as we shall see, are crucial components of the protagonist's sense of freedom and her adoption of a nomadic approach to life.

Zelikha's experience is by no means unique, but manifests in different forms in other Algerian women's lives: "Javais déjà rencontré Zelikha dans la jeunesse de Rima et dans le regard angoissée de Tassâdit que l'on maria au camp de réfugiés" (132). In a meeting with female fighters in Tunis, the protagonist encounters Rima, an older woman who reveals her life story to her. Married at age fifteen to a stranger, Rima refers to her wedding night as "la

nuit de mon viol" as she had fainted due to fear and disgust and she was raped by her newly-wedded husband while unconscious (128). Her husband, the son of the Caïd, held a privileged position in the colonial order as one of the notables to whom the French administration offered absolute power in exchange for collaboration. Rima here interjects to offer a subtle critique of the colonial system that had seduced young men like her husband with the promise of power, while taking away their lands. During her traumatic wedding night, Rima recalls that she woke up to the shrill ululations of other women who, while carrying her bloodied nightgown, celebrated the consummation of the marriage: "Le crime de l'inconnu était la loi. Puis ma mère revint et me consola. Elle était fière" (130). Rima's story provides an alternative reading of marriage ceremonies and practices, which departs from the protagonist's hopeful musings about the unwritten law of solidarity amongst women. Here the protection of virginity, and, implicitly, of the honor of the family, maintains a prestigious social status for the family. "Dishonor," on the other hand, often means the repudiation of the entire family, their social isolation and the loss of particular privileges, which disadvantages both men and women. In tragic cases, as Mechakra shows through the story of freedom fighter Kouider and his former lover, Zehira, the daughter responsible for dishonoring her family is executed by a male relative (83). Rima's mother, oblivious to her daughter's suffering, takes pride in the nuptial blood, which represents the reassurance that the patriarchal law had not been trespassed and that tradition can follow its natural course undeterred. "Ça a toujours été comme ça et ça sera toujours comme ça," replies the mother to her daughter's supplications (130). For Rima, the blood is the result of the violence she had experienced, a crime normalized by patriarchal law.

What emerges from Mechakra's text is a complexity of desires, attitudes, and dispositions taken by women towards and against patriarchal law. Her novel demonstrates that there is no unified consensus regarding traditional practices such as cloistering and arranged marriages, and that women position themselves differently by either supporting and reinforcing these practices, or finding creative means to subvert them. Such is the case of an old village woman the protagonist meets in an Algerian refugee camp in Tunis. This unnamed woman, married against her will to a man she despises, refuses to give in to him until he forsakes her. Eventually, the woman falls in love with his cousin and decides to run away with him: "J'ai compris que l'homme pouvait tout de même être très proche de la femme" (133). The possibility of comradeship between men and women is something that Mechakra further explores through her protagonist's relationship to the male fighters she encounters in the mountains and her short-lived marriage to one of the maquisards, Arris, who is killed in an attack soon after. The revolution is depicted as the union of all Algerians, irrespective of gender, towards the common goal of overthrowing the repressive colonial regime, and thus, at least in principle, holds a promise for the reform of gender roles.

The protagonist's personal background is also a direct result of the unchallenged patriarchal conceptions of women's bodies. The woman, who was abandoned at an orphanage as a baby and cared for by Catholic nuns, was an unwanted child, her mother killed for having a child outside of wedlock. Even if she never discovers the identity of her parents, she suspects that her mother had been duped by a stranger, who abandoned her after leaving her with a child (51). Amongst the other fighters, her story is known. Salah recalls that a coal miner described her as "une enfant qui n'a ni père ni mère et que l'on fait à une fille quand on veut déshonorer son père" (77). The coal miner adds that such girls do indeed

deserve to be killed. The stigma attributed to the mother is passed on to the daughter, although the lineage had been broken. Being an orphan is at once a marginalizing experience for the narrator, as it is at times a liberating experience. She explains to Salah for instance the fact that she was never forced to pass through the strenuous machinations and intrigues of arranged marriages as she had no family to take care of such issues in her name. The woman marries instead another freedom fighter, Arris, while she is in the maquis. This marriage is portrayed by Mechakra as freely chosen by both partners, while their love grows out of their comradeship and their shared experiences of suffering. It is also a marriage born out of devotion to a cause and thus links partners according to the laws of the revolution, instead of those of the transfer of wealth and the continuation of heritage.

The protagonist's life course is offered by Mechakra as an alternative revolutionary path, since it rejects gender norms and restrictions, as well as nationalist and identitarian fixations. Through the narrator's perspective emerges a joint critique of Algerian patriarchy and colonial violence. The protagonist recognizes the multiple meanings of nomadism as an experience of both neglect and dispossession, which she reconfigures and appropriates as a revolutionary spirit and an egalitarian politics beyond ownership and law. The narrator notes France's exploitation of the working power of Algerians and of their lands and natural resources, as well as their colonial indoctrination: "Ils firent de nous un peuple errant et sans terre promise" (149). This uprooting, however, is precisely what constitutes the opportunity for the establishment of a different type of community beyond the identitarian distinctions introduced by colonialism, between colonizer and colonized, as well as the ethnic differentiations exacerbated amongst Algerians. A free community, in the protagonist's understanding, proposes a model of belonging based on the co-habitation of multiple desires,

political attachments, and senses of belonging. This would be a land encompassing multifarious and interconnected communities with indistinguishable borders: "J'étais heureuse de n'appartenir à aucune communauté, m'inventais des hommes et un pays aussi libres que moi" (34). Here, Mechakra moves beyond Yacine's emphasis on Amazigh nationalism. Through her protagonist's eyes, the author makes visible the rich multiplicity of Algerian identity and offers, in the form of a retroactive utopia, a vision of a liberated postcolonial Algerian society beyond communitarianism.

REVERSING PHENOMENOLOGICAL DISORIENTATION IN ASSIA DJEBAR'S *L'AMOUR, LA FANTASIA*

Published six years later, Assia Djebar's novel, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), approaches some of the same themes explored by Mechakra's novel, particularly the burden of cloistering, colonial exploitation and the traumatic experiences endured by Algerian female fighters, but towards different goals. Perhaps more than a novel in the strict sense of the word, Djebar's lyrical and hybrid text disrupts disciplinary and stylistic boundaries by joining together subaltern history-writing, through the author's revision and subversion of the French colonial archives of the conquest of Algeria, autobiographical reflections on the development of the female postcolonial writer, and oral ethnography, through Djebar's transcription, translation, and interpretation of her interviews with several Algerian women and war survivors in the Mount Chenoua villages close to her hometown, Cherchell. Several critics have noted the elaborate construction of Djebar's text, outlining in particular its intertextuality and its palimpsestic structure, "implicitly dialogical and three-dimensional"

(Zimra 157), its polyphonic style that "requires constant metamorphosis; therefore no single site of fixed ideology or subjectivity is favored" (Orlando, 112), and its "pattern of dichotomization" that moves between French and Arabic signifiers and subverts them both (Donadey 107).

Indeed, in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Djebar notes the political goals of her text after her literary excavation of the 1845 massacre of the Ouled Riah tribe through a reading against the grain of the testimony of the French Marshal responsible for their killing: "Pélissier, speaking on behalf of this long drawn-out agony, on behalf of fifteen hundred corpses buried beneath El-Kantara, with their flocks unceasingly bleating at death, hands me his report and I accept this palimpsest on which I now inscribe the charred passion of my ancestors" (79). The challenging task of her writing, that of working in the colonial language with a colonial archive in order to unearth the stifled voices of the Algerian women who perished in the aftermath of French conquest, represents a charged ethical responsibility for Djebar, which she will resolve, or at least complicate, through her autobiographical reflections on the postcolonial hybridization of her own identity.

While French colonial education provides the young Algerian girl with the means to avoid veiling and home confinement, to relearn the transgressive potentials of her own body, and come of age as an intellectual, this experience also alienates her from the familial languages of the home, Arabic and Tamazight, thus distancing her from the very subaltern voices she later seeks to represent. When other women in her community inquire why the adolescent girl does not yet wear a veil, her mother replies that it is because "she reads," in other words, because she attends French school, which requires Westernized dress. For Djebar, colonial education represents, on the one hand, a form of revelation "of the mobility

of my body, and so of my future freedom" (180). But this newly gained sensibility, that accompanies the girl's sense of autonomy, crucial for the development of the artist, comes with the bitter taste of coming into contact with and participating in the French language's "dark depository of piled-up corpses," for the language of the conqueror offers not only jewels and ornaments, but also "flowers of death – chrysanthemums on tombs!" (181). This becomes the fundamental postcolonial dilemma of *L'Amour, la fantasia,* which problematizes the writing of subaltern femininity and the question of representation along the lines of gender, class and educational privilege, given the author's social positionality and colonial education: how to unearth the buried corpses of her ancestors and reconstruct their perspectives and their history using the very same language that contributed to their interment? For Djebar also emphasizes what Edward Said had already referred to as the discursive power-knowledge mechanisms of Orientalism (1978)—the invasion of Algeria is not only "an enterprise of rapine," but also an epistemological endeavor through the multiplication of colonial scholarly publications, which "will form a pyramid to hide the initial violence from view" (45).

The attempt of working with, within, and against French Orientalist discourses without reproducing them is one of the tasks Djebar assumes in her work. According to some critics, Djebar does not always succeed to distance herself from colonial tropes—Lazreg, for instance, critiques Djebar for relying on "colonial nostalgia" in her collection of short stories, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (203), while O'Riley notes that Djebar, Fanon, and Alloula equate postcolonial discourse with the recovery of subaltern voices and consequently conflate "the traces of the Orientalized body with the discursive traces of a colonial past now dissolved" (par. 11), thus, reproducing the dichotomous structures of colonial discourse. In

my view, Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia*, as well as her other texts that center specifically on the stories of Algerian female fighters, including *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) and *La Femme sans sépulture* (2002), critically address the very same issues Lazreg and O'Riley invoke. The exploration of colonial discourse and Orientalist forms of representation is one of the first steps in the development of a postcolonial discourse critical of its own imbrication in the structures established by colonialism. To omit that imbrication would result in an ahistorical orientation. There is a form of self-referentiality in Djebar's work by which she insists on marking her own position within a discourse she is in the process of criticizing and reconfiguring, similar in its philosophical orientation to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of European philosophy from an ambivalent position that fluctuates from being an insider to being on the margins. As Spivak advises as well, Djebar unmasks her own position particularly in order to avoid the epistemological violence of the intellectual's claim to transparency in the representations of subaltern women.

Assia Djebar applies an ambivalent critique in her literary explorations of subalternity in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, noting the twofold implications of education, language and writing, both as tools of female authorial empowerment and as mechanisms of quasi-cooperation with a repressive discourse. Passing through this multivalent deconstructive critique, Djebar unveils the intricacies of colonial assimilation and locates different sources from which to write against the official history, such as the spectral traces of Algerian women's voices. Working with fragments of voices mediated by archives, with overheard stories, and with the fragile texture of oral storytelling, Djebar locates Algerian women's lived experiences in their specific settings and conveys them in the context of a more extensive anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal critique. Djebar also recurrently notes her unstable position as a mediator

between colonial culture and Algerian culture, her liminal position emphasizing both the advantages and the conflicts of a hybrid identity. In this sense, Djebar's extensive prefacing of her work with women is informative to the practice of transnational feminism, preoccupied with rejecting monolithic representations of subaltern women, while simultaneously marking the varied striation in the socio-political production of subjectivity. It is not so much Djebar's Algerianness that authorizes her to speak about other Algerian women, although her lived experience of developing in colonial schools in Algeria is certainly crucial to the project; it is the strenuous efforts of her writing that directly problematize the ethical concerns and complications of speaking for other women, as well the author's educational privilege, while relaying a multiplicity of contexts that emphasize diversity and plurality amongst Algerian women.

In addition to problematizing her contact with colonial discourses, Djebar also notes the disorienting phenomenological effect her dual education at the Qur'anic madrasa and the French school have had on her sense of self and the conflicting bodily habits she develops as a young woman. She experiences these two different apprenticeships as splitting up her subjectivity and establishing "a dichotomy of location": studying Arabic entails a specific vocabulary of corporeal postures and movements and physical memories in which she feels that her body reproduces the architecture of Algerian cities: "the *medinas* with their tortuous alleyways closed off to the outside world, living their secret life"; French, on the other hand, enables her body to travel "far in subversive space, in spite of the neighbours and suspicious matrons; it would not need much for it to take wing and fly away!" (184) The project of *L'Amour, la fantasia* entails embracing these two different embodied orientations towards the world, following a rhizomatic path to uncover subaltern histories through the subterranean

passages of colonial archives, and a nomadic philosophy of flight, which privileges experiences of mobility and errancy as subversive for the female body.

In Deleuze and Guattari's understanding, a rhizomatic model of politics opposes genealogies, filiations and roots, whereas nomadic politics opposes totalitarianism and the centralized power of the State through the sheer affective force of movement (381).[24] Similarly, the phenomenological models described by Djebar, resulting from Arabic and French forms of education and habituation, have their respective politically subversive potentials. The labyrinthine, rhizomatic structure of the *medina* opposes the architectural and geographical logic of the European city and can be used for anti-colonial guerilla warfare, as has happened during the Battle of Algiers. The transgressive potentials evoked by the French cultural tradition also offer their lines of flight through their anti-normative work. Djebar's anti-colonial feminism thus synthesizes philosophical and political models from her multiple cultural belongings, Arabic, Amazigh, and French. In this sense, Djebar's project resembles Mechakra's nomadic philosophy of identity in so far as they both reject cultural essentialism and propose alternative pathways for Algerian women to move beyond the constrictions of patriarchy and colonial assimilation.

[24] The philosophy of nomadology, proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus,* explores a subversive counter-State and non-normative manner of thinking. It is also connected to rhizomatic structures, in so far as these are opposed to arboreal, rooted and genealogical structures. The nomadic tribe functions as a war machine, according to the thinkers, because it locates itself beyond the striated space of the State, it places itself in opposition to the hierarchical principles of the State and impedes the formation of tyrannical governing structures. The nomadic war machine opposes totalitarian regimes of government since it distributes itself in smooth space and constitutes itself in packs or bands of the rhizomatic type "as opposed to the arborescent type that centers around organs of power" (358). The nomad is different from the migrant in that his trajectory is not subordinated to the path, but its positions are subordinated to movement (380). In fact, Deleuze and Guattari claim that it is false to describe the nomad solely through movement, since the nomad's movement is not extensive, she does not necessarily traverse a territory, but she gains speed by filling a smooth space with an affective or intensive movement (381).

As she is withdrawn from the Qur'anic school upon reaching puberty, Djebar loses contact with written Arabic, which she will later not only experience as a tragic separation "from a great love," but also as shaping her sense of corporeality in distinct ways: "so I spoke and studied French, and my body, during this formative period, became Westernized in its own way" (127). This takes place through the loss of certain capacities that allow her to participate in communal gatherings at family parties or during dances and trance ceremonies with other women. The girl loses "the knack of sitting cross-legged" on the floor, a posture that is no longer suitable for her shorter European dresses. Even her voice undergoes a transformation, becoming less capable to participate in women's chorus of ululations, "this ancestral plangent cry," uttered both on occasions of celebration, such as weddings, and as a form of lamentation in moments of distress. This embodied alienation from her formative environment and from her immediate social and familial circles distances the girl from her native tongue(s) and from the possibility of solidarity with other women.

Furthermore, colonial education introduces a super-sensorial world, in which a non-referential language of living beings, plants, and natural phenomena is imposed upon the familiar Algerian landscape: "I write and speak French outside: the words I use convey no flesh-and-blood reality. I learn the names of birds I've never seen, trees I shall take ten years or more to identify, lists of flowers and plants that I shall never smell until I travel north of the Mediterranean" (185). The discordant juxtaposition of these different worlds, a written language of imaginary beings that does not elucidate the lived reality of inhabiting the North African landscape, engenders "an incipient vertigo" for the young girl (185). This form of phenomenological disorientation functions in the manner of a palimpsest in that the sensorial input connected to the immediate environment is layered by other forms of sensorial

representation.

In *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o refers to this form of disorientation as an effect of "the cultural bomb" of colonial education, which performs the dissociation of the sensibility of the child from his natural and social environment and the reinforcing of a perception of his culture as inferior through the views introduced by European texts taught in school (3). The colonial Algerian intellectual, who had gained access to the select French schools that welcomed only a handful of Algerians, had undergone this form of alienation in the process of becoming an artist or a writer. Indeed, as Kateb Yacine notes in his preface to *La Grotte éclatée,* Mechakra, like Djebar, had struggled with losing contact with her native tongue. Her novel, writes Yacine "est écrit en langue française, ce qui signifie au départ une double aliénation, celle d'écrire un roman 'pour faire passer la poésie,' et celle de parler aux siens une langue étrangère. Elle a vu pleurer sa mère, le jour où elle s'aperçut que la petite fille qui fasait merveille à l'école française avait oublié sa langue maternelle." (7) This double alienation gives birth to the hybrid text of *La Grotte éclatée* which uses the stylistic and linguistic conventions of French literary forms in order to perform a postcolonial critique, just as Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* subjects the text itself, as well as the author's phenomenological disorientation, to critical inquiry.

The French colonial strategy of assimilation in Algeria and other African colonies purposively erased the specificity of local cultures as exemplified by school textbooks, which taught colonial pupils about "nos ancêtres les Gaulois" and "reinforced the notion of a French *grandeur* manifested in its imperial domination" (Aldrich 178). The process of decolonization for Djebar entails the critical deconstruction of this super-sensorial discursive

world, while simultaneously acknowledging its fundamental formative influence both through internalized psychic traces and embodied habitual uses of the senses and of the body's sensuality:

> the French tongue, with its body and voice, has established a proud *presidio* within me, while the mother-tongue, all oral tradition, all rags and tatters, resists and attacks between two breathing spaces. In time to the rhythm of the *rebato*, I am alternately the besieged foreigner and the native swaggering off to die, so there is seemingly endless strife between the spoken and written word. (1985: 215)

The oral tradition, subterranean in the distribution of the psyche, functions as a concealed trace, as a resistant anti-colonial expression, attacking in the breathing pauses between the writing of the French text. The voice of the author, even if channeled by the French text, draws upon this elided oral tradition as if inhaling the gulps of air necessary for survival. The very body of the author, then, becomes a battleground of the colonial war, which is concomitantly a conflict between *écriture* and *kalaam*. As Mortimer notes in her observations on Djebar's extensive efforts to reconfigure the French colonial archive and open the space for female voices within, "écriture and kalaam [spoken Arabic] are unknown and unintelligible to each other. Djebar uses her language skills, translating, interpreting, to bridge the gap between the two" (303). In this sense, the existential and embodied disorientation of the author becomes transposed into a task of translation, critique and interpretation, which rewrites Algerian history.

The research and oral ethnographic work Djebar undertakes for her cinematic project, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* (1979), one of the two films she directed during her

hiatus from writing,[25] as well as for her text, *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), creates the existential environments for the author to reverse the embodied alienation provoked by colonial education and establish connections with her extended family and with her elders, women who have participated in and survived the Algerian War. As Djebar states in an interview with Clarisse Zimra for the English translation of *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement [Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1992)], "the sound-image connection" she discovered through filmmaking allowed her to return to literature and, in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, "take charge of my writing […] return to my innermost self in my work" (171).[26] Zimra later explores the primacy of sound in Assia Djebar's cinematic and literary work, arguing that it is the preferred sensorial entry into other women's worlds because sound "can produce authentic, unmediated presence" and disrupt the scopic economy of the (Orientalist) gaze (1999: par. 13). For Djebar, the creative act is linked to the structuring of the senses; the sharpening of the author's capacities to hear and to travel by way of sound is one of the ways in which history can be rewritten against official representational narratives: "I always start from sound in my films and writing. I hear the voice and a vast space opens up from which the image eventually emerges" (Djebar, quoted in Zimra, 1999: par. 13). In this context, Djebar's creative projects hinge upon an understanding of the senses as eminently political, in that the act of listening entails not only an attuned aesthetic sensibility, but also a sense of responsibility towards the other. Reaching subaltern women's voices by way of this type of

[25] Upon her return to Algeria after the war, Djebar took a break from writing in the 1970s and taught at the University of Algiers and channeled her energies towards the making of two art films, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua* (1979), a fictional account of a woman's travels in the villages of Mont Chenoua collecting stories about the Algerian War from women, and *La Zerda ou le chant de l'oubli* (1983), a work of collaboration with her partner, Malek Alloula, which reframes cinematic footage from the French colonial archives in order to trace the depiction of Algerian women.

[26] Djebar's later work comprises of a projected Algerian quartet which includes *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), Ombre sultane (1987), and Vaste est la prison (1995), and other novels and autobiographical texts such as *Ces voix qui m'assiègent* (1999) and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (2007).

enhanced sensibility also requires a certain selectivity and critical process in discerning the extent and specificity of each voice.

Without purporting to inverse colonial discourse, for this would entail remaining within the parameters set by colonialism, Donadey argues that Djebar enacts a complex "female Algerian mimicry," which makes the master text collapse from within (112). According to Homi Bhabha, colonial mimicry represents one of the most elusive strategies of the colonial power/knowledge mechanism, which attempts to create "a recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (86). In other words, mimicry is characterized by ambivalence, particularly because the project of (re)forming and disciplining the Other according to the homogenized image of the "civilized subject," through colonial education and assimilation for example, always already internalizes its own failure, "its slippage, its excess, its difference" (88). Indeed Djebar takes the question of ambivalence as the direct subject of her literary and philosophical explorations in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, not only as a fundamental feature of (post-)colonial subjectivity, but also of women's modes of adaptation to and disruption of patriarchal societies. If she takes advantage of the gaps in the discourse of colonial mimicry, it is first in order to make the colloquial Arabic of her family life, the Tamazight dialects of Algerian village women, and the shrill ululations of the "wild collective voice" (Elia 195) erupt between the lines, hybridize, and transform the master discourse.

Moreover, Djebar is preoccupied with marking the traces that haunt the French colonial archives, the underwritten or overwritten ghosts of the women who perished in their resistance against the encroaching armies. Djebar even notes that she is haunted by the war testimonies she researches in the archives, by the verve and the passion of the killers and

conquerors, and their affective investment in pillage and possession. The author, thus, lets herself become inhabited by conflicting spirits in what becomes an affective form of counter-history-writing, which negotiates the different valences of the text in search for intimate knowledge of bodily vulnerability, of pain, of distress, and of suffering. This form of embodied and affective knowledge offers, both Djebar and Mechakra, an alternative vocabulary for their *écriture feminine* and for their attempts to envision diverse forms of female resistance. The fact that Djebar chooses to write by way of spirits and affective traces in *L'Amour, la fantasia* represents a significant turning point in her literary corpus.

In Avery Gordon's poetic theory of haunting as the afterlife of social violence, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), the ghost has almost the material impact of a social figure, in that it opens pathways to the elided intertwining of history and subjectivity. To write from the point of view of the ghost, thus, to let yourself be haunted and led by ghosts, means:

> making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory of the future. (22)

The ghost, like the subaltern, is oftentimes a vague lingering presence in the colonial archive, marking the place of an omission and an epistemological violence upon which colonial

mythology is deployed.[27] As Djebar observes, such moments proliferate in the accounts of military men, journalists and artists describing the invasion of Algeria and the resistance of Arab and Amazigh tribes. Through intertextuality, her novel weaves in fragments of accounts by French male officials involved in the conquest of Algeria, Amable Matterer, Baron Barchou de Penhoën, Pierre François Bosquet, Aimable Pélissier, amongst others, as well as painters and writers such as J.T. Merle and Eugène Fromentin. Reversing the Orientalist gaze of these texts, "Djebar places herself in a position of voyeurism vis-à-vis the private lives of these men […] Thus, Djebar counteracts the voyeuristic gaze of the colonizer by placing herself in the traditionally masculine position of the voyeur" (Murray 55). Browsing through their private letters and journal entries, Djebar searches for the bodies of women, captured as they are, close to death or having been already murdered. In Barchou de Penhoën's memoir, she reads:

> "Arab tribes are accompanied by great numbers of women who had shown the greatest zeal in mutilating their victims. One of these women lay dead beside the corpse of a French soldier whose heart she had torn out! Another had been fleeing with a child in her arms when a shot wounded her; she seized a stone and crushed the infant's head, to prevent it falling alive in our hands; the soldiers finished her off with their bayonets." (18)

The detached language Barchou uses in this passage focuses in particular on the women's cold-bloodedness in the face of their enemy. It is, like many other accounts Djebar quotes, an inscription in a military diary, which captures the facts in objective fashion. Subverting this falsely neutral language of strategy and reconnaissance, Djebar focuses instead on the

[27] See also Stoler 2006 and Khanna 2003.

affective life of these women, who, seized by panic and in the frenzy of war, fight until the very last minute; "these two heroines enter into recent history" (18) establishing a genealogy of resistance often erased by male-dominated nationalist discourses. Djebar's desire to trace this genealogy of female resistance to oppression (which cites not only Algerian women, but also French feminists, including early socialist thinker and activist Pauline Rolland) shapes a rich historical heritage for the female fighters who participated in the liberation of Algeria. Contrary to Fanon's assumption according to which the Algerian War instantiated the birth of a "new Algerian woman," Djebar shows that the political consciousness and revolutionary attachments of Algerian women have had long and complicated histories and manifested both in historically dramatic *and* in minor, everyday forms of resistance.

Moreover, when researching the massacre of the entire Ouled Riah tribe by French colonel Pélissier in 1845, Djebar reconstructs individual stories from the eyewitness accounts of European soldiers, doctors, and military men. As the Ouled Riah people seek shelter, along with their cattle and other domestic animals, inside of the labyrinthine caves of the Dahra mountains in retreat from the encroaching French army, Pélissier gives the order to his men to start a fire at the main entrance of the chain of caves. Fifteen hundred men, women, and children perish, along with their animals. Djebar lingers on a striking scene reported by an anonymous writer: "a dead man with one knee on the ground, grasping the horn of an ox in one hand. In front of him lay a woman with her child in her arms. It was easy to see that this man had been asphyxiated, together with the woman, the child and the ox, while he was struggling to protect his family from the enraged animal" (73). The tragedy of the massacre of the Ouled Riah is made almost tangible through the focus on the relics of the bodies of the family and their ox, clenched together in their very last moments, and pre*f*served as they

were by the literary text after more than a century of silence. Djebar writes: "I am practicing a very special kind of spelaeology, since in my descent in those dark caverns my only hand-holds are words in the French language – reports, accounts, evidence from the past" (77).

But perhaps the most striking moment in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, which explicitly marks the text's own heritage, represents a scene Djebar collects from French painter Eugène Fromentin's travel narrative, *Un Été dans le Sahara* (1853):

> In June 1853, when he leaves the Sahel to travel down to the edge of the desert, he visits Laghouat which has been occupied after a terrible siege. He describes one sinister detail: as he is leaving the oasis which six months after the massacre is still filled with its stench, Fromentin picks up out of the dust the severed hand of an anonymous Algerian woman. He throws it down again in its path.
>
> Later, I seize on this living hand of mutilation and of memory, and I attempt to bring it the *qalam*. (226)

Not only does Djebar bring writing to the severed hand, the remnant of an Algerian woman who may have never learned to read or write, but she brings her the *qalam*, the instrument of writing utilized for Islamic calligraphy. The Arabic word *qalam*, which could refer to any type of pen, most likely carries Qur'anic significance in Djebar's appropriation of the term. Thus, the fact that an Algerian woman's hand might seize the *qalam* and rewrite history represents not only a revision of the master discourses of colonial history, but also of those of Islamic patriarchy.

Last but not least, Djebar's engagement with autobiography and oral historiography creates bridges between the text and orality, by not only bringing the Algerian stories she has

read in French books to other Algerian women, but also incorporating a new form of storytelling in the vernacular languages of Algeria. According to Spivak, "one of the major motifs of *Fantasia* is a meditation on the possibility that to achieve autobiography in the double bind of the practice of the conqueror's writing is to learn to be taken seriously by the gendered subaltern who has not mastered that practice" (771). In other words, as Djebar travels to the villages in Mount Chenoua to meet with women who participated in the Algerian War in different capacities, she needs to be accepted in their community first and become their confidante and, for this purpose, she exchanges her own stories for theirs. When meeting with Lla Zhora, Djebar's grandmother's cousin, the writer tells her the story of Fatma and Meriem, two Algerian dancers and prostitues who had been killed in the summer of 1853 during France's invasion. Djebar gleans this story from Eugène Fromentin's *Une année dans le Sahel*, and brings it in tight connection to Lla Zhora's own stories about her times during the war. She had housed and cared for the maquisards, and consequently her farm was burnt down to the ground several times, while she was subjected to torture by electricity during interrogation by the French army (161). In these interventions, in which Djebar reproduces the women's stories as faithfully as she can by relaying their specific linguistic idiosyncrasies in her French translation of their interviews, the author partakes in the making and reshaping of Algerian women's oral tradition. Oral storytelling, which encapsulates the traces of each person through whom the story passes, becomes a repository of memories, impressions, and expressions of desire that give shape to the alternative language of subalternity.

THE LANGUAGES OF THE BODY: AHMED, DJEBAR, MECHAKRA

In the overture to *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980) [*Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1992)], Djebar problematizes the role of the postcolonial writer, a woman writing about women, an ambivalent thinker, and a translator, mediating between fragmentary snippets of voices overheard in Arabic and the French of the literary texts. Folding in a fragmented and ruptured oral tradition, and particularly a minoritarian language, "un arabe populaire," "un arabe féminin," "un arabe souterrain"[28] (1980: 7). The subterranean quality of minoritarian languages invokes echoes from the caves in which entire Algerian tribes perished without a trace during colonization, caves which Djebar excavates in *L'Amour, la fantasia* and Mechakra in *La Grotte éclatée*. It also references the work of underground guerilla fighters and, implicitly, that of minoritarian subjects marginalized by the diffuse distribution of power. The multiple senses of the underground—to go underground, to perish in underground caves, to remain confined in the underground—establish postcolonial Algerian women as minoritarian subjects.

Furthermore, the intersection of class, gender, and the use of language, a colloquial Arabic, opposes the official language of those in power, the formal Arabic of official Islam, the language of the law, and the language of formal documents. This is a gesture reminiscent of Egyptian feminist scholar Leila Ahmed's recuperation of the orality/aurality of Islam. In her English language memoir, *A Border Passage* (1999), Ahmed recalls the important role the vernacular education received from the women in her family played in her life. This orally transmitted awareness of the world relying on a lived experience of Islam conveyed

[28] "From colloquial Arabic or from feminine Arabic; one might just as well call it underground Arabic." (Djebar 1992: 1)

crucial ethical advice regarding everyday decision, conduct, the proper behavior towards others, and the development of a spiritual life in line with the physical: "Leaving no written legacy, written only on the body and into the scripts of our lives, this oral and aural tradition of Islam no doubt stretches back through generations and is as ancient as any written tradition" (127). This is "the Islam not only of women but of ordinary folk generally, as opposed to the Islam of sheikhs, ayatollahs, mullahs, and clerics" (125). It is, thus, a language transmitted through the circulation of breath, instead of the written word. It transgresses the instated patriarchal law and remains open to manifold interpretations as a language of potentialities of meaning. It is also a corporeal language, a dialect performed through the body and its senses, through sounds and gestures. Finally, Ahmed explains, it is a language physically instantiated, in that meaning emerges through its individualization in each body, instead of floating above the material plane in transcendental form. Ahmed's preoccupation with sound and the aural qualities of spirituality locates the search for expression within the embodied self. It also invokes the fleeting quality of aurality, the ways in which it escapes capture and, concomitantly, fixation within written histories.

Similarly, Assia Djebar's interest in recuperating the language of women invokes a radical deconstruction of the transcendental language of representation of both colonialism and patriarchy. In her work, Djebar demonstrates how the harm experienced by women derives from different systems of colonial and postcolonial government and control, which can be equally characterized as patriarchal in their paternalistic attitude towards women, albeit for different historical reasons. In this reconstructive affective history writing, she follows the frail and fugitive movement of the senses, the balance between silence and the murmurings in the dark, behind closed doors, in the private realm in which women were

often confined. Indeed, this fragmentary language becomes even further shattered towards becoming almost imperceptible, "transmitted only by chains of echoes and sighs" (1992: 1). The echoes reverberating in enclosed spaces, as well as the minimal expressions of sighs. To sigh is to exhale air loudly in an expression of heaviness. The breath returns here as the fundamental expression of emotional suffering. The fragmentary language, which Djebar is in the process of piecing together, follows the circulation of the breath.

Djebar's role as a postcolonial historian and writer relies on the necessity of working with impressions of things, echoes and sighs—in addition to official discourses—as the raw material through which she reassembles subaltern histories. In this she assumes the role of a *sourcière,* a water dowser, someone who goes to the source of things to find the life-giving fluid and bring it back to the community (1992: 1).

And yet the source of the voices she collects remains perpetually slippery: "Can I, twenty years later, claim to revive these stifled voices? And speak for them? Shall I not best find dried-up streams? What ghosts will be conjured up when in this absence of expressions of love (love received, 'love' imposed, I see the reflection of my own barrenness, my own aphasia" (1985: 202). The writer's aphasia is an inevitable philosophical failure, the inability of the text to fully reproduce the affective traces of subaltern histories. Djebar is critical of the claim of originary presences. In other words, she is well aware of the impossibility of a project that purports to reconstitute the authentic voice of Algerian women. Additionally, the mere fact of Djebar being a woman "cannot alone qualify her for the role of spokesperson for the 'womenfolk'," as Nada Elia notes (192). If the shared experience of gendered violence is explored in her work as a sort of rapprochement to other women, Djebar is keenly aware of the fact that she is also different from many of her female interlocutors through her class and

educational privilege. Yet her later work establishes itself as an ethical commitment to listening in order to grasp "the traces of some ruptures" (1992: 1).

The traces of ruptured histories can be discerned almost on the threshold of perception and constitute the imperfect sources of the postcolonial imagination. Revealing the subaltern voices that haunt the author is inevitably dependent upon the language of writing, the language of the colonizer, yet this text is hybridized through the mediation of the Algerian oral tradition. Developing a new language for Algerian women, both critical and empowering, is thus, for Djebar, a matter of bringing together the different traditions layering her knowledge of the world and her creative work. This language is an embodied language; it is a language of desire, of pleasure and of eroticism.

In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Djebar notes that girls like her and those of her generation had access to four different languages by which they were able to express different attachments, affective dispositions and desires—French for love letters, Arabic for spiritual aspirations, Lybico-Berber (Amazigh) for access to the mother-gods of pre-Islamic Mecca, and a fourth language, which:

> for all females, young or old, cloistered or half-emancipated, remains that of the body: the body which male neighbours' and cousins' eyes require to be deaf and blind, since they cannot completely incarcerate it; the body which, in trances, dances or vociferations, in fits of hope or despair, rebels, and unable to read or write, seeks some unknown shore as destination for its message of love. (180)

For Djebar, there is a creative revolutionary potential within the female body, an energy which exhaust itself in "trances, dances or vociferations," and that can be channeled towards

expressions of autonomy and of pleasure. By bringing reading and writing to the confined body, Djebar thus conjoins her feminist and her anti-colonial stances in her intimation of a language of the senses as springing directly from the specificity of the female body.

Assia Djebar's conception of female corporeality is primarily sensual: "When I think of the female body, I do not see it as a procreating but as an erotic body" (*Femmes* 177). Yamina Mechakra's perspective on the relationship between language and female embodiment relies, on the contrary, upon metaphors that draw their richness from the procreative capacities of the body. *La Grotte éclattée* opens with an invocation that directly addresses this embedded and embodied language:

> Langage pétri dans les nattes tressées au feu de l'amour qui flambe depuis des siècles au cœur de mes ancêtres et dans mon cœur vers lequel souvent je tends mon visage gelé et mon regard humide pour pouvoir sourire. Langage pétri dans les tapis, livres ouverts portant l'empreinte multicolore des femmes de mon pays qui, dès l'aube se mettent à écrire le feu de leurs entrailles pour couvrir l'enfant le soir quand le ciel lui volera le soleil; dans les khalkhals d'argent, auréoles glacées aux fines chevilles, dont la musique rassure et réconforte celui qui dort près de l'âtre et déjà aime le pied de sa mère et la terre qu'elle foule. (13)

Mechakra taps into this "langage pétri dans les nattes tressées," a form of language kneaded in the braided hair worn by women, in the mats under their feet that adorn their houses, and in the silver bracelets wrapped around their ankles. The narrator takes the perspective of the child in this opening paragraph, observing the women from below, while sheltered in their houses, warming up against their fires. The expression "langage pétri" bears a number of other connotations: this language of the home, of the womb, and of the fireplace is steeped in

culture, gathering in its seams an intuitive form of knowledge passed from one generation to another. It is also a fossilized language ("pétri" / "petrifié"), a language that relies upon the sedimentation of traditions. Mechakra suggests that the language of Algerian women is by no means unified since it leaves multicolored traces upon the rugs opened as if they were books to the visitor. Her novel disrupts the idea of a unified identity carried under the nationalist Algerian banner, which claimed Arabic as the language of the land and Islam, its religion. Instead, the traces left by Algerian women are also spoken in a variety of Tamazight dialects. The "khalkhals d'argent" (traditional Amazigh jewelry) mark the multiplicity of the cultural expressions of Algeria, and of its villages and mountains. The passage also reveals a dialectical movement between the materiality of cultural objects and the bodies of women as carriers of texts, instead of overwritten objects. Mechakra performs a reversal in this paragraph that lays the foundations for her own novel—instead of writing about Algerian women and their everyday environments, she clings onto the ancestral text that rises from their homes and from their bodies. In other words, the author concedes some of her textual authority by evoking Algerian women as the active producers of knowledge and by bringing homage to the care they bestow upon others.

Taking the private scene of the home and the labor of women in the home as the departure point of her text, Mechakra also makes visible and values the domestic and emotional labor of women. In this sense, her conceptions of the body and of love differ from Assia Djebar's appropriation of these topics, which is symptomatic of their different feminist philosophies. Djebar explores the transgressive potentials of the female body as a source of sensuality, while Mechakra recuperates the life-giving powers of women's bodies, focusing instead on gestation, healing, and care. The metaphor of the womb as a source of life and

warmth perseveres throughout the text as the anonymous protagonist of the novel bears her pregnancy resiliently while still caring for the injured fighters inside of the cave.

Mildred Mortimer has argued, for instance, that the cave in Mechakra's text becomes a specifically feminine and maternal space (16). Here, the fire of life is to be preserved at great risks and sacrifices. But the significance of fire is twofold in *La Grotte éclatée* as it can cleanse and heal, as well as destroy and kill. When the sheltering cave of the FLN fighters is bombed with napalm by the French military, the protagonist loses her two month old son in the explosion, her war companions, as well as her left arm: "je haïs le feu" (96). In this sense, Mechakra's imagery of fire, joining both the life-giving warmth of women's wombs and the destructive force of colonial violence, approaches Djebar's preoccupations with the ambivalent nature of love–love that can nourish and love that can hurt and do violence to the body.

If the cave is indeed depicted as a protecting and nurturing space in the first pages of *La Grotte éclatée*, it is nevertheless vulnerable in the face of a colonial army with advanced war technologies and well-worn counter-insurgency techniques. The cave is often deployed as a symbol of resistance in literary texts about the Algerian War, and functions in both Mechakra's and Djebar's work as a tension between possibility and vulnerability. According to Christa Jones, Mechakra in particular projects upon the geography of the cave a multivalent understanding of femininity:

> la féminité s'exprime à l'intérieur de l'antre de la grotte, à l'abri de l'activité guerrière située à l'extérieur. Cette féminité toute-puissante se manifeste en dépit des contraintes imposées par la guerre, tels le manque d'hygiène, la faim et le froid. Généreuse, elle englobe non seulement le désir sexuel ou l'enfantement au sens strict,

> mais cette féminité s'étend à une manière d'être spécifique, à savoir une grandeur d'âme et d'esprit qui s'exprime par l'amitié, la solidarité, l'amour du prochain, les soins proférés, le courage et le partage. (138)

It is significant to point out that Mechakra's conception of femininity is not solely linked to gestation, but extends to a utopian view of human communion, as Jones suggests. Equally, it cannot be said that the space of the cave simply coincides with maternity and the metaphors of the womb, as this would idealize the gendered dynamics of Algerian nationalist groups in which women had marginal or instrumental roles. But the potential of feminizing the space of the cave is certainly present in both Mehakra's and Djebar's writing, who explicitly choose to foreground the perspectives and voices of women in developing embodied forms of linguistic expression.

LOVE IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES: DESIRE, CARE, AND VULNERABILITY

The threshold towards writing subaltern histories, the stories of forgotten Algerian women, is to be crossed through an invocation. In their respective literary works, Yamina Mechakra and Assia Djebar summon the stifled voices of the past, those of their ancestresses, rising from the homes of their childhood, the villages, the mountains, and the caves, architectures of suffering and the loss of life. To seek permission to "write-about" and "speak-in-the-name-of" entails giving precedence to the authority of the invoked voices while joining one's authorial voice to them in the same breath. As a result of having passed through a French colonial education, which opened the possibility of writing to both of them,

Mechakra and Djebar face the responsibility of the postcolonial translator, rendering the voices of their ancestresses from Tamazight dialects or colloquial Arabic to the French of their *écriture*. But perhaps even more than bridging the gap between two different linguistic expressions, Mechakra and Djebar pluralize the different spoken and written languages of Algerian women by locating them in layered aural environments populated by different sounds, cries, and music. Invoking the voices of women involves recreating the complexity of their surroundings in writing, describing in detail their movements, the texture of their adornments, the shrill reverberation of their ululations, the intimate details of their everyday existence, as if the opening of the senses to these scenes from the past has the effect of transporting the author back to her childhood to a maternal language of love and care.

In *L'Amour, la fantasia* Djebar writes: "Love, if I managed to write it down, would approach a critical point: there where lies the risk of exhuming buried cries, those of yesterday and as well as those of a hundred years ago" (63). Writing as an act of love and as an attempt to capture the ephemeral qualities of love, the frailty of bodies and their desire, their suffering and their destruction. The author writes through the body, through the radical receptivity of her senses. Writing, then, is a form of love, and an opening of one's capacities to feel and to be receptive to others' suffering with "the risk of exhuming buried cries," the cries of those who perished throughout the French conquest of Algeria and during the war of independence.

Danielle Marx-Scouras argues that authors such as Djebar and Mechakra, who represent the traumatic effects of war upon women's lives, play on the personification of the homeland as a woman in order to "depict the devastation of revolutionary and civil war on their writing bodies; the 'body in pain' becomes, so to speak, the textual signifier" (176).

Employing images and poetic strategies that bring their writing bodies closer to the bodies of female revolutionary fighters and to the desecrated land, they also mark the multiple sources of gendered violence at the intersection of colonial patriarchy and traditional patriarchy. Both Djebar and Mechakra rely upon the multiple significations of love in the midst of violence, with different feminist approaches. While Djebar forges a transgressive vocabulary of love, of the body, and of sensuality as a means of resistance to oppression and a way of building solidarity amongst women, and reversing the patriarchal appropriation of love as conquest, Mechakra relies on a nationalist model of love and loving, which manifests as commitment to Algeria and to Algerians by representing women's capacities of alleviating suffering and healing the bodies broken by war.

In Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia,* love is always ambivalent, multivalent and potentially dangerous. It entails, on the one hand, the discovery of one's own body as a source of autonomy, transgression and pleasure: "To write *confronting* love. Shedding light on one's body to help lift the taboo, to lift the veil" (62). In this sense, love is an individuating and individualizing experience. It is also a form of resistance to the taboos of one's community that limit mobility, voice, and the expression of desire. The little girl of Djebar's autobiographical narrative must embrace and relearn her body in order to discover herself, her limits and her capacities. She must explode the space constructed within herself "filled with desperate cries, frozen long ago in a prehistory of love" (4). Writing becomes the channel through which she can present her body to the world, by releasing the internalized cries and learning to love her own body as well as open it up to love.

If the taboo shelters the body of the girl against sexual desire and, thus, prevents the possibility of dishonor to the family, what is foreclosed in the same gesture is sensual desire.

The latter is what makes communion and community possible. Sensuality does not always coincide with sexuality, but exceeds it in that it occasions the exploration of the senses and the interfolding of individual and collective desires. As Djebar's masterful narrative shows, to be able to "exhume the buried cries" of Algerian women, she must first recall and access her own muffled cries, linking the history of her silencing and oppression as an Algerian woman to that of her ancestresses and sisters as a way of entering their life-worlds. The personal is here inextricably embedded in and intertwined with the collective.

Furthermore, in Djebar's work, the exercise of the imagination and of empathy is carried out by way of sensuality. To be able to lend her ear to subaltern aurality, Djebar must first learn how to develop the language of her own body by stripping herself naked and freeing her senses. With the constrictions of tradition and colonial assimilation gradually removed as if they were successive veils, the author must relearn her native tongue in order to access the subaltern voices of women, for this will take her back to herself:

> *'L'amour, ses cris (s'écrit)*': my hand as I write in French makes the pun on love affairs that are aired; all my body does is to move forward, stripped naked, and when it discovers the ululations of my ancestresses on the battlefields of old, it finds that it is itself at stake: it is no longer a question of writing only to survive. (214)

Writing thus brings Djebar to the discovery of the ambivalence of love as a tension between desire and appropriation, caress and violent possession, closeness and rapine: "War and love leave similar impressions: the hesitant courtship dance before the image of the one who takes flight" (57).

Reading through the French colonial archives of the conquest of Algeria, Djebar discovers that soldiers, captains, and military generals write of the Algerian land as if they were writing of "a woman whom it is impossible to tame" (57). As she probes the personal letters of military men, Djebar develops a fascination for the "agitation of the killers," for their "obsessional unease" (57). Their expressed desires and fears, their most intimate recollections and experiences of the foreign Algerian land and the encounters with its people, especially the women, unnerve and disconcert these conquerors. And above all, Djebar notes the passion with which their conquest is infused. It is almost as if the invaders come as lovers in pursuit of their prey (8). The sexualization of the land is marked by Djebar in one of the opening scenes of the book in which the French flotilla approaches the harbor of Algiers on June 13, 1830, the first incursion into Algeria. The city "sheds her veils and emerges, a wraith-like apparition, through the blue-grey haze […] [it] makes her first appearance in the role of 'Oriental Woman,' motionless and mysterious" (6). As with the desire to unveil Algerian women, the conquest of the city, as narrated by Djebar, takes place through a metonymic association of female embodiment and land. Love, here standing for possessive passion, carries the consequences of Orientalist discourses that depict both the land and women's bodies as available for the taking.

While Djebar insists on the deployment of love within the logic of heteropatriarchy as an oscillation between pleasure and violence, Mechakra presents the possibility of love as the transfer of care from one generation to another through the devotion to the homeland and its people. In the Aurès mountains, where FLN fighters seek refuge, "les siècles lentement courbèrent l'échine et le silex fit jaillir le feu de l'histoire pour nourrir le combat et illuminer la route des enfants dans le regard desquels l'amour refusait de creuser sa sépulture" (15). To

use Yacine's expression, "Kahina's children" are figured here as the carriers of life and as the embodiments of hope for the Algerian people in a classical nationalist discourses, which celebrates the fighters who have sacrificed their lives for independence.

But Mechakra's narrative also pushes against the limits of nationalism towards a nomadic humanist philosophy, which takes bodily vulnerability as its point of departure. The protagonist's identity, an orphaned child, carries the traces of the social taboo of her birth outside of marriage, which continues to impact her life into her young adulthood. However, while she was passed from one orphanage to another, and through the homes of multiple charitable families, the woman gradually discards her socially marked identity in favor of a fluid status: "Chez les uns on m'appelait Marie ou Judith, chez les autres Fatma." The child without a name embraces the Christian, Jewish and Muslim identities imposed upon her. She practices every religion of Algeria, because she does not become invested in fixation, in a single, unitary identity: "je n'aimais personne […] Pour moi, le ciel comprenait trois grands mondes où je n'avais pas de frontière: celui de Moïse, celui de Jésus et celui de Sidna Mohammed" (33). For the narrator, the strict divisions between traditions, cultures and religions represent a restriction of human freedom, just as the frontiers and borders demarcating land ownership and nation remain abstract hindrances. In a socialist vein, she declares that the absolute human right is to love "toute la terre et tout le ciel, vieillir et mourir à l'ombre d'un vieux peuplier sans qu'il n'appartienne à personne" (32). Here love is an ethical responsibility for the land, instead of merely denoting the desire to possess. Furthermore, land, nation, cultural belonging, and the other symbolic structures of societies become revealed to her as already hybridized and multitudinous constructs. The protagonist embraces her uprootedness and her nomadism towards developing a vision of absolute

freedom, rejecting allegiances to particular communities and dreaming of inhabiting a country as free as herself: "Je rêvais de partir un matin, nue, habillée de brume, à la recherche de la ligne où le ciel et la terre s'épousaient pour enfanter le jour […] Je me promenais sans fiche d'état civil, sans nom, sans prénom. Je vivais clandestinement sur terre. J'étais une hors-la-loi" (34). In this vision of liberation which parallels Djebar's, to be stripped naked, wrapped up in mist, means to discard constrictive cultural markers. It also means to gain a different freedom of movement than before. Being outlawed, outside of the law, is to live beyond the surveillance of the (colonial) state and beyond the grasp of tradition. The protagonist's nomadic flight represents a refusal of the orders imposed on her by dominant and destructive communal and state ideologies including French colonialism, as she witnesses its devastation of Algerian land and the exploitation of its people, and the different patriarchal communities she inhabits—that of Muslim tradition, which has already stigmatized her as the fruit of dishonor, and the Catholic partiality of the orphanage nuns who punish her for reading Gide, whose writing is deemed improper for a teenage girl. As the protagonist joins the nationalist cause, she is particularly drawn to the potential of the revolution as a revolution of the people, rejecting imposed colonial borders, land ownership, and communal divisions. She is skeptical of notions of national purity, which lead to the solidification of (male) genealogies, instead adopting what could be called a relational nationalist stance premised upon the importance of care in intersubjective and intergenerational relationships, and the valuing of human vulnerability.

In his book *Poétique de la relation*, a lyrical development of Deleuzean rhizomatic and nomadic thinking, Martinican writer Édouard Glissant expands the notion of a fixed national postcolonial identity to a relationship with the Other in an effort to develop a new

sense of relational identity, multilingual, creolized, nomadic or errant, cross-cultural, "produced in the chaotic network of relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation" (144). His philosophy embraces an aesthetics of the Earth, "of rupture and connection" (151), a vision of the chaos-monde, defined as the creative globalized relationality and interconnectivity of life, beyond the pre-established or normalizing control of one permanent identity or another.

For Mechakra's main character, love is about being implicated in tight relational networks with other people and with the land. Hers is an eco-humanist nomadic vision of life, in which the care given to the other is inextricably connected to the respect for the land and other living beings. On the limits of the Aurès mountains, amongst freedom fighters from all corners of Algeria and other men who had come from across the sea, all united in the same cause—that of fighting oppression—she begins to know "l'amour simple et honnête" (29). Sharing with them the precarious reserves of food, enduring famine, drinking the blood of jackals to regain strength, witnessing massacres and spending her days nursing injured soldiers with severed limbs, the narrator experiences herself at the very limits of her body and her emotional endurance, surviving only through the reassurances of the warmth of other bodies against her own. On the Tunisian frontier, in the sector where her underground network is later distributed, she declares:

> Sur cette ligne où le tambour de guerre résonnait inlassablement, j'appris à mourir et à aimer les hommes.
>
> Comment n'aimerais-je pas les hommes après avoir trempé mes doigts dans leur sang, ramassé leurs tripes, respiré leur haleine fétide, recueilli leur dernier souffle? (21)

Learning to die and learning to love the other are facets of the same affective impulse towards the valuing of human vulnerability. The most intimate and vulnerable aspects of the human body, those that make the body so susceptible to being hurt, wounded, and annihilated, become for the protagonist the particularities through which she establishes deep affective bonds of commitment, care and responsibility. Precariousness, in Judith Butler's words, is what links the mortality of one body to the other, thus enabling the possibility of empathy and care.[29] In this passage, Mechakra moves beyond gender-specific conceptions of embodiment towards a humanist philosophy of vulnerability as the possibility of profound love, and thus, the prerequisite of the foundation of just societies.

CODA: CAN THE SUBALTERN ALGERIAN WOMAN SPEAK?

Yamina Mechakra's *La Grotte éclatée* and Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* approach the task of writing subaltern histories from different angles, that of a first-person prose poem narrative and that of a hybrid, cross-disciplinary historical reflection, yet the texts use similar strategies in their representation of subaltern Algerian women's participation during the war. Can subaltern Algerian women speak through their texts? Sometimes their voices are rendered explicit and more audible, such as in Djebar's transcription of the oral history interviews with rural Algerian women, yet these voices are highly stylized, translated (into French), mediated, and framed by each author's political investment and attachments. What does emerge from their texts is a creative alternative history, which reflects a heterogeneity of Algerian women's voices, embodied practices, desires, affective dispositions as well as cultural and linguistic expressions. Both Djebar and

[29] See Butler (2004) and Butler (2009).

Mechakra privilege a fluid model of feminism that reclaims the specificity of the female body as the pathway towards developing an anticolonial and antimasculinist discourse of representation; yet the writers also reject claims to cultural, national or gender essentialism, in their literary developments of nomadic thinking. Their writing proposes a feminist politics of the senses that links women's freedom of movement to their capacity to participate in natural worlds and communal spaces. By critiquing the coinciding patriarchal and colonial systems of oppression that have historically produced Algerian women's precarity, Mechakra and Djebar imagine social systems premised upon cultural plurality and hybrid and nomadic identities. The paradoxes that emerge from their Francophone texts, which seek to establish more complex postcolonial reflections on Algerian women's rights and politics, offer resourceful feminist frameworks to consider the relationship between critiques of colonial violence and patriarchal violence, and push the boundaries of conceptions of subjectivity beyond monolithic colonial or nationalist logics.

CHAPTER TWO

The Challenges of Transnational Feminism: Responding to Sexualized Torture During the Algerian War

In his introduction to Henri Alleg's testimony of torture by the French army in Algeria, *La Question* (1958), Jean-Paul Sartre deplored the metropolitan French population's silence and complicity in the horrors their government inflicted during the Algerian War, a protracted conflict which lasted from 1954 until the independence of Algeria in 1962. The unwillingness to take responsibility for state violence was blatant to Sartre because, as he noted, not long before the French had been victims of torture themselves in the hands of the French militia and the Gestapo occupation forces in Paris. The analogy between the violence of the Third Reich and French colonialism in Algeria was often raised by left-leaning French intellectuals of the time as a means of opposing what became known as "the gangrene" of French society—the use of torture with impunity.

In this chapter, I will turn to the public debates stirred in France in the late fifties and early sixties by the revelations of torture, massacres, summary executions and sexual violence employed in order to maintain *L'Algérie française*, and focus in-depth on Gisèle Halimi and Simone de Beauvoir's involvement in the Djamila Boupacha case. This historical case of transnational feminist solidarity holds several lessons for our contemporary globalized political investments as it demonstrates the development of feminist critique towards an integration of anticolonial considerations and historically specific concerns. Moreover, Djamila Boupacha's experience of being raped and tortured while detained by the French military offers a unique perspective on the culturally specific and gendered forms of torture used by occupation forces in Muslim societies. Finally, this chapter will reflect on the

question of bodily pain and trauma in an effort to expand a vocabulary of bodily vulnerability in order to refer more concretely to gendered experiences of extreme violence.

Several accounts of the excesses of the French army in Algeria were published in 1957 including François Mauriac's investigative reporting for *L'Express*, the Müller Dossier published in *Témoignage Chrétien*, in which a soldier fighting in Algeria denounced some of the worst atrocities he witnessed there, and Pierre-Henri Simon's book, *Contre la torture*[30]. Simon, who had served as a military captain during World War II, had been himself imprisoned in German war camps, and would later compare the practices of torture used in Algeria with what he had observed after visiting the concentration camp at Belsen. Additionally, testimonies of torture were published in France, whether on behalf of captured Algerian fighters, such as Georges Arnaud and Jacques Vergès's *Pour Djamila Bouhired* (1957) and Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi's *Djamila Boupacha* (1962), or written by those who had been tortured themselves such as Heni Alleg's *La Question* (1958) and a collection of torture testimonies by Algerians publishes as *La Gangrène* (1959). The latter differed from previously published testimonies in that the victims were five Algerian students and workers Béchir Boumazza, Mustapha Francis, Benaïsa Souami, Abd el Kader Belhadj, and Moussa Khebaili, who had been tortured in Paris on rue des Saussaies at the headquarters of the DST (Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire), a branch of the French National Police. *La Gangrène* thus again invited the comparison with the Nazi occupation, whose officials tortured French resistance fighters in the very heart of Paris, and in the very same place where the headquarters of the Gestapo were located.

[30] See Alistair Horne's *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962* (1977) for a more detailed account of the coverage of the Algerian War in the French Press.

In this context, on September 6, 1960, French intellectuals published the "Manifesto of the 121" in opposition to the use of torture by the French Army during the Algerian War of Independence, and advocating for the rights of conscientious objectors and in support of the recognition of the rights of Algerians to national autonomy. The manifesto, signed by Simone de Beauvoir, Robert Antelme, Marguerite Duras, Guy Debord, Henri Lefebvre, and Jean-Paul Sartre, amongst many others, noted the fact that torture was once again institutionalized in Europe despite its recrimination during and after the Nazi regime.

James D. Le Sueur argues that the process of decolonization in North Africa, and particularly in Algeria, contributed to the redefinition of French identity, as French intellectuals grappled with the challenges to the perceived universalism of French culture (170). Frantz Fanon, writing in *El Moudjahid*[31] during the war, expressed his dissatisfaction with metropolitan displays of solidarity for the sake and in the name of salvaging "French honor," which appeared ineffective to him because of the emphasis placed on the French sensibility, while the suffering of the actual victims of the extensive military torture complex, Algerian men and women was often erased (1967: 71). Indeed, the discourse of the French left sometimes revolved around a perceived sense of disenchantment with the idea of Frenchness which revealed the sense of having lost something essential about one's national belonging and the ideals of the French nation. This, of course, coincided with the beginning of the collapse of the French empire. Rita Maran has also noted that discourses surrounding the Algerian war, whether they were deployed in defense of torture or, on the contrary, as a staunch criticism of torture, followed "a common thread of understanding about France as the

[31] El Moudjahid is an Algerian French-language newspaper which represents the views of the Front de libération nationale (National Liberation Front), the main party involved in the Algerian liberation struggle which later became the single governing party of the postcolonial state. Fanon wrote several articles for the newspaper from 1952 to 1961, and served as its editor upon his exile in Tunisia during the war.

seat of civilization and disseminator of civilization in Algeria" (188). Thus, the ideology of the *mission civilisatrice* was either deployed for the legitimization of the use of torture as a necessary means to uphold the preservation of the empire, or it resurfaced more subtly in discourses critical of the war which emphasized the deterioration of French culture as a result of the excesses perpetrated in Algeria. However, as I argue in this chapter, the focus on the moral dissolution of French society and the attempt to move the French audience towards political action were often strategically calculated rhetorical devices in a war of ideas in which public opinion was of utmost importance.

In this context, the comparison between the German occupation of France and the French occupation of Algeria surfaced in different ways in the public discourses of the time. First of all, it was often deployed by politicians and military figures as a means of reneging responsibility and relied upon the assumption that the traumatic experiences of the Nazi invasion of France were fundamentally at the root of the later abuses of war generals and the army in Algeria. Secondly, the analogy was used by torturers themselves as a means of enhancing the terror experienced by their victims. Last but not least, anticolonial thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre employed the comparison so as to dispel the myth of French exceptionalism by demonstrating that France too, despite the resistance mobilized against the German occupation, was in fact a nation-state that benefitted from the oppression and extermination of people.

In his highly comprehensive study of globally employed torture techniques, *Torture and Democracy* (2007), Darius Rejali investigates one of the main tools of torture used in Algeria, informally known as *la gégène*, a magneto device repurposed from early generators initially used for telephones and automobile ignitions. The device consisted of a generator

capable of producing high voltage rates and a set of wires, which would be attached to the most sensitive spots on the victim's body. Rejali notes that the use of the magneto was sometimes attributed to the Gestapo through the "*reductio ad Hitlerum*" thesis, which assumed that the worst torture practices could only be traced back to the Nazis. But in fact, techniques such as the use of the magneto and water boarding were characteristic of French colonial domination practices, and were rarely used by the Gestapo outside of French territories (165). Rejali's analysis shows that the torture used against resistance fighters during the German occupation of France was in fact inspired by local torture techniques brought back to metropolitan police stations from France's colonial project in Indochina. The most plausible hypothesis according to him is that "magneto torture passed through the French colonial system from Indochina to France during World War II, and then spread to the German Gestapo and possibly to the Hungarians" (157). The haunting presence of the French colonies in Indochina was often elided in narratives that attributed the use of torture in Algeria to the methods introduced by the Nazis, but some of the seasoned war generals such as Jacques Massu, Marcel Bigeard and Raoul Salan, who had served in Indochina, were well familiarized with the policing techniques employed there.

The torture of Henri Alleg was a case in point for the ways in which the analogy between colonial violence and the Gestapo surfaced as a weapon of terror. As he details in *La question*, his torturers, the Tenth Division of Paratroopers under the command of Massu, unabashedly boasted about being like the Gestapo in the midst of their torture session: "'You're going to talk! Everybody talks here! We fought the war in Indo-China—that was enough to know your type. This is the Gestapo here! You know the Gestapo?'" (58). The irony of this statement did not escape Alleg, whose Jewish descent endangered him during

World War II, when he relocated from metropolitan France to Algiers in 1939 and became involved with the Communist Party in Algeria. Henri Alleg's sobering torture testimony was one of the first texts to expose the extent of the methods employed by the army in Algeria. Alleg was the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Alger Républicain*. Arrested for his support of the Algerian liberation struggle in 1957, he was tortured by French paratroopers through repeated beatings, water-boarding, electricity, and he was administered Pentothal, an experimental drug that was believed to act as a truth serum. Alleg wrote about his ordeals on snippets of paper, which were eventually smuggled out of the prison and published in book format in France. The book was seized and censored by the French government in a matter of days, similarly to the later censorship of *La Gangrène*. But Alleg's testimony of torture, which managed to sell several thousands of copies and was then distributed on the black market, agitated the national and international debate about the methods the French army used as part of their counter-insurgency strategy, as did the accounts of the torture and rape of Algerian female revolutionaries Djamila Bouhired and Djamila Boupacha.

Henri Alleg's text opens with a call for witnessing the collective suffering of Algerian prisoners, who had gone through similar experiences as him, and for the solidarity expressed amongst them in the nationalist songs that would resound from all to accompany a sentenced prisoner to his execution. Indeed, Alleg felt that "it is almost indecent to talk about oneself," but that the extent of his and others' pain and humiliation had to be exposed and communicated to a larger audience. Alleg was arrested on June 12th, 1957 at Maurice Audin's residence. Audin, an assistant at the Faculty of Science in Algiers, was arrested a day before Alleg, tortured and subsequently disappeared in what many argued was an

assassination (Alleg was the last person to see Audin in prison right before he died while being tortured[32]).

Alleg's interrogators attempted to extricate from him information about the whereabouts of his hiding place and the other revolutionaries he was connected to. When Alleg refused to betray his friends, he was subjected to the first "session." Stripped naked and tied to a wooden plank "sweating with humidity, polluted and sticky with vomit," the bodily traces of previous prisoners, Alleg was tortured with electricity: "A flash of lightning exploded next to my ear and I felt my heart racing. I struggled, screaming, and stiffened myself until the straps cut into my flesh. […] Suddenly, I felt as if a savage beast had torn the flesh from my body. Still smiling above me, J– had attached the pincer to my penis" (54-55). The fantasy of power torture enacts is depicted lucidly by Alleg. The more vulnerable his body was rendered as he was stripped naked, immobilized, and forced to experience intermittent electric shocks growing in intensity, the more his torturers enforced their own strength and masculinity. The use of sexualized torture, mimicking orgasms through the vibrations forced on Alleg's sexual organs, enabled his torturers to perform their own gendered fantasies of power in which Alleg's body was emasculated. What was perhaps even more unsettling to Alleg was one of his torturers' smiles throughout the entire session—this affective incongruity between J–'s cheerfulness and Alleg's extreme pain marks the radical intersubjective disconnect facilitated by torture.

Torture was not an exception, but the rule of the French strategy in Algeria. In *Torture and the Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad* (2008), Marnia Lazreg examines the use of torture during the Algerian war as a normalized form of terror, which

[32] See Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *L'Affaire Audin* (1958).

aimed to forestall the collapse of the French empire in North Africa. Lazreg argues that torture was not simply an epiphenomenon of the war, as was claimed by certain French generals, but that it was "central to the army's defense of a colonial empire in its waning years" and "the logical outcome of revolutionary-war theory," a doctrine employed by war veterans who had also fought in Indochina. Torture was then "a part and parcel of an ideology of subjugation that went beyond Algeria's borders" (3), a globalized phenomenon with a traceable colonial legacy of violence perpetrated by the French empire. Torture was also a fundamental tool of state terror. Lazreg's book demonstrates the extent of the use of torture in Algeria not only in prisons, but also in villas, farms, candy factories, wineries and even hammams.

In Jean-Paul Sartre's words, torture in Algeria "was simply an expression of racial hatred" (1958: 33). The dehumanization enacted by torture was a symptom of a larger discursive system, which backed the claims of colonists to cultural superiority, a mystification of the economic relations of exploitation and its transmutation into a doctrine of human hierarchies. Fundamentally, for Sartre, the colonial system was a structure of economic and existential dependency—the exploiters were dependent on their victims for their wealth, yet this relation of power was repressed and returned in the form of racism. The emancipation of the colonized threatened, then, not only the financial security of colonialists, but also their exclusive claim to humanity (1958: 32).

Moreover, as Sartre notes in his later reflections on colonial violence in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, colonialism enacts a double alienation, not only that of the colonized who are estranged from themselves through the contradiction of forced assimilation and

discrimination, but also of the colonists themselves who quench their repressed anxieties about losing their domination foothold through racism as praxis:

> the colonialist reveals the violence of the native, even in his passivity, as the obvious consequence of his own violence and as its sole justification. This discovery is made through hatred and fear, as a negative determination of the practical field, as a co-efficient of adversity affecting certain multiplicities in this field, in short, as a permanent danger which has to be avoided or prevented. Racism has to become a practice: it is not contemplation awakening the significations engraved on things; it is in itself self-justifying violence: violence presenting itself as induced violence, counter-violence and legitimate defense. (720)

In this cycle of violence, the institutionalization of racism through torture becomes a form of counter-insurgency. The justification for torture often invoked as legitimate defense—that of saving countless lives from terrorism through the torturing of one person—obfuscates the function of torture as a means of suppressing and preventing the expressions of resistance of the colonized, and as a method of disciplining Algerians into passive participation in the workings of colonialism.

FANON'S PSYCHIATRIC ASSESSMENT OF TRAUMA AND TORTURE DURING THE ALGERIAN WAR

For Frantz Fanon, torture was a fundamental necessity of the colonial world, "an expression and a means of the occupant-occupied relationship" (1967: 66). Fanon, who was

not tortured himself, closely observed the psycho-somatic and traumatic effects of torture in his patients at the Psychiatric Hospital of Blida-Joinville and at the National Liberation Army's medical facilities. In comments resembling Sartre's argument that colonial violence instantiates a double alienation, Fanon writes about the effects of the violence of the war on both victims of torture and survivors of massacres *and* on police officers responsible for torture. A thirty-seven-year-old Algerian peasant, who survives a massacre of the French army in his village, develops random homicidal impulses and a delirious desire to "kill everybody," including the ALN (Armée de Libération Nationale) soldiers who had taken him under their protection. A former student and ALN fighter suffers from severe depression and depersonalization due to being haunted by the image of a French woman he killed in a displaced moment of retribution for the killing of his mother at point-blank range by a French soldier. A twenty-year-old European police officer is referred to the hospital by his superiors because he presents behavioral problems. The man suffers from depression and he is troubled because he can continuously hear the screaming of the people he tortured, especially the ones who died in custody. In a particularly distressing scene recounted by Fanon, the police officer encounters one of his former victims who was treated for post-traumatic stress at the same hospital: while the French policeman is seized by a panic attack, the Algerian man is later discovered hiding in the bathroom and trying to commit suicide in order to avoid being captured again (196). Finally, a French police inspector displaces the violence internalized through his day-long torture sessions at work onto beating and torturing his wife and children at home. These cases demonstrate that the violence of torture transcends the intersubjective relationship between torturer and tortured. Torture remains lodged in the body in the form of auditory hallucinations, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and depression. Moreover, it permeates

all levels of life in its multiple displacements and reconfigurations, affecting the extended social circles of torturers and tortured.

Fanon also records the psychological, affective and embodied symptoms experienced by his patients who have undergone torture. The experience of torture returns through the reenactment of the physical sensations impressed upon the body of the tortured, as well as through heightened emotional states associated with trauma. After torture with electricity, one of the most routinely employed methods in French prisons in Algeria, patients experience "local or systemic somatic delusions" in which they "feel pins and needles throughout the body and get the impression their hands are being torn off, their heads are bursting, and they are swallowing their tongue" (211). In addition to generalized apathy and lack of energy, they also develop "phobia of electricity" in which they fear touching the light switch, radio or telephone. After the administration of the drug known as Pentothal, a chemical used as a truth serum during interrogation and torture sessions, patients present repetitive verbal ticks, blurred mental and sensory perception which manifests in their inability to recognize the existence of objects or tell the difference between truth and falsehood, inhibition, and a phobia for one to one conversations. Noting the persevering effects of other psychosomatic disorders such as stomach ulcers, disturbed menstrual cycles and premature hair whitening, Fanon writes that they are evidence of the fact "that there is no need to be wounded by a bullet to suffer from the effects of war in the body and soul" (217). The invisible scars of war are retained by the psyche, yet they often resurface in bodily manifestations that transport the sufferer back to the event of torture.

In his reflections on the neuroses produced during times of war, Sigmund Freud uses an economic model of affect to refer to the dynamic of traumatic mental processes

characterized by fixation to the moment of the traumatic accident and a recurrent revisiting of the episode in dreams or in panic attacks:

> Indeed, the term 'traumatic' has no other sense than an economic one. We apply it to an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates. (340-341)

The traumatic disorientation enacted by torture can thus be conceived as a transfer of energy, which no longer functions normally, but breaks down leaving indelible wounds within the psyche and upon the body. The body broken by torture is assaulted by an overflow of stimuli that reshapes and reconfigures its capacities. The reopening of the wound in the later triggering of the initial trauma acts, in Freud's words, as a "complete transplanting of the patient into the traumatic situation" (341). In this context, Fanon's detailed observations of the post-traumatic effects of torture are invaluable for understanding the temporal dynamic of trauma—not only has the tortured victim experienced a traumatizing splitting blocking some of her capacities and impressing pain deep within the body, but she experiences herself stretched back in time and confined to the event of torture through the lingering physiological and affective remnants of torture. The experience of the body in alignment with its corporeal schema malfunctions as phantom pains and phobias continue to haunt the traumatized subject.

SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE AS A FORM OF TORTURE

The debate about torture in France was stirred once again in 2001 with the publication of former Algerian fighter Louisette Ighilahriz's memoir of the Algerian war, *Algérienne*, in which she recounts her implication in the struggle, her injury, capture and torture by the tenth division of the paratroopers, under the command of general Jacques Massu, and her imprisonment. Although Ighilahriz does not explicitly linger on the sexual violence she was subjected to because of fear of the social stigma associated with rape in Algeria[33], she nevertheless recounts the horrors she endured, including being tied to a hospital bed for several months, tortured and penetrated with different objects, while left to lie in her own excrement and menstrual blood, without medical care. Ighilahriz was only one of the many Algerian women captured and subjected to rape routinely in prison as a form of torture, in addition to electricity and water-boarding.

Djamila Bouhired, a twenty-two year old Algerian student and FLN militant, was captured on April 9, 1957 and wounded by a bullet by the French police forces during the Battle of Algiers. She was carrying crucial FLN correspondence destined to Yacef Saadi and Ali la Pointe, two of the main members of the urban guerrilla warfare network in Algiers. Bouhired was also accused of participating in the coordinated FLN bombings in the French quarters of Algiers earlier that year which were carried out in response to the bombing of the Kasbah by the French forces. When Siamese-born French lawyer Jacques Vergès decided to

[33] See for instance her 2014 interview with Florence Beaugé for *Le Monde*, in which she recalls the relief her testimony brought her, but also the personal complications it brought in her life, such as falling apart with her son who blamed her for making the intimate details of her sexualized torture public: https://www.lemonde.fr/festival/article/2014/07/28/20-juin-2000-louisette-ighilahriz-retrouve-la-trace-de-son-sauveur_4463627_4415198.html?xtmc=aussaresses&xtcr=7

represent her, he and Georges Arnaud published a book in defense of the Algerian fighter, *Pour Djamila Bouhired,* which contains fragments of her testimony. During her torture, Bouhired was subjected to sexualized humiliations, harassment and threats of being raped: "Un jour, un lieutenant, blond, grand à lunettes blanches, me mit nue devant les trois capitaines, les trois policiers et deux parachutiste à berets rouges, et me fit des attouchements obscènes devant eux, disant qu'ils amènerait pour moi un Sénégalais qui avait plusieurs fois servi déjà sur des femmes musulmanes" (50). This passage reveals the elaborate gendered and racial fantasies that informed the staging of sexualized torture to which Algerian female fighters were subjected. Not only were the soldiers' desires to undress and possess Algerian women satisfied and made possible by interrogation and torture practices, but also their conceptions of violence and humiliation relied on stereotypes about Muslim and African cultures. Anti-black racism, sexism and Islamophobia converged in the production of actors in sexual fantasies of extreme violence.

And yet Djamila Bouhired was by no means the only woman to have been subjected to the use of sexual violence as a mechanism of counter-insurgency. Algerian female fighters were routinely tortured and raped during their imprisonment, while rural Algerian women were subjected to organized and systematic rapes as part of their internment in concentration camps and when their villages were ravaged by the French army (Lazreg 166; Vince 240). Debra Bergoffen argues that the crime of wartime rape needs to be understood both as the exploitation of the vulnerability expressed in the desire for intimacy and that of the gender codes through which desire is socially structured as an expression of power**.** In this context, rape does not only destroy the integrity of the body and the subject's dignity through harm

and humiliation, but also often destabilizes the victim's capacity of establishing intimate bonds in the future:

> If we identify the human rights violation of rape as a weapon of war with the crime of forced intercourse (accounting again only for the way it abuses the material body) and forget the ways that it destroys the body's desire for intimacy and the communal effects of destroying our trust in this desire (by forgetting that the lived body is always a lived desiring body) we will not be able to understand the effectiveness of rape as a weapon of war. (113)

Rape, as a weapon of colonial war, functioned on multiple levels in Algeria as a racialized and gendered means of terrorizing the colonized. The trauma produced by sexualized torture left indelible marks on Algerian women's lives, who were often left to negotiate the complexities of being reintegrated in their communities after the war and to cope with the consequences of the assault they had endured.

This was the case for Djamila Boupacha, another twenty-two-year-old Algerian militant, whose torture and rape with a bottle became a turning point in the public debate during the war, particularly after her lawyer, Gisèle Halimi, and Simone de Beauvoir began a media campaign in defense of Boupacha which culminated with the publication of a report of her case under the title of *Djamila Boupacha* (1962). In what follows, I will focus at length on the intersection of gendered, religious and racialized assumptions which informed the representation of Boupacha, in particular, and of Halimi by association, in what became one of the most significant public debates about torture during the Algerian War.

Simone de Beauvoir, who had already been actively mobilizing in France against the Algerian war, alongside Jean-Paul Sartre, Francis Jeanson and others, recalls in her autobiography, *Force of Circumstance* (1963), her gradual alienation from French society which she considered complicit in the incessant violence meted out to Algerians overseas. Her work records her and her circle's gravitation between feelings of despair, rage and powerlessness during the war and the sense that, through their fervent political dissent, they had become "exiles in [their] own country" (340). The recent memory of the German occupation of France during World War II determined her to raise analogies between the fascism of the S.S. and that of Jacques Massu's paratroopers, deployed during the Battle of Algiers and afterwards in order to fight a slow counter-insurgency war against the FLN (National Liberation Front). When observing the paratroopers parading or holding war propaganda exhibits in Paris, Beauvoir writes:

> I could feel the old lump forming in my throat, the old impotent, raging disgust: exactly the same symptoms the sight of an S.S. man had always produced. French uniforms were having the same effect on me that swastikas once did […] Yes, I was living in an occupied city, and I loathed the occupiers even more fiercely than I had those others in the forties, because of all the ties that bound me to them. (385)

But in her introduction to her and Halimi's *Djamila Boupacha*, Beauvoir carefully notes that, unlike Minister of Justice Edmond Michelet who declared to her that "the Nazis are responsible for this canker in our midst" (14), it is the French themselves who must assume full responsibility for being complicit with an army who "is determined to keep Algeria a slave-state" (21).

This chapter also reflects on the Boupacha case in light of Simone de Beauvoir's ethics of responsibility and existentialist philosophy of freedom. While Melissa M. Ptacek has claimed that de Beauvoir's involvement in debates about torture during World War II and the Algerian War enabled her to turn away from her ethical philosophy and towards a contextual feminist politics (500), Ranjana Khanna has argued that de Beauvoir's ethical thought is in fact very instructive for a transnational feminist praxis (229). In my view, de Beauvoir's ethical philosophy and the anticolonial politics she enunciates earlier in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) are crucial to understanding her committed, yet understated, involvement in the Djamila Boupacha case. Additionally, the urgent problems raised by de Beauvoir's involvement in the war as a dissident political philosopher, who felt complicit in her government's crimes, would reform her approach to the condition of Muslim women on which she comments in a dehistoricized, Orientalist manner in her earlier work in *The Second Sex* (1949). In this sense, I argue that the experience of living through the Algerian War complicated de Beauvoir's feminist politics and opened the possibility for an intersectional, decolonial approach in her thinking. For this purpose, Djamila Boupacha's story represents a unique moment in the history of transnational feminist alliances as it raises numerous problems and contradictions produced by the specificity of location, and the challenges brought to European feminism by the movements of decolonization.

THE CASE OF DJAMILA BOUPACHA

On the night of 10 to 11 February 1960, Djamila Boupacha, was arrested arbitrarily by the French police in Algeria, along with her father, Abdelaziz Boupacha, and her brother-in-law, Abdelli Ahmed. All three of them were beaten severely by the *gardes mobiles*, harkis and police inspectors who arrived to their house and ransacked their belongings, and were subsequently taken in custody and tortured. Djamila Boupacha was taken at the triage center at El Biar, where she was beaten until she collapsed and a paratrooper kicked her repeatedly in the ribs until she suffered a hemithoracic displacement, one of her ribs protruding afterwards and giving shape to a lump-like formation under her left breast. After a few days, Boupacha was transferred to Hussein Dey where she was tortured by electricity, with wires attached to her legs, her face, her anus and her vagina. She was intermittently burnt with extinguished cigarettes, beaten and subjected to water boarding by being attached to a stick, with her legs and wrists tied together, her head submerged in water. But according to her civil indictment, published in Simone de Beauvoir and Gisèle Halimi's report, *Djamila Boupacha* (1962), the worst was yet to come: the 'bottle treatment.' In Boupacha's words, "they tied me up in a special posture, and then they rammed the neck of a bottle into my vagina. I screamed and fainted. I was unconscious, to the best of my knowledge, for two days" (192).

Boupacha had been an FLN militant who sheltered and helped other FLN fighters and this, she admitted deliberately. But under torture, Boupacha also admitted to the accusations her torturers attempted to place on her: having left a bomb at the university restaurant in Algiers on September 1959, which was discovered and defused. She also confessed to a

number of other crimes she had not committed and for whom other Algerian fighters had been captured, in order to annul the testimony her torturers extricated from her and forced her to sign. Her violent deflowering through sexualized torture was to become a point of contention in the trial to follow and the public debate surrounding the scandal the revelation of her case provoked in France and internationally. Yet her case would have likely been concealed and forgotten, as many other such cases were, if Gisèle Halimi had not decided to assume her defense.

Halimi, a French lawyer of Tunisian Jewish descent, well-versed in defending FLN revolutionaries, took on Djamila Boupacha's case at the request of Boupacha's brother and soon discovered that it could be represented as emblematic of the abuses of the French police and military forces in Algeria. In order to publicize the case in metropolitan France and raise awareness about practices such as arbitrary detention, torture and sexual violence, Halimi sought the help of Simone de Beauvoir who agreed to break the story in the press by publishing an article in *Le Monde* on June 3rd, 1960. Afterwards Halimi, de Beauvoir, Germaine Tillion and others formed the Djamila Boupacha Committee, which advocated for the Algerian fighter by putting pressure on French governmental authorities to assume responsibility for their implication in the condoning of torture and other abusive war practices. Halimi also wrote a report of the history of the case, her attempts to extricate Boupacha from the compromised Algerian jurisdiction and bring her to France in order to seek justice for the experiences she endured. Simone de Beauvoir agreed to take responsibility for the text published in 1962 as *Djamila Boupacha*, she co-signed it and wrote an introduction for the book in which she challenged French metropolitan citizens to break with their complicity with the murderous occupation of Algeria.

The book remains a remarkable document of the extensive and intricate relationships of institutional power, which legitimized, obscured and condoned blatant human rights infringements perpetrated by the French colonial military complex in Algeria. Halimi carefully outlined the numerous obstacles placed in the way of Parisian lawyers like herself, seeking the defense of Algerian militants, including her difficulties with obtaining a visa to be present for Boupacha's hearings, her expulsion from Algeria and her replacement with an Algerian default lawyer complicit with an unjust court of law. Halimi also noted the risks of the profession evidenced by the assassination of other Parisian lawyers such as her friend, Popie. Moreover, the colonial juridical system was construed in such a way that torture was systematically used not only in order to uncover underground militant networks, but also in order to obtain incriminating testimonies from victims, which would ensure that they were sentenced, imprisoned and sometimes executed with expediency. As Boupacha's case demonstrated, medical personnel were often employed to corroborate the official story and to deny the signs of torture imprinted on the victim's body. The first doctor who examined Boupacha at El Biar right after she had been tortured, ignored her scars and her wounds and declared her to be in good condition, with the exception of "certain menstrual troubles of a constitutional nature" (52). Djamila had been bleeding profusely after being deflowered with a beer bottle, which then enabled the doctor to attribute her symptoms to naturally occurring bodily processes. In this way, the consequences of her rape were ascribed to her gendered constitution, which was used in turn in order to conceal her suffering. The doctor's report, thus, placed the blame on the gendered specificity of Boupacha's own body.

Gisèle Halimi's rhetoric in *Djamila Boupacha* maintained a delicate balance between arguing for the recognition of rape as a gender-specific form of torture and the fetishization

of Boupacha's sexuality. At several points throughout the text, Halimi noted the devastating shock produced by rape on Boupacha's sense of self, particularly in the context of her Muslim background. According to Halimi, Boupacha was most unsettled about the fact that she had lost her virginity and that, consequently, she would no longer be suitable for marriage. Halimi then invoked her own childhood in Tunis, when she too was affected by similar taboos, and emphasized the culturally-specific weight that rape carried for Boupacha, to the point that it was experienced as "a kind of amputation" (75). Halimi's recurrent insistence on Boupacha's anxiety as to the status of her virginity (Boupacha demanded at several points a gynecological exam) had the effect of essentializing Muslim sexuality through the prism of Boupacha's experience for a French audience who was more than prepared to take for granted such generalized assumptions. This being said, Halimi proceeded as such for several reason: in order to confront those who would take gendered forms of violence lightly, to establish rape during wartime as a form of torture in its own right, and in order to foreground the extent of Boupacha's trauma with its reverberations at the level of the body and psychologically, and also with socio-cultural consequences and implications.

In fact, Boupacha's gender-specific experience became a hinge in the argument by way of which her suffering was sometimes denied and diminished. As a case in point, when the Djamila Boupacha committee paid a visit to M. Patin, the President of the Committee of Public Safety, their complaint was dismissed on account that Boupacha did not endure "real torture." "Real" torture, Patin casually informed them, would have consisted of the practice employed in Indochina in which the victim was forced to sit on a bottle, inserted "per anum," until their intestines were perforated, often leading to fatal injuries (97). Not only did Patin inadvertently invoke the colonial legacy of practices of torture such as "the bottle treatment,"

but also voiced deeply misogynist conceptions about the effects of sexual violence upon women. Torture, in Patin's conception, could only be bodily destroying and lethal, whereas Boupacha had survived to tell the story.

Boupacha's body was produced and reproduced for media consumption and chained in a complex set of gendered and cultural representations. Halimi detailed the sexist stereotypes proliferating in the conservative press coverage of Boupacha's case in both France and French-owned Algerian media. A French newspaper complained about the fact that lawyers such as Halimi, "'our charming companions of the weaker sex' were turning so many Pasionarias, that oblivious to their 'gentleness and feminine grace,' they had treacherously committed themselves to active participation in the nationalist cause" (87). In other words, Halimi should have stayed at home, leaving the rough war business to men who were better equipped to handle it. This was not very different from early FLN discourses about Algerian women who desired to join the armed struggle and who were sometimes turned away because they would create a disruption in the male fighters' tightly knit underground networks (Vince 89). Furthermore, *pied-noir* journalists represented Boupacha as an easy woman who had no right to claim that she had been sexually abused after she had admitted to hiding FLN fighters in her bedroom (88). Both Halimi and Boupacha's gender identities were exploited for political gain in various forums, according to critically instrumentalized patriarchal stereotypes, "the angel in the house" and "the whore." These attacks were part of a concerted campaign of silencing the testimony, experiences and political investments of three different women (including de Beauvoir) who brought clear charges of gendered violence to a patriarchal colonial system living through its last days.

Djamila Boupacha's body, in particular, became a screen upon which conflicting narratives about femininity and Algerianness were projected and negotiated. In her oral history work on the Algerian female survivors who were involved in the liberation war, *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria, 1954-2012* (2015), Natalya Vince notes the conflicting narratives Algerian women were forced to fulfill, both in Algerian nationalist discourses, as well as in the discourses of their defenders and in those of their torturers, respectively:

> Women were depicted as politically conscious militants using their bodies in 'new' ways to defeat the (male) enemy by charming or tricking their way into colonial society. Or they were innocent, pure victims, their bodies martyrized and honour defiled by (male soldiers). Or they were revolutionary whores, foolishly allowing themselves to be led astray by manipulative men (85).

Gisèle Halimi also relied on representations of Djamila Boupacha as an innocent and powerless victim, whose "extraordinary blend of unhappy maturity and pure feminine childishness" (55) endeared her to everyone who met her and absolved her of any guilt. The fact that the rhetoric of childish innocence was pervasive in Halimi's account can be attributed, in my opinion, to her efforts to achieve at least two different goals: to confirm Boupacha's lack of involvement in the bombing plot she was accused of, *and* to establish her as a fundamental "virgin at heart" who had not (as she was suspected and accused) had previous relations with men before her violent assault during imprisonment. Contrary to these infantilizing comments, Boupacha emerged at other points in Halimi's narrative as a resilient and autonomous woman, responsible for herself, aware of her condition and consciously involved in the struggle for independence. When Halimi demanded to know

what could have persuaded a young woman like herself to join an underground guerrilla movement, Boupacha sternly recounted her difficulties with surviving and persevering in a French colonial society foisted upon its Muslim majority population. After training to become a nurse at the Beni Messous Hospital, she was informed that, despite her excellent performance, Muslim women would not be allowed to obtain their practitioner certificates. It was then that Boupacha decided to turn against the system and steal medical supplies from the hospital in order to deliver them to the maquis (rural Algerian fighters) (53). In other words, Boupacha translated her shock provoked by her encounter with institutional discrimination into concrete action against an unjust system.

Finally, despite Halimi's complicity with stereotypical gendered representations, her intervention and her unswerving commitment to demonstrating the extent of Boupacha's pain and to defending her integrity, also unsettled different sets of gendered dynamics in various patriarchal systems including in Muslim Algeria, in the Algeria of the *pied-noir* colons, and in metropolitan France. Because of the complications introduced by reconciling the presence of multiple patriarchal assumptions about Boupacha's body in the context of a national liberation struggle, Halimi had to tread very carefully around notions invested with multiple symbolic meanings such as the question of 'virginity.' Without disavowing Boupacha's trauma experienced upon deflowering and the personal and social consequences she faced, Halimi also subtly noted her disagreement with cultural taboos related to virginity. But Halimi maintained the focus on what she considered the more considerable source of patriarchal violence against Algerian women, the French colonial system and its systematic destruction of women's bodies. In this sense, Halimi's own feminist political priorities were structured according to the most urgent necessities of the struggle for decolonization.

In a similar sense, the Dajmila Boupacha case enabled Simone de Beauvoir to restructure her feminist commitments in order to incorporate an anticolonial critique, while paying close attention to both the particularity of Boupacha's experience and the widespread violence against Algerians. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir had already deconstructed the fetishization of virginity and the mythologies according to which 'woman' becomes a construct of the patriarchal imagination. In her 1960 *Le Monde* article, "In Defence of Djamila Boupacha," de Beauvoir recognized however that the stakes and the context in which she was writing were considerably different. Consequently, she used succinct, lucid and straightforward language to describe Boupacha's ordeals step by step, including her rape. *Le Monde* replaced, however, Boupacha's own word, *vagina* (vagin), with the more innocuous, *belly* (ventre), thus further obscuring the specificity of gendered torture. Beauvoir, on her part, insisted on marking this specificity and added in parenthesis tersely: "She was a virgin" (195). The recognition of sexualized torture was a central political issue for both Halimi and de Beauvoir, who were later involved in other gender rights struggles—the fight against the ban on abortion in metropolitan France in the 1970s.

In her article, Beauvoir also noted the tenuous relationship between witnessing the suffering of another person and moral action. "The most scandalous aspect of any scandal is that one *gets used to it*," she argued (1962: 194). In other words, there is a deadening of affect in the repeated exposure to representations of spectacular violence, as de Beauvoir recognized with respect to herself as well. In *Force of Circumstance*, she admits to "suffering from a sort of tetanus of the imagination" (1965: 366), after reading one article after another about the extensive violence unleashed against Algerians, in her name: the concentration camps, the massacres, the summary executions, the systematic organized rapes and the use of

torture. Witnessing can in fact block feeling, Beauvoir shows, because of the distance and the irreducibility of experiences of extreme violence, but also because violence can become a normalized state of things if it is not challenged, disrupted, and opposed incessantly. Beauvoir's autobiography displays her considerable difficulties to come to terms with her own sense of powerlessness and fatigue, and with the fact that she, as a French citizen, felt directly responsible for what Algerians were experiencing overseas: "I allowed the war in Algeria to invade my thoughts, my sleep, my every mood" (1965: 364). She was utterly disconcerted by the complicity she observed everywhere in French society from the higher levels of the government (Charles de Gaulle and André Malraux had falsely declared that torture was no longer used in Algeria under their administration) to the indifference of regular Frenchmen and women. Responsibility, for Beauvoir, aligned individuals with the actions of their nation state: "When the government of a country allows crimes to be committed in its name, every citizen thereby becomes a member of a collectively criminal nation. Can we allow our country to be so described? The Djamila Boupacha affair is the concern of every person in France" (1962: 197). To be responsible for state violence meant not only acknowledging that it was taking place, but also finding institutional, political or creative means to oppose it.

To better understand what is at stake in Beauvoir's notion of responsibility, it is helpful to consider her involvement in the Algerian struggle in relation to her ethical philosophy and her conception of freedom. Indeed, the Djamila Boupacha case created the possibility for transnational feminist conceptions of gender, sexuality and resistance to converge towards a common goal, that of saving Boupacha's life and seeking justice within an unjust system. In this sense, transnational feminism must also become a decolonizing

feminism, functioning in opposition to multiple axes of power, as demonstrated by Gisèle Halimi's complex, and sometimes ambiguous, rhetoric in *Djamila Boupacha*. Similarly, I believe that, despite some of Beauvoir's early feminist attitudes, which misrepresented Muslim women, her ethical philosophy is especially well attuned to a critique of colonial power as it proposes a conception of the relationship between self and other that is mutually constitutive and that deconstructs racialized hierarchies of value about human life. As Beauvoir reflected in her autobiography: "the lives of Moslems were of no less importance in my eyes than those of my fellow countrymen" (460).

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY

Simone de Beauvoir's writing sometimes approaches the pitfalls of colonial feminism in its dehistoricized and decontextualized depiction of the universally oppressed Muslim woman. The "Mohammedan woman enclosed in a harem," and the plantation slave, have no immediate resources to liberate themselves from their oppression, argues de Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. But when their freedom is made possible then it must be asserted because, if it is not, it becomes a source of dishonesty (41). The paragraph makes some troubling historical conflations between the condition of the homogenized figure of the Muslim woman and African-American slaves on Southern plantations, and even more worryingly, attributes to "the slave" and "the Mohammedan woman" false consciousness. The image of the harem, tinted with Orientalism, is here an inevitable fate for all Muslim women without specification of geographical and historical location, class or social status.

Moreover, if we take for granted this scenario, the Muslim woman who, given the chance to emerge from the harem, chooses to remain cloistered, is in Beauvoir's formulation a victim of bad faith. This claim, premised paradoxically upon a celebration of individual freedom, also makes abstraction of the social and economic conditions of women's dependence on the harem space, and misrepresents the harem as fundamentally a space of victimization and violence, instead of a gendered segregated form of habitation.[34]

In *The Second Sex*, the "Muslim woman" makes an appearance again, surprisingly in a chapter on ancient history, which binds together the condition of women in contemporary Tunisia with that of Jewish women in biblical times and women in Ancient Egypt and Greece. Simone de Beauvoir, who had visited Tunis and Algiers in 1946 to give lectures on literature and existentialism, reminisces:

> The Muslim woman, veiled and shut in, is still today a kind of slave in most levels of society. I recall an underground cave in a troglodyte village in Tunisia where four women were squatting: the old one-eyed, and toothless wife, her face ravaged, was cooking dough on a small brazier surrounded by acrid smoke; two slightly younger but equally disfigured wives were rocking children in their arms; one was breast-feeding […] Leaving this gloomy den—realm of immanence, womb and tomb—in the corridor leading up toward the light, I met the male, dressed in white, sparklingly clean, smiling, sunny (92).

[34] Fatima Mernissi's more complex discussion of the harem structure, including both its positive aspects (the creative relationships established among women in a gendered space of their own) and the negative aspects (the lack of mobility), is helpful here to complicate Beauvoir's understanding of the harem. See for instance Mernissi (1994; 2001).

This passage takes place in the context of Beauvoir's attempt to define woman's alienation when tied to the realm of the private and that of the family, and moreover, living under a religion (Islam), which Beauvoir claims professed "the utmost disdain for women" (92). While acknowledging the reduced mobility of impoverished rural Tunisian women compared to men's participation in worldly affairs, the passage demonstrates an unfettered disdain for the women themselves and the space they inhabit, a dark cave "in a troglodyte village." The racializing imagery employed plays on the grotesque and the sub-human, and attributes the disfigurement of the women to their confinement to the patriarchal sphere of their family, and not to poverty or even, the global social economic conditions that produced their impoverishment historically, including the effects of French colonialism in Tunisia.

For Beauvoir, in a claim characteristic of her feminist views, the private space is forever compromised; it is a "realm of immanence, womb and tomb." In other words, women's participation in the family, their child-bearing and their roles in the private sphere are equated with their reduction to their bodies and the inevitability of their deaths. Incommensurate with Beauvoir's ethical philosophy, liberation is here compared to emerging from the cave, debarring oneself of material constrictions, including responsibility to those who need care, and walking towards the light, enlightenment, individual accomplishment. These passages reveal Simone de Beauvoir's failure to connect her extensive critique of colonial oppression in her earlier work, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, and the specificity of Muslim women's situation in the Maghreb, a result of multiple forms of patriarchy, both local and colonial.

Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* proposes a defense of existentialism and Sartre's philosophy of being, which had been under attack for its perceived solipsism, and yet, in the

process, takes a departure from Sartre's conception of being-for-others and its relationship to freedom and offers a striking claim: freedom can only be accomplished through radical dependence on others. "To will oneself free," argues Beauvoir, "is also to will others free" (78). In other words, the possibility of freedom is premised upon relationality, not merely through the intersubjective manifestation of a mutually dependent freedom to choose and to achieve transcendence, but also through social action, which takes as its point of departure the freedom of others. "The existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom," de Beauvoir adds (97). However, there are priorities to be established: freedom does not entail having the capacity to imprison others. For this type of sophistry Beauvoir employs the example of the false claim Southerners invoked according to which the liberation of their African-American slaves impinged upon their freedom (96). Liberation cannot be achieved at the expense of the other's imprisonment. This radical dependency upon others is what renders existence ambiguous, thus prone to contradictions and choices that require responsible ethical action. As opposed to Sartre's theorization of the troubled relationship between self and other, which is almost always premised upon existential displacement and objectification, Beauvoir in fact embraces the radical vulnerability of interdependence as the foundation of ethical behavior. Her work comes against multiple types of obstacles and limitations, as it struggles with contextualizing and rendering specific different models of behavior. In fact, Beauvoir herself later criticizes this earlier work as something that she would happily dispose of if she could, particularly by virtue of its lack of historical specificity which renders her thinking of ethical action highly abstract.

However, some of the most resourceful moments of Beauvoir's *Ethics* are the instances in which she explores behaviors conducive to oppression as the abolition of freedom for both self (through self-deception and bad faith) and others (through negation and destruction). The colonial administrator, one of the examples Beauvoir provides for the figure of the serious man[35], establishes as his ultimate goal the object which enhances his power, whether that is the building of a highway, economy or the idea of empire: "The colonial administrator who has raised the highway to the stature of an idol will have no scruple about assuring its construction at the price of a great number of lives of the natives," therefore sacrificing subjectivity to the thing (53). The oppressor, argues Beauvoir, feeds on the transcendence of others and refuses to accord them the recognition of their freedom (89). If being can accomplish itself through her freedom and if freedom is dependent upon the opening of a future by others, then the very temporality of being is to become extended in space through relations to those others. If, on the other hand, the other is oppressive in that he forecloses the future you had hoped for and extends himself in space through the annihilation of your being and your capacity of transcendence, then this involves the reduction of being to mere facticity, or as Beauvoir formulates it, "they are cutting me off from the future, they are changing me into a thing" (88-89).

The tension between transcendence and facticity is crucial to understanding the interdependency of self and other in Beauvoir's earlier thought and can insightfully

[35] In a metaphor inspired by Nietzsche, Beauvoir defines the serious man as a figure who represses his affectivity, his passion, his joy for life, and therefore sacrifices his freedom, in favor of the ready-made values of the serious world. He is most often anti-semitic, anti-clerical and anti-republican, according to Beauvoir. Among the examples of serious men, she mentions the military man, the colonial administrator and the revolutionary. These figures all take the goal (army, highway, revolution) to be more important than the means by which it is achieved (the destruction of other human beings). While Beauvoir is indebted here to Nietzsche's descriptions of repressed subjectivity, she does not fully subscribe to his image of the Übermensch in which bare will to power is exalted, something she finds ethically mistaken (77).

illuminate the dynamic of instances of extreme violence. What is foreclosed in the process in which the oppressor, in this case the person who tortures, reduces his victim to mere object amongst objects in the world through the act of torture? Or, what is denied in the gesture in which colonial discourse dehumanizes the colonized? In an existentialist sense, the person who is subjected to oppression is deprived of transcendence and reduced to pure facticity. If we define facticity as the embeddedness of the person in the contingency of one's world, as the properties which define the person's belonging in an environment or in a society from a third-person point of view, then attributes such as skin color, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion and other identity markers, can be said to establish the implication of being in her immediacy. However, once these properties are considered from a third-person perspective as objective, essentialized qualities of being, and, moreover, once these gestures of essentialism are contextualized within discourses of patriarchy, racism and colonialism, then being can thereby be fetishized and objectified in the process, or reduced to pure facticity. What is taken away from being is then her capacity for becoming, her open future and her transcendence.

Oppressors and tyrants justify their own actions through the degradation of their victims, argues Beauvoir. By reducing them to their facticity, oppressors establish their foothold of power and legitimize the work of destruction of other human beings. Here Beauvoir draws a somewhat troubling parallel between the casting into abjection of Jewish prisoners by the Nazis and the reduction to utter impoverishment of Algerians by the French colonial administration: "In Algeria I have seen any number of colonists appease their conscience by the contempt in which they held the Arabs who were crushed with misery: the more miserable the latter were, the more contemptible they seemed, so much so that there

was never any room for remorse" (109). In this sense, the process Beauvoir describes, in which the colonized are reduced to abjection through the practice of colonial violence, precedes and informs Sartre's reading of colonial violence according to which racism is routinely produced as praxis in order to justify the use of violence.

One of the ruses of oppression, argues Beauvoir, "is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one cannot revolt against nature" (89). French colonialism, for instance reproduced itself through the mystification of its mission of conquest in the shape of *la mission civilisatrice*. This mystification, as Fanon and Sartre noted as well, was premised upon the claim of a universal humanism, which was co-constitutive with the dehumanization of the colonized. Beauvoir also notes the hypocrisy of the claim to bring education and comfort to the colonies, and marks the dysfunctionality of charity: "there is nothing more arbitrary than intervening as a stranger in a destiny which is not ours: one of the shocking things about charity—in the civic sense of the word—is that it is practised from the outside, according to the caprice of the one who distributes it and who is detached from the object" (93). There is skepticism in Beauvoir's thought, then, with regard to colonial intervention, as something that deprives the colonized of freedom even in its supposed charitable inflections.

Moreover, Beauvoir was aware of the limited potential of the French left to contribute to the Algerian liberation struggle and advocated for Algerian autonomy, instead of ready-made recipes for freedom. Melissa M. Ptacek shows, for instance, that Halimi was critical of Beauvoir when she refused to intervene upon Djamila Boupacha's release from prison at the end of the war, when FLN members essentially kidnapped her and returned her to Algeria. Beauvoir claimed that the French had no right to intervene on behalf of an independent

Algerian woman. Ptaceck notes that her stance was in line with her conceptions of personal responsibility and freedom and emphasized that "Algerians, like all people, need to forge their own path to freedom, a path not requiring tutoring by the French or any others" (529). It is possible, then, that the Algerian War impacted Simone de Beauvoir's conceptions of the role of transnational feminism, particularly when governed by relations of power between the former colonizers and the colonized. Beauvoir disagreed with Fanon that the Algerian liberation was also a revolution in gender roles, yet she was aware of the fact that it was no longer her role to intervene in the complicated context of postcolonial Muslim women's rights and freedoms.

The context in which her feminist critique and political advocacy were effective had very much to do with carefully disrupting particular relations of power and refraining from reinforcing stereotypes. In her introduction to *Djamila Boupacha*, Beauvoir focuses on emphasizing the intertwined racialized and gendered dynamics of Boupacha's torture in the larger context of a colonial system of "racial extermination":

> Men and women, old folk and children, have been machine-gunned during 'mopping-up operations' [*ratis-sages*], burnt alive in their villages, had their throats slit or their bellies ripped open, died countless sorts of martyrs' deaths. Whole tribes have been bundled off to so-called rehabilitation or 'regroupment' centres, where they were starved, beaten, and decimated by exposure and epidemics. Such places are in fact death camps, though they have a subsidiary function as brothels for the crack regiments. (9)

In the context of such a large scale, systematic and organized destruction of human beings, Beauvoir asks whether one can still be moved by the sufferings of one girl, Djamila

Boupacha. By refraining from sentimentalizing Boupacha's story as a singular story and from fetishizing her sexualized torture, Beauvoir maintains the context of the larger colonial system in focus with its "lying propaganda machine" which Halimi's report carefully unveils (10). This does not mean that Beauvoir is unfeeling towards the extreme violence Boupacha endured. She offers a detailed summary of her abuse and her struggles for justice throughout the introduction, while linking her story to those many other Algerians who were tortured, killed or disappeared. Beauvoir's last lines emphasize the stakes of taking responsibility for the colonial violence inflicted by one's own government abroad: "The truth confronts you on all sides. You can no longer mumble the old excuse 'We didn't know'; and now that you *do* know, can you continue to feign ignorance, or content yourselves with a mere token utterance of horrified sympathy? I hope not" (21). Reading this passage in the context of Beauvoir's ethical philosophy, the focus on her French audience was deliberate as the most oblivious and insouciant of her fellow French citizens were not free in so far as Algerians continued to be confined by French colonialism. Moreover, Beauvoir showed, through her autobiographical descriptions of the affective displacement the Algerian War provoked in her life, that she herself could not be free at the expense of the rape and torture of Algerian women.

CODA: TOWARDS A TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM

Caroline Huppert's 2011 television film, *Pour Djamila*, closely follows Gisèle Halimi's account in *Djamila Boupacha* and remains generally faithful to the book, with a few

important exceptions, as I will argue below. The film casts Franco-Algerian-Tunisian actress Hafsia Herzi in the role of Boupacha in a powerful and affecting performance.

Upon Boupacha's transfer to a French prison, Halimi insured that she received a thorough medical examination by four French doctors whom she expected to be neutral. Boupacha's psychiatrist, Dr. Hélène Michel-Wolfrom, concluded that her psychological condition was quite precarious as she "was suffering from a post-traumatic anxiety neurosis, which contained phobic elements and was accompanied by obsessional preoccupations" (127). Boupacha was unsettled at the sound of the key opening her cell door, fearing another interrogation. She was also deeply connected to the news of the arrest and execution of other Algerians and she read the papers systematically in search of new information. As Halimi also noted throughout her encounters with Boupacha, she suffered from frequent mood swings gravitating between hopeful, cheerful states and depressive periods in which she showed no interest or motivation in carrying on.

Huppert's *Pour Djamila* stages the triggering of Boupacha's trauma in a scene based on her audition with a judge in France when she was asked to recognize the instruments and methods that were employed in her torture. In Halimi's report, the examining magistrate produced "a curiously shaped object, a narrow, cylindrical machine which, from a distance, looked rather like a small duplicator minus its revolving drum. It had a small winding-handle or crank, and wires attached to terminals on one side" (148). He then asked Boupacha to identify it, carefully observing her emotional reactions: she was seized by a flash of pallor and lost her speech for a few moments, then, in a sudden outburst, recognized it as the gégène. In the book, the investigation continues by way of interrogation. The magistrate asks Boupacha to describe how the gégène was used and then to explain how she was tied to a

stick and submerged in water—he calls in one of the court photographers, and Halimi and the other clerk tie him and suspend him above two chairs according to Boupacha's descriptions.

In *Pour Djamila*, however, Huppert departs from the script, lingers on the employment of the gégène and has Boupacha herself mimic the use of the torture device on one of the clerks in the room, while her hands tremble on the wires she places on his chest. This scene is interspersed with vivid and troubling flashbacks of Boupacha's torture. In this symbolic role reversal, Huppert unsettles the male/female and French/Algerian binaries of power by placing the wires in Boupacha's own hands. And yet, as her hands shudder on the wires, what is also revealed is the manner in which the retriggering of trauma takes over Boupacha's body and transports her back to the moment of her torture.

Halimi and Huppert's narratives demonstrate that, as Boupacha navigated the many obstacles of the Algerian and French juridical systems, she was forced to relive her trauma repeatedly. Even more, her very psycho-affective state and her embodied reactions were put to test as a means of demonstrating that her testimony was true. According to the logic of the court, to be integrated in a regime of discipline and truth as a survivor of torture meant that Boupacha's testimony needed to be backed not only by the scars left on her body and her deflowering, as certified by medical experts, but also by something rather more fragile and elusive: her post-traumatic affective states and her bodily habits. In the reconstitution of the scene of torture, both as it is represented in Halimi's report and in Huppert's film, what is foregrounded is the very intangible vulnerability of Boupacha herself.

The frontispiece to the English edition of *Djamila Boupacha* announces that the Evian agreement had come into force by the time of the publication of the document. This entailed that all Algerian political prisoners were released in 1962 as the Algerian War came

to an end with the liberation of the nation. Boupacha was reunited with her family and became, more or less willingly, integrated in the propaganda agenda of the postcolonial FLN ruling party[36]. The Evian accords also entailed that her torturers walked away and were never held responsible for their actions.

Gisèle Halimi and Simone de Beauvoir's extensive efforts on behalf of Djamila Boupacha mark a turning point in the negotiations of the different meanings associated with feminist politics in a transnational context of decolonization, while also providing a vocabulary and a framework to further reflect on the intertwined relationship between gender, religion, culture, race and sexuality in the practice of colonial and imperial torture. To assume responsibility for torture during wartime, as Simone de Beauvoir demonstrated, meant not only to be moved to sympathize with its victims, but to be galvanized into political action. Or, as Djamila Boupacha noted, "action is the only solution when you get down to it" (54).

[36] Natalya Vince shows for instance how uncomfortable Boupacha felt with being coopted as an idealized figure of the revolution in the propaganda of the post-war FLN government (159).

CHAPTER THREE

Diasporic Phenomenologies: The Poetics of Cultural Displacement in Anglophone Muslim Women's Contemporary Literature

> "I am interested in writing about Islam not as an identity but going deeper and showing the state of mind and feelings of a Muslim who has faith. I want also to write fiction that follows Islamic logic. This is different than writing 'Islamically correct' literature – I do not do that. My characters do not behave necessarily as a 'good Muslim' should. They are not ideals or role models. They are, as I see them to be, ordinary Muslims trying to practice their faith in difficult circumstances and in a society which is unsympathetic to religion." - Leila Aboulela

Sudanese-British author Leila Aboulela proposes a form of writing engendered by Muslim sensorial and embodied experiences in a quite striking interview detailing her relationship to her writing practices (Hassan 192). Aboulela's aesthetic project raises a number of interesting questions with regards to what constitutes a Muslim sense of self and of communal belonging, while also invoking the heterogeneous lived experiences which make up the various lives of Muslims in *de facto* secular countries, beyond the stereotypical, culturally-constructed notion of Islamic identity[37]. In effect, Aboulela insightfully draws our attention to the fact that *identities* – religious, political, ethnic, cultural or otherwise—, are bound within complexly constituted, geographically-specific and historically-dependent contexts, and function as containers of distilled meanings, rather than exhaustive descriptors of embodied experiences. Her literary work attempts to force the rigid boundaries of dominant representations of Islam in the West, by exploring the personal endeavors of her Muslim characters, as well as their difficult negotiations with faith, the affective complexities

37 Oftentimes, the notion of Islam and, consequently, terms such as "Muslim worldview" or "Islamic identity" are employed in popular discourses in Western countries as shorthand for reductive and stereotypical views of Muslims.

of interpersonal and cross-cultural communication, and their sense of disorientation and alienation as migrants in foreign lands[38]. Drawing inspiration from her own experience as a Muslim migrant and student in London, and later as a writer residing in Scotland[39], Aboulela introduces portraits of ordinary British Arab Muslims for whom Islam provides the dimensions of a journey of self-retrieval and of realignment of their religious and cultural symbols. But just as her narratives complicate the stereotypical images of Muslims in the West, offering accounts of the ways in which social affect and spatiality are ordered for those perceived and identified as Muslim, her texts can also be misappropriated as paradigmatic depictions of Muslim identities, thus, establishing Aboulela as a postcolonial native informant primarily writing (in English) for a majoritarian British audience[40].

The question of a type of English fiction, which would follow a certain *Islamic logic,* is certainly a thought-provoking one. On the one hand, one could ask whether the term might not be compressing, in a singular formula, the complexity of Islam's philosophical, religious, cultural and political dimensions, as well as the manner in which it is spiritually internalized and practiced by individuals worldwide. On the other hand, one might argue, as Amin Malak does, that the very conditions of imperial power embedded in the structure and history of

38 Leila Aboulela has published four novels to date in English – *The Translator* (1999), *Minaret* (2005), *Lyrics Alley* (2011), *The Kindness of Enemies* (2015) –, and a collection of short stories, *Coloured Lights* (2001). Her work is chiefly concerned with Muslim themes and entails extensive analyses of the psychological makeup of Muslim women, trapped in between nations (Sudan and Britain in *The Translator* and *Minaret;* Russia and Georgia in *The Kindness of Enemies)* and analyses of post-independence Sudanese society (*Lyrics Alley)*.
39 Leila Aboulela was born in Cairo in 1964 as the daughter of an Egyptian mother and a Sudanese father, but she lived most of her childhood and young adult life in Khartoum, Sudan. In 1987, she moved to the UK to complete her Master's degree at the London School of Economics. In 1990, Aboulela moved to Aberdeen, Scotland where she also began her writing career. After living a while in the Middle East, she moved back to Aberdeen in 2012.
40 I am thinking here of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discussion of the figure of "the native informant" as the colonial or postcolonial subject who is featured as a blank space which needs to be inscribed by normative European discourses (6). The "native informant," a concept re-deployed by Spivak from its use in anthropology, is both needed and foreclosed by dominant forms of knowledge which invoke the misappropriated, authoritative voice of the Other to validate their own claims.

English are subverted by Anglophone Muslim authors' capacity *to muslimize* the language through their use of Muslim themes and their deployment of words such as *fatwa, inshallah, mecca, shari'a,* and so forth, "without seeking sanction from any authority, be it literary, religious, or institutional" (7).

Could we, then, speak of a type of phenomenology derived from the experiences of minority Muslim communities in Western Europe and the United States as a source of inspiration for Anglophone Muslim narratives? What might the potentials and the pitfalls of such a socio-philosophical theorization of Western Muslim subjectivity be? This chapter attempts to theorize the connection between socially-produced majoritarian fantasies about Muslim communities in the West, the circulating myths, stereotypes and Islamophobic means of representation, and the varied desires of Western Muslims to represent themselves, to share their personal and fictional accounts and to respond, counteract or complicate those prevalent cultural narratives reducing them to ready-made identities. I seek to outline the manner in which Muslim authors themselves internalize and respond to the burden of these representations through their accounts of lived, embodied practices. I ask whether there is a direct and, indeed, vividly material, relationship between *discourse* and *space* with regards to the manner in which Western Muslims' sense of space, freedom of movement and potential for becoming are shaped, constrained and reduced by the overwhelming negative stereotypes circulating in social and cultural spheres.

In this chapter, I would also like to focus on the manner in which Muslim identities are deconstructed and reassembled in two Anglophone novels that take as their central, guiding logic the experiences of their Muslim female protagonists in an often hostile, or alienating British or U.S. environment: Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* (1999) and Mohja

Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006). While Aboulela's novel pursues the experiences of Sammar, a Sudanese woman working as a translator for a Scottish professor in Middle Eastern Studies in Aberdeen, Kahf's novel introduces us to the coming-of-age narrative of Khadra Shamy, a Syrian immigrant growing up in a tightly-knit Muslim community in Indiana, United States, throughout the 1970s and beyond. By juxtaposing these narratives, I am primarily interested in exploring the phenomenological aspects of migration, the overlapping senses of home felt as disorienting attachments by the novels' protagonists, cultural and embodied forms of alienation, the experiences of being othered, excluded or marginalized in majoritarian spaces as a Muslim woman, and the ways in which the two protagonists rework the complicated symbols and representations surrounding their Muslim identities.

Moreover, I am interested in bringing together a discussion about the evolving histories of representation of Muslim women in the West, the socio-political and cultural context of Muslim minority communities in the United States, France and Britain and theories of gendered and racial othering. This exploration gives shape to the outlines of what I would call depictions of diasporic phenomenologies, vocabularies of the senses, of affective attachments, of charged perceptual geographies and embodied forms of orientation that inform the various experiences of Muslim female migrants' lived realities in adoptive Euro-American environments.

This chapter is also concerned with the manner in which majoritarian social fantasies and affective pre-dispositions produce different types of selective spatialities for minoritarian

subjects and shape their possibilities for movement and the orientation of their bodies[41]. Specifically with respect to Muslim minority communities living in Western Europe and the United States, I am interested in the manner in which Muslim bodies become contrasting elements in spaces informed or produced by secularism, nationalist ideologies of war, and neo-Orientalist dispositions. Leila Aboulela and Mohja Kahf's narratives display the personal negotiations their protagonists undergo as they work their way through these imposed reductions of spatiality and limitations upon their bodies and their freedom of movement. My argument takes into account the fact that dominant representational discourses have both affective consequences at the level of the collective and material consequences, particularly with respect to the manner in which shared spaces are carved, delineated, limited by borders and barriers, while bodies are differently oriented, censured, denied entry or marginalized. Aboulela and Kahf explore the more intimate and personal consequence of these geographies of exclusion. Without being by any means exhaustive descriptions of the effects of discrimination upon Muslim women's bodies, their texts point us, however, to different strategies of affirmation of complex and conflicted identities in contested public spaces. While Aboulela's *The Translator* proposes an inward movement towards narratives of authenticity as a means towards protecting a besieged Western Muslim identity, Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* moves outwards towards a deconstruction of cultural and religious identities and offers a pluralized philosophy of Muslim embodied practices and beliefs.

41 I use the terms *majoritarian* and *minoritarian* to refer to the different relations of power governing Western societies, which give more representational, cultural, economic and discursive space to white Christian majorities rather than to ethnic and religious minorities.

SECULAR SPACES, ISLAMOPHOBIA, AND CULTURAL RACISM

In *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Talal Asad engages in an anthropology of secularism defined in relation to a particular evolution of European modernity, with its liberal conceptions of citizenship and the rise of a system of capitalist nation-states. Secularism cannot be understood in abstraction from the project of modernity, which has imposed itself hegemonically on a global scale through the cultural, economic and ideological scope of several European countries and the United States. For Asad, Euro-American modernity aims at institutionalizing a series of principles such as:

> constitutionalism, moral autonomy, democracy, human rights, civil equality, industry, consumerism, freedom of the market – and secularism. It employs proliferating technologies (of production, warfare, travel, entertainment, medicine) that generate new experiences of space and time, of cruelty and health, of consumption and knowledge. (13)

The affective landscapes produced by modernity are rooted in specific liberal traditions of subjectivity, narratives of progress, individual values, the negation of the superstitions and myths of pre-moderns, and specific principles of life and forms of expression that have consistently relied on binary distinctions between Europe and its Others. According to Asad, the ideological construction and self-image of Europe is organized in such a manner that Muslim minorities cannot be properly represented in its midst. This has less to do with Muslims' own capacity to adapt to liberal, secular societies, but more with the European secular environment which relies on particular absolutist notions of "culture," "civilization,"

"the secular state," "majority" and "minority" that estrange Muslim immigrants or citizens (158).

Because their cultural and religious practices are rendered radically foreign, Muslims are often conceived to be the primary threat to the progress and the safety of the modern secular state. These conversations have consistently intensified around *the headscarf affair* in France in which Muslim women were denied the right to veil in public schools, or around the more recent ban on the burkini on beaches in Cannes.[42] In Britain, public veiling has been tolerated with some exceptions[43], yet the tensions mainly surrounding the South Asian Muslim community have risen ever since the Rushdie affair, in which some British Muslim youths supported Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie.[44] These events, including the 2005 London bombings, the Charlie Hebdo and the November 2015 Paris attacks carried by British and French Muslim citizens respectively, have intensified the public discourse according to which Islam itself is registered as the main cause of threat not only to the European way of life, but also to the equality between sexes, and to the fundamental right to freedom of expression of each citizen. In the United States, a modern secular state only in principle, the attacks upon American mosques and hate acts against Muslims and those

42 For a critique of the ban on the burkini and its history rooted in liberal French politics, see Robert Zaretsky's "So Long, Marianne: From the Bare Breast to the Burkini" in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*.
43 This, despite several incidents including the comments that Labour politician Jack Straw has made with regard to Muslim women who prefer to cover their face. See this BBC article on Jack Straw's 2006 comments according to which Muslim women should remover their niqab for better communication, "Straw's veil comments spark anger".
44 Salman Rushdie's publication of his novel, *The Satanic Verses* (1988), in the United Kingdom sparked outrage amongst Muslims across the world due to its controversial and perceived blasphemous content and the denigration of the most important symbols of Muslim faith. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran issued a fatwa ordering the killing of Rushdie in 1989. For a more extensive commentary on the political and cultural context of The Satanic Verses controversy, please see Nicole Falkenhayer's *Making the British Muslim: Representations of the Rushdie Affair and Figures of the War-on-Terror Decade.*

resembling Muslims have intensified in the aftermath of 9/11.[45] The public spaces produced as a consequence of the conflations of terrorism and Islam in France, Britain, and the United States respectively, have proliferated zones of exclusion for Muslims in which mosques have been set on fire, religious practices sometimes forbidden by law, while Muslims have been confronted with verbal and physical assaults, excluded or barred from certain public or institutional spaces, discriminated against on the job market, and disproportionately policed and surveilled in airports and by state powers[46].

The claim to suppress Muslim religious and cultural practices in the name of universal humanism, as it happens in France, would not be enacted if the fantasy of a Europe with unequaled progressive freedoms would not be politically and ideologically effective. Talal Asad argues that Muslims are both paradoxically included and excluded in Europe—included as a de facto religious minority, but excluded from the space of representation and from the histories of space and time which articulate the official narrative of European civilization. To live "as a minority among minorities" in Europe would involve a re-articulation of complex time and complex space (beyond the nation-state scope of identity-making and citizenship), in which multiple ways of life and heterogeneous histories could flourish (180). Étienne Balibar adds that the new articulations of ethno-cultural racism in

45 See John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin's *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st* Century, an edited collection of essays studying the countless Islamophobic acts of discrimination, hate-crimes and anti-Muslim campaigns in Europe and the United States in the aftermath of September 11.
46 For a detailed report on the rise of anti-Muslim attacks and discrimination in Europe, please see Enes Bayrakli and Farid Hafez's SETA's 2015 *European Islamophobia Report.* In France, for instance, anti-Muslim physical assaults have increased 500% and attacks against mosques soared by 400% after the 2015 November terrorist attacks in Paris. For the American context, please see the 2016 report, *Confronting Fear: Islamophobia and its Impact in the U.S. 2013-2015*, put together by the Council for American-Islamic relations and the U.C. Berkeley Center for Race and Gender. In the United States, Muslims were assaulted and even murdered in hate-crimes, as it happened in the 2015 Chapel Hill shooting. There were 78 recorded incidents in which mosques were targeted in 2015, students were subjected to religion-based bullying and armed anti-Islam demonstrations were organized.

European secular societies imply that the forms of institutional and discursive racism which characterized the colonial period have been replaced with more subtle forms of discrimination reliant upon practices of *social* and *internal exclusion* (199). Balibar argues that, even if marks of bodily difference have not stopped shaping discriminatory discourses, "the dominant obsession is increasingly *culture*, cultural difference being all the more insistent the more it is invisible and the more reality in practice is made up of mixing, hybridization, and cultural standardization" (205). In this context, certain minority groups, traditions, cultural practices or forms of collective behavior are represented as culturally foreign and, thus, at odds with the universal norms of European culture.

This is has also been the case in the United States, despite some geopolitical and historical differences, including prior to September 11. Edward Said has poignantly remarked as early as 1981 in *Covering Islam: How Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* that U.S.-based media has consistently produced an unrestrained and immediate image of a monolithic Islam closely tied both to an academic tradition of Orientalism and to U.S. geopolitical interests in the Middle East, with representations of hostile Islamic forces and dangerous political militancy populating televisions across the country after the Islamic revolution in Iran and the subsequent American hostage crisis and throughout Palestinians' struggles for liberation. Said traces the role of such representations of Islam, not to any type of essence attributed to Muslim societies themselves as Orientalists might argue, but to aspects of American society for which a polarization between pro- and anti-American forces has been a powerful political strategy throughout the Cold War (and beyond). Said assigns these stereotyped, static and confrontational images of Islam in Europe and the United States, as well as the reactive discourses emerging in some Muslim countries

themselves, to the development of historically-specific *communities of interpretation*, "many of them at odds with one another, prepared in many instances literally to go to war with one another, all of them creating and revealing themselves and their interpretation as very central features of their existence" (45). To take Said's argument further, while such communities of interpretations are by no means homogeneous or one-dimensional, they draw their coherence and perseverance as communities from the reproduction and replication of certain deeply-seated beliefs or stereotypical images about self and other in the very constitution of a sense of national, ethnic, religious, and cultural identity.

One of the most crucial aspects of theorizing Muslim social, cultural and religious subjectivities in the United States and Europe consists in avoiding the uncritical gesture of essentializing either a static Muslim identity or a one-dimensional Western identity and, therefore, reinforcing the binaries between Islam and the West, Muslim and Christian, religious and secular societies which have enabled a hegemonic rhetoric rooted in the clash-of-civilizations thesis to take over dominant media sources, foreign policy decisions and pop culture representations of Muslims and Islam. Samuel P. Huntington's article "The Clash of Civilizations?" has popularized the theory according to which the post-Cold War stage of global politics will be dominated not by a conflict between nations, ideologies or economic interests, but by a clash between major civilizations, Islam and the West gaining center stage (25). In this supposed historically-specific, yet paradoxically timeless and trans-historical struggle, the internal dynamics and plurality of cultures and identities is erased towards the constitution of intractable, incompatible and monolithic enemies. The narrative persisted

insidiously in the discourse in the aftermath of September 11[47], and has been employed to justify the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in a US-led coalition as part of the "war on terror."[48]

I take both the notion of the Western subject and that of the Muslim subject to be merely tropes of discourse, collapsing within their folds a multiplicity of different desires, needs, positionalities, cultural attachments, political affiliations and religious predispositions. Sharif Gemie emphasizes the many different positionalities a Muslim might inhabit depending on their relationship to their own beliefs, their community-belonging and their cultural heritage:

> 'Muslim' can signify a number of different forms of identity: first, a person who defines their life according to the five criteria outlined in the Koran; secondly, a cultural Muslim, a person who perhaps has no clear, confident faith in the Koranic principles, but continues to live alongside Muslims, and to follow some of the precepts (such as Ramadan); thirdly, 'Muslim' can function as an ideological term. (8)

Importantly, identifying and being identified as Muslim are different matters and depend not only upon one's personal beliefs, but also on the manner in which subjects become interpellated in different communities: culturally, as members of predominantly Muslim communities, or ideologically, as a minority population marked Muslim in order to

47 Edward Said has extensively refuted the clash-of-civilizations thesis which he attributes to the influence of both Bernard Lewis' text, "The Roots of Muslim Rage," and to Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" on the basis that they implicitly support an aggressive United States Republican foreign policy, while also inciting the exacerbation of an "us" versus "them" bellicose attitude amongst the general audience. See his 2001 article in *The Nation*, provocatively titled "The Clash of Ignorance," which critiques the thesis in the context of its effective mobilization immediately after September 11.

48 The clash-of-civilizations narrative can also be intuited in the manner in which suicide bombings, mass shootings and terrorist attacks by perpetrators identified as Muslim, are spontaneously explained in the media via the facile narrative of a war by foreign forces against the lifestyle, equality and liberties of the Western world, while the perpetrators of the acts are internal citizens.

disempower it politically in relation to the majority population.[49] These tropes are repeatedly employed in mainstream discourses to connote and trigger a chain of significations and associations with various effects on large swaths of populations. In other words, while such notions as a singular Muslim subjectivity, identity or worldview reduce the complexity of entire worldwide populations to essentialized conceptions about what it means to be Muslim, these notions create powerful narratives, social fantasies, affective predispositions, stereotypes and meanings which circulate by way of different political, mediatic or cultural objects and impact the lives of real Muslims inhabiting contentious public spaces in Western countries. That set of historical conditions and cultural identities, which is assumed to be Western, modern, free and progressive, is consistently compared to that which is non-Western, generally perceived as backward, struggling with poverty, strife and superstition.

In their respective novels, Leila Aboulela and Mohja Kahf have been concerned with tracing the relationship between these over-arching neo-Orientalist discourses affecting Muslim and Arab women through poetic and phenomenological reflections on the experiences of disorientation, alienation, and vulnerability their female protagonists experience in postcolonial or diasporic secular environments. Both texts investigate the mechanisms that produce Muslim women's vulnerability by referencing the role of global conflicts such as the Iranian hostage crisis or the Gulf War in exacerbating anti-Muslim sentiment and hate crimes. Hijabi women, in particular, due to the visibility of their religious and cultural practices, become the targets of Islamophobic attacks irrespective of their connection, or lack there of, to the highly mediatized conflicts in the Middle East. In this

49 Gemie offers the example of the 2005 riots which broke out in the impoverished, predominantly North African suburbs of Paris and which were spontaneously marked as 'Muslim riots' by commentators, despite the fact that no religious organizations were explicitly involved (9).

sense, both Aboulela and Kahf explore the different pathways their female protagonists take in their efforts to express their political agency and to negotiate their relationship with their own beliefs and their belonging to conflicted diasporic spaces.

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL POETICS OF CULTURAL DISPLACEMENT IN LEILA ABOULELA'S *THE TRANSLATOR*

Leila Aboulela's debut novel, *The Translator*, follows the story of Sammar, a devout Muslim Sudanese woman, struggling with the complexities of grief and the mourning of her husband in a foreign land, the cold and unwelcoming landscape of Scotland. Following the death of her husband, Sammar, feeling no longer capable to be a mother, leaves her son with her mother-in-law in Khartoum, and returns to Aberdeen to resume her position as a translator of Arabic documents for Rae, a Scottish scholar and professor in Middle Eastern studies. The growing affection developing between Sammar and Rae encounters major obstacles, despite their mutual sympathies, foremost amongst these obstacles being for Sammar the question of faith – she cannot and will not marry Rae, unless he pursues his interest in Islam beyond scholarly lines and becomes an observant Muslim. More than a cross-cultural romance rewriting the postcolonial relationship between colonizer and colonized, *The Translator* pursues a story of conversion, of uncompromising principles and a reversal of binary oppositions: Sammar introduces Rae to the spiritual dimensions of Islam, without compromising her own cultural allegiances or her religious identity. In other words,

Rae, an embodiment of the quintessential (albeit sympathetic) male Western subject abides to Sammar's own terms, in a rewriting of power asymmetries[50].

The Translator is also a novel about the incommensurability of translation on multiple levels: linguistic, religious, cultural and experiential. The thematic of cultural translation manifests itself in different forms through the novel's hybrid textuality[51], the protagonist's own negotiations with her exiled condition, the cultural translation of Islam[52], and the embodied and physical displacements experienced by Sammar as an exiled Muslim Sudanese woman in Scotland. Nadia Butt argues, for instance, that Aboulela's novel demonstrates the untranslatability of Islam across cultures and across religious and racial divisions (169). Waïl S. Hassan's work on *translational literature* emphasizes that Aboulela's poetics employs the motif of translation as a means of interrogating the limits and possibilities of cross-cultural communication. The novel's ideological project, according to Hassan, consists in its story of conversion, outlining Rae's decision to convert to Islam for its spiritual dimensions (2013: 187).

However, Aboulela's novel has posed many different issues for critics who hold her text accountable for its limited identitarian practices and the elision of the political

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50 Aboulela's text is deeply influenced by Tayeb Salih's masterful Arabic novel, *Season of Migration to the North*, in which intimacy, love and the relationship between the postcolonial subject and the previous colonizer is inflected by a postcolonial power reversal. Aboulela adopts Tayeb Salih's journey motif, as well as the contrasting elements between the sun-burnt warmth of the South (Sudan) and the cold indifference of the North (Britain) and the elaboration of the postcolonial politics of interracial relationships. Sammar feels at times closer to Rae because of a sense of familiarity and complicity which she senses in relation to him as opposed to other Britsh acquaintances, and yet she feels also distant from him by way of their different cultural backgrounds: "Sammar felt separate from him, exiled when he was in his homeland, fasting while he was eating turkey and drinking wine. They lived in worlds divided by simple facts – religion, country of origin, race – data that fills forms." (34)

51 The insertion of Arabic words and expressions destabilizes the majoritarian English language (e.g. *"Ya Allah, Ya Arham El-Rahimeen")* in a text about translation which specifically refuses the act of translation at times, as a political statement.

52 Leila Aboulela herself claims that Sammar does more than to simply translate Arabic into English for Rae, she "is also translating Islam for Rae. She is the agent of his change. She shows him that Islam is relevant for him too and points out that he needs it" (Chambers 109)

dimensions of postcolonial Sudan. Sadia Abbas accuses Aboulela of mobilizing an apologetics of conservatism through her representation of Sammar as a woman seeking her own subjection, the idealization of Islam as the sole ethical framework available for Rae towards his personal and spiritual development, and the elision of Sudanese state brutality (444). Abbas sees Aboulela's text as a symptom of an anti-imperial politics that reverts upon narratives of justification for a liberal audience, in the end condoning a right-wing Islamist position as a form of dissension from the norm (447-448). Hassan outlines Aboulela's critique of racism, Islamophobia and uncritical multiculturalism, yet argues that Aboulela's version of Islam "reinscribes male supremacy" through its assumption of patriarchal gender roles (314). For Hassan, Aboulela's work is a form of "reverse-Eurocentrism," an unreflective religiosity held captive within the grasp of the colonized-colonizer binary. *The Translator* is a striking text for its extensive phenomenological poetics of cultural displacement, yet its political dimensions do harbor claims to cultural and religious authenticity. The nostalgia for the Sudanese homeland, the provocative gender politics, and the idealization of a one-dimensional and undeniable Muslim identity as a form of finding guidance and direction in an alienating foreign world inform the novel's aesthetic and political complexities.

I argue that Leila Aboulela's text presents us with a postcolonial geography of the senses which reveals both an immigrant Muslim woman's struggles with the disorienting factors of her cultural displacement and marginalization, as well as Sammar's search for an authentic, stable and comforting Muslim identity to gather together all the pieces of her fragmented subjectivity. Aboulela draws imaginary maps demarcating Sammar's dissociative perception of sights, colors, sensations of warmth and cold, memories of taste and familiar

sounds from her home in Sudan, which are registered as a form of sensorial excess pouring through the seams of an estranging Scottish landscape. The novel's very opening, which introduces us to the protagonist caught between waking and sleep, imparts something of her existential anxiety about the cold and unfamiliar weather in Britain: “She was afraid of rain, afraid of the fog and the snow which came to this country, afraid of the wind even.” Sammar is struck by the leisureliness of those who do venture out on their different chores, facing the cold and the dark fog enveloping the city: “They were superhuman, giants who would not let the elements stand in their way” (3). The others are extraordinary because they appear to her to possess bodily capacities which she does not have. She has not been inured to the cold, nor did she harmonize her own bodily practices to the cycles of the wind, the rain and the fog in Scotland. Colors sadden her, as they appear different:” Yellow and sad as she knew it and green as she knew it were not here, not bright, not vivid as they should be” (44). Different geographies produce different embodied experiences and habits of perception, different resistances and vulnerabilities. Sammar, particularly vulnerable after her husband's death, registers her surroundings with an intensified gaze, as if all is defamiliarized for her, unnatural: “In this country everything was labeled, everything had a name. She had got used to the explicitness, all the signs and the polite rules” (4). Her adoptive home is a highly organized space, a space that bears the burden of over-signification, of an excess of rules and regulations, of marks to be followed and unwritten laws. This entails well-structured regimes of visibility, in which the public space is governed by possibilities and prohibitions, and in which, at any moment, you might appear ill-suited, strange or out of place: “In this country, when she spoke to people, they seemed wary, on their guard as if any minute she would say something out of place, embarrassing” (6). Sammar registers the subtle affective changes in

her interlocutors' attitude towards her. She elicits a vague defensive attitude in those with whom she casually interacts in Scotland, perhaps a sense of suspicion, of unease, of discomforted expectation.

Aboulela delineates different types of spaces which Sammar navigates with various degrees of apprehension, but what appears to populate the very first pages of the novel is the tension between the hidden, which preserves Sammar's frail and private existence, and the open, which appears hostile to her, exposing her or rendering her somehow incongruous in public. There are things left unuttered, which cannot and should not be explicitly transformed into language; there is an excess of affect which cannot be neatly captured by the highly organized space which she inhabits: "Her invisible mark shifted, breathing its existence. It was hidden from Rae, like her hair and the skin on her arms, it could only be imagined" (4). Like her grief, which she carries deeply buried inside, there are aspects of her being that cannot be revealed. This is not a comment on the impossibility of communication, but rather a comment on the difficulty of communication when relations of power structure the public space of the dissemination of meaning. Sammar's very name, in fact, demarcates one of these impossibilities of a faithful translation in English:

> 'Do you pronounce it like the season, summer?' Rae asked the first time she had met him. 'Yes, but it does not have the same meaning […] It means conversations with friends, late at night. It's what the desert nomads liked to do, talk leisurely by the light of the moon, when it was no longer so hot and the day's work was over'. (5)

An unusual name in Khartoum, and even more so in Scotland, Sammar reflects. A name that attempts to condense in a word a lived, embodied experience ("conversations with friends, late at night"), within a unique socio-cultural context (desert nomads' lives), at a particular

time of the day, marked by specific sensorial experiences (a conversation lit by the moon, in the soothing cool of a desert night). For Rae, Sammar's name reminds him of summer, an experience far removed from what Sammar herself can quietly evoke when thinking back to Sudan and the way in which her name is embedded in a particular geography.

The majoritarian public spaces Sammar traverses in Britain contain the structures of her implicit exclusion as they are governed by complex imaginaries that render her body, her appearance, and her faith as symbolic targets of apprehension. These spaces, whether shaped by the logic of war or by the logic of liberal secularism, crystallize around certain perceptions of Sammar's very presence, a veiled woman of color, not immediately available to the scrutinizing eyes of her viewers, nor immediately classifiable. During the Gulf War, Sammar experiences a change in attitude and affect towards her, with people paying her more attention, or even shouting insults at her on the street: "That was during the Gulf War, when suddenly everyone became aware that Sammar was Muslim. Once a man shouted at her in King Street, *Saddam Hussein, Saddam Hussein"* (99). These reactions emphasize her hyper-visibility and vulnerability as a Muslim woman in increasingly complex political contexts by association with which she becomes racialized, rendered a symbol of a tyrannical regime that must be combated. Alienating reactions come even from supposedly liberal-minded individuals such as Jennifer, the head of the Language department at her university, who approaches her unexpectedly and informs her that she is not religious, but respects people who practice religion and that, even more, her boyfriend is Nigerian. Aboulela ironically notes both the explicit hostility of conservative British people who become prone to reductive and racist associations, and also the hypocrisy of multicultural liberals who racialize and objectify Sammar as a symbol of their tolerance. Sammar finds herself at a loss

in the midst of the dazzling overlapping connections she evokes for others, which affect her bearing and prevent her from publicly praying for fear of eliciting astonishment or hostility:

> She was used to praying in the middle of parties, in places where others chatted, slept or read. But she was aware now, after having lived in this city for many years she could understand, how surprised people would be were they to turn the corner of a building and find someone with their forehead, nose and palms touching the ground. (75)

Even more, Sammar perceives that there are genuine consequences to her exposing her belief through prayer, especially in highly securitized environments like airports: "If she stood up and prayed in the corner, people would have a fit. A story once told by Yasmin: Turks in London praying in Terminal 1 and someone called the police. Sammar prayed where she was, sitting down, not moving" (132). For Sammar, inhabiting a postcolonial secular spatiality involves developing newly-fashioned senses, a proprioceptive politics of restraint and of precariousness, which enables her to guide her bodily movements so that she does not spill out and over the normative and well-regulated patterns of social conduct. Praying, for Sammar, has lost its spiritual ease and its sense of togetherness, her body harmonized in prayer to the different rhythms and times of the day, as she had once experienced it in Sudan. In a dominant European secular space, the gesture of reclining in prayer presents the potential of becoming criminalized. Sammar's very leisureliness of movement, her bodily expression of her agency, her desire and her religious and cultural identities, become suppressed, fragmented and immobilized.

As argued earlier, Sarah Ahmed has extensively theorized the question of orientation from a phenomenological point of view in *Queer Phenomenology*, reflecting on the

differentiated manner in which bodies are oriented or orient themselves in space, depending on whether they are perceived as minoritarian or majoritarian subjects. Ahmed is concerned with the manner racialized bodies often experience stopping devices (139), blockages in their movement and extension in space. Similarly to the manner in which Sammar is stopped from conducting her prayers in the public space of the British airport, Ahmed's personal story of being delayed at New York airport customs shows the consequences of bearing a Muslim name that is slowing her down (140). Specifically in relation to the migrant subject, Ahmed argues that individuals struggle to find their way when navigating spaces and environments which are pre-determined to render their bodies unfit:

> Reflecting on lived experiences of migration might allow us to pose again the very question of orientation. Migration could be described as a process of disorientation and reorientation: as bodies 'move away' as well as 'arrive,' as they reinhabit spaces. (9)

Migratory subjects, determined by their very capacity to move in between worlds, across various landscapes, negotiating and translating cultural codes, encounter multiple types of obstacles throughout their extension in space, particularly when their bodies are coded culturally or racially "other." To move in between worlds is not always a leisurely experience. The phenomenology of migration entails successive moments of cultural displacement, whether these include material uprooting or memory erasure. To inhabit different spaces, the migrant subject must engage in a process of cultural translation, through which she reorients her bodily practices according to foreign contexts.

Sammar's frequent moments of cultural and spatial displacement display the search for an orientation, a way of grasping onto a cultural identity in order to reorient herself in

space. Throughout her multiple hallucinations, her sense of self and her embodied presence become extended between two worlds, her home in Sudan projected upon her current Scottish settings:

> Outside, Sammar stepped into a hallucination in which the world had swung around. Home had come here. Its dimly lit streets, its sky and the feel of home had come here and balanced just for her. She saw the sky cloudless with too many stars, imagined the night warm, warmer than indoors. She smelled dust and heard the barking of stray dogs among the street's rubble and pot-holes. A bicycle tinkled, frogs croaked, the muezzin coughed into the microphone and began the azan for the Isha prayer. (20-21)

This experience of disorientation, the pull towards home governed by the atemporal logic of nostalgia, the confusion of sensorial inputs with involuntary memories of distant sensations, the disruption of her identitarian coordinates, these moments take place at the level of the body in a moment in which the cultural codes of translation become scrambled. If the name *Sammar* denotes a unique embodied experience, *home* too gains perceptual dimensions as a structure of feeling[53] more than a physical space. The nostalgia for an idealized Sudanese homeland removes Sammar from the sense of a present with which she cannot come to terms due to its incommensurability.

These moments of hallucinatory disorientation are deeply destabilizing for Sammar, and concomitantly lead her to a desire to construct a stronghold for herself upon which to stabilize her sense of self, in other words, bring herself to a space of comfort in which

53 I use Raymond Williams' term here to refer to the manner in which senses of home often escape linguistic, geographical and temporal definitions, and reveal more about the subject's disorientation and attachments than about a concrete space. See his essay, "Structures of Feeling," in *Marxism and Literature*.

political and material constraints no longer produce crises of identity, temporality and spatiality. The novel's strained resolution, in which Rae, now a converted Muslim, seeks Sammar's hand in marriage after her return to Sudan, produces the stabilization desired by Sammar under the protection of the institution of marriage and the convergence of the lovers' spiritual beliefs and systems of value, despite their cultural differences. Aboulela's political investments carve a particular trajectory for her protagonist formed in opposition to liberal conceptions of the self and gender and towards the construction of a subjective experience which can only be rendered whole through marriage and through the homogenization and alignment of uncompromising beliefs and worldviews.

VEILING AND UNVEILING IN MOHJA KAHF'S *THE GIRL IN THE TANGERINE SCARF*

In her novel, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Mohja Kahf introduces us to the coming-of-age journey of Khadra Shamy, the daughter of Syrian Muslim political refugees who flee Hafez al-Assad's regime and seek shelter in a small-town Muslim community in Indiana, United States, a narrative reminiscent of Kahf's own life story. The novel is a complex reflection on the development of Khadra's consciousness as a Muslim woman and as an immigrant in a country which she first experiences as alienating due to various forms of discrimination and violence, and later comes to accept as an imperfect home. The semi-autobiographical narrative offers Mohja Kahf the potential to speculate on the unstable identifications a Muslim Arab American woman might internalize as she grows up in a culture recalcitrant to her religious and cultural practices. Throughout Khadra's various explorations of her faith from an oppositional and essentialist understanding of Muslim

identity towards a rather more open-ended and pluralized Sufi conception of the world, Kahf also emphasizes the complexity of Islamic practices and beliefs, as well as the different significance they are invested with across various geographies as Khadra traverses the United States, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Upon her return to Indiana for a journalistic photography assignment, the already mature Khadra remarks on her consistent feeling of alienation, the feeling of being invisible against her home landscape of repetitive uniformity, strip malls carrying the same names, agricultural lands and suburban expanses:

> But it is not mine, she thinks, this blue and gold Indiana morning. None of it is for me. Between the flat land and the broad sky, she feels ground down to the grain, erased. She feels as if, were she to scream in this place, some Indiana mute button would be on, and no one would hear. (2)

Khadra experience a sense of existential dispossession as if her own hometown and the land on which she was raised were never really meant for her, as if she was and has remained a perpetual migrant at home, as if her existence there had been merely temporary and precarious, never quite entirely welcomed by others. And yet, this is what she has come to identify as home, the monotonous landscape that has formed and shaped her life in ways that have become mysterious even to herself.

The Shamys' move to a small town community in Simmonsville, Indiana in the early 1970's is less than welcomed by some of their neighbors. Khadra and her brother, Eyad, are bullied by other neighborhood children, while adults wield other forms of insults against them. Mohja Kahf, keenly aware of the impact of American media on the popular

perceptions of Arab and Muslim communities, notes the intensification of abuse in connection to the American hostage crisis in Iran and its televisual mediation, as well as the widely distributed image of Arab oil sheiks "unjustly" depriving Americans of "their" oil resources (83). As part of the Islamic revolution in Iran, American embassy workers were taken hostage for more than a year in protest against the United States-controlled regime of the overthrown Shah. The incident, taken out of context in American media, was continuously sentimentalized, which increased, at the time, the general hostility towards Iranian Americans and, more generally, Muslim Americans: "This made America hopping mad," Kahf writes, "America was mad at Khadra personally, the Shamy family, and all the other Muslims of Indianapolis" (119). The Dawah center, an Islamic religious organization where Khadra's father works, is continuously vandalized as a result. Khadra becomes increasingly aware of the reductive discursive mechanisms which single her family out as a source of eternal difference. Her schoolbooks do not represent the achievements of Islamic cultures with which she is familiar, they instead reduce ethnic, cultural and religious identities to stereotypical depictions, "an Arab with an unkempt beard standing in a dirty caftan next to a camel" (120). Khadra herself is harassed by the boys at her school who forcefully remove her hijab and tear it to pieces. But the incident which leaves indelible marks in Khadra's perception of her own vulnerability and her manner of relating to her identity is the rape and murder of a Muslim Kenyan woman and prominent activist in their community, Zuhura. The crime remains unsolved by the police, but the Muslim community in Simmonsville is aware of the fact that it had been a hate crime perpetrated by members of the KKK, who were active in the area and organizing marches at the time. This impacts on

Khadra's sense of self and marks her transformation towards a more defensive expression of her religious and cultural identity:

> *Maybe we* don't *belong here*, Khadra thought, standing next to Zuhura's graveside. Maybe she belonged in a place where she would not get shoved and called 'raghead' every other day in the school hallway. Teachers, classmates – no one ever caught her assailants. They always melted into the crowd behind here (97).

Just as Zuhura's murderers remain unpunished, Khadra's daily harassment at school becomes matter of fact. Violence, abuse and discrimination are normalized in an environment which envelops and shelters the abusers in its midst. Khadra compensates for her sense of precariousness by espousing a radical version of Islam. She dons a black scarf, eats frugally, scorns her family and her community for their moderate Islamic beliefs, scrutinizes and rejects assimilated Muslims, and embraces a Muslim identity which constitutes a "revolutionary path" of expression for her, a fervent political consciousness which links her own troubles to the oppression of Muslims worldwide.

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler considers the productive function of power in the formation of the subject following Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation and Michel Foucault's theorization of subjection. Butler is interested in investigating the manner in which power becomes internalized by the subject, thus shaping the subject's own psychic life and self-identity. The paradox of subjectivity consists of the fact that we are both produced by power and dependent on power for our survival through what Butler calls *passionate attachments.* In investigating the ambivalence which marks the subject both as the product of her own subordination as well as the condition of the possibility for agency, Butler asks whether agency can ever be considered as oppositional to subordination:

> What does it mean, then, that the subject, defended by some as a presupposition of agency, is also understood to be an effect of subjection? Such a formulation suggests that in the act of opposing subordination, the subject reiterates its subjection […] A power *exerted on* a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power *assumed by* the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming. (11)

Butler does not see the paradox of power as an irremediable sign of self-destruction, nor does she conceive of agency solely as a form of empowerment in a liberal humanist framework of identity politics. But her observation that agency is, to some degree, an effect of power as well as a form of creative opposition merits further investigation in relation to minority politics. From Khadra's point of view, for example, the function of white power in the United States and the violence which threatens her body and her community, enable her to develop a form of *subjective ambivalence* in which she constitutes herself in opposition to what she perceives as the dominant American identity and worldview by espousing an equally essentialized notion of Muslim subjectivity, but finds herself inextricably connected to the American context which has defined her very being, development, education and lifestyle.

Similarly to Aboulela's Sammar, Khadra experiences a sense of spatial and existential disorientation in relation to her uprootedness and her difficulty in attaching herself to a clearly defined *sense of home*. As an immigrant and a child of immigrants, Khadra experiences conflicting senses of attachment to her homeland, Syria, her adoptive home, the United States, and her spiritual home, Mecca. Too young to remember the Syria of her birth, she is connected merely by a type of bodily and sensorial memory to the land, by fugitive "flashes of words and tastes":

> Khadra couldn't remember Syria, although she thought of it whenever she rubbed a little boomerang-shaped scar on her right knee that had been made on a broken tile in Syria. Red blood running down a white stone step. *Walay himmek. Ey na'am.* Sometimes she had a vague memory of having been on a mountain. Dry sunny days that had a certain smell made her think of Syria, and when she bit into a tart plum or a dark cherry, her mouth felt like Syria. (15)

Fragments of words, tastes, smells, pains in the body, vague impressions of a forgotten land which emerge only at fortuitous moments, a cultural identity and a lived reality from which Khadra feels existentially severed. Syria is accessible to her only through her body, though the traces left by forgotten wounds and the involuntary memories sparked by the transposition of past perceptual realms into present environments. Syria functions as a trace for Khadra, buried deeply within her psyche, formative of her earliest years, yet inaccessible through her conscious attempts at remembering. For her, this means being far removed from what she initially perceives as her very essence As her own Syrianness coming back to her in spontaneous and short-lived epiphanies, Khadra feels not only culturally displaced, but existentially displaced in the United States. This estrangement is compounded by her alienation from American culture and her sense of marginalization, which enables her to foster affective and spiritual attachments to the *umma* as well as to imagine her original belonging to the holy spaces of Islam.

On a trip to Saudi Arabia with her family for the hajj to Mecca, Khadra, trying to overcome the lump in her throat as she leaves Indianapolis, reflects on the Islamic nasheeds (religious songs) she had heard numerous times relating “how a true Muslim feels at home whenever the call to prayer is sung, how a true Muslim feels no attachment to one nation or

tribe over another" (157). Finally, upon their landing, she exclaims with a sigh of relief "someplace where we really belong" (159). But Kahf is not as much concerned with giving her protagonist a sense of wholeness and relief, as she is interested in exploring the ironies of Khadra's search for an authentic Islamic identity. Drawn by the sound of the adhan, the early morning call for prayer, Khadra slips out of her relatives' house in Mecca to pray at the mosque and is brought back by two policemen who find her walking alone on the street. Women don't go and pray at the mosque alone in Saudi Arabia, her father informs her, she is much too used to the practices of their American Muslim community (168). Khadra experiences another disenchantment when she is unwillingly dragged into a limousine drinking and drug-taking party by her Saudi cousin, in which her cousin's friend, Ghazi, mocks her for wearing a hijab in America, tries to remove it and even forces himself upon her. In the midst of Mecca, Khadra reflects in a panic, "she had never felt so far from home" (177). What Khadra fails to comprehend, but is suggested by the narrative, is that her cousin and her friends indulge in their own forms of surreptitious transgression under a state-imposed Islamic normativity.

Mohja Kahf destabilizes the notion of an authentic and one-dimensional Muslim identity through Khadra's maturation process and through her discovery of the many facets of Islam and the many ways in which it is or can be internalized or practiced. As part of an Islamic studies university course, Khadra discovers Sufism, the mystical path of Islam, which challenges her and her community's perceptions about how Islam should be lived. After an unsuccessful marriage in which Khadra decides to get an abortion and divorce her husband, she returns to Syria on a journey of healing. Now open to perceiving the multifaceted nature of reality and the complex meanings that envelop human identities, Khadra abandons herself

to various epiphanies which deconstruct her long held beliefs. Learning to overcome an "us" versus "them" mentality through which she had generated her oppositional sense of self, she is visited by the dazzling array of people she had rejected throughout her lifetime, assimilated Muslims, those with different and more moderate political beliefs. It is as if an entire universe of complexity has been revealed to her and, pouring down upon her, it dislocates her self-assurance and her sense of certainty until she breaks down in sobs of overwhelming realization (306). Khadra's transformation, her opening onto the world, comes to a climax when she symbolically unveils and allows her hair to collect the stray rays of sunlight, in a gesture which is at once the removal of her scarf and of her inner veils as part of a moment of intensified exposure to the divine:

> *Alhamdu, alhamdulilah.* The sunlight on her head was a gift from God. Gratitude filled her. *Sami allahu liman hamadah.* Here was an exposure, her soul an unmarked sheet shadowing distinct shapes under the fluids. Fresh film. Her self, developing. (309)

As her scarf slowly slips from her hair, Khadra reflects on the Sufi concept of *kashf*, the unveiling of light: "How veiling and unveiling are part of the same process, the same cycle, how both are necessary; how both light and dark are connected moments in the development of the soul in its darkroom" (309). Gesturing to Khadra's future career as a documentary photographer, Kahf transposes the Sufi concept of unveiling to the image one obtains of one's self at the end of the film developing process. It is as if the image that is finally available to Khadra is a representation of reality, a vision of the nature of things accomplished through the act of taking the photograph. And yet this image is the result of her own creative process. Her developed self, glimpsed only briefly as part of her momentary epiphany, is her own

artwork, her capacity to fluidly mold and expand her self beyond the limits of language or norm. The process of unveiling, the removal of her material scarf, is not merely a form of liberation for Khadra, but only the exploration of one possibility in the ways of the body and of lived experience. Even if, in the beginning, going out uncovered is disorienting for her as it exposes her to the world without protection, she will continue to veil and unveil whenever she deems it appropriate, leaving both possibilities available for herself, to conceal herself and to reveal herself to others. When the growing anti-Muslim sentiment intensifies in the United States during the Gulf War, Khadra refuses to remove her hijab for her own safety upon her friend's concerned supplications. She knows that her veil is an integral expression of herself she will not abandon out of fear[54].

The concept of *kashf* (كشف translates as "to reveal" or "to uncover") appears at various points in the Qur'an, most notably in the fiftieth sūra concerned with God's revelation in the Hereafter: "Thou wast heedless / Of this; now We / Removed thy veil, / And sharp is thy sight / This Day!" (1413-1414). Unveiling involves a divine revelation through which one's perception becomes sharper, clearer and can pierce through the nature of things, as if a veil had been removed from one's eyes. Sufi scholars have expounded on the multiple significance of *kashf* as a state of absolute comprehension, in which the veil between the individual and Allah, perceived inside of one's soul, is lifted to allow for the self to embody the divine presence fully. To reach towards the divine is a journey across the labyrinthine chambers inside oneself. Unveiling, then, represents a removal of one's constraints to seeing

54 Katayoun Zarei Toosi argues that Khadra's different acts of veiling, unveiling and re-veiling throughout the novel mark her different stages in her maturation and her acceptance of her relationship to her Muslim self. Unveiling is not represented as liberating as "an end in itself," but as a step towards developing "an affiliative relationship with her faith" (652). I agree with Toosi that Khadra's gesture cannot be incorporated in a Western liberal humanist framework of anti-normativity and liberation. Her gesture is one towards the complexification of her experience and no longer one of opposition, although she becomes aware of the fact that the veil has different significations in different contexts.

and being closer to the inner truth of God. For Ibn al-Arabi, the thirteenth-century Andalusian scholar and Sufi mystic, whom Mohja Kahf cites as inspiration in one of her epigraphs, the state of bewilderment (hayra; حيرة) is one of the most important spiritual stages of self-discovery because it relies upon ambiguity, in the unification of God's image and essence. Thus existence reveals itself in the interim of things:

> So man emerges from the form of God; in him the property of the Breath comes to its end – since there is nothing more perfect than the form of God – the world inscribes a circle, and possible existence becomes manifest between light and darkness, nature and spirit, unseen (ghayb) and visible (shahâda), conceiling (satr) and unveiling (kashf). (53)

Revealed existence appears as if on a continuum between those binary opposites said to exist in separation of one another. Beyond Platonic philosophy's dialectical division of things, Ibn al-Arabi perceives life as a mediator between light and darkness, body and spirit, the concealed and the revealed. In other words, there is no artificial separation between things, but only one essence that engenders all things.

This question of the possibility of being as a mediator of reality reveals Mohja Kahf's philosophy of language, identity and representation. If Khadra had been previously driven by a sense of certainty, by a forceful expression of a stable sense of identity, and by a clear cut division between proper and improper, good and evil, us and them, her coming-of-age epiphany elicits the sense that things are complexly connected in the network of the living and the virtual. Her own being, thus, as the temporary center for the unification of things, can have access, at different times, to different forms of perception, reflection, attachment, awareness, possibility. And still, she is never fully and entirely revealed to herself as a stable

being. What Khadra learns is to embrace confusion, the state of bewilderment, the disarray of her political and affective attachments, and, by exposing herself to the complexity of life, to create new meanings even if these are to be destabilized the moment soon after. For Khadra, her new form of existence involves living through these flashes of comprehension instead of through the conviction that she has already discovered the truth:

> Funny, the strange ways of the heart in its grasp of things, the way Reality unveils itself for an instant and then just when you think you've got a shot at it, the shutter goes down, and the light has evaporated. And all you can do is keep plodding along and working it, working it, hoping for another glimpse, and meanwhile working patiently at your little given task, just working at developing the picture, whatever you've been lucky enough to get in that instant. (421)

Kahf suggests that we are always working with and against representations, images snatched from the world of things, always and forever incomplete forms carved and shaped out of an excess of life. And even if reality appears to be unveiled in the process of taking the photograph, in other words in your spontaneous epiphanies, the moment is soon lost with the closing of the shutter. This is the moment between the raw perception of things and the transposition of affect into language, discourse, and representation. Khadra no longer seeks to achieve absolute certainty and control over her world by way of closing down the meanings attached to her identity. Instead she opens her perceptual mechanisms to the world, returns the gaze of others through the eye of her camera, and reassembles her impressions in ways which she deems ethical and in accordance with her system of Islamic values. As a documentary photographer, she is aware of the burden of representation Muslim communities carry. She chooses to represent American Muslims in a manner conscientious

of Orientalist imagery, yet without idealizing or obliterating what she perceives as the problems internal to the community, "negatives and positives." She will not "operate from fear anymore" (436), she will instead search for more sophisticated conceptual and visual tools to deliver her insights.

CODA: MULTIDIMENSIONAL MUSLIM IDENTITIES

In *The Girl with the Tangerine Scarf,* Mohja Kahf's reading of the Sufi concept of *kashf* in relation to contemporary embodied practices of unveiling and re-veiling connects Islamic notions of spiritual revelation with a phenomenology of perception engendered by the experiences of a Muslim American woman's transition between cultures, geographies and forms of consciousness. While Leila Aboulela's *The Translator* attempts to come to terms with the confusion arising from experiences of social marginalization and cultural displacement, Kahf acknowledges this sense of disorientation and reformulates it as a creative realm of bewilderment (in Ibn al-Arabi's terms, *hayra)* in which ambiguity enriches instead of diminishing the self. Both novels engage in extensive descriptions of perceptual geographies upon which their respective protagonists negotiate their sense of belonging or their alienation, their bewilderment and disorientation, their conflictual atttachments to different senses of home which appear incommensurate to them, their cultural displacement and their destabilized relationship to their immediate environments. In addition, these texts offer thoughtful critiques of the manner in which dominant discourses, shaped by war, secularism and Orientalism, construct different spaces of exclusion in which Muslim women

become limited in their movement, attacked and estranged. Both texts are concerned with conveying the manner in which immediate experience becomes internalized in the formation of subjectivity, thus offering different phenomenological descriptions of Muslim diasporic embodiment. But while Leila Aboulela's novel seeks solutions for the lived experience of cultural displacement and minoritarian disorientation through the affirmation of an authentic Muslim identity, thus offering a centripetal narrative of identity formation, Mohja Kahf's text suggests that feelings of displacement, alienation and disorientation can be reformulated as productive and flexible operations of thought which distend and expand the subject's identitarian attachments in a centrifugal movement beyond the sense of a centralized self.

CHAPTER FOUR

The War on Terror at Home: Muslim Arab American Women's Creative Responses to Gendered Racialization

Sara Filali is a young Muslim American artist based in Florida whose paintings employ pop art and comic book conventions in their representation of iconic, celebratory and empowering images of Muslim women. In her 2016 series, *Hijabi Women*, Filali represents different women in bold colors and sharp lines, often surrounded by Arabic script, printed on their clothes or inscribed on their faces. In one painting, a woman, emerging from the midst of a surreal landscape, part desert, part urban sprawl, is adorned in colorful flowing garments and wears a niqāb on which the Arabic reader can decipher the word *ālḥurrīa* (freedom). Filali also references the media commodification of women, and Muslim women in particular, through her self-conscious appropriation of pop art styles and themes, yet turns these representations on their head by foregrounding the revolutionary agency of Muslim women. In a gesture that forecloses stereotypical representations of Muslim women as passive victims, devoid of political agency, Filali deliberately employs a mixture of popular imagery and revolutionary messages in order to represent her heroines as real forces of social change and resistance and subjects of political engagement.

One painting in particular draws my attention. In a piece titled *What I Can't See,* a hijabi woman appears to have been abruptly stopped in her tracks, as she turns her head over her shoulder and stares intently at the viewer (Figure 1). Her red-rimmed sunglasses display what we, the viewers, cannot fully see: a dazzling and unsettling array of Islamophobic insults reflected in the lenses of her glasses, printed in bold letters as if they were newspaper headlines. Her reaction, crystallized in the question mark in her thought bubble, appears to be

one of confusion, bewilderment and disorientation. We do not know what the woman sees on her horizon, beyond the reflections in her sunglasses, nor do we have access to the context of the quotidian process of racialization. Even more, we, the viewers, appear to occupy the same position as the source from which Islamophobic insults derive. This spontaneous realization invites an opening of our capacities to witness and take responsibility for the moment of racialization captured so thoughtfully in the painting. In other words, the viewer cannot claim that they are outside of the system of racial and cultural oppression referenced in the painting, even if they take a certain degree of critical distance from that which is represented in the painting and, thus, from Islamophobic discourses of representation. This means that the viewer is addressed by Filali's hijabi woman in a direct manner and is invited to take responsibility for the act of violence.

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler takes into consideration "the structure of address itself" as a demand made by the other to assume responsibility for the way in which self and other are implicated and intertwined in the social (129). Working through Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of the face as containing the biblical moral imperative "thou shalt not kill!," Butler inquires into the mechanisms that distort the perception of the Other in the gesture of address through the possible manipulation of the face both as a gesture of humanization and as a gesture of defacement, or dehumanization. In Filali's painting, the ambivalent nature of the address is subtly suggested by the manner in which her protagonist can be figured both as the target of violent rhetoric, and also as a vulnerable subject inviting an empathetic response in the viewer. What is significant here is that this form of address invites the viewer to examine her positionality in relation to the events depicted in the artwork.

In the moment of hesitation, captured so vividly by Sara Filali's painting, there is a sort of indeterminacy to what is to follow: Is the woman in physical danger? Will she simply brush off the comments and walk away? Will she engage in a response? The tension, the uncertainty and the disorienting aggression of the racializing encounter emphasize the woman's vulnerability. She is the object of an anonymous collective and hostile gaze and, still, her own gaze is shielded by her black sunglasses. Does this mean that the woman refuses the stereotypical identifications projected upon her? Does she shield herself actively from abuse? The image conveys an ambivalent and contradictory existential position of bodily vulnerability and strength. We cannot see the woman's eyes, but her arched left eyebrow gives us an indication of the fact that she actively refuses the identifications projected upon her.

Sara Filali's painting skilfully captures the everyday experiences of many Muslim American women facing the burden of stereotypical representations of Islam in U.S. politics and the media, an intensified assault on their bodily integrity and their well-being in hate crimes and other articulations of Islamophobia, as well as the surveillance and policing of the state. As mentioned previously, miriam cooke has argued that the Muslim veil functions similarly to race, as "a marker of essential difference that Muslim women today cannot escape" (104). Several other critics have claimed that September 11, 2001, although not the originating moment, represented a historical turning point in the racialization of Muslims in the United States and the "racing of religion"[55]. These studies mark the connection between the cultural racism mobilized against Muslims and the intricate histories of racialization articulated to domestic U.S. racial hierarchies as well as the growth of U.S. empire, while

55 I use the term "racing religion" in reference to Moustafa Bayoumi's discussion of Islamophobia in *This Muslim American Life*.

emphasizing the transformations in legislation, the functioning of state sovereign power and the intensification of hostile affective dispositions towards Muslims throughout the "war on terror." I here borrow Étienne Balibar's term, *cultural racism* (205), to refer to the manner in which the othering of Muslims in the United States and Europe has functioned as a form of racialization premised upon cultural and religious differences. According to Balibar, the discursive shifts in the manifestations of racism have mutated in order to single out culture and religion as factors that can be inscribed on the body in similar manner to the function of race. In this sense, Islamophobia, which bases its rationale in the depreciation and exclusion of Muslim cultural practices, becomes a form of cultural racism.

ARTICULATIONS OF CULTURAL RACISM AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

In Michael Omi and Howard Winant's understanding, racial categories in the United States do not rely upon fixed racial denominators or markers; instead, they "are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded" (60). Omi and Winant employ the term *racial formations* to refer to the manner in which racial categories and meanings about race are produced as an effect of historically-dependent social, economic and political forces. "Racialization," in their understanding, "is an ideological process, a historically specific one" (64). In a society such as the United States, in which race is a fundamental organizing principle, the interpellation of different minority groups within racial formations takes place through the reliance on foundational racial hierarchies (in which the black/white binary structures the articulation of other

racialized idenitities) and the political and social conditions of specific historical events or eras. To understand the racialization of Arabs and Muslims in the United States post-September 11, it has to be remarked that there are striking continuities between the manner in which the nation state founded itself upon the expropriation and extermination of Native Americans, the way in which its economic growth and racial divisions are rooted in the enslavement and dehumanization of African Americans, and the building of a sense of nationhood during times of crisis through the incarceration of Asian Americans during the Second World War, and finally through the backlash against Arab Americans and Muslim Americans throughout the "war on terror." In this sense, the racialization of Arabs and the racialization of Muslims, although both have distinct, yet overlapping genealogies, are implicated in the larger domestic racial logic which structures US society and the racializing foreign policy logic which defines US imperial projects in the Middle East and North Africa.

In *Civil Rights in Peril: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims*, Susan M. Akram and Kevin R. Johnson note that the post-September 11 backlash against Arabs and Muslims should be conceived in the context of their prior stereotypization as terrorists and religious fanatics enforced prior to September 11 through the censoring of pro-Palestinian activists, the proliferation of anti-Arab images in popular culture and the production of symbolic enemies in times of national crisis. Nancy Murray traces the concerted efforts of the three branches of government which have persistently targeted Arabs and Muslims through racial profiling after September 11: executive actions, laws passed by the US Congress and laws approved by the courts. In *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience after 9/11,* Louise Cainkar argues that the social constructions stereotyping Arabs and Muslims culminated on September 11 through their racialization as part of the larger

global policies of the US government and made spectacularly visible an already extant historical repertoire of discrimination (94). Indeed, Sarah Gualtieri has demonstrated that considerations concerning race were crucial factors in the construction of Syrian ethnicity in the United States during the first waves of migrations from Greater Syria (today, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine) at the turn of the twentieth century. In her book, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*, Gualtieri investigates a series of court cases, media events and oral histories in order to emphasizes the shifting and arbitrary nature of constructions of race in the United States, and the manner in which early Syrian immigrants have navigated these complicated racial taxonomies so as to negotiate their belonging to "whiteness" and thus gain access to citizenship and equal constitutional rights. In the post-September 11 climate, these tenuous histories of aspirations towards "whiteness" become unravelled as the political and public focus strongly shifts towards practices of racialization which produce "an inherent threatening difference between 'us' and 'them' that provides a scaffold legitimating and supporting the violation of the ethnic minority's civil liberties," according to Amaney Jamal (117). Nadine Naber argues that these practices of racialization entail the interplay of culture-based racism and nation-based racism in the construction of an imagined "Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim" Other whose potential for terrorism justifies US imperial ambitions (2008: 279-280). Last but not least, in studies of mainstream media, Evelyn Alsultany's argues that post-September 11 TV dramas demonstrate that "Arabs and South Asians are combined into the racial figure of the Muslim" according to a racial logic that conflates phenotypic attributes and "notions of religious comportment, dress, and cultural practice" (2013: 189), while Suad Joseph and Benjamin D'Harlingue scour *New York Times* articles on Arab Americans and Muslim Americans and

conclude that the newspaper has consistently represented them in a racialized fashion which differentiates them from other Americans as homogenized and collectivized identities connected to religious fervor and global Islamic fanaticism (234-235). These theoretical studies of the transformations in the processes which racialize Arabs and Muslims after September 11 all mark the connection between intricate histories of racialization articulated to domestic US racial hierarchies and the growth of the US empire, while also emphasizing the transformations in legislation, the functioning of state sovereign power and public affective dispositions towards Arabs and Muslims in the "war on terror."

The changes implemented in US legislation by the Bush administration, through the promulgation of such laws as The USA Patriot Act and the establishment of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), extended the powers of the state in the name of counter-terrorism. As Moustafa Bayoumi demonstrates at length in *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror*, this led to the disproportionate surveillance of Arab and Muslim communities, the designation of certain mosques as "terrorism enterprises," the arbitrary arrests and detention of Muslims and Arabs on terrorism-related charges in sting operations or through random, unverified tips, and the deportation of thousands more on the basis of minor immigration violations. This infringement of the basic human rights of Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, as well as of non-citizen Arabs and Muslims, brought forth no significant terrorism charges to date. Bayoumi argues that the special registration requirements of NSEERS, which involved the compulsory border registration of aliens from predominantly Muslim countries, "participated in a long bureaucratic tradition found in American law of racial formation. Through its legal procedures, special registration was a political and bureaucratic policy that created a race out

of a religion" (56). In other words, religious and cultural background become transformative racializing categories which proliferate the cultural racism directed against Arabs and Muslims. Even more significantly, Bayoumi emphasizes that the counter-terrorism practices of racial profiling characteristic of the domestic "war on terror" introduced the policing of human potential through the state's pervasive attempts to penetrate the minds and consciences of Arabs and Muslims and discern whether they have the potential to become terrorists (9).

The logic of state power in the "war on terror" then moves in the realm of the production of life itself, in which affective dispositions, bodily capacities and human potentialities are to be ascertained by state apparatuses, policed and sometimes even produced, as it happens in sting operations in which individuals are baited into participating in their own criminalization. In this sense, the post-September 11 era represents a major shift in the operations by which state powers contribute to racial formations through the postulation of the figure of the "potential terrorist" hidden behind the supposedly deceiving peaceful appearance of ordinary Arabs and Muslims. State power reproduces itself through its self-designation as the primary force that ensures the safety of the population – it is, after all, the master reader of human intentionality-, and it puts American citizens on guard with regard to the potential threat inherent in their neighbours, thus, ensuring that state control also functions via community policing, vigilante hate crimes and intersubjective interactions. Conversely, faced with the enormous burden of surveillance, policing, suspicion and racial profiling, Arabs and Muslims' daily, embodied practices become shaped by the experience of being constantly under pressure and exposed. In her study of the Arab American diasporic community of the Bay Area, Nadine Naber coins the term "internment of the psyche" to refer

to the manner in which one's life can be deeply permeated by state and community surveillance. In Naber's understanding, the internalization of state policing by Arabs and Muslims plays out through the constant "sense that one might be under scrutiny – by strangers, hidden cameras, wiretaps, and other surveillance mechanisms of the security state, as well as invisible arbiters of the legality and normality of behavior, rendering them vulnerable to the 'truths' conceived by the state – even if they were engaging in lawful activity" (2012: 39). The internment of the psyche, then, produces bodily vulnerability through the reductions of the possibilities of movement and communal participation of Arabs and Muslims, the censoring of their capacities for political dissent from US imperialist incursions in the Middle East, and the very internalization of tendencies of self-policing which enforce the policing mechanisms of the state.

Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality sheds some light on the relationship between state and population in the criminalization of Arabs and Muslims after September 11. In Foucault's later lectures, governmentality is defined as the "ensemble of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument" (108). Governmentality is thus a new stage in the reorganizations of sovereign and disciplinary power, which founds its rationale on the very existence of the population, its well-being, its safety, its cohesiveness, its productiveness and its health. By political economy, Foucault means the manner in which individuals, relations and objects become imbricated in the functioning of state power. In his formulation, population becomes

the ultimate end of government rationality, the justification for its existence and the material that needs to be managed, coerced and controlled at the same time.

Building on Foucault's model of governmentality, I would add that the events of September 11 make it possible for collective affect to become one of the active social materials to be instrumentalized and shaped by state discourses, particularly via the production of feelings of retaliatory and righteous anger, fear of hidden enemies and love of the nation. In an increasingly militarized post-September 11 state, the primary logic along which governmentality structures itself becomes the logic of security, defence and pre-emptive action. Therefore, all actions of the state that racially profile and criminalize Arabs and Muslims at home and lead to military invasions abroad derive supposedly from the fundamental necessity to safeguard the well-being of the population. In this, state power becomes synonymous with the preservation of the ideals of the nation and the fundamental rights of its citizens. Thus, when George W. Bush addressed the Congress and the population in his historical speech on September 20, 2011, he repeatedly invoked the responsibility of the state to defend the freedom of its people and protect the "American way of life" from the threats posed by radical Islamic terrorists by engaging in an indefinite war against these hidden enemies. While Bush distinguished, in his speech, between Muslims and Arabs as friends of the nation and radical terrorists as enemies of the nation[56], the repeated coupling between Islam and terrorism invoked in the ambiguous figure of the international Islamic terrorist blurred the boundaries between who constitutes a friend and who constitutes an enemy.

56 See Mahmood Mamdani's *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and The Roots of Terror* for a discussion of this rhetorical tactic according to which Muslim communities are divided between so-called "good Muslim," who support the actions of the US government and "bad Muslim," who dissent.

In *Islamophobia and the Politics of* Empire, Deepa Kumar argues that anti-Muslim prejudice has been consciously reproduced at the level of the social, through political discourse, state action and the media apparatuses, to serve the political interests of different state powers at different moments in history (3). According to Kumar, there are several myths which have insistently dominated the public imagination in the US and elsewhere with regards to Muslims and which have brought forth intricate racializing fantasies and imaginaries: the myth according to which Islam is a monolithic belief with unchanging practices and stereotypical forms of expression; the myth according to which Islam is an inherently sexist religion, disempowering women in unique fashion as opposed to other monotheistic religions; the myth according to which the so-called "Muslim Mind" is incapable of reasoning in the rigorous and logical manner of the European subject; that Islam is by default a violent religion which reproduces violent subjects; and the myth according to which Muslims are incapable of democratic self-rule and must, thus, be assisted by foreign powers. In post-September 11 United States, Kumar argues that there are a variety of groups which have contributed to the extended crisis related to the imminent dangers of terrorism in the world and who have agitated against the "Muslim enemy" lurking in the shadows of today's democracies: the neoconservative camp, Zionists whose interests converge with the logics of Islamophobia, the Christian Right and a number of former Muslims "who have profited from Islam-bashing" (176). A monolithic image of Islam emerges from these widespread discourses of representation, which forms spaces of encounter invested with racialized meanings about Muslims, Arabs and "Muslim-looking" strangers.

In his detailed study of the relationship between post-September 11 hate violence and state racial profiling, Muneer I. Ahmad argues that a new construct emerges, "the Muslim-

looking" person, who "has considerable, if not predominant, *racial* content and is preoccupied with phenotype rather than faith or action. […] The racial dimension of the construct allows it to capture not only Arab Muslims, but Arab Christians, Muslim non-Arabs (such as Pakistanis or Indonesians), non-Muslim South Asians (Sikhs, Hindus), and even Latinos and African Americans, depending on how closely they approach the phenotypic stereotype of the terrorist" (1278-1279). In other words, the targeted individual may or may not be Muslim, in so far as they are identified and interpellated as Muslim, and in so far as it is assumed that every Muslim is a potential terrorist.

The "Muslim-looking" person is then a figure of fiction, fantasy and the imagination. It has less to do with concretely embedded Arab and Muslim communities in the US, and more with the racist assumptions, preconceptions and fantasies of those who perform these identifications and interpellations. The "Muslim-looking" figure emerges at the convergence of older colonial and newer imperial forms of Orientalist representation, discourses of modernity, histories of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism. It is in fact the product of a modern cultural mythology formulated through the amalgamation of different forms of cultural racism and it functions as a key symbolic figure employed to distinguish between who belongs and who is to be excluded, who is a citizen and who is a stranger, who is a part of the nation and who is an enemy of the nation. The figuration of the "Muslim-looking" stranger is then both a necessary and a disruptive myth of the modern nation state. It is necessary because it becomes the scapegoat of the righteous anger of the public, who must strike against a symbolic target in order to recover its unity and cohesion in the aftermath of national tragedy. It is also necessary because it becomes the target of the intensified security apparatus of the state, in other words, providing the means for the exertion of retaliatory state

power. It is disruptive because it permeates and blurs the boundaries between citizen and non-citizen, here and there, identity and difference, which sustain the illusion of the late modern nation state. The imagined threat posed by the "Muslim-looking" person is their radical opacity coupled with their unpredictable mobility. In other words, the arbitrariness of racial categorizations in relation to the complexity and heterogeneity of Muslim and Arab populations makes the fixation of the "Muslim-looking" person an almost impossible task. This difficulty of identification and classification is what provokes a generalized form of social vulnerability with regard to the control of future danger. According to this racializing logic, if the potential terrorist could be hidden behind the appearance of any "Muslim-looking" person, and if any "Muslim-looking" person has the potential to become a terrorist, then danger populates all streets and public spaces. Thus, through the violence of hate crimes and that of the state, the "Muslim-looking" person, irrespective of their citizenship status, their ethnic or religious belonging, is identified as an enemy and expelled outside the borders of the nation state in a symbolic purification. This symbolic purification has the structure of futurity in so far as it extinguishes the potentiality of danger, instead of its actuality, through pre-emptive action.

According to Talal Asad, September 11 introduced a form of hermeneutics, or "an official suspicion about meaning," as part of the "war on terror" which entailed that "fear, uncertainity, and the ambiguity of signs" established the precondition for the violence of the state (31). The widespread sense of ambiguity and confusion felt by the greater part of the population establishes a productive institutionalized space for power to proliferate. In the aftermath of September 11, this entailed egregious violations of human rights throughout the

extensive deportation of non-citizens, indeterminate and arbitrary detention, torture, marginalization and disenfranchisement, and violent killings in hate crimes.

Fundamentally, the "Muslim-looking" racial construct functions as a deployment of the terrors installed by the indeterminacy of the stranger and the threat of the stranger to national identity. The anxiety, thus, associated with the "Muslim-looking" person does not only consist of the uncertainty of the stranger's emplacement in US society, but also of the sense that strangers are a threat to the very continuation of the "American way of life" through their presumed articulation of an anti-American and anti-modern sensibility. In this racializing logic, Islam is figured as the other of the West and, consequently, the other of modernity. The "Muslim-looking" person might thus not only present an immediate threat to the safety and well-being of the population, but could in fact surreptitiously challenge and transform the very foundations and principles of American society. The representation of Muslims as recalcitrant towards the very ideals and principles of the modern nation, including democracy, freedom of speech, equal gender rights, is indicative of the manner in which ideas of modernity historically emerge and develop through the exclusion and stigmatization of Muslim traditions.

DISORIENTATION, OBJECTIFICATION, RACIALIZATION

In the traumatizing moment of racialization, not only does the racialized body become an object for the other, but it begins to experience itself as an object in the world through the process of self-objectification, in which a manufactured sense of inferiority is

internalized as the origin of the self—what Frantz Fanon describes as the *epidermalization of inferiority* and Sara Ahmed as *disorientation*. The internalization of objectification transpires through the skin. In other words, it manifests in the shift of the functions of the body, its capacity to move in space and its extension in the world.

Frantz Fanon's description of the lived experience of racialization in *Black Skin, White Masks* directly addresses the blind spots of phenomenology's account of embodiment and orientation. The black man, navigating the space of the colonial metropolis for the first time, discovers that to be fixed by the white gaze is to be turned into an object amongst other objects. Fanon demonstrates that some classical phenomenology accounts take for granted a universal and ahistorical model of the human subject presumed to have an undisputed sense of the world, to be located at the origin of that world, to be in control of one's own existence, to have an unassailable access to freedom, to be in alignment with one's own body and to be clearly oriented in the world. These undifferentiated conceptions of lived experience fundamentally lack an analysis of the socio-historical regimes of colonial power that exclude people of color from normative models of the human, limit the movement of their bodies in space and engender their alienation. "In the white world," Fanon writes, "the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one's body is solely negating. It's an image in the third person. All around the body reigns an atmosphere of certain uncertainty." (90) The moment of racialization breaks down the structure of the bodily schema and reveals a different foundational schema, what Fanon calls a "historical-racial schema" [*un schéma historico-racial*], which endows the body of the black man with negative meanings, thereby circumscribing what a body can do within the discursive and representational constraints of the white mythos (91). The overwhelming burden of

stereotypical representations of blackness disrupts the smooth functioning of affect, the tactile, kinaesthetic and visual sensations of the body and paralyzes the senses, thereby disorienting the body by impeding the solidification of its habits and the alignment of its motor functions. This takes place through the displacement of a sense of bodily integrity (the implicit unity of the body schema) by the discursive forms of representation of the colonial imaginary, embodied in intersubjective affective encounters or materialized in the discriminatory function of colonial institutions and colonial space.

Here, Fanon relies on Jean-Paul Sartre's ontological description of the experience of *being-for-others*, which entails encountering the look of the other and being objectified by their gaze, therefore, becoming alienated from yourself (Sartre 345). Sartre considers the look of the other fundamentally unsettling because it engenders shame in the self, the shame of being looked at and valued by another, it decentralizes the experience of a unified and transparent self (*being-in-itself*) and it returns you to yourself as an object to your own consciousness (*being-for-itself).* Since you have no control over the process of objectification, in other words, over the value qualifications imposed by the other upon your body, and since you become an instrument for the means of the other, the act of being looked at is fundamentally dangerous because it deprives you of transcendence (358). Fanon complicates Sartre's account by arguing that the experience of objectification is highly differentiated for the black subject because it relies upon racial taxonomies and racist representations that already haunt the differentiation between self and other. In fact, the process of racialization played out through the function of the white gaze and the white imaginary is always already over-determined by a postulation of the European subject as self-identical through his differentiation from the colonized subject. Therefore,

objectification has a particular specificity in the process of racialization that reproduces the alienation and marginalization of black bodies through the stabilization and empowerment of white bodies.

Depending on our position in relation to the structures of racial or gendered oppression, our sense of embodied self can be either reinforced or diminished by the gaze of the other. Key to Fanon's intervention in phenomenological debates is the insight that the lived experience of *being-for-others* and, thus, being held by the gaze of the other, can be further complicated by the mechanisms of racialization. This takes place within a field of power in which some bodies are devalued, marginalized and abused, while others are bolstered, confirmed and reproduced by the social milieu. What makes objectification psychologically overwhelming in the process of racialization is the sense of inhabiting a "white world," in other words, being implicated in a social spatiality and a system of meanings over which one has no control, but which shapes, manipulates and imprisons the racialized body, as Fanon writes:

> As a result, the body schema, attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema [*schéma épidermique racial*] […] Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far from myself, and gave myself up as an object. (92)

Not only does the black body become an object for the other, but it begins to experience itself as an object in the world through the processes of self-objectification in which a manufactured sense of inferiority is internalized as the origin of the self, what Fanon describes as the *epidermalization of inferiority*.

The internalization of objectification transpires through the skin, in other words, it manifests in the shift of the functions of the body, its capacity to move in space and its extension in the world. Cultural objectification and self-objectification are co-constitutive and continuous processes that diminish, restrict and constrain the body and its expression of agency, as well as its creativity. In what follows, I will show that the lived experience of gendered racialization experienced by Arab and Muslim women can follow a similar logic to the experience described by Fanon, but that the intensification of self-objectification in this case presents its own specificity as it derives both from racial othering and the experience of bodily shame characteristic of the patriarchal commodification of the female body.

BODILY SHAME IN AMANI AL-KHATAHTBEH'S *MUSLIMGIRL: A COMING OF AGE*

In her memoir, *MuslimGirl: A Coming of Age*, Amani Al-Khatahtbeh shares a snapshot of her lived experience of growing up in a post-September 11 environment hostile to Muslim women. Her coming of age narrative represents an arch that follows the manner in which she has transformed her destabilizing struggles with social alienation into the foundation of an online community focused on feminist and Muslim solidarity. MuslimGirl.com began as a small online community in which Al-Khatahtbeh and her friends chronicled their daily experiences with anti-Muslim bigotry and expanded on issues specific to women, as well as discussions of Islamic spiritual practices. Today, the website is one of the most influential forums for Muslim American women featuring stories as diverse as the socio-political complexities affecting Muslims in the diaspora, global political concerns, the

coverage of imperial wars, cultural representations, feminist critiques of sexism inside and outside of Muslim communities, modest fashion, practices for the well-being of Muslim women, safety tips, as well as lively conversations about negotiating Islamic beliefs and customs for the present moment.

But Al-Khatahtbeh's journey was by no means effortless. In her book, she recalls hearing her first racial slur in elementary school right after September 11: "Your people throw rocks at tanks!" one of her classmates addresses to her, deriding her Palestinian heritage. Al-Khatahtbeh realizes that "this insult was different. This one didn't sting like the comments that I smelled or that I was ugly or fat. Suddenly, I belonged to a people, and that people was something I should be ashamed of. Shame" (10-11). The collectivization of her identity is one of the most explicit rhetorical devices of racialization in which the individual's traits are approximated to perceived group behaviour. Al-Khtahtbeh's Palestinianness, something she had been proud of prior to the racializing encounter, is rewritten by her abuser as something shameful, futile and absurd, just as the action of throwing rocks at tanks is represented as worthy of contempt. The phrase not only represents the Palestinian struggle for self-determination as a puerile reaction of frustration, it also ridicules the Palestinians' disempowerment by the far superior technologies of war of the Israeli state. As Steven Salaita argues, skewed representations of Palestinians in U.S. media and political discourses have considerably contributed to anti-Arab racism, particularly because the alliance between the U.S. and Israel has privileged Israeli narratives of suffering while demonizing Palestinians (35). These vocabularies of representation which generalize diverse political and individual beliefs to one self-same pattern of behaviour, later converge with depictions of

Arabs and Muslims after September 11 following a similar narrative logic rooted in anti-Arab racism, Orientalism and Islamophobia.

For Al-Khatahtbeh, the classroom incident is received as an initial, formative shock as she is forced into a representational narrative over which she has no control and whose significance she cannot yet fully grasp. In the aftermath of September 11, as she and her family experience various forms of victimization, Al-Khatahtbeh continues to struggle with deeply destabilizing feelings of shame. Already experiencing anxiety with regards to her cultural and religious identity, the elementary school girl denies her heritage on different occasions. Terrified that she would lose her friends and experience bullying at school, Al-Khatahtbeh conceals her religious background. On the one hand, the pressure she feels towards having to hide her Muslim identity leads her to internalize feelings of inadequacy, as if the attributes of her identity constructed as shameful by an ambiguous, external force replace and obliterate all other characteristics and meanings she might attribute to herself. On the other hand, the very action of concealing her own identity overwhelms her with a sense of shame for having denied her family history and taken the easy way out of potential social conflict. The various ways in which she is shamed by her peers, or the ways in which she lives socially-constructed notions of shame in embodied ways, lead to a persistent sense of inferiority:

> Being indoctrinated early on into a society seemingly at war with Islam, I quickly became afflicted by this condition, marked by a feeling of severe inferiority compared to my peers […] That inferiority complex really seized me by the throat for most of my upbringing. It wasn't just that I struggled to break out of the mental limitation of how far I could go, but the feeling even surfaced in everyday little concessions like

> letting someone else take the last seat because I was second-rate and thus not worthy of sitting in it (22).

Al-Khatahtbeh's account is striking because it offers a description of the lived experience of the internalization of socially produced notions of cultural inferiority, including the ways in which shame persists in a very physical sense like a lump in the throat on a daily basis (an indication of social anxiety), and the ways in which it limits her movements and the freedom she feels in relation to her own body. The epidermalization of inferiority, to use Fanon's term, has effects on the very shaping of the body and the habituation of its social practices. The girl learns to make herself small. Her feelings of unworthiness translate into her desire to retire from social spaces, to privilege other bodies and repress her own.

As discussed earlier, Sartre considers shame to be the fundamental affect that marks the relationship between self and other, particularly because it intensifies the look of the other as the source of judgement and the source of another world in which the self is mere object. Sandra Lee Bartky refers to a particular form of gendered shame, which she considers not so much an individualized emotion, but an affective attunement to a particular patriarchal gaze that produces feelings of personal inadequacy in women. Taking Sartre's commentary further, Bartky defines shame as "the distressed apprehension of the self as inadequate or diminished: it requires, if not an actual audience before whom my deficiencies are paraded, then an internalized audience with the capacity to judge me, hence internalized standards of judgement" (86). The tension between collective and internal criticism is tenuous and this extends the idea that feelings of the self and social meanings are symbiotic, rather than distinguishable processes. Concomitantly, the boundaries of bodies are porous in that they are not driven merely by a subjective intentional purpose and orientation to the world, but

also by the material and affective effects of the collective gaze or the received system of social meanings about embodied normativity. This back and forth process of self-objectification is perhaps best revealed through the dual function of shame, which reinforces culturally produced meanings and folds back upon the self as negation, as Sara Ahmed argues:

> Certainly, when I feel shame, I have done something that I feel is bad. When shamed, one's body seems to burn up with the negation that is perceived (self-negation); and shame impresses upon the skin, as an intense feeling of the subject 'being against itself'. Such a feeling of negation, which is taken on by the subject as a sign of its own failure, is usually experienced before another (2004: 103).

Crucial here is the fact that shame is experienced as an inverted affect, in that to feel shame towards oneself requires that one is aware of being seen by others, dissected and decentred. Shame then derives from the intensification of one's sense of self in relation to others, particularly in relation to the approximations, projections and readings of the regard of others for oneself. The experience of shame and being shamed or ashamed is in some ways paradoxical. This is because, while the circulation of shame as a social and intersubjective affect demonstrates the co-constitute relationship between self and other, the experience of shame can also reinforce the differentiation between self and other by reifying the borders of bodies and by opening up a spatial gap between them.

By the time she reaches high school, Al-Khatahtbeh feels entirely disconnected from her social milieu, grappling with deeply disorienting feelings of being unworthy, undeserving and coping with what she calls "a racialized imposter syndrome" (62). Her coming of age story shows the signs of extended trauma, experienced over the years as an accumulation of

destabilizing experiences of shaming, bullying and internalized guilt. Marginalized by peers and professors alike both due to the fact that she is a hijabi and because of her weight, Al-Khatahtbeh recognizes that she is perceived to be intimidating and potentially dangerous by others. The mechanisms of a patriarchal, consumerist and Islamophobic U.S. culture which privilege and profit from certain types of bodies conforming to white, heteronormative ideals of beauty, reproduce themselves by marking other bodies as improper, inferior and out of place. Bodily traits, senses of the body, elements of clothing then become over-determined objects of racialized affective intensity both for the racializing gaze and for the racialized subject. Al-Khatahtbeh recalls her bodily shame:

> That thought of not being 'in the running' [being unworthy] was one that permeated other facets of my self-image, such as where my shapely, big, brown body was concerned. It wasn't like the white girls' bodies. It wasn't normal. It didn't have a slim waist that tapered into seemly hips and a refined butt. I was a gigantic blob who loomed over people, in doorways – who was, in the way I saw myself, always in the way. Mine wasn't a woman's body - it didn't look like the bodies I saw on TV (64).

Al-Khatahtbeh experiences her body as unreadable because it exists in an uncertain and indeterminate space outside of white, normative definitions of femininity. Her gaze turning from these ideals of beauty and back towards her reflection in the mirror has the effect of reproducing her own body as a persistent absence. Since it does not conform to consumerist notions of femininity, it is equally visible as a foreign object out of place to her own gaze, but also invisible in its unrecognizable shape. When she looks back upon herself, she experiences her body as "always in the way," a disruptive object, out of tune with what she perceives to be the harmony of the "white world." This speaks to the internalization of a sense of bodily

and cultural aesthetics which are deeply exclusionary and prescriptive, an issue Al-Khatahtbeh recognizes when she refers to her feelings of bodily abnormality. The rupture of the sense of self, here derailed by the experience of one's own body as invisibilized and excluded from a system of white, heteronormative values, is enhanced by the lack of an alternative vocabulary to refer to one's body image.

Iris Marion Young's well-known essay, "Throwing Like A Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility and Spatiality," has expanded on the modes of alienation felt by women in relation to experiencing their bodies as contradictions, both as objects to be looked at and acted upon and as capacities, to act and to extend themselves in the world. Experiencing one's body as a fragile thing, as a shape perpetually held in scrutiny under socially-constructed standards of beauty, as a surface vulnerable to harm and violence, entails the development of specifically gendered modalities of the body which depart from Merleau-Ponty's model of the unified body schema. Young claims that these modalities of feminine movement display "an ambiguous transcendence, an inhibited intentionality, and a discontinuous unity with its surroundings" (35). In other words, the gendered unravelling of the body schema involves experiencing oneself concomitantly as transcendental and immanent, struggling with the potentials of one's body ("I can" is sometimes defeated by the socially- or self-imposed "I can't"), and finally being affected by a degree of spatial disorientation in which the motion of the body is discontinuous with itself or does not utilize its available space.

However, Al-Khatahtbeh's sense of bodily shame does not derive from discrete sets of experience, which can be attributed separately to anti-Arab racism, anti-Muslim bigotry or gendered objectification. These structures of discrimination convene in creating models of

feminine aesthetics, which are specifically raced, gendered and culturally dependent, and which are shaped through the abjection of undesirable bodily traits and aspects of clothing. This is a complex process of objectification, which attacks the bodily schema in multiple locations and reproduces sexism through cultural racism and vice versa. Al-Khatahtbeh is well aware of the co-constitutive operations of the structures of racial and gendered oppression and identifies two significant concepts deriving from the work of Black thinkers in order to make sense of her experience of marginalization and deconstruct it: double consciousness and double jeopardy.

First, Al-Khatahtbeh recognizes her own struggles with identity as being psychologically similar to W.E.B. Du Bois' description of double-consciousness and the forms of oppression affecting African-Americans in the United States[57]. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois' described African-Americans' life in Jim Crow America as intertwined with the psychologically-damaging experience of social dissociation:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring

57 Al-Khatahtbeh is not the only one to make an analogy between Arab American and Muslim American alienationand Du Bois' notion of double-consciousness and its effects on the African American psyche (Du Bois 2-3). In *How Does It Feel to Be A Problem? Being Young and Arab in America,* Moustafa Bayoumi takes inspiration from W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* to ask how it feels like to be young and Arab in an "age of terror" punctured by foreign wars, racial profiling, arbitrary detentions and deportations. His study of the lives of seven young Arabs living in Brooklyn reveals the struggles Arab Americans have faced in a changing society in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Young Arab Americans today experience, according to Bayoumi, both the pressures from their own communities to build a better world and the pressures of the culture at large that "spies you with mounting levels of fear, aversion, and occasionally outright hostility" (6).

> ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (2)

Double-consciousness is a form of existential alienation engendered by the widening gap between self and other, in which a white racializing gaze has the means to create and control the vocabularies and systems of meanings employed to refer to senses of self and cultural identities. As evidenced by Fanon in the case of the colonial subject, African-Americans have been persistently forced to reconcile the senses of self, projections, misrepresentations and fantasies produced in the encounter with the racializing gaze and their own lived experience, embodied awareness and sense of self. Similarly, Al-Khatahtbeh argues that September 11 "spawned a new age of double consciousness that impacted young American Muslims at a sensitive and vulnerable time in their developing lives" (44). Being perpetually under scrutiny and attacked in various ways by the dominant U.S. society, the Muslim American community invested most of its energies on countering negative images in the media and elsewhere through activism, campaigns and other efforts to prove "that we, too, are *human*" (45).

Yet, Al-Khatahtbeh extends this account of racialization by developing an intersectional feminist critique in response to her experience of gendered racialization based on Frances Beal's essay, *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female.* In her work, Beal traces the differences in social treatment, marginalization and economic exploitation affecting white and black women. Employing the idea of double jeopardy to refer both to her alienation based on racial discrimination and her gendered othering, Al-Khatahtbeh recognizes that these processes are deeply intertwined. As she formulates it, double jeopardy means "being subjected to racism, and then further being subjected to sexism within that

racist framework" (78). Careful to distinguish and differentiate between Muslim American women's experiences and African-American women's struggles with racism, Al-Khatahtbeh argues that intersectional frameworks[58] can be adapted to critique Muslim women's experiences. She finally evidences the neglected topic of the experiences of Black Muslim women who tackle racism on an everyday basis within and outside the Muslim community. The work to be done is then more nuanced and requires the articulation of different critiques of power, while acknowledging the complexity and diversity of Muslim experiences in the United States.

DIS-ORIENTING THE GENDERED RACIALIZATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN

How might we then employ an intersectional critique in order to understand the gendered racialization of Muslim American women after September 11? In her essay, "The Racialization of Muslim Veils: A Philosophical Analysis," Alia Al-Saji argues that intersectional analyses must be extended to account for the manner in which gender and racial oppression are inextricably connected and not separate processes of victimization. Al-Saji also argues that the othering of veiled Muslim women can be regarded as continuous with the racialization process described by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, primarily because it functions through a visual register. Her point is not to collapse the various

58 Intersectionality is a feminist theoretical framework emerging from the work of African-American feminists and popularized in particular by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), but referenced in the work of earlier Black feminists such as Frances Beal, Audre Lorde, Angela Y. Davis and others. Fundamentally, intersectionality proposes an analysis of the multiple axes of oppression which affect women of color, taking in consideration the fact that social identities are constituted by exclusion on the basis of gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.

imaginary, discursive and historical aspects of these different processes of racialization, but to investigate "the role of vision in the naturalization of 'race' to the body" and its intentional and habitual structure (884). Relying on Linda Martín Alcoff's work on the role of habit in the formation of the visual apparatus[59], Al-Saji argues that racializing vision is habitual, in that it is not necessarily inevitable but historically and contextually reinforced, and it functions through the projection of visual qualities upon bodies as if they were characteristic of those bodies alone. In this sense, racializing vision is *less*, because it forecloses the possibilities to see otherwise, but it is also *more*, in that it is reinforced by and it reproduces racist representations and perceptions (885). Consequently, discourses that project gender oppression onto the Muslim veil render invisible the structure of the field of vision in which they function, determined primarily by liberal conceptions of gender liberation and implicit Orientalist assumptions about Muslim cultures which inscribe gender violence as inherent to the practice of Islam and, simultaneously, absent or vanishing from modern societies.

Significant here is the fact that the othering of Muslim women is doubled by the manner in which cultural racism is intertwined with the gendered logics of liberal secular societies. Al-Saji complicates Fanon's description of racialization, as well as intersectional feminist frameworks of analysis, by investigating not how identities such as race and gender are additive to the discrimination experienced by Muslim women, but how they function through one another. In other words, Al-Saji proposes a relational model for understanding gendered racialization, which argues that notions of gendered difference and "western" norms of femininity become reworked and reinforced through the racialization of Muslim

59 See Linda Martin Alcoff's development of Merleau-Ponty's theorization of the relationship between habit and seeing in her account of the phenomenology of racialization in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (2006).

women. Investigating in particular the headscarf affair in France, Al-Saji argues that gender oppression becomes naturalized to the Muslim veil in a representational gesture, which rhetorically distinguishes the "Muslim woman" from the supposedly liberated Western female subject and, therefore, constitutes the racialization of Muslim women by way of their bodies:

> My argument is that western representations of veiled Muslim women are not simply *about* Muslim women themselves. Rather than representing Muslim women, these images fulfil a different function: they provide the foil or negative mirror in which western constructions of identity and gender can be positively *reflected*. It is by means of a projection of gender oppression onto Islam, specifically onto the bodies of veiled women, that such mirroring takes place. […] What is at stake here is a form of cultural racism that hides itself under the guise of anti-sexist and even feminist liberatory discourse. (877)

In this sense, the mechanism of gendered racialization which objectifies Muslim women is premised upon a double patriarchal logic, which renders invisible the structure of gender oppression in "the West" by projecting it upon the figure of the other, and also, in the same gesture, prescribes to Muslim women how they should carry themselves and cover or uncover their bodies. Running through this differentiation is a racializing logic which has already constituted Muslim women as part of a supposed pre-modern and backward Islamic culture. The gendered differentiation thus produced is dependent upon and reinforced by the logic of cultural racism and vice versa. Additionally, Al-Saji argues that secular space still preserves traces of religious practices, but renders these invisible, thus enabling Muslim women's cultural and religious practices to appear, in contrast, *hyper-visible* (881). Cultural

difference is then naturalized to visible features of the body. The space of encounter becomes informed not only by the structure of the racializing gaze, which relies upon Orientalist habits of seeing, but also by the way in which Muslim bodies are harmed, diminished or disoriented and emerge bearing the traces of the moment of gendered and racial "othering."

In her 2017 rap song, *Hijabi (wrap my Hijab)*, Syrian-American poet and activist Mona Haydar attacks the logic of these feminist liberatory discourses by engaging their banal, seemingly innocuous articulation in casual comments Muslim women receive on the street and public spaces, from strangers or acquaintances: "What that hair look like / Bet that hair look nice / Don't that make you sweat? / Don't that feel too tight? / Yo what your hair look like? Bet your hair look nice. / How long your hair is? / You need to get yo life." These interventions, continuous I would argue with uncritical feminist critiques of Muslim cultures, locate themselves within a particular social position of entitlement and seeing, in which one takes it upon oneself to police personal choice, agency and self-expression as represented in customs of dressing. There is also a fundamental patriarchal and Orientalist logic inherent in the fetishization of Muslim women's bodies connoted by the desire to unveil them, to uncover their hair and, thus, to gain possession of their bodies. And yet, the mechanism of objectification in this case is concealed by expressions of compassion, pity or concern for the well-being of the same Muslim women thus fetishized. How do we then understand the affective structure of these encounters?

Hijabi was also made into a music video highlighting the diversity of Muslim women and celebrating pregnancy as the camera zooms out to reveal Mona Haydar's full belly. The song marks the racist undertones of unwarranted expressions of patronizing compassion or pity expressed as genuine concern or even feminist solidarity. Structured primarily by

Eurocentric notions of subjectivity, freedom and gender identity, these expressions of pity assume that Muslim women are merely passive receivers of religious norms and thus oppressed, without their consent, by their own communities. This, Haydar notes in her song, is not only a form of Orientalism, but a type of misogyny: "Make a feminist planet / Women haters get banished / Covered up or not don't ever take us for granted."[60] Reversing the popular assumptions according to which veiling is an anti-feminist practice, Haydar points to those who police women's bodies, their choices and their manner of dressing as the very source of sexism.

In Mona Haydar's account of the racializing encounter, expressed feelings of sympathy, solidarity and pity play in fact upon the construction of Muslim women as the negative mirrors of liberal feminists, to follow Alia Al-Saji. In other words, Muslim women are represented as worthy of pity precisely because they are assumed to not be able to benefit from the achievements of liberal feminists' struggles for gender equality. The headscarf itself, which becomes a racialized object charged with intensive symbolic meanings, is taken as the primary indicator of their cultural backwardness and their bad faith. Concomitantly, the very existence of Muslim women in U.S. society is figured as a point of origin, an indication of the distance mainstream feminists have had to surpass in their plight to liberate themselves from patriarchal constraints. These types of narratives assume that feminism is an almost completed and wholesome project, a project that can and should be imposed upon other cultures. This is another discursive mechanism by which Muslim women are denied their individual and personal histories, their capacities for discernment and political awareness and their persistence as social actors with real effects in the world. In this sense,

60 See Mona Haydar's personal blog for the complete *Hijabi* lyrics: http://www.monahaydar.com/2017/03/27/lyricshijabixmona (Accessed June 17, 2017)

Muslim women are taken "out of time" and "out of space" through their representation as fixed social entities belonging to a distant pre-modern past, a past, which has supposedly been surpassed, in the Euro-American sphere, through the achievements of human rights and democracy.

Pity is an ambivalent affect that often manifests as an extension between compassion and contempt. Pity is sometimes experienced as a type of attachment, a feeling of proximity with another individual or group condition, a relation between self and other based on similarity and deep identification. Pity is fundamental in the act of witnessing, experiencing the suffering of another as if it were one's own or as if it could at any time happen to oneself. Yet, in the racializing encounter, pity can in fact reproduce the differences between self and other as worthy of contempt. The play upon similarity and difference engendered by the gravitation of pity between compassion and contempt is doubly problematic. First of all, deep identification, thus pity as compassion, premised upon similarity in the conditions of self and other, erases structural differences and diverse cultural positionalities. In the racialization of Muslim women, the diversity of Muslim perspectives and women's different personal ways of interpreting issues of faith, social conduct, manners of dressing, devout choices, are dismissed as mere instances of false consciousness by the logic of liberal secular societies. Secondly, differentiation, thus, the use of pity as a form of contempt for or fetishization of perceived racial, cultural or religious differences, widens the gap between self and other in a gesture that presumes the other to be at the origins of the self. This fundamentally colonial narrative relies upon the production of racialized others, in this case, Muslim women, who are relegated to an imagined, primordial past. Intertwined with the narratives of progress characteristic of modernity, the self can then restructure the borders of its being in

oppositional fashion, by expelling the abject other within. In the racialization of Muslim women, this takes place either through their social exclusion or through the insistence that they must subscribe to the liberal humanist ideals of feminism. Finally, this gesture assumes a one-dimensional understanding of feminism, which ignores the insights of feminists of color, and which has been consistently depicted to be mutually exclusive with Islamic beliefs[61]. But, as I will show in the next section, this form of imperial feminism can be engaged by way of its double standards.

In the "The Pity Committee and the Careful Reader" (2011), Mohja Kahf takes to takes two predominant narratives about Muslim women, that produced by "the neo-Orientalist Pity Committee" and that produced by the "Defensive Brigade" of Muslim apologists (112-113). While the first relies upon the victimization of Muslim women as part of imperialist motivations, the second, represented by "mosque newsletters, Muslim chat rooms, and conservative-press offerings in Muslim locales," takes an oppositional stance to the dominant discourse by denying the "real issues of sexism in Muslim societies" (113). Kahf establishes a feminist framework for engaging with the patriarchal sources of vulnerability Muslim women experience in different settings, without further contributing to the demonization of Muslims in Euro-American socio-political contexts. She suggest the following five strategies: critical thinking (questioning narratives for their logical inconsistencies), dual critique (comparing the oppression of women in Muslim communities to that in Western societies), cross-cutting parallels (establishing parallels and similarities

61 For a critique of Eurocentric feminism, also referred to as colonial or imperial feminism, and the discussion of the relationship between Muslim feminist discourses and Islamic norms and beliefs, see the works of Fatima Mernissi (1987), Amina Wadud (1999), Saba Mahmood (2005). Chandra Talpade Mohanty's work on third world women, the imperial gaze and imperial feminism is also invaluable here (2003).

between different types of patriarchal societies), and remembering one's history (foreground the historical genealogy of socio-political development in Muslim countries).

In her literary work, Kahf proceeds to challenge the received narratives of the "Pity Committee" through her efforts to reveal the lived, embodied experiences of Muslim women in the United States and disengage conventional expectations. Her collection of poems, *E-mails from Scheherazad*, offers alternate scenes of encounter in which Muslim women turn around expectations and actively refuse stereotypical identifications, thus disorienting the common assumptions about their lives and identities. In several poems in the collection, Kahf utilizes what she refers to as the double critique and cross-cutting parallels, demonstrating that sexism is not an exclusive feature of Muslim communities and societies, but that it transcends cultural and religious boundaries. See for instance her poem *Hijab Scene #2*:

> 'You people have such restrictive dress for women,'
>
> she said, hobbling away in three inch-heels and panty hose
>
> to finish another pink-collar temp pool day. (2003: 42)

It is significant that the feeling of being encumbered and restricted by the clothing or the adornments that you wear can be relative to the social position you inhabit. In this sense, although high-heeled shoes could easily be construed as an element of fashion produced by patriarchal conceptions of beauty and feminine elegance, they become invisible in a normalized social environment in which they have been rendered a habitual practice. In other words, habitual forms of dressing can become so deeply naturalized to one's body that they become detached from their cultural and political signification and become part of the body itself. No longer tools, but elements which extend the body in space. In this sense, the woman

with the pink-collar temp pool job does not question the integration of her own preferences with fashion trends, patriarchal dispositions and consumerist practices. Even more, the woman no longer feels the pain in her soles and the tight wrap of the panty hose around her legs. Instead, she projects her displaced feelings of bodily constriction onto the figure of her hijabi acquaintance and her manner of dress, particularly because the Muslim woman, who is thus othered and racialized, represents an unfamiliar disruption in her world. Kahf illuminates in this encounter what Alia Al-Saji has referred to as the patriarchal foundation of gendered racialization. This moment of racialization undercuts feminist solidarity and, instead, reproduces the widening differentiation gap between the modern, westernized woman and her Muslim other. Kahf reveals the duplicitous logic of these moments of gendered racialization, thus defamiliarizing the conventional assumptions which engender these binaries.

This logic is not restricted to feminist affect, though, as Kahf's other snapshot poem shows, *Hijab Scene #1:*

> 'You dress strange,' said a tenth-grade boy with bright blue hair
>
> to the new Muslim girl with the headscarf in homeroom,
>
> his tongue-rings clicking on the 'tr' in 'strange.' (2003: 41)

Mohja Kahf's biting humour evidences the double standards implicit in the Islamophobic gaze, particularly in relation to the ways in which different bodily practices and customs of dressing are rendered extra-ordinary, unusual or strange. Kahf seems to be suggesting once again that the relationship between non-conformism, difference and social exclusion is complicated by the manner in which certain personal choices become normalized, while

others remain permanently visible and disruptive. The relationship between the blue-haired boy and the Muslim girl, Kahf suggests, is in some ways more about similarities rather than difference. In other words, both practices of dressing and personal aesthetics rely on choice, beliefs, values and the expression of identitarian attachments. Moreover, both the blue-haired boy and the Muslim girl stand out in the crowd as deviation from the norm. But while the blue-haired boy's choices are registered as youthful subversions of social norms, the Muslim girl's expression of identity is instead represented as normative within a restricted understanding of Islamic culture and, therefore, politically conservative. *Hijab Scene #1* is organized more around sound, rather than sight. Here, what vibrates centrally within the poem is the sound the tongue-rings make when closing on the pronunciation of the word 'strange.' Indeed, Kahf renders the sound and the very presence of the tongue-rings strange by defamiliarizing them and by evidencing them in the poem and guiding the attention away from the Muslim girl. It is as if, by way of sound, Kahf invites the reader to redirect their gaze, to shift perspectives and to deconstruct the relative meanings of that which is said to be strange, out of the ordinary, out of place.

In *Hijab Scene #7*, Mohja Kahf shifts perspectives and gives voice to her Muslim female speaker:

No, I'm not bald under the scarf

No, I'm not from that country

where women can't drive cars

No, I would not like to defect

I'm already American

But thank you for offering

What else do you need to know

relevant to my buying insurance,

opening a bank account,

reserving a seat on a flight?

Yes, I speak English

Yes, I carry explosives

They're called words

And if you don't get up

Off your assumptions,

They're going to blow you away." (2003: 39)

It is interesting to note the dynamic qualities of the poem and its movement back and forth between the speaker and her interlocutor's perceptions of her, as well as the manner in which negation gradually takes the shape of affirmation. An affirmation of the power of language to shatter conventional assumptions. The voice speaking in the poem is forceful and strong. The hijabi woman appears to be fatigued by the comments she receives on an every day basis with regards to her clothing, identity and national belonging. She also appears to have discerned from her various social cues the type of prejudices that lie beneath the different treatment she receives in quotidian circumstances. Therefore, not only does she dispel the usual stereotypes, but she refuses association with the narratives and imaginaries projected

upon her. "No I am not from that country / where women can't drive cars." The fact that Kahf does not name the country itself, although she is clearly aware of the country in question[62], emphasizes the fact that Muslim women are not part of a homogeneous cultural context and that there are nation-based differences in the manner in which Muslim women experience their relationship to the law and the state. In addition, Kahf's speaker disavows responsibility for the oppressive circumstances some Muslim women may experience in specific contexts, an association that is often imposed on Muslims living in the diaspora. This gesture emphasizes the necessity to pay attention to the specific social, political and cultural circumstances which shape different (Muslim) women's experiences of the environments they participate in, the social norms they confront and their own bodies. Kahf's speaker targets the urgent political issues which confront her experience in U.S. society, which means that she prioritizes a critique of Islamophobia. She also affirms her national belonging and her attachment to the environment in which she has developed, irrespective of its difficulties. Finally, in emphasizing the explosive nature of language, Kahf transforms the use of stereotypes into an affirmation of the creative powers of poetry as a means of political expression.

CODA: REDEFINING HABITS OF SEEING

By way of conclusion, I'd like to return to Sara Filali's painting which opened this essay and, thus, tie together the dispersed phenomenological threads that shaped its body. I am intrigued by the fact that Filali chooses to reference a negative capacity in her title. *What I Can't See*

[62] In the meantime, Saudi Arabia has passed a law in 2017 to allow women to drive. See Ben Hubbard's article in the New York Times, "Saudi Arabia Agrees to Let Women Drive," https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/26/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-women-drive.html (Accessed February 1st, 2018).

might refer to the fact that her hijabi subject is ignorant of the stereotyping discourses which abound around her. But more likely, it might suggest that the woman transforms a capacity to be affected into a strategy to deflect violence. This gesture of refusal and disidentification is important because it subverts the internalization of the destabilizing value judgements produced by the racializing gaze. In other words, the hijabi woman creates a distinct separation between the function of her own gaze, shielded as it is by her black lenses, and the effects of the gaze of the other upon her. In this sense, she maintains a degree of intentionality as well as her orientation in the world by preserving her capacity to look back and return the gaze of the abuser. It is interesting to note the fact that the co-imbrication of the self and other is subtly referenced by her painting: the misnomers produced from the outside by an objectifying Islamophobic gaze could become part of the self, as it is suggested in the depiction of these labels projected upon the woman's lenses. They can not only disrupt the movement of the body, but block vision and derail the negating gaze back upon oneself. And still, Filali's painting seems to be suggesting that this process is not always already inevitable and incontrovertibly tragic: the hijabi woman's bodily position and gestures enact the very creation of this separation between dominant representation and alternative knowledge deriving from one's lived experience. Her subject appears to position herself in opposition to the grasp of these mis-representational discourses. In other words, what she does see on the horizon, beyond the blur of Islamophobia, is a resilient system of meaning which values her embodied existence in the world.

I would argue that there is a fundamental existential question underlying the debates I've presented in this chapter: to what degree does the co-constitutive relation of the self and other, and implicitly the self and social normativity or representation, can be unhinged

particularly when it is violent and deeply inequitable? I believe the question can be shifted in this case from the ontological to the epistemological realm in order to consider the manner in which the body's orientation and the production of the self can be articulated to alternative practices of knowledge that reject, rework and re-define habits of seeing.

EPILOGUE

The War on Terror Abroad: The Multiple Senses of Vulnerability

> It's strange what you can get used to hearing or seeing. The first time is always the worst: the first time you experience cluster bombs, the first time you feel the earth shudder beneath you with the impact of an explosion, the first tanks firing at houses in your neighborhood, the first check-point…the first broken windows, crumbling walls, unhinged doors…the first embassy being bombed, the first restaurant…It's not that you no longer feel rage or sadness, it just becomes part of life and you grow to expect it like you expect rain in March and sun in July.
>
> (Riverbend, 2003)

SHARED SENSES OF VULNERABILITY IN RIVERBEND'S *BAGHDAD BURNING*

In August 2003, several months into the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, *Baghdad Burning* comes into being, an English language blog allegedly written by a twenty-four year old Iraqi woman, under the pseudonym of Riverbend, detailing her experiences of the "shock and awe" bombing of Baghdad and the chaos of the subsequent U.S. and British occupation of Iraq. Riverbend is a young woman from a middle-class Muslim family in Baghdad, well educated, and, prior to the occupation, financially independent as a computer programmer at a software company. Riverbend's collected blog posts (2003-2006) have been published by The Feminist Press in the United States in two volumes (2005; 2005), which were framed as providing a corrective narrative to the mainstream U.S. representation of the liberation of Iraq from Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. The reception of Riverbend's astute political commentary hinges upon the authenticity of lived experience as the accurate portrayal of a society under siege by imperial powers, as well as on the feminist intent to give voice to the

(other) Iraqi woman. Or, as Ahdaf Soueif puts it in her preface to the book, "it is an articulate, sensitive, often witty, always brave narrative of what it is like to be an Iraqi living in Iraq today […] a narrative authentic for being firmly embedded in the daily life of her family and friends" (vii). Riverbend's own writing often relies on the claim to lived experience, which opens a number of interesting questions for the intersection between transnational feminist politics and phenomenological insights which is foregrounded by my project. First of all, what sort of interpretive frameworks mark lived experience as indicative of textual authenticity? And how is this claim to authenticity complicated by the ambiguous identity of the author? The fact that Riverbend's identity remains unknown disrupts her text's reception as an eminently faithful depiction of life under occupation, despite it often being framed as such. However, despite this ambiguity, Riverbend's narrative is arguably more affecting and effective due to its claim to lived experience. The quoted passage, for instance, evokes the manner in which war takes over everyday life by eroding the senses and normalizing conflict, stress, fear, and anxiety. Riverbend talks about a sense of paralysis in the face of the intractable forms of violence erupting from the occupation, and yet, her writing is also a form of address to her audience, an invitation to imagine the experience of being at war and its paradoxes, however incomprehensible this may be to a comfortable and sheltered public.

Academic response to the *Baghdad Burning* series have been on the one hand invested in giving voice to the other woman by taking for granted the authenticity of the text and upholding Riverbend's perspective as truthful, as evident in McCauliff's article that represents the blog as "an advocacy for maternal peace" through its critique of war and its presentation of counter-narratives about Iraqi women (63). Other critics such as Amira

Jarmakani look instead at the highly mediated reception of Riverbend's writing in the U.S. context claiming that "her counter-narrative engages in a dichotomous logic that ultimately reifies the very categories she wishes to dismantle" (42). According to Jarmakani, Riverbend's blog series participates in a regime of truth premised upon deconstructing stereotypical representations of Iraq by playing to the reception of the Third World woman's voice as authentic. In Jarmakani's view, Riverbend's text regrettably fails to offer a consistent critique in so far as it reproduces expectations about the silent subaltern woman coming into consciousness through gaining a (truthful) political voice. In other words, the subaltern perspective is captured and mediated by U.S. representations of Arab and Muslim women's voices as exceptional occurrences.

In my view, even if it stays within a discursive logic tied to dominant U.S. representations, Riverbend's text marks its distance through acerbic political critiques of the structures of (male) authority in post-invasion Iraq, including the occupying forces, the new Iraqi Governing Council, as well as fundamentalist groups. It would be misleading to fetishize *Baghdad Burning* as *the* authentic depiction of (all) Iraqi women's lives under occupation (certainly Iraqi women experienced the occupation in highly differentiated ways depending on their class and social status, their political investments, and their proximity to the previous Ba'athist regime). But it also seems misleading to me to claim Riverbend's blog remains within the structures of dominant U.S. discourses, without acknowledging its textual specificity, contextual differences, and alternative political investments. After all, *Baghdad Burning* provides a wealth of political opinions pertaining to different segments of Iraqi society, marks the heterogeneity in Iraqi women's experiences of the war, and establishes conversations with other Iraqi blogs, as well as global media. Her blog entries range from

accounts of the lives of ordinary people, including herself, her family, and acquaintances, to sections educating a Western audience with respect to Arab and Muslim customs, to excoriations of the killings and massacres of the U.S. army and its allies, the indifference of U.S. soldiers to the extensive post-invasion looting of public institutions, the divide and conquer imperial strategy that elected a transitional government based on sectarian differences, the enhanced vulnerability of Iraqi women, the reception of the news of the torture at Abu Ghraib in Iraq, the rise of fundamentalist groups, and the foreign contractors benefitting from the reconstruction of the country, amongst many other topics.

When it comes to dispelling biased representations of Iraqi women, Riverbend first prefaces her commentary by marking her own positionality in Iraqi society and the specificity of her experience as a middle-class, Muslim woman, who does not usually veil. She explains, however, that Muslim Iraqi women engage in varied sartorial practices tied to their religious, political, and social attitudes, veiling being often not only an indication of piety, but also a statement regarding class divisions and social ethics. Furthermore, Riverbend marks the historical evolution of women's roles in Iraqi society in the context of the shift in political regimes of governance, noting that prior to the occupation "females in Iraq were a lot better off than females in other parts of the Arab world (and some parts of the Western world—we had equal salaries!)" (2005: 22). Arguably, Riverbend enacts a problematic distinction between Iraqi women's lives before and after the occupation, as a result of an attempt to deconstruct the U.S. government's claim that the invasion liberated Iraqi women from oppression. Although the imperial feminist discourse about Iraqi women was not nearly as pronounced as the one employed regarding Afghan women (who were indeed experiencing varied forms of politicized violence under the Taliban), it was still a

significant component of the representation of the invasion and the occupation of Iraq as an occasion for the achievement of democracy and human rights. Thus, Riverbend emphasizes the political disorder introduced by foreign occupation, including its dismantling of state structures such as the Ba'athist-ruled police force and the military, which further bred an atmosphere of lawlessness, looting, and the flourishing of different criminal gangs and fundamentalist groups in Baghdad and the rest of the country. Riverbend notes that these interconnected forces produced the insecurity felt by Iraqi women, who could no longer go out alone without a male chaperone and who were forced to veil and dress more modestly than before in fear of insults, abduction, or violence (16). Riverbend herself loses her computer programming job since the company she had worked for now considered women a liability.

In *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq* (2009), Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt argue that, despite the declarations of the U.S. government, the situation of Iraqi women considerably deteriorated during the U.S. occupation, but not only because Iraqi women have been the victims of imperialist ambitions (as anti-war activists argued), nor only because they have been under threat due to an increase in Islamic fundamentalist activity in Iraq (as conservatives claimed). Iraqi women's shift in social and political privileges was the effect of interlinked sources of abuse due to "discriminatory practices and policies as well as to violence from a range of sources—political parties, militarized groups, and the occupation forces" (3). The fact that Iraqi women were the focus of some U.S. declarations regarding the advances brought to Iraq after its liberation from Saddam Hussein's dictatorship represented not simply a smokescreen to harness support for military intervention, but also an integral part of empire building. Al-Ali and Pratt argue that the "war on terror" has been premised

upon the reproduction of the "us" versus "them" mentality and has thus benefitted from claiming that U.S.-imported democracy is the only viable platform through which women's rights and equality can be achieved (6).

Riverbend denies dominant U.S. claims through her exploration of the vulnerability of Iraqi women under occupation as the result of an intersection of multiple forms of power and discriminatory practices deriving from foreign occupation, competing Iraqi political parties, criminal gangs, and rebel fundamentalist groups fighting against occupation. Riverbend critiques the efforts of what she calls "the Iraqi Puppet Council" to modify family law according to Islamic Shari'a by manipulating the privileges of women with regard to inheritance, divorce, and child custody (187-188). She offers examples of women who endured sexual violence after being kidnapped for ransom by criminal gangs (68-69), and of women who were killed by fundamentalist groups for refusing to renounce their public roles. However, she also gives accounts of the massacres of the U.S. army in Fallojeh and elsewhere in the country (251), and of family friends and acquaintances kidnapped by U.S. occupation forces and imprisoned at Abu Ghraib due to unfounded suspicions (231-235). Her observations provide a complex map of the instrumentalization of Iraqi women's lives and bodies by different patriarchal forms of political power, both imperialist and nationalist fundamentalist, benefitting from a clash of civilizations discourse that makes a radical demarcation between Western and Islamic socio-political organizations, customs, and ways of being.

Yet some of the most striking and resourceful moments in Riverbend's commentary bring forward her recurrent and consistent reflections on the ethical meanings of human vulnerability, sympathy and pity. In an entry dated May 7 2004, she notes that, in the

beginning, Iraqis felt a certain degree of sympathy for the foreign troops, irrespective of their political views of the occupation. It was particularly their discomfort under the hot Iraqi sun and their discernable unhappiness about being deployed so far away from home that made them seem vulnerable in people's eyes, and "that vulnerability made them seem less monstrous and more human" (261). Shared experiences of vulnerability, Riverbend shows, have the potential to humanize even "the enemy." In some ways, Riverbend is reverting the imperial gaze by looking back at U.S. soldiers and, instead of focusing on their implication in systematic violence, reflects on experiences she can connect with, the discomfort of the heat and homesickness. And yet, after the publication of the Abu Ghraib torture photographs, this general sentiment of pity shifts considerably as Iraqis struggle with rage towards the troops, frustration for not being able to change the situation, and feelings of shame, according to Riverbend. What she remarks upon, in illuminating ways, is the dissension between the individual and the power of the state. In other words, while individual soldiers may be more or less willingly or consciously implicated in imperialist violence, the responsibility lies primarily with those in higher functions who orchestrate and condone the distribution of different forms of violence, as the systematic torture employed at Abu Ghraib has shown.

In another entry dated September 15 2004 which completes the first volume of *Baghdad Burning*, Riverbend returns to these ethical considerations about shared vulnerability when she chances upon Michael Moore's documentary, *Fahrenheit 9/11*. One of the scenes in the film holds her attention in particular—the interview with the mother of a U.S. soldier who mourns his death:

> I pitied her because, apparently, she knew very little about what she was sending her kids into. I was angry with her because she didn't really want to know what she was

> sending her children to do. In the end, all of those feelings crumbled away as she read the last letter from her deceased son. I began feeling a sympathy I really didn't want to feel, and as she was walking in the streets of Washington, looking at the protestors and crying, it struck me that the Americans around her would never understand her anguish. The irony of the situation is that the one place in the world she would find empathy was Iraq. We understand. We know what it's like to lose family and friends to war—to know that their final moments weren't peaceful ones… (285)

Riverbend's mixed affective reaction to the woman is indicative of the need to attribute responsibility for the suffering of numerous Iraqi civilians she has strenuously documented throughout the blog, whether responsibility lies with average U.S. citizens' lack of awareness or even, willful ignorance, of the fate of the victims of U.S. wars. Still, in this moving passage, Riverbend gravitates once again towards identifying the potential for transnational empathy in mobilizing people towards ethical action. By employing a rhetorical strategy that links U.S. families' mourning for their loved ones who perished in the war to the Iraqi families who endured the loss of their families, friends, and living infrastructures, Riverbend invites her audience to create alternative affective connections and senses of solidarity, beyond those prescribed by the logic of nationalism and of imperialism. In this context, she invites a disarticulation of the instrumentalization of affect, of empathy, and of the senses from the structures of the U.S. nation state, and collapses the false binary between Western and Muslim societies by showing that the war takes its toll on everyone.

FROM COLONIAL FEMINISM TO A TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST PRAXIS

This project elaborated a transnational and transhistorical genealogy of the instrumentalization of the vulnerability of the "Muslim woman" figure in different colonial, neo-colonial, and imperialist articulations of power from the Algerian War to the War in Iraq. Thus, one of my aims has been to shift the discourse of vulnerability away from the reproduction of the image of the "Muslim woman" as victimized by Islamic cultures, towards an intersectional understanding of vulnerability as produced by interconnected patriarchal contexts, both Muslim and Euro-American, and by historically continuous forms of Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism, and gendered racialization. Secondly, I've explored the ways in which Muslim, Amazigh, and Arab authors, artists, and activists have reconstituted the disorientation produced by vulnerability as a source of resistance in cultural productions seeking to dis-orient Orientalist habits of seeing and to establish a political and creative forum in which their voices can be heard. Last but not least, Judith Butler's alternative philosophical understanding of vulnerability, as an experience fundamental to living beings that links our common injurability and mortality, can not only alter our understanding of subjectivity as autonomous, but can become a framework for the critical reworking of questions of pity, empathy, and responsibility towards the other. While vulnerability is certainly distributed differently in local and global contexts, depending on the different forms of social and political oppression communities experience, vulnerability can also be a locus for the mobilization of movements of solidarity and mutual responsibility, as Riverbend's reflections have shown. I argue, therefore, that an extended analysis of the potentials and possibilities of reclaiming vulnerability is necessary for postcolonial and transnational

feminism. I would now like to outline a number of insights connected to the incorporation of phenomenological feminism, the politics of the senses, and the discussion about the multiple senses of vulnerability in our transnational and postcolonial feminist frameworks of thought.

First of all, phenomenology and feminism intersect in the privileging of lived experience as one of the main sources of knowledge about the world. As I've shown in this project, one of the first ethical tasks of transnational feminism is to acknowledge the importance of lived experience, not only as the indicator of the positionality of the subject, but also as an alternative, often unconscious, sensorial, or affective understanding of the world. Several of the texts I've studied in this book rely upon elaborate descriptions of the lived experience of disorientation, including Assia Djebar's phenomenological descriptions of cultural hybridization, Leila Aboulela and Mohja Kahf's poetic reflections on cultural displacement, and Amani Al-Khatahtbeh's descriptions of her bodily shame as a result of gendered racialization. While it is certainly crucial to elaborate on these forms of embodiment and affective disorientation, one must avoid the effect of fetishizing them as perpetual indicators of the experiences of different communities at large. In other words, while critical and textual explorations of the lived experience of discrimination can be resourceful to developing our feminist frameworks, we should also mark the historical specificity and cultural production (as well as reception) of the texts we are in the process of investing with authority. This does not necessarily mean that the claim to lived experience should be disavowed, as some feminist critics have assumed in the case of over-determined cultural productions such as Riverbend's blog, *Baghdad Burning*. What is most important, in my view, is preserving a sense of the heterogeneity of lived experiences and striving to diversify our objects of research.

This brings me to my second point regarding the representation of subaltern voices in the common. As we've learned from the resourceful commonalities between Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Assia Djebar's work, one of the main tasks of the postcolonial or transnational feminist is not to represent herself (or himself) as the authoritative and representative guide to understanding subaltern demands and necessities, but to mark her own positionality as part of the process of representation and defer to the language used by other women, despite its mediation and reconstruction. As a personal example, my Eastern European background, U.S.-based education, and limited knowledge of Arabic, have considerably shaped the texts I have had access to and the political investments and attachments I've chosen to emphasize in my readings of women's literature, feminist work, and cultural productions. This project is thus fundamentally invested in postcolonial French- and English-language texts, and explores questions of cultural hybridization, while investing most of its critical energy in deconstructing colonial and imperial forms of violence. This latter aspect is of course contextual and relies upon the political urgencies specific primarily to the U.S. context.

Finally, I have advocated in this project for a feminist politics of sensibility that takes into account the cultural production of the senses, of affective dispositions, and of habitual bodily practices, at the intersection of patriarchal and (neo-)colonial forms of power. For this purpose, a globalized and relational understanding of power is necessary, emphasizing the relationships and parallels between multiple patriarchies and their implication in the different patterns of violence and discriminatory practices enabled by nation states and their actors, as well as their instrumentalization of the senses and of affect. The texts I've studied in this project have shown that ways of seeing are culturally dependent and can be defamiliarized

through inventive poetic and political strategies. They have also reflected on the historically occluded and culturally mediated deployment of women's voices in the political sphere, and have established creative contexts in which alternative forms of expression can be imagined for better futures.

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