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Writing the decolonized self: Autobiographical narrative from the Maghreb

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The Ohio State University, 1991
WRITING THE DECOLONIZED SELF:
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE
FROM THE MAGHREB

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of
The Ohio State University

By
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To My Parents, Paul and Eileen Geesey
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INTRODUCTION

Maghrebian literature of French expression exists as a direct result of the French colonization of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. The emergence of this literature during the early 1950s can be attributed to several factors, the most significant of which was the assimilationist policy that was posited on the assumption that a small number of indigenous inhabitants could be transformed into model French citizens. A select minority of Maghrebian children was chosen to attend French-language schools in the urban areas of French colonies in North Africa. The assimilationist policies that governed the instruction in these schools helped create a class of "elite" indigenous inhabitants who were trained to become active, contributing members of society in their colonized homelands. However, the colonizer's initial assumption was that this class of educated, colonized individuals would help to maintain the status quo of foreign control.
These indigenous inhabitants were given jobs in the administration in the hope that they would act as mediators between the colonizers and the general, native population.

The education of indigenous inhabitants eventually began to weaken the colonizers' position. The colonizers failed to reach their objectives in many cases because they refused to grant equal rights to the "évolués." After becoming familiar with the idealistic principles upon which French society supposedly rests (i.e., "liberté, fraternité, égalité"), Maghrebian students at French schools felt betrayed when they recognized that they would not be accorded the same treatment as French citizens. Rejecting their earlier admiration for the French cultural achievements that they had studied in the colonial schools, intellectuals of the late 1940s and early 1950s began to utilize the French language as a vehicle for political protest, for the condemnation of colonialism, and for the articulation of demands for national liberation.

Many North African intellectuals in the 1950s turned to literature, particularly the novel, as a means to communicate nationalist aspirations. Writers such as Mouloud Feraoun, Mohammed Dib, Driss Chraibi, and Albert Memmi, challenged perceptions of the colonialist status...
quo both in the metropole and in the colony by portraying the devastating effects of colonialism on individuals and on the groups that were subjected to it. Their novels were unabashedly autobiographical, and they themselves believed that a universal message about alienation and about the quest for identity could be proclaimed even if one’s point of departure was a profoundly individual, culturally specific perspective. Works such as Feraoun’s *Le Fils du Pauvre* (1950), Memmi’s *La Statue de sel* (1953), and Chraibi’s *Le Passé simple* (1954) were certainly intended to be read as fiction, but as one proceeds through the constantly growing catalog of Maghrebian French-language literature, one cannot fail to notice a predominance of autobiographical works. Often, as in the case of the works cited above, these narratives were presented as if they were really novels, but, self-referentiality is clearly the main focus of many of them.

The boundaries between autobiography and autobiographical fiction tend to be blurred and indefinite. In using the term "autobiographical narrative," I apply it to works that are based on events from the author’s life, but are not "pure" autobiographies according to Philippe Lejeune’s definition of the word. The texts in question do not always comply with what he calls "le pacte
autobiographique" because their authors deliberately foster doubts in the minds of readers as to whether or not the extra-textual author, the narrator, and the protagonist are all one and the same individual. Thus, these Maghrebian novels fall into Lejeune's category of "roman autobiographique" (5). I refer to these texts as "narratives" because the two principle works discussed in this study are not actually novels; they are narratives that borrow elements from the novelistic genre while employing dramatic dialogues and the non-linear récit (Khatibi) or historical chronicles and transcribed oral narratives (Djebar).

Until recently, autobiography in non-Western cultural contexts has received relatively little attention, although James Olney's 1973 *Tell Me Africa: An Approach to African Literature* did succeed in bringing African autobiographies to the attention of literary scholars. He maintains that autobiography can be read as "the story of a distinctive culture written in individual characters and from within" and that it "offers a privileged access to an experience [...] that no other variety of writing can offer" ("Cultural" 13). Olney's approach implies that a reader of non-Western autobiographies (even if they are written in "Western" languages) needs to develop appropriate "strategies" for
understanding African and other non-Western autobiographies in relation to the contexts in which they were produced. In other words, a reader should not assume that the author's reasons for writing an autobiography are the same in non-Western cultures as they might be in Western cultures. While autobiographical discourse allows the reader access to non-Western cultural perspectives, Olney concludes, the reader should not necessarily expect to find the exact same concepts of the self and of individuality in autobiographies written by authors from non-Western societies.

French-language autobiographical narrative from the Maghreb (during the colonial as well as the post-colonial era) can be best understood when considered in light of the socio-historical context with which it enters into a dialogic relationship. The earliest North African autobiographical novels—Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, Mohammed Dib's *La Grande maison* (1952), and Ahmed Sefrioui's *Le Chapelet d'Ambre* (1949) and *La Boîte à merveilles* (1954)—are generally read as individual and collective self-portraits that are highly ethnographic in tone and presentation.

Writers such as Feraoun and Sefrioui felt they were "attesting" to the humanity and to the dignity of their
people by depicting traditional lifestyles and values. Their works describe a lost childhood world of innocence and security; they themselves view the time before they attended the French school as an era of self-acceptance that would be destroyed by their subjection to a colonial education. In retrospect, they insisted upon depicting their societies in a positive, even idealized light because they were seeking to emphasize the positive values and the cultural specificity of Arab-Muslim North Africa. These early writers understood the potential for self-creation and self-analysis in autobiographical writing. However, their depictions often verge on the picturesque as they proclaim the value of their heritage and the dignity of the colonized largely for the benefit of European readers.

In Memmi’s La Statue de sel and Chraïbi’s Le Passé simple, the self-writing project is an integral part of the emotional and intellectual decolonization process. In fact, the works of these two novelists mark a departure from the earlier ethnographic texts in which a "positive" portrait of the colonized’s culture was presented. The protagonists of these novels rebel against their situation as colonized subjects and reject indigenous values and customs; they feel that, in order for self-decolonization to occur, they must rebel
against all forces (external or internal to their own
culture) that attempt to define them without their
consent. The protagonists of Memmi’s and Chraïbi’s
novels are on a journey to self-knowledge—a journey that
will be successfully completed only when they affirm
their moi by accepting the divisions and ambiguities that
characterize it as the result of their having been
subjected to a specific set of cultural circumstances and
to the French colonial education.

For many Maghrebian authors, autobiographical
narration was an enabling factor in the sense that it
allowed them to compensate for the psychologically
harmful effects of colonialism by reclaiming their status
as "subjects." The term "subject" in this context refers
not only to the writing, self-representing subject, but
also to the individual who regains control over his or
her historical discourse and uses it to negate the
"objectifying" effects of colonization. Memmi’s essay Le
Portrait du colonisé (1957) describes the colonizer-
colonized dialectic in Sartrian terms and discusses the
"power" of the colonizer’s gaze to deny the colonized’s
subjectivity. He then relates how the inherently racist
principles that underpin the structures of colonial
control operate in a series of discursive negations, "Il
n’est pas ceci, n’est pas cela" (105). He refers to this
process as one of "déshumanisation" in which the colonizer exercises control over the colonized by either ignoring the latter's humanity, or by reducing it to insignificant proportions.

According to Memmi, the most effective weapon in the colonizer's "discourse of power" is the refusal to acknowledge the individuality of the colonized. "La marque du pluriel" reaffirms the colonizer's subjectivity (granting him the "power of the gaze") while denying that of the colonized: "Le colonisé n’est jamais caractérisé d’une manière différentielle; il n’a droit qu’à la noyade dans le collectif anonyme. (‘Ils sont ceci... Ils sont tous les mêmes’)" (106). By classifying all members of the indigenous population under the same heading and by viewing them as an indistinct mass, the colonizer effectively denies the uniqueness of the colonized individual. Within the context of Memmi’s explanation of the colonized-colonizer dialectic, autobiographical narrative becomes a tool of self-empowerment for colonized writers, a means to reaffirm their individuality and to assert their subjectivity through first-person narrative.

Emile Benveniste has observed that the relationship between language and the self is a mutually dependent one. An individual’s subjectivity is established through
language and, in turn, he believes, language is only possible because of the human capacity to posit one’s self as a "subject:"

C'est dans et par le langage que l'homme se constitue comme sujet; parce que le langage seul fonde en réalité, dans sa réalité qui est celle de l'être, le concept d'"ego." [...] Le langage n'est possible que parce que chaque interlocuteur se pose comme sujet, en renvoyant à lui-même comme je dans son discours. (259-260)

Benveniste’s theory about the interrelatedness of subjectivity and language suggests the need to reflect upon the implications of a situation in which an individual’s subjectivity is expressed in the language of the Other. The nature of the autobiographical act is cast in a slightly different light when the language being used is not the writer’s mother tongue. In the case of Maghrebian writers who write in French, the raison d'être of their texts is to provide the framework for an analysis of the relationship between the colonized-decolonized subject and the language that is being used to express that subjectivity.

The choice of language for postcolonial writers continues to be an inflammatory issue for some and a moot question for others. In the particular case of Maghrebian French-language autobiography, the choice of language remains problematic in many instances. Precedents for an autobiographical writing do exist in
the Arabic literary tradition (see Shuiskii). Therefore, North African writers who use French for their autobiographical narratives do so for reasons other than the fact that the genre is (erroneously) considered to be a uniquely "Western" one. Why then do many Maghrebian autobiographers continue to use the French language?

Each writer has his or her own reasons for using French in the self-writing project, but a common denominator is that many (de)colonized writers direct their autobiographical discourse towards a dialogue with the European other. In "De la Subjectivité dans le langage," Benveniste notes that the use of first-person narration immediately posits the presence of an interlocutor: "Je n’emploie je qu’en m’adressant à quelqu’un qui sera dans mon allocution un tu. C’est cette condition de dialogue qui est constitutive de la personne, car elle implique en réciprocité que je deviens tu dans l’allocution de celui qui à son tour se désigne par je (260). When colonized writers undertake their self-writing projects in the language of the other, the dialogue they seek to establish serves not only to affirm the colonized’s subjectivity, but also to interpellate the Other. In this way, the colonizer/foreign Other is made aware of the debilitating effects of colonization and of the French educational system on the psyche of the
colonized. A dialogue with the European other is thus initiated in Maghrebian autobiography, obliging the colonizer to relate to the colonized subject as a unique individual.

The implications of the Maghrebian autobiographer's choice of language have not yet been fully explored. However, Kacem Basfao's analysis of Maghrebian literature and the language issue does present a hypothesis that can account for the reasons why more Maghrebian autobiographies are written in French than in Arabic. His premise is that the use of French—the "foreign" or "Other" tongue—facilitates the expression of intimate details of the author's past, family difficulties, sexual encounters, and the social and religious criticisms he or she desires to make. This is so, he maintains, because if one is writing in the "mother tongue," one must, for example, veil sexual references with modesty because a failure to do so would incite the accusation of linguistic "incest." To the extent that Arabic is also the paternal, sacred language of religious tradition, Maghrebian autobiographers are often reluctant to use it in criticizing the social and religious institutions of their own society.

Self-writing is seen as "transgressive" in an Arabic-Islamic context because it appears to be in
conflict with what Basfao characterizes as traditional inhibitions (i.e., modesty) and an emphasis on the collective ("l'oumma") as being more important than the individual (381). Basfao discusses iconoclastic and irreverent texts such as Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* and Chraïbi’s *Le Passé simple*. Although these works are often interpreted as being autobiographical, they interest him primarily because their treatment of family life, women's sexuality, and religious hypocrisy could only have been expressed in French; otherwise they would have violated the taboos of the mother('s) tongue (380). If the autobiographical project is going to succeed in communicating feelings and ideas that might not be acceptable to the author’s Arab-Islamic society, then the use of French makes the autobiographer feel more at liberty to reveal what many people might regard as deviant aspects of his or her personality.

Charibi’s *Le Passé simple* and Memmi’s *La Statue de sel* represent two of the most influential Maghrebian autobiographies of the 1950s. These works elaborate social and religious critiques that sought to expose not only the disastrous personal consequences of French colonialism and French education, but also the mechanisms of a "self-colonizing" society. They establish the model
of a self-dissection that enables an author to examine the alienated and divided nature of his or her own colonized self.

The two novels have several themes in common, the most evident of which is the protagonist's feeling of being a misfit, of being neither North African nor French. As a result of the colonized situation, the hero is "in limbo." The protagonist experiences alienation from the heritage of his family, and yet he cannot find total acceptance in the colonizer's group.

In Le Passe simple, Chraibi's alter ego explains the nature of his untenable situation by remarking on how he feels about the external manifestations of his "difference" from his fellow Moroccans:


His European clothing cannot hide the fact that his ego is divided between two languages and two world views. At home, the narrator's father ridicules him because he desires to wear Western-style clothes. On several occasions, Moroccans are taken aback to learn that Driss is not the young Frenchman that he appears to be. He
does not feel comfortable or accepted in either the French or the Moroccan group; Chraibi's narrator considers himself to be a misfit, bordering on the monstrous, because the external manifestations and the internal reality of his identity are in total disequilibrium with each other. The passage cited above highlights the effect of "doubling" or the internalized schism that characterizes the colonized subject's experience of alienation as depicted in Maghrebian autobiographies from the 1950s. For Chraïbi and Memmi, the possibilities for self-analysis and self-creation offered by the autobiographical narrative model provide a means of exploring the divided self and of lending it a sense of coherence by representing it in textual form. The self-writing project for many writers from the Maghreb can thus be cathartic in the sense that it enables writers to fuse together the fragmented elements of individuality they feel inside themselves.

The adoption of European clothing and mannerisms is not the only external manifestation of an acculturation that belies an internal schism and its concomitant alienation. Both Le Passé simple and La Statue de sel portray the protagonists' confusion about the language that might be best suited to express the divided identity of the colonized subject. In Memmi's novel, Benillouche
desires to feel a solidarity with the other Tunisian Jews who, along with himself, have been taken to work camps by German soldiers. He is forced to recognize that his French education and the bilingualism that resulted from it have caused him to remain constantly aware of the language he uses for different purposes. This acute self-consciousness about language causes him to feel alienated from the people with whom, under the present circumstances, he would most like to engage in a dialogue:

Je pense en français et mes soliloques intérieurs sont depuis longtemps de langue française. Lorsqu’il m’arrive de me parler en patois, j’ai toujours l’impression bizarre, non d’utiliser une langue étrangère, mais d’entendre une partie obscure de moi-même, trop intime et périmée, oubliée jusqu’à l’étrangeté. Je n’ai pas le même malaise quand je m’adresse aux autres, comme si j’utilisais alors un outil indifférent. Mais je ne possédais pas assez de mots en judéo-arabe pour leur dire tout ce que j’avais préparé. [...] Je compris combien j’aurais été plus près d’eux, combien notre conversation aurait été plus intime si j’avais parlé leur langue. (314)

Memmi here presents a theme that dominates Maghrebian French-language autobiographical narrative: the inability of the Other(‘s) tongue to express what is "closest" and most intimately related to the subject’s innermost feelings. Benillouche’s education and bilingualism have split his psyche into two realms: an intellectual one for which French is the most suitable means of expression and a realm of everyday, family life for which the Judeo-
Arabic dialect is most appropriate. The problem facing the narrator at this juncture is that he wishes to boost the prisoners' morale by delivering a homily that subtly alludes to their captors and to their future escape attempts. He recognizes, however, that he is unable to manipulate the dialect in a sufficiently precise manner; he is only capable of such linguistic gymnastics in the language that he had acquired during his education at the colonizer's school. Benillouche's divided ego manifests itself in a bilingualism that is characterized by an inability to function harmoniously or simultaneously in the two different languages. Each language remains separate from the other and serves different purposes under different circumstances.

The (de)colonized subject thus experiences an internal division on a linguistic level, and this schism becomes apparent in autobiographical narrative because the inherent interrelatedness of language and self is exposed in the self-writing project. For this reason, the Maghrebian autobiographer raises a question that continues to be debated in contemporary critical discussions of autobiography: namely, is the self transcendent and independent of language, or does the self need language in order to exist? (Eakin 181). Maghrebian autobiographical narratives illustrate the
ambivalencies of the entire self-language question. Benillouche and other Maghrebian fictional protagonists identify their monolingual childhood with a "lost paradise" of unified selfhood. In nostalgic recollections of this time of innocence, they do not question the mother tongue's ability to translate or to communicate the reality perceived by the self. Only the acquisition of the Other('s) tongue and the resulting internalized schism give rise to the autobiographer's reflection about the nature of the bilingual, divided selfhood.

Memmi and other Maghrebian autobiographical writers come to the realization that each language remains distinct and expresses different facets of the ego in different situations, and their epiphany in this regard occurs during a period of crisis when selfhood or identity has been perceived in terms of being a "grotesque" individual or a "misfit." Although the self-writing project is cathartic insofar as it enables narrator-authors to vent their frustrations with the insoluble dilemma of their fractured identities. They are ultimately left with no illusions about the possibility of recovering the lost ego or of fusing together its divided parts. At the end of La Statue de gel, Benillouche opts for exile in Argentina as a means
of escaping from his past and from a split identity that he cannot reconcile with himself. Before his departure, he destroys the journals in which he has minutely traced his itinerary of bitter alienation and division, thus symbolically acknowledging the futility (and the emotional "danger") of "looking backwards," of truly understanding his past and how he has come to be who he is.

Many critics have remarked on the pervasiveness of autobiographical narrative in the field of Maghrebian French-language literature, but few have explored the reasons behind this situation in more than a cursory fashion. The fact is that, since the publication of Feraoun's *Le Fils du pauvre*, Maghrebian autobiographical writing has clearly undergone an evolution in terms of its dominant thematic concerns and its characteristic narrative structure. The publication of Abdelkébir Khatibi's *La Mémoire tatouée* in 1971 marked a turning point in Maghrebian autobiographical writing because it creates a new space for itself in the midst of previous autobiographical models, especially *Le Passé simple*, because of its emphasis on self-referentiality. In *La Mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi self-consciously meditates on the possibility of autobiography in the larger sense of
the word; he also reflects upon the illusion of the unified self in a postcolonial context.

The case of the Algerian writer Assia Djebar represents another sort of departure from previous examples of Maghrebian autobiographical writing. Unlike the work of male Maghrebian French-language novelists who began their careers with the publication of an autobiographical work, Djebar's earliest novels were not autobiographical, although they were narrated in the first-person. After the publication of five fictional works and the production of two films, however, Djebar undertook the writing of an admittedly autobiographical "narrative." L'Amour, la fantasia (1985) portrays the novelist's childhood and her "coming to writing."

Reflecting on the cultural and religious proscriptions against women's first-person discourse, her work focuses upon the social conditions of Algerian women; her own life and the lives of her female relatives from several generations serve as examples for the points she is attempting to make. In contrast to other Maghrebian autobiographical writings, L'Amour, la fantasia makes no pretense to being a fictional portrayal. Indeed, the story of her own life is interwoven with the lives of nineteenth-century Algerian women and with women's
accounts of their own activities during the Algerian revolution of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Djebar and Khatibi both challenge the existing models of Maghrebian French-language autobiography through their highly self-conscious use of new self-writing paradigms. The self-portrait of the split and alienated colonized subject has given way in their works to a sophisticated examination of questions surrounding bilingualism and subjectivity, identity and difference, and the nature of the autobiographer's relationship to the text that results from the self-writing act. Both writers question the ability of language to translate and communicate the self. The self-writing projects undertaken by Memmi and Chraibi were not premised upon a profound skepticism with regard to the capacity of language to sustain the act of self-portraiture. Both authors felt that self-writing was cathartic and could help bring about an "autodécolonisation" during which their "fictional" alter-egos would testify about their nostalgia for the "pure" and innocent time of childhood or vehemently expose the sufferings of tormented and alienated individuals who can find peace neither within the family nor within the world of the Other.

Djebar and Khatibi consciously wrote their autobiographies in a postcolonial situation, and this
factor helps explain how their works differ from earlier Maghrebian autobiographical texts. Published during a period of ongoing French colonial presence in North Africa, *Le Passé simple* and *La Statue de sel* depict the colonized subject's reaction to the colonial situation from the perspective of someone who is still living within it. Khatibi and Djebar came of age near the end of French colonial rule in the Maghreb, and although they were profoundly influenced by French colonial education in much the same manner as were writers such as Kateb Yacine, Memmi, and Dib, their autobiographical narratives also reflect the attempt to reconcile the two linguistic and cultural spheres that had shaped the evolution of their identities. This desire for recovery and growth characterizes their perception of a "postcoloniality," one that seeks to end futile recriminations against former colonial masters and to end writers' reliance on the time-worn themes of protest and alienation.

Khatibi's text breaks new ground by examining the self-other question in light of what he describes as the plural heritage and the cultural-linguistic "hospitality" of the Maghreb—a region that has served as the site of cultural métissage for many centuries. Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* is innovative in the sense that it situates *écriture féminine* in an Arab-Islamic cultural context.
while embedding it in a French linguistic context. She examines her relationship to both French and (dialectal as well as classical) Arabic, and she meditates on what it means for an Arab Muslim woman to "write" (in any language)—an act that has traditionally been seen as a transgression against male authority and power.

The works of Khatibi and Djebar complement each other because they revitalize and challenge previous models of Maghrebian autobiographical narrative. In Le Roman Maghrébin, Khatibi discusses the techniques of North African autobiographical writing and observes that Sefrioui’s and Feraoun’s desire to "testify" on behalf of their own culture caused them to become mired in a quagmire of ethnographic portrayal that did not, in reality, accomplish its intended goal of "proving" the humanity of the colonized. He believes also that the use of autobiography by writers such as Chraibi and Memmi, while being more sophisticated than that of earlier writers, remained ultimately unsatisfactory because they failed to examine the assumptions upon which the autobiographical model was based and to question its adequacy as a tool of self-expression.

According to Khatibi, Maghrebian writers would benefit from a self-conscious examination of the relationship between the text and its author: "[...]
l'autobiographie doit être une manière de se dire encore présent, [...] elle est une permanente remise en question du monde et de l'homme..." (110). The autobiographical projects of Khatibi and Djebar do call into question the relationship between the writer and the world, between the autobiographer and his or her self-portrait. Neither of them is overcome by the sense of having lost the mother tongue as a result of having been subjected to a colonial education. On the contrary, they focus upon the Maghrebian writer's growing awareness of the advantages of bilingualism and the possibility of using it to analyze (from within and without) the autobiographer's own relationship to language. The "double vision" of the bilingual autobiographer's gaze enables both Djebar and Khatibi to explore their "coming to writing" in the French language. In turn, the path they retrace leads them back to a re-discovery of the mother tongue and to a recognition that, rather than being in opposition to each other, the sphere of the "Other" tongue and the sphere of the mother tongue can function harmoniously together, affecting each other and intertwining with each other in the writer's conscious and subconscious mind. Djebar's and Khatibi's autobiographical narratives thus provide an answer to Eakin's question about the dependency of the self on language: the self can never completely transcend
language because language is a prerequisite to self-awareness, an enabling factor in any "fictional" self-creation or self-exploration. If language does not actually "create" the self, the autobiographical act (as practiced by contemporary Maghrebian writers of French expression) allows for a conscious, dialogic exploration of the bilingual self, of the languages affecting its development, and of the nature of the text that results from this self-analysis.
CHAPTER I

L'Amour, la fantasia: Autobiography/Auto-Autopsy

Tout de moi se liguait pour m'interdire l'écriture: l'Histoire, mon histoire, mon origine, mon genre. Tout ce qui constituait mon moi social, culturel. À commencer par le nécessaire, qui me faisait défaut, la matière dans laquelle l'écriture se taille, d'où elle s'arrache: la langue. Tu veux--écrire? Dans quelle langue?

Hélène Cixous
"La Venue à l'écriture" (20)

Assia Djebar was born in the Algerian city of Cherchell in 1936; one year later, Hélène Cixous was born in the city of Oran, also a coastal Algerian city. Although of different religious and cultural backgrounds, both were born into colonized societies, and both came of age during the last decades of colonial French rule in Algeria. In the works of Djebar and Cixous, women's writing is shown to be an act of transgression; their desire to express a pure female subjectivity is complicated by their bilingualism and by their inability to express themselves in the mother('s) tongue. As the passage from "La Venue à l'écriture" illustrates, external forces sought to prevent Cixous from finding a "lieu d'où écrire" (23).
Without the maternal language, or with recourse only to a masculine discourse, the problem of écriture féminine developed in Cixous's essay revolves around woman's inability to express her féminité in the paternal language: "'Je suis'... qui oserait parler comme dieu?" (24). Both Djebar and Cixous have sought to locate a new discursive site of feminine difference.

In Cixous's autobiographical essay "La Venue à l'écriture," and in Djebar's L'Amour, la fantasia, the two writers trace their "coming to writing" as it has led them from the mother('s) tongue, into the language of the (masculine) Other. Both texts articulate the quest for a feminine discourse in which the woman can express her "moi" by challenging the reader to re-evaluate commonly held beliefs on the transcendency and referentiality of language as it relates to women's experiences.

Ever since the publication of her first work, Djebar's style and the themes of her works have evolved from what was termed a kind of "hedonism and egotism" by Algerian critics to an interest in depicting the solidarity of the female collective within Algerian society. Yet all through her writings, which range from novels, essays, theater, and poems, to translations of Arabic-language women writers, Djebar has maintained that there exists a need for a rejuvenated, more active women's intercommunication capable
of engendering a new era of understanding and equality between Algerian men and women. From the assertion of a young girl's "moi" in La Soif and Les Impatients to a portrayal of the difficulties for "le couple algérien" and the realities of life for Algerian women who did not receive all the hoped-for social and political changes from the Revolution, Djebar's work has grown and matured in seriousness and sophistication throughout her long career.¹

Although Djebar's initial two novels are narrated in the first-person, they are not (by the author's own admission) autobiographical and therefore will not figure significantly in this study. Les Enfants du nouveau monde (1962) and Les Alouettes naïves (1967) both deal with the effects of the Algerian Revolution on the lives of men and women from various socio-economic backgrounds. To this day, the novels are required reading in many Algerian high school and university literature courses; both portray the prise de conscience of French-educated, young Algerians who come to the realization that their society can be founded exclusively neither on traditional and religious values nor on the thoughtless imitation of French mores and customs. These two works effectively silenced many of Djebar's politically-minded critics, and at the same time, hinted at the major themes that would become the focus of her post-1980 novels: stunted male-female communication, aborted
relationships between men and women, and woman's quest for a fulfilling and active role in the new Algerian society.

One of Djebar's severest critics is Mostefa Lacheraf, a social historian and former minister of education; his influential 1963 essay in *Les Temps Modernes* criticizes several Algerian writers, among them Djebar and Malek Haddad, whom he feels do not adequately reflect the concerns of the majority of the Algerian people. Writing in French himself, Lacheraf demonstrates little sympathy for the situation of Algerian writers who, unable to communicate effectively in Arabic, remain alienated from the culture and religion of their origins. In "L'Avenir de la culture algérienne," he observes: "Il faut démystifier Malek Haddad et Assia Djebar, ce sont des écrivains qui n'ont jamais saisi nos problèmes, même les plus généraux. Ils ont tout ignoré, sinon de leur classe petite bourgeoise, du moins de tout ce qui avait trait à la société algérienne; de tous les écrivains algériens, ce sont eux qui connaissent le moins bien leur pays, ce qui les pousse à escamoter les réalités algériennes sous une croûte poétique, elle-même sans originalité du point de vue du roman" (733-4).

Lacheraf failed to recognize the value of an Algerian woman's writing that depicted the specific dilemma of the *évoluée*, who is obliged to walk a tightrope between, on the one hand, her expectations for liberation and her right to
make her own choices, and on the other hand, family and social pressures that attempt to confine her within the established boundaries of modest behavior for Muslim women. The most important theme in Djebar’s early fiction—a theme often overlooked by her male critics—is that of the young woman’s sensual awareness of her own body as she walks freely in the sunlight or races her car on the highway to feel the wind blowing on her skin and through her hair. Her desire for free movement out of doors symbolizes the young woman’s refusal to become cloistered and cut off from society in order to assuage the Algerian male’s fear of dishonor if she and others like her should assume control over their own movements and sexuality.

Her impulse might also be interpreted as the young woman’s search for individuality and for a voice in which to express her uniqueness. As can be seen in L’Amour, la fantasia, young women of Djebar’s generation and background were seeking in the mid-1950s, to express their "difference" from the previous generation’s model of appropriate feminine behavior: not standing out from the collective, not raising one’s voice above anyone else’s for fear of being seen as "different." The heroines of Djebar’s early novels revel in their new-found possibilities to experience freedom of movement out of doors, to meet with men who are not members of their immediate families, and to engage in dialogues on
the future of male-female relationships in an independent Algeria.

Linked to women's control of their own physical and emotional space is the theme of the Algerian couple. In pre-1970 Maghrebian fiction, it is rare to find romantically linked Algerian couples in which both partners are Muslim, Algerian citizens. Only a few texts, among them Kateb Yacine's *Nedjma* (1956), presented an Algerian woman as the target of romantic and sexual desires. It was more common for male writers to manifest their own alienation and frustrated desires in attempting to assimilate French culture by depicting an évolute who was married to a European woman or involved in an amourous relationship with one. For these writers and their fictional alter-egos, love with an Algerian woman was regarded as impossible because, if she had not, like the protagonist, received a French education, she would be viewed as "arriérée" and incapable of complementing the hero's own fractured identity.²

From *La Soif* to her most recent novel, *Ombre Sultane*, Djebar has explored the issues facing the modern Algerian couple, most significantly, the difficulty of male-female communication. The need for uninhibited discussion of the Algerian woman's sexuality as well as her changing marital and social role in the "new" Algeria is, in her opinion, of tantamount importance. An effective male-female dialogue--
one in which both men and women participate equally—is necessary before real social change can occur in Algeria. Many young Algerian women demonstrated their willingness to fight for political independence by playing an active role in the Revolution. But did the country's independence in 1962 give Algerian women a greater degree of control over their own sexuality? Did they attain equal political and economic rights? Did they acquire a means for making their concerns known in the political arena? The 1981 Algerian constitution contains no provisions to guarantee a woman's right to work outside the home; divorce and inheritance laws continue to be based on the Sharia, ensuring men more power than women in such matters. As Djebar suggests, the concerns that women expressed publically before the promulgation of the new constitution obviously fell on deaf ears.

In a 1969 interview with Monique Hennebelle, she discussed what she feels to be a major difference between her own writings and those of male Maghrebian authors whose protagonists are involved in a rebellion against tradition, the father, and Islam. For male writers, the quest for identity invariably implies the rejection of the family:

L'adolescence est l'âge de refus. À 17 ans, on veut s'affirmer contre sa famille. Mais j'accorde dans mes livres moins de place à cette lutte--capitale au demeurant--qu'au problème du couple qui constitue à mes yeux, le problème essentiel pour une femme, et que ces
She goes on to explain that, while her heroines rebel against the constraints of tradition, the struggle that must take precedence derives from their need to reclaim their own subjectivity, to become the sujet of their own discourse. According to Djebar, Algerian women have learned that, after independence, a major obstacle continues to block their path towards equality: they must squarely confront the lack of options that exist for them within the boundaries of marriage and society. If an effective male-female dialogue can be established within the couple, then there is a better chance that the needs of both partners will be satisfied.

In Djebar's first two novels and in the fictional works that she wrote about the Algerian revolution, Les Enfants du nouveau monde and Les Alouettes naïves, she portrayed heroines who are engaged in the quest for a self-fulfillment that balances the needs for personal freedom and intellectual growth with the needs for sexual and emotional companionship. Often the weight of tradition and bien séance, or emotional scars from the Revolution, or a general inability to initiate an intimate, effective communication between marriage partners, make the woman's quest more difficult. From Les Alouettes naïves to two of her recent works (the short story "Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement" and the novel Ombre Sultane), Djebar becomes
increasingly pessimistic with regard to the future of the Algerian couple. Achieving a non-exploitive, mutually satisfying sexual-emotional union appears to be virtually impossible in Djebar's fiction because women are not accustomed to expressing their affective needs and because men fail to anticipate these needs. In *Ombre Sultane*, published nearly twenty-five years after Algerian independence and the creation of a "new" society, Djebar portrays the Algerian couple as stagnating in a silent morass of mutual unintelligibility. The frustrated bourgeois Algerian drinks and beats his wife for going out without a veil because she had simply desired to experience a greater freedom of movement. He cannot accept the fact that his first wife, whom he had married for love, left him to live freely, without a man. His attitude is characteristic of the men in Djebar's novels--men who invariably seek to impose their will and their ideals on women.

Throughout her fiction, Djebar maintains that, if Algerian women hope to achieve liberation, they must first challenge the widely held assumptions that their bodies are not their own and that there is no place in Maghrebian society for a woman who demands control of her own sexuality. Only recently have Djebar's critics recognized the importance of an "écriture sur/du corps" in her
However, the sensual awakening of the young women in her fiction is not limited to strictly sexual connotations. In a more basic sense of the term, Djebar's young heroines revel in the feeling of sunlight and wind on their bare flesh; they feel alive and at peace with themselves when they are simply wandering the streets, enjoying a freedom of circulation that is normally reserved for men in traditional, Maghrebian, Muslim society. Taboos against women's sexual pleasure are not the issue for Djebar as she points out in an interview—echoing the studies of Mernissi—that frigidity is certainly not the central problem for Muslim women. On the contrary, the Qur'an explicitly reminds men that they must not be selfish in taking their pleasure and that legitimate sexual intercourse gives no cause for guilt. Djebar explained her position on the subject in an interview with Marguerite Le Clézio: "Dans la sensibilité musulmane, le plaisir n'est pas du tout lié au péché, vraiment pas. Donc, je n'ai pas cette blessure-là. Les femmes arabes sont 'coupées' pour un tas de raisons, leur voix est peut-être étouffée, mais ce ne sont pas des femmes frustrées. Je parle des femmes traditionelles..." (239).

The "aspect corporel" of Djebar's fiction is thus the manifestation of a desire or thirst for sensual experiences in the outside, natural world as well as the external sign
of the woman's acceptance and jouissance in her own, unique sexuality. In the section on Djebar in Littérature maghrébine de langue française, Jean Déjeux describes her "écriture du corps" as similar to the hedonistic pleasures of sun, water, and sky so vital to the aesthetic vision of Camus:

Cette découverte du corps se fait d'une manière très charnelle et très sensuelle. Ce sont d'abord des sensations et des jouissances qui nous rappellent celles des Noces ou de L'Été de Camus. Le soleil réchauffe la terre, la mer est proche, le sable est chaud. On se laisse aller à la rêverie et à la somnolence. Bref, on jouit du moment présent, on vit et on existe avec un corps purement et simplement. (256)

The early critical readings of La Soif and Les Impatients were concerned either with the author's lack of political engagement or with what one described as a Racinian, classically restrained style. Djebar herself agreed with this reading, and she explained to Le Clézio that she now understands why the spirit of classical French drama held such a strong appeal for her: "Je me tournais vers un siècle où la censure était importante, où les écrivains écrivaient à travers des miroirs, à travers les mythes, à travers l'histoire très ancienne, pour pouvoir parler de l'actualité, au moyen de cette écriture déviée qui aboutit à une écriture de limpidité" (236). Writing with mirrors appeals to Djebar because it reflects her concern for "dissimulation through writing in French." The sensual,
corporal nature of Djebar's texts might well be a screen masking a political concern in the text, but there is certainly no mistaking the feminine presence in the text and the importance given to the movement of women within a masculine space—in a North African-Muslim context, masculine space is any out-of-doors public space. In light of contemporary French feminist theoretical writings (in particular those of Cixous), one can re-read Djebar's earliest novels with a new understanding of the role of the female drive toward *jouissance*. The heroine's awakening to her sensual self and her quest for a new order of existence that will satisfy her mind and body demonstrate the will of the "jeune née" to actively/aggressively take her pleasures from the world around her. In doing so, the young Algerian woman acquires a sense of self; she assumes her feminine subjectivity fully and in a manner that challenges traditional expectations of women's reluctance to draw attention to themselves.

In her interview with Le Clézio, Djebar touched upon the theme of the female body and upon women's writing "à partir du corps." When asked if her "écriture du corps" resembles that of other French-language, women writers in the sense that the point of departure is a "drive towards gestation," *jouissance*, or childbirth, Djebar's response is
revealing, especially in light of the ten-year hiatus in her own literary career:

Peut-être que j'ai arrêté d'écrire lorsque j'ai vu que j'allais vraiment écrire sur le corps. Si tu veux, mon écriture est sur le corps...et en même temps sur le bonheur. Ou peut-être sur la jouissance et le plaisir; non, je ne pense pas que c'est sur le bonheur, c'est-à-dire, le présent, [...]

Et je pense que le dizaine d'années de silence que j'ai eue était faite pour surmonter une contradiction. En tant que transmettrice, j'ai tout de même à parler de l'étouffement de générations de femmes arabes. Mais en même temps, je n'ai pas ressenti cet étouffement dans ma vie individuelle, en tout cas, jusqu'à ce que je devienne une femme mure; maintenant, si je m'étouffe, je m'étouffe par moi-même, tu comprends? Il y a d'une part ce désir de parler de mon expérience individuelle... Il y a un terme que j'emploie quelquefois [...] le mot engorgement. En fait, quelque part dans ma vie, j'ai eu l'expérience d'être rassasiée... (238)

Djebay is suggesting here that, as she matured in her career as a writer and as she became increasingly interested in the situation of Algerian women, she came to recognize the contradictory nature of her status as a "femme de lettres" who had been born into a culture where, until recently, women of all social backgrounds had remained illiterate. Their access to "la parole orale" had been controlled and limited to the confines of the family home. Within this context, Djebay has become more and more intent upon becoming a "transmettrice," or spokesperson, for Algerian women. How could she write about their experiences, their frustrations, when she herself had led what could only be termed a privileged life that included an advanced education
and a successful career as a writer, film maker, and university professor? In the ten years during which she had retreated from writing, she reflected on this situation; this process culminated in her decision to adopt cinema as a means of creating an artistic union between herself and Algerian women who lived in a traditional milieu, specifically those who lived in the Mount Chenoua region from which Djebar's maternal ancestors had come.

To date, Djebar has produced two films: La Nouba des femmes du Mount Chenoua (1979) and Zerda, ou les chants d'oubli (1982), both of which depict Algerian women in rural environments. In the first film, village women recall their experiences during the Algerian Revolution, when a French-educated daughter of the tribe returned to the mountain village in search of clues to her younger brother's disappearance during his involvement with the maquis. Accompanied by her daughter and her husband (who is paralyzed as a result of an accident), the young woman returns to the village of her maternal ancestors. The husband's silent, impotent, and voyeuristic presence in the film increases the dramatic tension as he helplessly watches the woman being reborn to herself through her re-discovery of her collective memories and through her bonding to her daughter in an atmosphere that is filled with the healing
and rejuvenating powers of the female collective (Tamzali 100-105).

Djebar has explained that her own return to the Chenoua region—a world she associates with her own childhood that had been spent in an extended family of cloistered, female relatives—gave her the impetus to begin writing again. Most importantly for Djebar's autobiographical L'Amour, la fantasia, the return to the traditional world of rural Algerian women motivated her to reflect on two aspects of her personality: the linguistic realms of langue paternelle (French) and langue maternelle (dialectal Arabic). The two languages that shaped the development of her "moi" are in turn associated with women's writing (in French) and women's discourse or speech (in dialectal Arabic). Djebar's autobiographical narrative is, in part, a retrospective meditation on her own "coming to writing" and on her feelings toward the two languages that are sometimes separate, sometimes reconciled within her own concept of self. The reader comes to recognize that L'Amour, la fantasia was not an easy text for Djebar to write; there are several references to the author's hesitancy to write about herself in the first-person. Her recollections of accepted women's behavior within the extended family illustrate that during her youth, women were not encouraged to assume their subjectivity. She relates that another obstacle to
autobiographical writing is caused by her ambivalent feelings toward the French language:

But no historical or sociological explanations can now prevent the woman of Islam from thinking of herself as an individual in her own right. (UNESCO Courrier 25)

Me mettre à nu dans cette langue me fait entretenir un danger permanent de déflagration. De l'exercice de l'autobiographie dans la langue de l'adversaire d'hier... (241)

Assia Djebar's *L'Amour, la fantasia* retraces the itinerary that led her away from the harem, through a French education in colonial schools and at French universities, to a "coming to writing," a return to the world of "la parole orale," and a rediscovery of the Algerian feminine collective. It is a polyphonic, complex novel in which the author juxtaposes first-person, autobiographical narration with Algerian women's oral narratives that detail their personal experiences of combat, arrest, torture, and incarceration during the Algerian Revolution. Alternating with these female voices are excerpts that Djebar collected from the writings of French soldiers, journalists, and artists who came to Algeria during the nineteenth century to participate in the French conquest and its aftermath of "pacification" and colonial administration. The scraps of "male" texts describe the role and presence of Algerian women during the French conquest--their victimization as well as their efforts to resist the invaders.
L'Amour, la fantasia is an "autobiographie plurielle" whose objective is to give voice to Algerian women, including Djebbar herself—to women who must resist traditional forces that seek to enclose them in veils of silence. According to Djebbar, Algerian women must strive for greater access to "la parole" both in writing and in speaking. Her particular concern, as the quote from the UNESCO Courier demonstrates, is that, in the past, women from Arab-Islamic cultural backgrounds have been consigned to the shadows, that is, to the inside of their homes. When she describes women thinking and talking about themselves as "individuals," she is referring to women who claim the right to first-person discourse. The attempt to provide herself and other Algerian women with a "forum" from which they can speak directly about their own lives might appear relatively easy to accomplish, but Djebbar's work also focuses upon the difficult relationship between colonized autobiographers and "la langue adverse," upon the doubts they might experience about the "self-writing" project in a language that is not the mother('s) tongue. Djebbar's first novels, written between 1956-58, were often criticized because they fail to mention the struggle for independence that had reached its most violent point during those years. It is almost as if she consciously repressed the presence of French troops and colonizers in her homeland and the political struggles that
dominated day-to-day life then. She herself explained her reasons for excluding such material in a 1968 article entitled "Le Romancier dans la cité arabe." Her remarks in this essay underscore her own essentially ambivalent relationship to the French language:

Vivant alors en plein les incidents de la guerre d'Algérie, il aurait été indécent de ma part d'utiliser cette vie comme thème. C'était pour moi alors plus que de la politique, plus que de la littérature, oh bien plus, la vie la plus quotidienne possible. Erreur peut-être? Je n'en sais rien. D'autre part, je me méfiais, je me méfie toujours d'une littérature a priori témoignage, d'autre part, parce que j'écrivais en français, je pensais alors que je n'avais à faire entrevoir "aux autres" qu'une surface de moi et des miens; en somme, le passage à une autre langue me faisait prendre comme règle de départ dans la facture du roman la dissimulation. Quelque chose comme "j'écris pour cacher ce qui me semble le plus important"... (118)

In Djebars view, writing in French while living through the events of the Revolution were irreconcilable. She acknowledges a tension between the desire to express intimate feelings and the capacity of French—"la langue des autres"—to communicate what is closest to her heart. She herself seems to be asking whether or not the French language can be used by an Algerian woman as a tool for total self-revelation or "unveiling."

Unlike several Maghrebian authors who never felt compelled to examine the nature of their relationship to the French language, Djebar's comments in essays and interviews indicate that this issue has been a constant source of
reflection and anguish for her. As she notes in the passage above, her thoughts about French ("la langue adverse" as she calls it) suggest an awareness that she might be hiding something, protecting herself from giving away too much of her innermost self. This awareness helps explain the difficulty Djebar has experienced in deciding to write an autobiographical narrative in the Other's language. How can one overcome the need for "dissimulation" in "la langue des autres"? The desire to hide oneself is (supposedly) antithetical to autobiography, which is generally perceived in the West as being the most intimately "honest" and "revealing" of genres.

In the autobiographical novels of Maghrebian writers such as Tahar Ben Jelloun (Harrouda 1973), Abdelhak Serhane (Messaouda 1983), and Driss Chraibi (Le Passé simple 1954), the protagonists' mothers enlist their sons as a captive audience in order to relate the story of their lives; sometimes their narratives are recounted night after night in a ritualistic manner. The autobiographer-novelist then takes advantage of the opportunity to include his mother's story along with his own. In Harrouda, Ben Jelloun adds a postface in which he summarizes the significance of the mother's narration of her life story: "La parole est déjà une prise de position dans une société qui la refuse à la femme" (184). The mother's telling of her life can be seen
as a transgressive act because women have traditionally been expected to remain silent. When she initiates her own discourse, she is marking her refusal to adopt an attitude of silent resignation. Although her words are not always written, their value should not be underestimated.

Orality and folktale have long been associated with women's space and social roles in Muslim North Africa. To a certain extent, of course, anthropological research reaffirms the existence of this image, which exists for a number of reasons. Literacy rates in Maghrebian countries have gradually increased since the late 1950s, but there continues to be wide discrepancies between the literacy rates for boys and those for girls, between those for urban children and those for children living in the countryside. In isolated villages and in the shanty towns of large urban cities, many children fail to receive any education beyond the most elementary level because their families lack the financial means to provide appropriate clothing and school supplies. Also, many children are kept at home to work in the fields, especially if their families are engaged in subsistence agriculture. Even when boys are allowed to continue in school, girls often stay home to assist with household chores and the care of younger siblings. In 1982, girls accounted for only 38% of the total enrollment in

For Algerian women, the principle issue has been and continues to be women's free access to public and private discourse, regardless of whether it is conducted in oral or written form. In Djebar's fiction and in her essays on the condition of Algerian woman, one of her main concerns involves her desire to make Algerian Muslim women aware of the internalized, invisible veils they wear—veils that act as a barrier to direct speech and to a discourse in which they can openly assume the role of sujet in writing and speaking of themselves. Such veils compound the social, political, and economic challenges they face in post-independent Algeria.

Upon Djebar's return to writing after the first of her films, she dealt with women's silence and the self-imposed veils that inhibit direct discourse. According to her, the only way to overcome this wall of silence that threatens to imprison all of Algerian society is for women to reinstate a lost form of communication among women; it was lost due to the cultural sclerosis that one hundred and fifty years of colonial rule had imposed on them. This new invisible veil, which even today's liberated Algerian woman continues to wear, has taken the place of the traditional stone walls of
the harem. It confines women’s discourse and subjectivity nearly as effectively as the methods employed in the past:

...j’étais une prisonnière muette. Un peu comme ces femmes d’Alger d’aujourd’hui, que tu vois circuler dehors sans le voile ancestral, et qui pourtant, par crainte des situations nouvelles non prévues, s’entortillent dans d’autres voiles, invisibles ceux-là, bien perceptibles pourtant... Moi de même: des années après Barberousse, je portais encore en moi ma propre prison! ("Femmes d’Alger" 65)

— Je ne vois pour les femmes arabes qu’un seul moyen de tout débloquer: parler, parler sans cesse d’hier et d’aujourd’hui, parler entre nous, dans tous les gynécées, les traditionnels et ceux des H.L.M. Parler entre nous et regarder. Regarder dehors, regarder hors des murs et des prisons!... La femme-regard et la femme-voix, ajouta-t-elle.... ("Femmes d’Alger" 68)

Many women who have thrown off the veil of cloth have not yet overcome their reluctance to speak about themselves in the first-person, to become the sujet of their own discourse. Centuries of Islamic-Berber tradition and one hundred and fifty years of colonialism have fostered the social, religious, political, and economic factors that constrain Algerian women to remain silent. Their presence is still not supposed to be manifested in the outside world, except as the shadowy, veiled figures that move silently through the streets. Even behind closed doors, as the sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba relates, tradition maintained that women’s voices must not be raised to the point at which they might be heard in the street (53). Because a woman’s voice could reputedly induce fitna, or (seductive) chaos, her silence was required to ensure a
well-ordered society. The weight of secular and religious traditions still pressure Algerian women to keep silent, for as Muslim feminists point out, the veil covers the lower part of the face and specifically the mouth, suggesting the image of women being physically coerced into silence.

The only way, in Djebar's view, to open the floodgates of women's discourse, is for women to discard their shrouds of reticence, to reflect upon themselves and their experiences in the world, and to discuss these subjects jusqu'au fond. To speak and to write represent, she believes, a salvation for women who have been denied access to la parole. Sarah and Leila's woman-to-woman communication in "Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement" constitutes the first phase of a psycho-affective therapy; it is a "déblocue ment" that will enable them to recover from the festering wounds they still bear as a result of the Algerian war.

As early as 1975, Djebar remarked upon women's (inculcated) silence in her essay in the UNESCO Courrier: "Indeed, Muslim women are all too often silent, and they appear to be so all the time. The assumption, sometimes overstated, that they excercise a measure of authority behind the scenes is small consolation and one which is generally offered to oppressed minorities" (28). Responding to researchers who believe that the domestic authority women
excercise within the household is a sign of empowerment and an indication that women play an active role in society, Djebar suggests that, while Algerian women may have access to la parole orale, their direct access to written discourse has been limited by an Islamic tradition of schooling primarily boys. Djebar discusses her own relationship to written and oral discourse in L'Amour, la fantasia, where she reveals the difficulty she herself experienced in coming to terms with the need for Algerian women to begin to speak about and to observe their own experiences from the "objective" and retrospective stance of the autobiographical act.

Djebar wrote her autobiographical text after the production of her two films and her return to writing in 1980. The hiatus in her career, as she explained, was a time of reflection and personal growth. Djebar began to study Arabic in the hope that she could write fiction in it, thereby returning to the mother tongue, as various other North African and Sub-Saharan writers had also done. She spent most of the 1970s taking stock of her writing and of her previous life. The novel Les Alouettes naïves represented a turning point for her because in it she begins to experiment with narrative structures and themes that were new to her. Speaking with Le Clézio, she indicates that, although she has always been "at home" in French when
writing fiction, she could not allow French to become too intimately linked with her innermost self in the way that language and the self become mutually interdependent in an autobiographical text. Explaining the link between Les Alouettes naïves and her decision to stop writing temporarily, Djebbar declared:

Ce roman une fois terminé, je me suis arrêtée d’écrire parce que, dans le coeur du roman, sur quarante pages peut-être, pour la première fois dans ce trajet-là, j’avais une écriture à la limite de l’autobiographie... je me suis arrêtée.

Parce que ça te boulversait de reconnaître que tu laissais passer quelque chose de toi-même à ce moment-là?

Oui, confusément peut-être, je refusais à la langue française d’entrer dans ma vie, dans mon secret. Ce n’est pas tellement un rapport à l’écriture; c’est un rapport à la langue française. J’ai senti celle-ci comme ennemie. Écrire dans cette langue, mais écrire très près de soi, pour ne pas dire de soi-même, avec un arrachement, cela devenait pour moi une entreprise dangereuse. (238)

The internal veil she described in "Les femmes d’Alger..." affected Djebbar herself at this particular point in her career. Her "coming to writing" in the Other’s language was not at first meant to be self-revelatory. In contrast to male Maghrebian writers for whom French served primarily as a vehicle for self-analysis, Djebbar initially considered French as a way of masking her true identity. By dint of its adversarial nature, the colonized writer expressing him/herself in "la langue adverse" uses this language first as a shield, a smoke screen, or as a
pseudonym—which Djebar uses as well—because to do otherwise would be, in her eyes, to make herself vulnerable. There is a risk involved in opening oneself to a "foreign" tongue, for the displacement of the mother('s) tongue evokes the possibility of a second violation, mimicking the colonizer's initial invasion of the mother country. This situation is potentially even more problematic for a Muslim Algerian woman because her self-writing would represent a transgression of traditional exhortations to "modesty."

Although Djebar has never used French as a means to express her alienation from the Arabic language or Islamic tradition, the veiling and unveiling, in their literal and metaphorical senses, represent a common theme in her fiction. In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, for example, she plays on this metaphor to clarify her relationship to autobiographical narrative. Her reluctance and that of other Algerian women to speak directly and frankly about themselves and about their own lives parallels the Algerian woman's liberating, albeit difficult, first step out of doors after having been cloistered and veiled for years.

Je me sentais naturellement Algérienne, je veux dire enracinée dans ma région, dans ma famille. Vingt ou vingt-cinq ans après mes débuts en littérature, je peux dire que le français que j'utilisais, en fait, dès le départ, pour moi est un voile. Une façon de se dissimuler, parce que j'avais le sentiment constamment, dans mes rapports à l'extérieur, qu'on ne percevait pas mon image. (Le Clézio 236)
As Djebar writes in her autobiography, her father's wish that she remain in school after puberty and that she pursue her studies after having completed secondary school prevented Djebar from experiencing the customary secluded adolescence that would have culminated in an early marriage. Even though she did not veil herself when she went out in public, she did choose to wear a veil when she wrote in French; it became the mask through which she spoke without exposing more of herself than she was willing to reveal. Since she conceives of French as "la langue adverse," it must be used with caution, especially when writing intimately about oneself. The issue actually hinges upon the possibility that language is sufficiently "transparent" to allow the self to be seen through it. An autobiographer's self-conscious use of language to "create" the self requires a certain distance between the subject and the text, permitting the self to be seen as an "other," as an "object" to be analyzed. The distance that Djebar maintains between her inner self and the French language acts as a barrier or as a screen that veils her true identity. She would reject the idea that the "langue adverse" could fully translate or constitute her "moi" because she chooses to maintain a distance between French (as the means of her written expression) and her innermost sense of herself as an Algerian woman.
Djebbar's growing concern with "unveiling" the situation and issues facing Algerian women gradually replaces her dissimulation of herself behind fictional characters who do not have to confront most of the challenges that Algerian women face. More and more, the women in her texts speak about themselves, for themselves; they increasingly initiate the female-to-female dialogue that Djebbar considers to be the next necessary step in the Algerian women's revolution.

Djebbar's use of veil/unveil imagery is not rooted in a Western, Orientalist obsession for defining Arab-Muslim women in terms of the veil. In her insightful essay "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria," Marnia Lazreg suggests that the omnipresent word "veil," even in feminist works by and about women in an Arab-Islamic context, bespeaks a reductionist, ahistorical epistemology that assumes the "naturalness" of veiling in these societies (85). Most European and North American feminists experience considerable difficulty in distinguishing the influence of Islam from a whole host of other social and cultural factors that affect the status of women in the Middle East. In contrast to them, Djebbar uses the image of the veil in rich and varied ways, and she never exploits the theme in a sensationalistic manner. For her, the veil/unveil dichotomy translates a complex of
relationships that exist between Algerian women and the language(s) they use.

In her writings, Djebar has never criticized Islam in and of itself. Unlike such writers as Driss Chraibi and Rachid Boudjedra, whose characters exploit Islam as a means of hiding their own hypocrisy and corruption, she rarely mentions religion at all. Similar to Arab-Muslim feminists such as Mernissi and Leila Ahmed, Djebar blames the structures and institutions of Muslim, Maghrebian society for the degradation of women. The veiled woman in Djebar's works usually wears both a small face veil and the haik—an envelopping, large white cloth worn around her body and head, held together under the chin by a pin or by the woman's hands. This costume is an inseparable part of Djebar's childhood recollections of the feminine presence in her extended (maternal) family. The image of the veil is not inherently negative for her, nor is it regarded as a "stigma" or as the manifestation of the Muslim woman's "oppression." Her metaphors of veiling and unveiling are therefore not linked to any orientalist fantasy. On the contrary, allusions to the veiled women in her family suggest that veil wearing can simply reflect a customary practice—indicative of one's social class. Furthermore, the veil protects a woman's identity when she goes out in public. The reasons for desiring anonymity in public arise
from practical considerations as well as from a desire for modesty as defined in Muslim law. For example, a woman who must do her own shopping is obviously not sufficiently wealthy to have a maid who could perform such tasks for her; she might wish to remain anonymous to her neighbors. In *Ombre Sultane*, Djebar depicts poor women who veil themselves because they do not want others to know that economic circumstances oblige them to work outside the home.

Contrary to Orientalist contentions that the veil increases the sexual desirability of the Muslim woman by enhancing the "charms" of the female face and body that cannot be seen by the concupiscent, Western gaze, Arab-Muslim scholars point out that the veil serves two basic purposes in an Islamic culture: by guaranteeing a woman's anonymity it protects her reputation when she goes out, and it maintains the complete separation of the sexes, as prescribed by certain religious scholars in their interpretations of the Qu'ran and the Hadith. Bouhdiba explains the fundamental raison d'etre of veiling in his study *La Sexualité en Islam*:

Une double recommandation de baisser le regard et de cacher ses atours. Psychosociologie du regard mais qui l'apprécie comme un début de "transgression" des limites de Dieu. Le voile va donc faire passer la musulmane dans l'anonymat le plus total. Etre musulmane c'est vivre incognito. (50)

This passage suggests why Djebar came to consider the veil as a metaphor for the lack of women's first-person
narrative in the Maghreb. Just as the veil lends anonymity to women in public places, another kind of barrier constrains them to remain silent about their personal experiences and their innermost feelings. For the Algerian woman to express her subjectivity, her "moi," she must, Djebar argues, find within herself a source of inspiration that will allow her to speak openly, first within the female collective, then to the men in her circle, and finally to the rest of Algerian society. This source of inspiration represents a different type of orality, not one that is linked with folktales and storytelling, but one that gives expression to "la voix collective," the voice that can narrate new stories about women's courage in war and politics, a voice sustained by the strength of the collective. This voice underlies the plural, polyphonic of nature of Djebar's autobiography. One woman speaks about herself and about what she has seen; she speaks to a circle of female listeners, who in turn speak to other women until an unbreakable chain of (spoken or written) paroles féminines is forged.

In her essay on Delacroix's painting, "Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement," Djebar concludes that the contemporary significance of the work lies in the fact that the scene he observed during his 1832 visit to Algiers still echoes with the voices of the women he depicted.
Delacroix’s visit to the harem, she points out, had clearly interrupted a serious dialogue between two of the three women in the scene. Djebar contends that twentieth-century Algerian women (and she includes herself in this group) are still trying to pick up the threads of this conversation—a dialogue that could result in the Algerian woman’s affirmation of her "self" and her freedom: "Je ne vois que dans les bribes de murmures anciens comment chercher à restituer la conversation entre femmes, celle-là même que Delacroix gelait sur le tableau. Je n’esespère que dans la porte ouverte en plein soleil, celle que Picasso a ensuite imposée, une liberation concrète et quotidienne des femmes" (Femmes d’Alger 189). The author’s reference to Picasso’s brightly colored, light-washed version of "Les Femmes d’Alger..." returns to the theme of women’s movements out of doors. Djebar equates the liberation of the woman’s speaking voice with that of the right to circulate freely in a way that is antithetical to the harem as imagined in Western fantasies about it. On the basis of two radically different French artists’ views on the women of Algiers, Djebar draws the conclusion that the renewal of women’s communication within the harem could lead to the bright glow of sunlight in Picasso’s vision of the harem chamber.

In the narrative that takes its name from Delacroix’s painting, Djebar develops the theme of women’s communication
by invoking the experiences of contemporary Algerian women who lived through the terrors of the Revolution but repressed their memories as being somehow "unfit" to recount. In the same text, she also portrays the modern Algerian couple whose lack of direct communication leaves both partners drowning in silent, marshy lives of memories and frustrated hopes. The outwardly successful bourgeois marriage of Ali, a surgeon, and Sarah, a musicologist and former porteuse de feu, belies the truth of their hollow conjugal existence. The story itself revolves around Sarah's coming to terms with her past (including her imprisonment during the Revolution), which occurs when she renews her friendship with Anne, a pied-noir who is returning to Algiers to commit suicide in the wake of a failed marriage. The Algerian women with whom Sarah comes into contact talk about their past experiences and the disappointments they have suffered in their own lives. For example, Leila, a former maquisarde, has been hospitalized for drug addiction; she bitterly rants against the current state of political and social affairs in an Algeria where women are silenced and their concerns ignored. A middle-aged masseuse from the hammam, Fatma, recounts her sad life, telling how she was born into a poor family in the extreme south of Algeria, forced into marriage while still an adolescent, beaten by her husband, tormented by her mother-
in-law, and forced to become a prostitute after running away from her husband. When she realizes is too old to continue in this trade, she accepts a job in the hammam, carrying buckets of hot water for the clients and massaging them for a bit of extra money. When she slips and breaks her wrist, she worries that she might be unable to work and that she will be forced to beg. Such a desperate, tragic woman contrasts sharply with the educated, materially comfortable young Algerian women in Djebar's earlier novels. Sarah and Anne become concerned with the elderly woman and the arduous path that has led her to her present state, and their genuine solicitude reflects a newfound commitment to improve the lives of Algeria's women.

The story's most poignant moment occurs when Sarah meets Leila in the hospital where she has brought the massesuse for treatment. The two women have not seen each other since their release from prison and the pathetic condition in which she finds the revolutionary heroine, feverish and suffering from drug withdrawal, sparks a moment of mutual confession and understanding. Once a fiery political activist, Leila found that, after independence, the new government refused to accept the women (who had served side-by-side with men in the resistance) as political and economic equals in the "new" Algeria. Heroines such as Leila--her character is perhaps modeled on real life
heroines such as Djamila Boupacha or Djamila Bouhired—were expected to go quietly back to a way of life that included marriage, children, and domestic responsibilities. They were not expected to demand their rights to careers and political offices. Their experiences of torture and rape remained undisussed; physical wounds were treated, but no one knew how to deal with the emotional scars. The reader quickly suspects that this disillusionment is Leila's real illness:

Il me faut parler, Sarah! Ils ont honte de moi! Je me suis desséchée, je suis mon ombre d'autrefois... Peut-être parce que j’ai trop déclamé dans les tribunaux d’hier, je suis trop souvent entrée en transes publiques quand les frères applaudissaient, je croyais...(elle rit) Y a-t-il jamais eu de frères, Sarah...dis? Toi... on t’appelait déjà la silencieuse... On n’a jamais su les détails bien répertoriés de tes tortures à toi. On t’a soignée ensuite comme moi, on a cru ne te laisser que quelques cicatrices, on n’a jamais su... (61)

Although both women had shared the fate of imprisonment for their resistance activities, Leila continued the fight after independence, whereas Sarah did not. However, Leila's sacrifices went unrecognized because she was rejected by the "brothers" with whom she fought. When she acknowledges her need to speak openly about her disillusionment, she has already become engaged in the first stage of a cathartic process. Leila repressed her story until it flows out of her when she recognizes a sympathetic listener in Sarah—a sister who has a similar tale that is waiting to be told.
But the details of Sarah's experiences were unknown to the other women because she had remained silent. Like so many Algerian women, she is "la silencieuse." Yet even in this poignant scene of female sharing, she still cannot find words capable of calming her friend's delirium. Instead, she simply unbuttons her blouse to reveal her own scar, running from her abdomen to her breast. She still lacks the language to express what she had suffered during the war; her gesture of revealing the scar demonstrates her willingness to be vulnerable, to share a painful experience that she had simply repressed in the belief that no one would listen to her, that there was no interlocutor with whom she could communicate. Sarah's gesture parallels the autobiographical act performed in L'Amour, la fantasia; through written language rather than in spoken conversation, Djebar reveals her own "scars" and opens herself to the reader's scrutiny.

In the next section of the story, Leila's words "il me faut parler!" return to haunt Sarah, who begins to talk to Anne, to answer her question, "Autrefois...comment s'est déroulé pour toi le temps de prison?" (64). Her response is the next link in a chain of Algerian women's dialogues. By reclaiming her right to first-person discourse in recounting what she has seen and experienced, each woman passes on "les mots torches" to other women. In Djebar's mind, these
"flaming words" can light the way to the renewal of feminine discourse; they can show all women how to discard the internalized veil of silence by learning to speak in the first-person. After years of research as a musicologist, recording and transcribing rural Algerian women's songs, Sarah for the first time understands that the collective voice must be comprised of thousands of individual voices, raised without fear of recrimination and telling their own stories:

Je ne vois pour nous aucune autre issue que par cette rencontre: une femme qui parle devant une autre qui regarde, celle qui parle raconte-t-elle l'autre aux yeux dévorants, à la mémoire noire ou décrit-elle sa propre nuit, avec des mots torches et des bougies dont le cire fond trop vite? Celle qui regarde, est-ce à force d'écouter et de se rappeler qu'elle finit par se voir elle-même, avec son propre regard, sans voile enfin... (64)

Only direct communication—one woman speaking to another one who listens—can help women acquire self-knowledge and the will to express it orally or in writing. Only direct communication can enable Algerian women to relinquish the anonymity of the "veiled" existence that Islamic tradition and European colonialism have imposed on Algerian civilization.

The first step in recovering the lost female dialogue is a recognition of the need for women to speak or to write about themselves, about their own experiences, the need for women to designate themselves by the word "ana" or "je."
Only by assuming the position of sujet in her own discourse, will the Algerian woman become capable, in Djebar’s view, of affirming the uniqueness of her life and the specificity of her own self-knowledge. In this way, Algerian women can leave behind the centuries of anonymity in which the majority of them have lived.

While discussing L’Amour, la fatasia with Mimi Mortimer, Djebar speaks about her reluctance to embark on an autobiographical project because she feels inhibited about using her experiences for literary purposes. Djebar attributes this feeling to her upbringing during the formative years she spent partly in the midst of traditional women in her mother’s family, women who themselves had been conditioned by Arabo-Berber traditions that proscribed certain activities and attitudes for them. Djebar remarks upon the difficulty of writing an admittedly autobiographical text:

Visiblement, c’était plus dur pour moi de parler de(s) souvenirs d’enfance qui n’ont rien à voir avec la guerre, simplement parce que pour la première fois, si vous voulez, contrairement à mes précédents romans, j’annonçais ouvertement que je vais écrire une autobiographie. J’essaie de comprendre pourquoi je résiste à cette poussée de l’autobiographie. Je résiste peut-être parce que mon éducation de femme arabe est de ne jamais parler de soi, en même temps aussi parce que je parlais en langue française. (203)

Djebar’s explanation sheds light on the orality of Algerian women’s culture. If women were associated with la parole orale, the written, sacred text/word was usually reserved
for men. According to Djebar's recollections of a childhood spent in the maternal extended family's *gynécée*, women had spoken readily with each other, but at gatherings that included female guests who were not closely related, discourse could only evolve within a limited number of prescribed patterns, which were intended to assure the smooth functioning of the collective.

At such parties, the matron preceded her daughters and daughters-in-law into the room. Guests were seated according to social rank and age, with very young women occupying cushions on the floor. The conversation unfolded according to a ritual that included an etiquette of greetings, blessings, and inquiries about the participants and the health of their families. Djebar notes that direct references to the speaker's own life, marital difficulties, financial problems, and health concerns were scrupulously avoided. Allusions, understatements, and prayers were the accepted means of discussing one's own life. "Plutôt que de se plaindre d'un malheur domestique, d'un chagrin trop connu (une répudiation, une séparation momentanée, une dispute d'héritage), la diseuse évoquant son propre sort conclura à la résignation envers Allah et envers les saints de la région. Quelquefois ses filles reprendront, en commentaires chuchotés mais prolixes, le thème autobiographique de la mère" (175). It was acceptable for the woman's daughter to
speak about her mother's difficulties, but the person in question refrained from any direct reference to her own situation--refrained, in other words, from first-person discourse.

Djebar maintains that despite these protocols, women's gatherings were cathartic in the sense that the participants in them found sympathetic listeners who more or less shared the same situations in their own domestic lives. The sharing of news, ritual blessings, and greetings was a healing and bonding experience for the guests, one that also provided a certain outlet for the women's frustrations. "Celle qui clame trop haut ou celle qui chuchote trop vite--s'est libérée. Jamais le 'je' de la première personne ne sera utilisé: la voix a déposé, en formules stéréotypées, sa charge de rancune et de râles échardant la gorge. Chaque femme, écortchée au-dedans, s'est apaisée dans l'écoute collective" (176). This solicitous atmosphere ensured that speakers would feel at least momentarily relieved from their burden of suffering in silence. Even though first-person narration was avoided by most of the women, they used what could be described as a "woman's language," which allowed each of them to express herself and to make herself understood in a set of shared the accepted formulae.

Only a woman's advanced age granted her the indulgence of the group and allowed her to use the first-person without
fear of censure. Modesty and the belief that a "good" woman was not an "égoiste" contributed to the elaboration of this protocol. In addition, Djebar specifically recalls her maternal grandmother's injunctions against speaking directly about oneself; mentioning one's own good fortune or happiness supposedly attracted the "evil eye" and thereby invited retribution for anyone who distinguished herself from the rest of the group. In her childhood memoirs, Djebar strongly associates this superstition with the origin of her reluctance to designate herself by "je:"

Comment dire "je," puisque ce serait dédaigner les formules-couvertures qui maintiennent le trajet individuel dans la résignation collective?... Comment entreprendre de regarder son enfance, même si elle se déroule différente? La différence, à force de la taire, disparaît. Ne parler que de la conformité, pourrait me tancer ma grand-mère: le malheur intervient, inventif, avec une variabilité dangereuse. Ne dire de lui que sa banalité, par prudence, et pour le conjurer... (177)

Djebar's point relates to an issue that has also been raised by several critics of autobiography, notably Karl Weintraub, who has asked whether autobiography might not only be possible in cultures that accept individuals' deviations or differences from the established norms of behavior. Weintraub believes that "individuality," as it has come to be defined in the post-Enlightenment West, fosters the emergence of the autobiographical genre because it is premised on the assumption that people should be encouraged to distinguish themselves from the group. In the West,
individual variations on the standard model of selfhood are regarded as positive and often are praised as marks of superiority or "uniqueness" on the part of people who "stand out" from the crowd.

For the Algerian women in Djebar’s childhood world, "egotism" or a desire to "stand out" from the collective was unacceptable, for the harmony and unity of the whole group were valued more than the individual accomplishments of its members. The problematic aspect of Djebar’s autobiographical project, which necessarily "transgresses" against her grand-mother’s injunction, derives from the fact that she analyzes her past precisely in terms of its "difference" from that of most other young Algerian women in her age group. To write about her life, to describe the itinerary of her "coming to writing," unavoidably stamps her, according to the traditional view, as a woman who is distinguishing herself from the collective by virtue of her difference.

Of course, Djebar is not the first Algerian woman to transgress against the limits of traditional pudeur by singling herself out as a "je." In her autobiographical narrative, she herself recalls that, even during her childhood, there were women who refused to remain silent, refused to "veil" their voices in the prescribed ways. Within the gynécée of her maternal family, for example,
there were two separate categories of women. The
distinction between them had nothing to do with money,
social rank, or marital status: according to the popular
wisdom of Djebar's youth, there were silent, "good" women,
and there were those who complained and raised their voices.
As Djebar and the sociologist Bouhdiba point out, a woman
whose voice was loud enough to be heard in the street
outside the walls of her dwelling--in the "masculine" public
space--were "bad" because they had broken the rule about
"veiling" their voices. "Laquelle parle haut, libère sa
voix malgré l'aire resserrée du patio, laquelle au contraire
se tait ou soupire, se laisse couper la parole jusqu'à
l'étouffement sans recours" (L'Amour 228).

Those who did not muffle their voices in accordance
with protocol, Djebar recalls, were treated as outcasts;
they were ostracized by a society that, above all, wanted to
preserve the appearance of order and unity. More than the
widow or the repudiated woman, the woman who raised her
voice and railed against fate, society, family, or
government was a woman marked for scorn by the rest of the
group:

La seule qui se marginalisait d'emblée était celle qui
"criait;" celle dont la voix querellait la couvée,
s'entendait hors du vestibule et jusque dans la rue,
celle dont la plainte contre le sort ne s'abîmait ni
dans la prière, ni dans le murmure des diseuses, mais
s'élevait nue, improvisée, en protestation franchissant
les murs.
En somme, les corps voilés, avaient droit de circuler dans la cité. Mais ces femmes, dont les cris de révolte allaient jusqu'à transpercer l'azur, que faisaient-elles, sinon attiser le risque suprême? Refuser de voiler sa voix et se mettre "à crier," là gisait l'indécence, la dissidence. Car le silence de toutes les autres perdait brusquement son charme pour révéler sa vérité: celle d'être une prison irrémédiable." (228-9)

Djebar obviously feels a good deal of sympathy for the women who "spoke out loudly." In L'Amour, la fantasia, her plurivocal autobiography narrates incidents in the lives of various Algerian women, including several who lived in the past. Although the women who raised their voices might have been scorned a generation ago, Djebar now understands their refusal to "veil" their voices and to suffer in (socially accepted) discretion. For this reason, her two films and her autobiographical narrative focus upon the stories of women whom she interviewed in the countryside, individuals who might otherwise never have had contact with educated, literate Algerian women interested in recording their stories.

Marnia Lazreg warns of the equivocal undertaking upon which "Third World" feminists often embark in their attempts to "speak for" or to "give voice" to their rural, illiterate sisters. However, Djebar's project does not entail the displacement of her female speakers; on the contrary, she wants to give them the opportunity to tell their own stories. Djebar's solidarity with the women whose words she transcribes derives in part from the fact that these women
belong to the same tribal or extended-familial group that she does. They represent the collective, maternal consciousness that is a vital part of her own inner, creative life.

Whether this solidarity among Algerian women actually exists at present or is simply an ideal toward which they can strive, it defines, in Djebar's eyes, the real sense of the word harem, the women's "space" in the house, not the fantasy realm that the word evokes in Orientalist discourse. In her 1975 essay on the condition of Algerian women, Djebar explains that female solidarity, which must be revitalized if Algeria is to become a truly socialist nation, represents a "new" type of harem, where young Algerian women can keep alive an awareness of the sacrifices made by their predecessors. Her image of a living chain of sisterhood, winding through the generations, illustrates how each woman is linked to those who have preceded her. "It is as though the young women of Islam, in their inexorable advance, feel themselves to be vicariously reliving all the wasted lives of former days. This is the new harem, an almost instinctive alliance welded together by a singleness of purpose..." (Courier 28).

The woman who raises her voice and seizes la parole has become empowered as a consequence of her having laid claim to the right to speak in the first-person, to express her
feelings, and to question her fate. "Celle qui criait" becomes, for Djebar, a symbol of feminine presence-through-speech. Similar to the writer who leaves her mark on the world through her texts, the woman who refuses to veil her voice is affirming her presence in the world. Unveiling the voice, like unveiling the feminine presence, is to step out of the anonymity prescribed, by traditional patriarchy, for the "good" Algerian-Muslim woman. On several occasions in *L'Amour, la fantasia*, "dévoilement" is explicitly used as a metaphor for Djebar's autobiographical project. The symbolism of the term is of course related to autobiography as a revelational genre that "exposes" what is normally hidden. "Veiling" herself also refers to her use of the French language during her entire career as a novelist. In her discussion of veiling, she herself observes that her education in French schools permitted her to remain "unveiled." In Djebar's experience, the French language connotes a certain freedom of movement, but it is also inextricably linked to a different veil, one with which the author cloaks herself in place of the haïk she would have been required to wear under different circumstances.

Her "venue à l'écriture" in the Other's language thus clearly reflects the binary dévoilement/voilement. The paradox that unfolds in *L'Amour, la fantasia* is that, for a colonized writer, the European tradition of "truthful"
autobiography often veils or conceals a truth that can be and has been revealed in fiction:

Ecrire devant l'amour. Eclairer le corps, pour aider à lever l'interdit, pour dévoiler...Dévoiler et simultanément tenir secret ce qui doit le rester, tant que n'intervient pas la fulgurance de la révélation.

Le mot est torche; le brandir devant le mur de la séparation ou du retrait [...] Refuser la photographie, ou toute autre trace visuelle. Le mot seul, une fois écrit, nous arme d'une attention grave.

This passage underscores the "veiling/unveiling" dichotomy that Djebar demystifies and yet perpetuates in her own autobiographical text. "Love" is the other half of the work's title, and her many references to the emotion and the physical act of love, reveals that her own writing "exposes" the female body in a metaphorical sense. For Djebar, écriture féminine implies the writing of women's desire, and because this enterprise is by its nature transgressive, it must be performed with a sleight of hand.

Writing within the cultural context she knew as a child proved to be an act of empowerment for Djebar, and according to her, it can be empowering for men as well as women. Much has been written about the power of the Word in Islam. The study and exegesis of the Qu'ran, the sacred text that provides the foundation for Islamic culture, has been largely dominated by men who "controlled" the textual interpretations of passages which have been cited as the basis for laws that govern the actions and rights of women.
For Djebar, "l'écriture du corps" symbolizes the capacity of the written word to express passion and to circumscribe the body, highlighting and at the same time veiling the woman's presence/body in a way that is more powerful than a photographic image because the Word in an Islamic tradition has sacred as well as secular power.

However, (de)colonized autobiographers must still confront the possibility that they are concealing rather than revealing the truth. For Djebar, the crux of the matter is how to "unveil" feminine desire (her own or that of other Algerian women) to the reading public without becoming engaged in a banal intellectual "strip-tease."

Because autobiography demands that one become the object of one's own gaze/discourse, does the female autobiographer become an object of sexual desire for the reader, and if so, would this response defeat the purpose of assuming her subjectivity?

Djebar discusses the danger of autobiographical discourse for Algerian women writers, who run a risk that their male counterparts do not have to face. Being "unveiled" to the outside world and performing the act of unveiling in the Other's language represent transgressions against the boundaries of accepted woman's space. Spatial divisions in North Africa follow much the same pattern as in other Islamic nations, where boundaries are also drawn along
lines of a separation between public/masculine space and private/female space. A woman who is free to choose will often prefer not to enter the public/male space, where she can expect to be treated as an intruder or as a woman who is going out to beg or to work for wages. "L'écriture est dévoilement, en public, devant des voyeurs qui ricanent...une reine s'avance dans la rue, blanche, anonyme, drapée, mais quand le suaire de laine rêche s'arrache et tombe à ses pieds auparavant devinés, elle se retrouve mendigante accroupie dans la poussière, sous les crachats et les quolibets" (204). The woman who exposes herself in public is generally regarded as a prostitute who merits the contempt of those who see her "nakedness" (Djebar notes that in Algerian dialectal Arabic, "unveiled" means "naked"). If a woman dares to seize la parole to write about herself and, more specifically, to write so as to reveal her body through an expression of her desires, then she becomes vulnerable and "exposes" herself to a vilifying public gaze.

Viewed from this perspective, the risks encountered by an Algerian woman autobiographer would seem to be great. Readers might scorn a woman who writes intimately about herself, or they might "read her" only with a voyeuristic interest in their own titillation. Despite such dangers, however, Djebar does reveal more of her own personal life in L'Amour, la fantasia than she had done in any of her
previous works. If she argues that Algerian women must overcome their reluctance to speak in the first-person, she herself cannot convincingly defend this point of view unless she abides by her own principles.

Of the more intimate experiences that Djebar relates in *L’Amour, la fantasia*, her "nuit de noces" was undoubtedly the most difficult to reveal to the reader. Married in Paris in 1958, Djebar was a university student. Her husband was living clandestinely in the French capital because of his role in the Algerian revolutionary underground. The ceremony-in-exile was a small affair, and only her sister and her mother travelled from Algeria to attend. The marriage had been hastily arranged because the couple was scheduled to leave immediately for Tunis, where they planned to live among Algerian refugees and to work as journalists for *El Moudjahid*, the official newspaper of the F.L.N.

In North African autobiographical fiction by male writers, a detailed account of the author’s first sexual experience is *de rigueur*; it is usually described as a "coming of age," or a rite of passage. In contrast, the passages dealing with Djebar’s wedding night and the "scène de défloration" reflect a feeling of solidarity with other women; the imagery of pain and blood is more like that of male circumcision rites than of the first sexual experiences recounted in male autobiographies from the Maghreb. In the
collective psyche of Arabo-Berber culture, the wedding night is associated with the virgin’s blood and the pain of penetration—an archetypal fantasy that commonly occurs in the fiction of writers such as Ben Jelloun, Boudjedra, and Serhane.

In Djebar’s description of her wedding night, she also refers to the flash of pain. More significantly, however, the experience is recalled as an awakening, or re-birth, to herself—to her sexuality and to her body. The cry of pain, silent yet audible to the ears of a woman, reveals the depth of her being, symbolically bonding her cry to the "cri de la fantasia" (the ululation of the women who watch the fantasia) as well as to the cries of other women who had experienced the same pain as she was experiencing:

Et j’en viens précautionneusement au cri de la défloration, les parages de l’enfance évoqués dans ce parcours de symboles. Plus de vingt ans après, le cri semble fuser de la veille: signe ni de la douleur ni d’éblouissement... Vol de voix désossée, présence d’yeux graves qui s’ouvrent dans un vide tournoyant et prenant le temps de comprendre.

Un cri sans la fantasia qui, dans toutes les noces même en l’absence de cheveux caparaçonnés et de cavaliers rutilants, aurait pu s’envoler. Le cri affiné, allégé en libération hâtive, puis abruptement cassé. Long, infini premier cri du corps vivant. (122)

The liberation experienced as a result of her first act of sexual intercourse represents the passage to a new level of understanding about the being of women. There were no "fantasia" spectacles or Andalusian muscians on Djebar’s wedding night, yet her cry links her with other members of
the female collective in the sense that it symbolizes her sharing in their experience of woman's first love. Two recurrent, inter-dependent themes emerge from Djebar's meditations on love and on the possibility of expressing it through language. She plays on the homonyms in the phrases, "l'amour c'est [le] cri" and "l'amour s'écrit" to suggest her own particular reworking of the polarity that links the parole orale and the parole écrit. Throughout her text, the "cri" evokes both women's joy and women's suffering. To write the cri is to textualize the "wordless" language of Algerian women, thereby translating a vital aspect of the maternal language into French—the "paternal" tongue. But if Djebar wishes to give expression to female desire as communicated in the tzarl'rit, she must first find a means of reconciling the two languages that are associated with the separate spheres of male and female existence in Algeria: orality and written language. This goal is ultimately a raison d'etre of Djebar's écriture féminine, which converts wordless language (i.e., the "silent cry" and the ululation) into written discourse.

During Djebar's account of her wedding night, she shifts from a first-person to a third-person perspective. She refers to herself as "l'épouse" or as "la jeune femme" instead of as "je," sacrificing the transparency of first-person discourse in order to "veil" the night's events and
to protect her own privacy. Such shifts in perspective also occur on the occasions when she recounts intimate details about her life.

Fifteen years after the wedding night, Djebar offers a final sequel to that "histoire d'amour" in another passage relating rebirth and awakening. Once again the woman's cry is the externalized, vocal expression of the experience. A woman who lives alone in Paris goes out late one evening to wander the deserted streets "pour chercher les mots pour ne plus rêver, pour ne plus attendre" (131). Obviously tense, she seems to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She seeks release in walking, without a precise destination in mind; however, the reader is informed that she is on some kind of quest, that she is looking for a way out: "où aboutir au bout du tunnel de silence intérieur" (131). Then, without transition, the tone shifts, and the anecdote becomes more precise: "Quelqu'un, un inconnu, marche depuis un moment derrière moi. J'entends le pas. Qu'importe? Je suis seule. Je me sens bien seule..." (131).

The reader understands that the writing/speaking subject is relating the story as if it were being experienced by two different women at the same time: one is the voice of the narrator; the other is that of a witness who was observing the scene from a distance. A schizophrenic effect results from the fact that the speaking
subject is both a first-person narrator and a third-person observer of the same event. This effect might well serve as a metaphor for autobiographical writing. Told from a first-person perspective, the voice flows out of her depths like magma from the earth and takes the shape of the cry, the cry that means both joy and sorrow, the cry that reappears in *L'Amour, la fantasia* as a sign of the female presence. This cry bursts forth after years of silence, of repressed emotions that can find no outlet in speech or writing because they can only be vocalized in a cry. The narrator is both the source of this cry and an indifferent witness to it:

Tandis que la solitude de ces derniers mois se dissout dans l'éclat des teintes froides du paysage nocturne, soudain la voix explose. Libère en flux toutes les scories du passé. Quelle voix, est-ce ma voix, je le reconnais à peine.

Comme un magma, un tourteau sonore, un poussier m'encombre d'abord le palais, puis s'écoule en fleuve râche, hors de ma bouche et pour ainsi dire, me devance.

Un long, un unique et interminable pleur informe, un précipité agglutiné dans le corps même de ma voix d'autrefois, de mon organe gelé; cette coulée s'exhale, glu anonyme trainée de décombres non identifiés... Je perçois, en témoin quasi indifférent, cette écharpe écoeurante de sons. (131)

The woman's experience is at first liberating; her frozen voice has thawed, and the flow of sound carries away with it all the pent-up feelings that could not be expressed in ordinary speech or in writing. The cry purifies, but the author's sense of being both the source of the cry and a witness to it reveals what is still a divided sense of the
self. By shifting from first-person to third-person narration, the illusion of autobiographical narrative is momentarily destroyed. Suddenly the reader can no longer be certain about the veracity of the "autobiographical pact." Can "je" and "elle" really be referring to the same subject? She herself is employing them as a way of revealing intimate details about herself while maintaining a semi-opaque veil over her identity in order to protect her "anonymity."

The theme of veiling and self-writing in Djebar’s work is indicative of a larger question in regard to the ability of autobiographical discourse to communicate an accurate portrait of the self. Furthermore, autobiography written in "la langue adverse" presents a unique set of problems for the colonized intellectual. In Fictions in Autobiography: A Study in the Art of Self-Invention, Paul-John Eakin discusses the inter-dependent nature of language and the concept of the self. He analyzes the fundamental question for all autobiographical writing: does the self exist as an entity separate from language, or does the self only achieve form and expression through the use of language? (181) Djebar would pose this question in a slightly different manner, for she would ask whether or not the colonized autobiographer can express the self through the filter of the Other’s language. She is not oblivious to the dangers of this situation, particularly because she comes from a
culture that has traditionally reserved the use of written language for men. Colonized writers who cannot (or do not) choose to write in the mother(’s) tongue encounter serious political and emotional obstacles when they write fiction, but these obstacles are exacerbated when autobiographical writing is involved.

Before she could write an autobiographical work, Djebar explains, she first had to overcome the Algerian woman’s "natural" reluctance to speak about herself in the first-person, but she also had to move beyond her belief that the use of the Other’s language protected her from revealing too much of herself. As she explained in her interview with Le Clézio, the ten-year hiatus in her writing career resulted from a desire to reevaluate her position as an Algerian woman writing in French. During this period, she studied Arabic intensively in the hope that she would be able to stop writing in French and to begin writing in Arabic. She discovered, however, that written Arabic, whose origins were in the classical, sacred forms of the language, "n’était même pas la langue des femmes" (242). She was thus obliged to re-examine her relationship with French while she continued to use it and to explore the possibilities it offered to her. Her involvement with film allowed her to distinguish among various levels of women’s discourse, to depict the orality of a specific group of Algerian women,
and to experiment with her own use of it. Within this context, she discovered that "la langue adverse" also offers a different level of discourse for Algerian women:

Dès que je finis mon premier long métrage, je m'aperçois que ce travail de cinéma m'a nettoyée en quelque sorte de tout le malaise que j'avais vis-à-vis de la langue française: je peux de nouveau écrire en français, parce que je me suis aperçue que même dans l'arabe, il y a un niveau de langue dominante et un niveau de langue souterraine. (Le Clézio 203)

Although Djebar seems to have made her peace with the French language, she continues to refer to it as a "langue adverse" and a "langue ennemie." How is her autobiographical text affected by such an attitude toward the French language? Can the Other's language be used in such a way that it does not continually evoke the usurpation and denigration of the mother tongue? L'Amour, la fantasia advances answers to such questions, for it is not only an autobiography, but also a conscious meditation on the possibility that she can actually write such a text. She herself referred to it as "une préparation à une autobiographie" (Mortimer "Entretien" 203), suggesting that she remains ambivalent toward the genre and can still not write an autobiography in the "pure" sense of the term. Her label for the text also draws attention to the fact that elements from other genres (chronicle, testimonial, etc.) appear in the text and prevent readers from viewing it strictly as "an autobiography."
When (de)colonized autobiographers write/create the self in the Other's language, a language that has become their own in a sense, the usurpation of the mother tongue is reversed; the other('s) tongue has been appropriated to relate the experiences of cultural schizophrenia back to the Other. Djebar's view of this situation resembles that of Albert Memmi, who recognizes that the colonized writer's self-analysis/revelation in "la langue adverse" can become a process of self-mutilation. From this perspective, the French language can be seen as a cutting tool that reopens the barely healed wounds inflicted by a cultural and linguistic schism of enormous proportions. As Djebar explains:

Laminage de ma culture orale en perdition: expulsée à onze ans de ce théâtre des aveux féminins, ai-je par là même été épargnée du silence de la mortification? Ecrire les plus anodins des souvenirs d'enfance renvoie donc au corps dépouillé de voix. Tenter l'autobiographie par les seuls mots français, c'est, sous le lent scalpel de l'autopsie à vif, montrer plus que sa peau. La chair se desquame, semble-t-il, en lambeaux du parler d'enfance qui ne s'écrit plus. Les blessures s'ouvrent, les veines pleurent, coule le sang de soi et des autres, qui n'a jamais séché. (177-8)

The painful imagery of this passage suggests that the autobiographical "scalpel" peels away the exterior to reveal old, festering wounds created by an exile from the mother tongue and from the heritage of one's ancestors.

Much more is at stake in the colonized autobiography than recounting childhood experiences in the attempt to
recreate an idyllic past. As Djebar points out, every examination of an episode from her past, brings to mind the women in her extended, maternal family, women who lived out their lives in virtual silence behind the walls of the family villa. Although she acknowledges that she was metaphorically "exiled" from the harem because of her French education, Djebar does not feel that her autobiographical act occurs within a vacuum. When she writes about her own past, she is implicitly alluding to the lives of the voiceless, illiterate women of her (female) collective past—women who, in spirit, live again in her consciousness of them.

The act of unveiling the self through autobiography in "la langue adverse" involves a paradoxical and ambiguous position for every (de)colonized writer. To allow the Other access to one's inner-most self is to allow the Other to once again "possess" the colonized subject through a reading of the autobiographical text. For Djebar, this paradoxical situation is doubly revealing. As an Algerian woman embarking on a "dévoilement" of herself, she finally allows the Other's gaze to possess or to behold the Muslim, Algerian woman, unveiled and "nue." As Malek Alloula's study of French postcards of Algerian women demonstrates, the colonizer's lustful and acquisitive gaze was ultimately frustrated by the veil-wearing and secluded Algerian woman.
Unlike the material spoils of conquest, the Algerian woman was rarely acquired as a trophy (7). Is she now willingly handing over the Algerian woman to the former oppressor through her autobiographical narrative?

Le dévoilement, aussi contingent, devient, comme le souligne mon arabe dialectal du quotidien, vraiment "se mettre à nu." Or, cette mise à nu, déployée dans la langue de l'ancien conquérant, lui qui, plus d'un siècle durant a pu s'emparer de tout, sauf précisément des corps féminins, cette mise à nu renvoie étrangement à la mise à sac du siècle précédent. (178)

When writing in French, the Algerian writer cannot escape fleeting images of the French conquest that brought the French language to the shores of Algeria in 1830. The danger of revealing too much, of allowing the Other to focus his or her gaze on the naked self of the colonized writer, exposed in the autobiographical text, continually recalls the bloody physical invasion of Algerian soil during the last century.

As a Maghrebian, French-language autobiographer, Djebar consciously establishes a link to the colonized Maghrebian autobiographers who preceded her. North Africa has been colonized by outside forces since the fifth century B.C. when Carthagians, believed to have sailed from Phoenecia, subdued the native inhabitants of the entire North African coast. The region fell under Roman control in the third century B.C. Until the fall of the Roman Empire and the westward spread of Arab tribes from the deserts of the
Machrek, the region was divided into two Roman colonies: Mauretania (Morroco and Mauretania) and Numidia (Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya).

One of the most famous autobiographers who lived during an earlier colonial era and wrote in the language (Latin) of his homeland's occupiers was St. Augustine of Hippo. *L’Amour, la fantasia* specifically establishes a link with him, for Djebar considers Augustine to be her predecessor in the sense that he too was a minority voice speaking from within the hegemonic structure of a colonial administration. Another early Maghrebian autobiographer with whom Djebar feels an affinity is the Islamic historian Ibn Khaldûn, who was born in Tunis in 1332 and used Arabic, the language of the region's most recent colonizers. Near the end of his long and eventful life, Ibn Khaldûn was living in political exile in Tamerlane's Egyptian kingdom when he undertook the writing of his own life history, which was entitled *Ta’arif* or "Identity." Living in a region that has known several waves of occupiers, a region known to be the "melting pot" or meeting point of various cultures, Djebar sees a definite link between her own life-writing project and those of Augustine and Ibn Khaldûn. She concludes that the very métissage that characterizes the region, whether it is voluntary or imposed, perhaps inspires
the written quest/analysis for identity reflected in autobiographical writing.

The position of the autobiographer who uses "la langue adverse" to narrate a story in which the author simultaneously serves as "sujet et objet d’une froide autopsie" (242) is precarious and often untenable. At the meeting point of two languages in the colonized writer’s discourse, at the point where they are internalized and influence each other, the battle for the dominanace of one language over the other continues. Thus, in L’Amour, la fantasia, French and dialectal Arabic clash and interfuse, weaving a pattern of mutual desire and usurpation. The presence of the colonizer’s language in Djebar’s text implies a desire for possession and for discursive control as the Other’s language continues to infiltrate the civil, artistic, and scholastic life of the nation after the withdrawl of the colonizer. However, desire also operates in the opposite direction, for colonized writers appropriate the Other’s language and shape it according to the demands of their own mother tongues and worldviews.

According to Abdelkébir Khatibi, such writers seek to produce an alienating effect on Western readers, who will presumably not recognize themselves reflected in their own "native" language as it has been reworked in the imaginative space of the colonized other. Despite the revolutionary
aesthetic techniques at the disposal of colonized writers, however, Djebar warns against the dangerous undertow that threatens to drown them beneath the weight of a colonized past that survives in the dominant discourse of the adversary language:

Pour ma part, tandis que j'inscris la plus banale des phrases, aussitôt la guerre ancienne entre deux peuples entrecroise ses signes au creux de mon écriture. Celle-ci, tel un oscillographe, va des images de guerre--conquête ou libération, mais toujours d'hier--à la formation d'un amour contradictoire, équivoque [...] me parcourir par le désir de l'ennemi d'hier, celui dont j'ai volé la langue... (242-3)

Even writing in the Other's language decades after the end of the colonial era, (ex-)colonized writers cannot escape the implications of power, desire, and control that are present whenever they undertake to express themselves as subjects in the adversary language. With this observation in mind, Djebar refuses to accept the possibility that a colonized autobiography can be the straightforward, simple narrative of an individual's life as it was lived during and after the colonial era. Djebar's insistence that autobiography is too close to "auto-autopsie" in a postcolonial context means that any viable reading of L'Amour, la fantasia must be based upon an awareness of the textual defense mechanisms that she adopts to protect herself against the cutting tool of "la langue adverse."

As she herself realizes, the colonized autobiographer treads a thin line between, on the one hand, a complete
stripping away of the protective layers that shield the innermost self against the scalpel cuts of the Other’s language, and, on the other hand, a form of writing that lapses into superficiality in the attempt to maintain a veil between the reader and the subject of the autobiographical text. How can (ex-)colonized autobiographers guard themselves against the inclusion of too much or too little self-revelation? Djebar’s solution to this problem can be found in her veiling/unveiling metaphor. For her, "la langue adverse" is paradoxically both the solution and the problem; French can still veil as it reveals, and she continues to view it as being detached from her psyche at a very intimate level precisely because it is not the mother’s tongue. Furthermore, a complete dévoilement in the Other’s language is ultimately illusory, she believes, because her mother tongue remains present, shrouding the innermost core of her being. The colonized text that purports to be a total "mise à nu," she concludes, will be either highly ficticious or simply another veil worn to frustrate the intrusive glance of the Other/reader:

L’autobiographie pratiquée dans la langue adverse se tisse comme fiction, du moins tant que l’oubli des morts chariés par l’écriture n’opère pas son anesthésie. Croyant "me parcourir," je ne fais que choisir un autre voile! Voulant, à chaque pas, parvenir à la transparence, je m’engloutis d’avantage dans l’anonymat des aïeules! (243)
This passage reveals that the (de)colonized autobiographer can never rely fully on the fallacy that language is sufficiently "transparent" to allow one to communicate the self’s identity directly to the reader. The political and historical implications inherent in the (former) oppressor’s language transform it into an opaque screen that excludes any possibility of a transcendent self-creation.

The adversary language cannot escape its links to the blood of victims of colonialism. Throughout *L’Amour, la fantasia*, Djebar’s depictions of her own intellectual development and of her own "coming to writing" in the French language are inextricably linked to her awareness of the French presence in her homeland. As she notes, her real date of birth was sometime in 1842, "lorsque le commandant Saint-Arnaud vient détruire le zaouia des Beni Ménacer, ma tribu d’origine..." (243). From that time forward, her fate and that of the French in Algeria were bound together. When her maternal family lost its tribal lands and its prestigious political and social position as Cherifians (descendants of the prophet), her mother’s marriage to a poor Algerian teacher of French became possible. Her father’s belief that girls should be educated to the fullest extent of their abilities in turn enabled Djebar to reach the position she now occupies: a "femme de lettres" and a Muslim woman who was never obliged to wear the veil and to
remain secluded. One of the last images in her autobiographical work returns readers to the beginning of the text, to the beginning of her life-writing project, to the moment when a young, Algerian girl, escorted by her father, left her mother’s circle to attend the local French school.

The penultimate chapter in *L’Amour, la fantasia* is entitled "La Tunique de Nessus." In Greek mythology, Nessus’s robe appears in the legend of Hercules and suggests a poisoned gift of love that kills its recipient. French education and an opportunity to escape the harem were intended as a father’s gift of love to his talented daughter. The gift of freedom and knowledge did prove beneficial, but it also opened the door to exile and anguish. The final image of her autobiography is that of an unveiled woman who has been reduced to the level of a beggar; she is spat upon and mocked by a society that prefers not to see "la femme dévoilée" (in the metaphorical sense) in public:

Ma fiction est cette autobiographie qui s’esquisse, alourdie par l’héritage qui m’encombre. Vais-je succomber?...Mais la légende tribale zigzague dans le silence des mots d’amour, jamais proférés de la langue maternelle non écrite, transportée comme un bavardage d’une mème inconnue et hagarde, c’est dans cette nuit-là que l’imagination, mendianente des rues, s’accroupit [...] Comment trouver la force d’arracher le voile, sinon parce qu’il faut en couvrir la plaie inguérissable, suant les mots tout à côté? (244-5)
In this passage, Djebar is evoking the struggle between her need for the veil and her desire to rip it away and to present the other with a glimpse into the tormented psyche of the (de)colonized autobiographer. Her words underscore the impossibility of writing the self in "la langue adverse" because so much of her inner self, especially that part of her which desires and needs love, can never be expressed in any tongue other than that of the mother. Autobiography for Djebar remains a fiction in the sense that it always serves to veil, not to expose, the void she feels inside herself as a result of having been exiled from the mother('s) tongue.

NOTES

1 For a more complete discussion of the range of Djebar's fictional themes in her earliest works (i. e. "le corps", women's roles in the Revolution, polygamy and sexual liberation), see Jean Déjeux's Assia Djebar: romancière algérienne, cinéaste arabe, Mimi Mortimer's "The Evolution of Assia Djebar's Feminist Conscience," and her CELFAN monograph Assia Djebar.

2 Maghrebian novels by male authors in which inter-faith marriage or romance plays a role, include: Mouloud Feraoun's La Terre et le Sang (1953), Albert Memmi's Agar (1955),
Mouloud Mammeri's *Le Sommeil des justes* (1955), Driss Chraibi's *Les Boucs* (1955), Rachid Boudjedra's *La Répudiation* (1969), Mohammed Dib's *Dieu en Barbarie* (1970), and Abdelkébir Khatibi's *Amour bilingue*. In these cases, the women in question are European and the relationships usually end in an emotional rupture or in the death of one of the partners. The failure of inter-faith marriages depicted in Maghrebian novels suggests that such relationships tend to mirror and even magnify the inherent difficulties of the colonizer-colonized situation, as Memmi points out in *Portrait du colonisé* (138).

Muslim feminists and sociologists have described traditional Islamic society's insistence on the virginity of women before marriage—a practice that continues today. For further information on this cultural proscription against female pre-marital sexual relations see chapter 2, "Regulation of Female Sexuality in the Muslim Social Order" in Fatima Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society*; chapter 5, "The Very Fine Membrane Called 'Honor'" in Nawal el Saadawi's *The Hidden Face of Eve*; and chapter 1, "Avant le mariage: l'espace clos de la soumission" in Soumaya Naamane Gessous's *Au-delà de Toute Pudeur*. 
4 See, for example, chapter 2, "Renaissance au monde" in Jean Déjeux's *Assia Djebar: Romancière Algérienne, cinéaste arabe* : 35-48.
5 See the review of *La Soif* written by Roger Clermont, published in *Les Lettres françaises* (September, 1957): 5-11.
6 Djebar discusses the critical reaction to her first two novels in an interview with the Tunisian newspaper *L'Action* (8 sept. 1957).
7 For a discussion of individuality and autobiography in a non-Western cultural context and particularly for a discussion that refutes Karl Weintraub, Georges Gusdorf, and other European-oriented critics, see James Olney's *Tell me Africa: An Approach to African Literature* and his essay "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction."
CHAPTER II
Women's Writing and Women's Language

Le français m'est langue marâtre. Quelle est ma langue mère disparue, qui m'a abandonné sur le trottoir et s'est enfuie?... Langue-mère idéalisée ou mal-aimée, livrée aux hérauts de foire ou aux seuls geôleurs!... Sous le poids des tabous que je porte en moi comme héritage, je me trouve désertée des chants de l'amour arabe. Est-ce d'avoir été expulsée de ce discours amoureux qui me fait trouver aride le français que j'emploie? (240)

Much of the recent critical discussion on the genre of autobiography has revolved around the central issue of language and the self. Contemporary critics of the genre are divided into two main groups with regard to this debate. The first, represented by Paul De Man, holds that the self is an illusion because it is created by language—or, rather, that the autobiographer's self is "written" by language and not the source of it ("Autobiography" 920-22). For De Man, power resides essentially in language. The opposing view has been most clearly formulated by James Olney and Paul John Eakin,
who theorize that language is a tool used by
autobiographers to express and to shape the autonomous
self, which they view as a metaphoric or fictional
construction.

Maghrebian autobiographers are acutely aware of the
ambivalencies related to the self and the language used
to express it. Djebar consciously evokes the bilingual
situation that formed her subjectivity, likening it to a
civil war in which opposing cultures and languages are
pushed to their utmost limits:

Apres plus d'un siecle d'occupation francaise [...] un
territoire de langue subsiste entre deux peuples, entre
deux memoires; la langue francaise, corps et voix, s'installe en moi comme un orgueilleuxpresence, tandis que la langue maternelle, toute en oralite, en hardes depenaillees, resist et attaque, entre
deu essoufflements. Le rythme du "rebato" en moi s'eperonnant, je suis a la fois l'assiegé
etranger et l'autochtone partant a la mort par bravade, illusoire effervescence du dire et de l'ecrit. (241)

This richly evocative passage from her autobiographical
narrative illustrates that the bilingual writer is always
conscious of the two (or more) languages that are
battling each other for supremacy. Although the mother
tongue is sometimes in the humiliating position of having
been "supplanted," it often struggles back to the
forefront of the subject's consciousness. It can regain
domination, for example, when the autobiographer recalls
episodes from her past, from the pre-paternal, linguistic
stage that indelibly marked the bilingual, (de)colonized individual's (self-)formation. The interminable "war" that she mentions in this passage is characterized by a series of ambushes and sneak attacks. In much the same way, the subject's ambivalent feelings toward the two languages are not always apparent on the surface level of the text as half-hidden contradictions and ambiguities rise to the surface during the reconstitution of the self through the autobiographical act.

Like contemporary critical studies of the autobiographical genre, Maghrebian autobiography is concerned with the relationship between the self and language, as well as with the role of autobiography itself as a forum for the exploration of this relationship, but its task is complicated by the fact that it often focuses specifically on the development of the bilingual self. Abdelkébir Khatibi has written, for example, that the process of anamnesis is vital to Maghrebian writers precisely because their works reflect the bilingual circumstances under which their own sense of self has evolved. By consciously reconstituting their past in textual form, Khatibi argues, (de)colonized autobiographers must often reconcile the oral and written forms of expression that they have come to experience as distinct and separate spheres of discourse. However, he
adds, the intellectual and emotional "decolonizing" promoted by self-writing offers them the opportunity to fuse these two realms of expression conceiving of them as part of a "layered" structure, rather than as discrete and rigidly separate entities. "Le dialecte est inaugural dans le corps de l'enfant; la langue écrite est apprise ensuite, et en période coloniale, cette langue, cette écriture arabes, ont été combattues, refoulées et remplacées au service de la langue française. Telle est l'archéologie de l'enfant" (Maghreb 187). Khatibi's conception of autobiographical writing as an "archeology" is relevant to Djebar's project in L'Amour, la fantasia because, as she explains, her desire to write this autobiographical work had its origins in her desire to retrace her own exile from the mother('s) tongue and to "exhume" her previous experiences with both languages as a means of reconciling written and oral discourse in terms of their influence over the evolution of her self.

The bilingual situation of the Maghrebian writer is fraught with paradox and ambiguity. As the works of Khatibi, Abdelwahab Meddeb, and Abdelhak Serhane illustrate, a European language does not simply replace the mother tongue and erase all traces of it. In fact, the colonized writer's self is dependent on both languages, for although some elements of his or her
identity can be expressed in the "foreign" tongue, others can only be communicated in the mother tongue. Djebar's analysis of her relationship to French and to dialectal Arabic in L'Amour, la fantasia reveals the complex ambiguity of her own situation as a bilingual, Algerian woman writer. As she explained to Marguerite Le Clézio:

A l'origine dans mon enfance, mon rapport avec ma mère, avec le monde des femmes, se fait en langue arabe, un arabe dialectal, non destiné à être écrit, puisque l'on écrit en arabe dit littéraire. Donc, pour me résumer, un premier exil s'installe dans une langue qui m'est langue d'en face, et un deuxième exil est souligné par la question suivante, "Qu'est-ce que c'est dans la culture arabe qu'une femme qui écrit?" C'est un scandale. Ce n'est pas seulement très rare; pendant des siècles, ça a été étouffé. [...] Les femmes communiquent, les femmes s'expriment, mais elles s'expriment par une oralité nécessairement souterraine, tout au moins dans son dynamisme. (232)

Her remarks point to the fundamental paradox of her situation: as an Algerian woman, her closest ties should ostensibly be with dialectal Arabic, which she defines as "woman's language," yet because of her education in French schools, she feels that she has been "exiled" from the mother('s) tongue. The orality of women's discourse results from the fact that, traditionally, women have not had access to writing in their own culture.

Women's writing is scandalous in Djebar's culture because the Islamic tradition fostered the sexualization of language and power. Until the beginning of the...
twentieth century, written Arabic had been primarily used in the exegesis of scripture and in the clarification of Arab-Islamic law. Because women in traditional society were segregated from men at the approach of puberty, girls generally attended classes at the m'sid for a much shorter period of time than did boys. This situation represented the single most significant factor with regard to women's lack of access to written Arabic. When Djebar describes women's orality as "underground," she means that it is a discourse that remains "hidden" from the public eye; the loci of women's discourse are inside their houses, inside the steam baths, or on the rooftop terraces of their homes. Given the factors that traditionally affected the relationship between women and language in Djebar's Arab-Islamic, Algerian historical contexts, her autobiography attempts to answer the question she herself had posed: "What does it mean to be an Arab woman who writes?" By retracing the itinerary that culminated in her "coming to writing," she explores her own identity and achieves a better understanding of her ambivalent feelings towards the paternal and maternal languages.

The first part of L'Amour, la fantasia is entitled "La Prise de la ville, ou l'amour s'écrit." In this part of her narrative, she identifies the capture of Algiers
as the symbolic origin of her own "coming to writing" because the French conquest created the possibility of French education for Algerian children such as herself. The writing and reading of letters by Algerian women constitute one of the major themes running through this section. The image of women as recipients or instigators of correspondence reflects the author's belief that Algerian women can be empowered through writing—through a "prise de la parole"—just as the physical capture of Algiers empowered the French in a different way.

Djebbar's father taught French in a school that had been established by the colonial administration. As I pointed out in the first chapter, she came to think of French as la langue paternelle; in contrast, she associated dialectal Arabic with her mother and with her female relatives. French became her second language; it was spoken at school or with peers, but it was almost never used at home. She herself comments on this bilingual condition:

"J'ai vécu dès l'enfance ce que vivent beaucoup d'enfants d'émigrés à Paris. Le français devient la langue de dehors; quand on rentre à la maison, l'arabe reprend son rôle de l'intimité, du rapport à la mère, aux ancêtres. Dès l'âge de quatre ou cinq ans, j'ai vécu ce bilinguisme... c'était un bilinguisme qui "boitait des deux jambes," et ce n'est pas un choix. Je ne suis pas un écrivain parti d'une autre langue, qui écrit en français, par choix ou grâce à une évolution, qui l'a fait librement. Moi, j'ai été dès mon enfance, de par ma situation de colonisée, installée dans la langue..."
The spatial distinction that colonized children are conditioned to make between the two languages (i.e., French outside the home, Arabic inside the home) has the potential for triggering a sense of linguistic alienation. Associated with the interior of the home and with family life, the mother tongue can come to be seen as more suitable for the communication of intimate matters that are close to heart. Conversely, French—the adversary language, the language of the conqueror—can become identified with life outside the home. This distinction helps explain why French tends to be regarded as the only viable means of expression for ideas and feelings that might be communicated (under the guise of fiction) to the outside world. Djebar stresses the fact that, like other colonized writers, she had no choice but to use the French language; however, the psychological situation created by this absence of choice necessarily influenced the way that she conceived of self-definition/creation (through self-writing) in the other(‘s) tongue.

For the colonized writer, linguistic duality might thus be regarded as a kind of physical handicap, but it also opens new possibilities for exploring the world outside the home. With the advantage of hindsight,
Djebar portrays her French education as an agent of liberation from the restrictions that would have ordinarily have confined an Algerian girl of her class and generation to the inside of her home. "Mais il y a aussi le mouvement, la libération du corps de la femme car, pour moi, fillette allant à l'école française, c'est ainsi que je peux éviter le harem" (Mortimer 201). The relationship between the self and the French language is cast in a positive light at this point in her narrative. Although leading her into the outside world and away from the female collective, a French education allowed her to forge a bond between her self-image and the exterior world. Her knowledge of the "langue adverse" empowered her with the ability to write, giving her a weapon that might never have been placed in her hands if she had not attended French schools.

After contemplating her relationship to French-language writing, however, Djebar concludes that French education was actually a double-edged sword. L'Amour, la fantasia begins with a recollection of her father leading her along the path to school: "Fille arabe allant pour la première fois à l'école, un matin d'automne, main dans la main du père" (11). This opening sentence figuratively and textually defines the starting point for Djebar's entire autobiographical project. She herself
recognizes that learning the French language provided her with the ability to create her self-portrait. By ending her work with the same image, she is suggesting that her first day at the French school had planted the seed for the narrative she has just finished writing.

She never had any doubts as to the courage of her father's decision to send her to the French school, but she vividly remembers how the neighbors peered out of their windows at her as she walked by with her father. The women in particular observed her from behind the privacy of their lattices and prepared their words of censure for a future date. Surely, they thought, the time will come when the father will have to recognize his folly, for fathers who allowed their daughters to go out in public, even in order to receive an education, were courting disaster: "Le malheur fondra immanquablement sur eux. Toute vierge savante saura écrire, écrira à coup sûr 'la' lettre. Viendra l'heure pour elle où l'amour qui s'écrit est plus dangeureux que l'amour séquestré" (11). The reason for the neighbors' dismay, as Djebar describes it, is that writing empowers women to express their desires. For this reason, it is assumed that society must sequester women, so they will never experience a sense of control over their own sexuality and write the letter, the text of feminine desire.
The ironic undertone of this passage emphasizes a major theme that subtends Djebar's text. Women of her own and previous generations had often circumvented social interdictions against their learning to read and write. They had gained access to written discourse, which they used as a weapon to make their ideas felt in the rest of the community. All members of the Islamic community are expected to "recite" the verses of the Qur’ran, a duty that falls upon women as well as men. But conservative forces in the Islamic world have often sought to monopolize power by excluding women and the poorer classes from Koranic learning, which has traditionally been the key to secular and religious power.

Whereas men control classical Arabic (i.e., written discourse in Algeria) women have devised other languages in which they can communicate with each other, while excluding men's participation. Even women who do read and write Arabic or French, she explains, often discover that they have the ability to communicate in a fourth language—"la langue du corps"—that enables them to express their "moi" in ways that would be impossible in French or Arabic:

Pour les fillettes et les jeunes filles de mon époque [...] tandis que l'homme continue à avoir droit à quatre épouses légitimes, nous disposons de quatre langues pour exprimer notre désir, avant
Female body language in this sense is transgressive and subversive. Each of Djebar’s four languages has its own purposes, but body language is unique in that it serves to forge bonds of solidarity within the gynécée, bonds that ignore distinctions based on religion, tribal affiliation, age, or social class. The woman who uses dance or henna patterns traced on her body is communicating meaning in a language that is just as effective as French or Arabic.

The bilingual, (de)colonized autobiographer undergoes anamnesis as a means of reconstructing the evolution of the "moi" in relation to its linguistic context. For Algerian women, this "linguistic" context included a body language that found expression transe ceremonies, dancing, and even physical contact among women at the hammam. All these forms of expression are present in Djebar’s recollections of her earlier life. As an adolescent, she attended a lycée in a nearby city, and because her movements outside the house gave her the impression of being free in public spaces, she associated
her sensual self, her physical identity as a woman, with her ability to read and write French. Writing in particular became linked in her mind with the jouissance she feels at being able to "invade" the exterior space that was generally reserved for men alone. She even feels that her freedom represents a triumph for all the women who had been denied this experience:

Mon corps seul, comme le coureur du pentathlon a besoin du starter pour démarrer, mon corps s’est trouvé en mouvement dès la pratique de l’écriture étrangère. Comme si soudain la langue française aveuglait les mâles voyeurs de mon clan et qu’à ce prix, je puisse circuler, dégringoler toutes les rues, annexer le dehors pour mes compagnes cloitrées, pour mes aïeules mortes bien avant le tombeau. (204)

Her control over her own movements and, by extension, over her own body are thus clearly tied to her "vene à l’écriture." She feels as if she has been empowered by her access to The Word, a power that "blinds" the males who seek to curtail women’s movements in public. When these men are "blinded," it is as if a veil is covering their eyes, for they cannot actually see her or read the texts of her desire. At this point, she feels that she is free to continue on her path to self-awareness while remaining in contact with the rest of the female collective; her freedom of movement allows her to move between both worlds, to go outside into the public space and to return to the gynécée where she can report what
she has seen to the other women. The symbiotic relationship between writing in French and bodily movement thus reflects the theme of women's empowerment through the written and spoken word.

Acquiring the ability to write in French affected Djebar's body and her sense of a physical self in several other ways as well. During the years she attended a lycée, she lived in a dormitory during the week and returned home to her parents' residence on weekends. She refers to the changes that took place in her during this period of her adolescence as the "Frenchification" of her body:

Je ne m'apercevais pas que ma présomption signifiait une reprise du voile symbolique. Ayant dépassé l'âge pubère sans m'être immergée, à l'instar de mes cousines, dans le harem, demeurant, lors d'une adolescence rêveuse, sur ses marges, ni en dehors tout à fait, ni en son coeur, je parlais, j'étudiais donc le français, et mon corps, durant cette formation, s'occidentalisaît à sa manière. (144)

Her "présomption" is her adolescent belief that, since she could dress in Western-style clothing and walk the streets of the European neighborhoods in her city, she was anonymous in the same way as the pied noir women, who openly strolled through the public areas and never reflected seriously on their right to this freedom.

Dans un second mouvement, je souffrais de l'équivoque: me préservait de la flatterie ou faire sentir qu'elle tombait dans le vide, ne relevait ni de la vertu, ni de la réserve pudibonde. Je découvrais que j'étais, moi aussi, femme voilée,
moins déguisée qu’anonyme. Mon corps, pourtant pareil à celui d’une jeune Occidentale, je l’avais cru, malgré l’évidence, invisible; je souffrais que cette illusion ne se révélât point partagée. (143)

Her impossible desire to forget her body, to forget that she was unveiled in a public space, was, paradoxically, but another disguise, another sort of veil. At the same time, yearning to resemble French or European women walking alone in public revealed that she was not completely certain of her own identity. Wearing French-style clothing, walking through the streets, and hoping to blend in with the crowd could not alter the fact that she was an Algerian woman, whose experiences of freedom constituted a "privilege" that had been granted to her by an indulgent father. Ironically, she would never again feel comfortable in assuming the role of a traditional Algerian woman either.

Indeed, her awareness of the relationship between her French education and her freedom of bodily movement is paired with a sense of alienation from the women’s collective. Although happy to return to her extended family of female relatives, Djebar recalls that, during her adolescent years, she felt increasingly uncomfortable when she had to spend long hours sitting cross-legged on the floor amidst a group of women. The tzarl’rit, women’s ululations of triumph and joy, becomes another symbol of the linguistic and cultural schism that existed
within her. "Ce cri ancestral de déchirement—que la
glotte fait vibrer de spasmes allègres—ne sortait du
fond de ma gorge que peu harmonieusement. Au lieu de
fuser hors de moi, il me déchirait" (144). The cry, an
expression of pure feminine emotion, is an integral part
of women’s communication within the harem, and she cannot
master it!

She also failed to master the gentle, seductive
rhythms of the women’s dances. For this reason, she felt
uncomfortable participating in the traditional dances of
young, unmarried girls, who performed in front of the
older women (including prospective mothers-in-law) to
display their figures and their gracefulness:

De l’agglutinement de ces formes tassées, mon corps
de jeune fille, imperceptiblement, se sépare. A la
danse des convulsions collectives, il participe
encore, mais dès le lendemain, il connaît la joie
plus pure de s’élanter au milieu d’un stade
ensoleillé, dans des compétitions d’athlétisme ou de
basket-ball. Ce corps n’est cependant pas encore
armé pour affronter les mots des autres. (144)

The separation mentioned in this passage is not merely a
physical one; it also symbolizes the increasingly
emotional and great intellectual distance between her and
the other young women of her family. Traditionally women
could only experience their bodies while dancing within
the walls of the gynécée, but the young lycéenne also had
the opportunity to experience her body through
participation in sports—another aspect of the "Frenchification" of her physical identity.

The differences between her freedom of movement and the restrictions placed upon her female cousins prompted Djebar to question the fairness of the average Algerian woman's fate. Although she recognizes that her father's decision to send her to school was an expression of his love for her and a mark of his faith in her ability to succeed, her satisfaction at being granted such an opportunity was tempered by a sense that she had become alienated from the mother's tongue and by a nagging guilt about her own privileged status:

... moi qui longtemps me croyais si fière—moi, la première de la famille à laquelle on achetait des poupées françaises, moi qui, devant le voile-suaire n'avais nul besoin de trépigner ou de baiser l'échine comme telle ou telle cousine, moi qui, suprême coquetterie, en me voilant lors d'une noce d'été, m'imaginais me déguiser, puisque, définitivement, j'avais échappé à l'enfermement—je marche, fillette, au-dehors... Soudain, un réticence, un scrupule me taraude: mon "devoir" n'est-il pas de rester en arrière, dans le gynécée, avec mes semblables? Adolescente ensuite, ivre de sentir la lumière sur ma peau, sur mon corps mobile, un doute se lève en moi: "Pourquoi moi? Pourquoi à moi seule, dans la tribu, cette chance?" (239)

Her ambivalence toward the privileged fate that separated her from the majority of Algerian women is undoubtedly the source of her later desire to return to the world of the female collective and la parole orale. Even as an adolescent, Djebar realized that most women would not
have the opportunity to become educated and to decide the
course of their own lives. Thus, although her education
created a gulf between her and the women of her extended
family, she remained committed to them. If her education
and her "venue à l'écriture" led her away from the
gynécée, her "educated" reflections on her previous life
eventually led her back to the female collective.
However, before she becomes reunited with the feminine
collective (as represented by a renewal of her
identification with the mother's tongue), she must first
reexamine her relationship with the French language as it
evolved during earlier life. By doing so, she comes to
recognize that, although French served her as a means of
communication with the outside world, it always remained
an "adversary language." Because it could never
completely express her "moi," a portion of her identity
remains communicable only in the mother tongue.

Many of Djebar's anecdotes in L'Amour, la fantasia
are related to the theme of women and their writing. By
emphasizing this theme in a work that purports to be an
autobiography, she is suggesting that Algerian women's
subjectivity needs to be presented to the public in terms
of the way it represents an integral expression of their
sexuality. Whether in written or in oral form, such a
project can, she believes, liberate women's discourse
from the taboos and constraints perpetuated by contemporary Algerian society.

Her insight into this aspect of female subjectivity was initially triggered by her first encounter with her father’s "law" against receiving letters from boys. Referring to the incident as her first "histoire d’amour," at the age of seventeen and having just returned home for summer vacation, she received a letter from a young man who had seen her at the end-of-the-year academic award ceremony. He was writing her to express his interest in her studies and to propose a friendly exchange of letters during the holidays. In an act that he hopes will assert his control over his daughter’s sexuality, Djebar’s father intercepts the letter and destroys it in front of her. She was not even permitted to read its contents. Despite her father’s willingness to send his daughter to school, he refuses to grant her the freedom to maintain a correspondence with a young man.

During the afternoon’s siesta, however, Djebar rescues the fragments of the letter and reconstructs its contents. "Indécence de la demande aux yeux du père, comme si les préparatifs d’un rapt inévitable s’amorçaient dans cette invite" (12). This incident illustrates the risks of "writing" about love in a
society that does not acknowledge a woman's right to read and write; in fact, any woman who can read and write is seen as a potential threat to the smooth functioning of this society. A literate woman who can communicate (her sexual desires) with the outside world is thus in a position to circumvent the mechanisms that are calculated to prevent her from taking control over her sexuality. In the opinion of traditionally minded individuals, however, the young woman's writing becomes an obvious metaphor for her sexuality. "Si la jouvencelle écrit? Sa voix, en dépit du silence, circule. Un papier. Un chiffon froissé. Une main de servante.... L'écrit s'envolera par le patio, sera lancé d'une terrasse..." (11-12). This passage and the entire episode in which it is embedded reveal the male "fear" of women's writing as it encroaches on the masculine monopoly of written discourse and power that it confers. When a woman does not have to rely exclusively on the exchange of oral (hence transitory) words, she too can experience the force and permanence of the written word. Defying the social and religious order that sanctions her sequestration, a love-letter that leaves the harem defies two boundaries: that of the the harem and that of women's silence.
Although Djebar’s father allowed her to attend the colonizer’s school, he insisted upon monitoring her access to written language, especially in situations where she might "write" her sexual desire. The ambiguity of his attitude toward his daughter’s discourse is mirrored in her own ambivalence regarding the two languages that have become part of her, even though they generally are used to express different sides of her being. Ironically, his desire to prevent her correspondence produced an opposite effect, opposite to the one he had intended. As Djebar explains, her father’s intervention made the Other’s language seem more "seductive" and hence more appropriate for romantic discourse. For this reason, she came to conceive of letter-writing as a form of self-empowerment. By "usurping" written language, she could experience a forbidden knowledge of her own desires, and those of others:

Les mots conventionnels et en langue française de l’étudiant en vacances se sont gonflés d’un désir imprévu, hyperbolique, simplement parce que le père a voulu les détruire. Les mois, les années suivantes, je me suis engloutie dans l’histoire d’amour, ou plutôt dans l’interdiction d’amour; l’intrigue s’est épanouie du fait même de la censure paternelle. Dans cette amorce d’éducation sentimentale, la correspondance secrète se fait en français: ainsi cette langue que m’a donnée le père devient entremetteuse et mon initiation, dès lors, se place sous un signe double, contradictoire...

(12)
This passage identifies the origin of the ambivalence that characterizes the role of the French language as a "mediator" among herself, her father, and her sexuality. It is the "paternal language" in the sense that it is associated with her father's profession, with the "masculine" outside world, and with the "gift" of education bestowed upon her by her father. Yet after the episode of the letter, it has also become for her the "language of desire." The ambivalence resides in the fact that this "language of desire" is at the same time the language that expressly "forbids" desire.

In _L'Amour, la fantasia_, Djebar is openly trying to work through the psychological ramifications of her self-writing project in the paternal language. Feminist critics argue that all women autobiographers face the paradox of having to express their subjectivity in and through a language that denies the specificity of the female experience. Djebar's situation is further complicated by the fact that French is not only the masculine/paternal "other" tongue, but also the language that carries with it the reality of the French presence in Algeria and the contradictions of colonial education. On a linguistic level, the paradox inherent in this situation is reflected in the duality of French as a force that was both liberating and alienating in the
evolution of the young woman's "moi." While writing about the self in French permits Djebar to assume her subjectivity, the fact that French is the paternal/other language means that she will not be comfortable using it as a vehicle to communicate the most intimate dimensions of her self and particularly her own sexuality.

Many written forms of love and desire, even if sent or received by a woman, are marked by the presence of masculine authority—an authority that circumscribes the woman’s participation in the communicational act. In Djebar's subconscious, the father's presence is marked by his attempt to mediate a feminine desire that is expressed in the language of the "Other." As a Muslim, Algerian woman who was educated in French schools, she comes to the realization that the act of writing will always be against the grain of the father's controlling presence:

Chaque mot d'amour, qui me serait destiné, ne pourrait que rencontrer le diktat paternelle. Chaque lettre, même la plus innocente, suposerait l'œil constant du père, avant de me parvenir. Mon écriture, en entretenant ce dialogue sous influence, devenait en moi tentative--ou tentative--de délimiter mon propre silence... Mais le souvenir des exécuteurs de harem ressuscite; il me rappelle que tout papier écrit dans la pénombre rameute la plus ordinaire des inquisitions! (75)

If the father's gift of the French language enables her "coming to writing," it also creates the necessity of using the same language as a veil, for the father's
authority impedes the "writing" of love and his presence in the discourse of the Other obliges women to envelop themselves in modesty, rendering direct, self-revelatory discourse even more problematic. As Djebar explains: "Quand l’adolescente s’adresse au père, sa langue s’enrobe de pruderie.... Est-ce pourquoi la passion ne pourra s’exprimer pour elle sur le papier? Comme si le mot étranger devenait taie sur l’oeil qui veut découvrir!" (76). Only as an adult did Djebar fully understand the complex issues involved in "writing her feminine desire." Only then did she recognize the illusory nature of her attempt to express intimacy in the language of the "Other." As an adolescent, however, writing and reading in French seemed to offer a key to self-knowledge and to the possibility of asserting control over her own fate.

In the chapter entitled "Trois jeunes filles cloitrées," Djebar recounts the story of another illicit correspondance, one that originated within the gynécée and that predated her own. During a summer vacation with her maternal extended family when she was twelve years old, she made several astonishing discoveries. Her three cousins were several years older than she was, but they were more restricted in their movements outside the house. With the youngest of the three girls, she
investigated the contents of a locked book cabinet belonging to an older male cousin who was away for the summer. The two of them embarked upon an ambitious program of reading the contents of the cabinet: romances and mysteries. They discovered books by Paul Bourget, Colette, and Agatha Christie along with an album of erotic postcards that depicted the Ouled Nail girls of Southern Algeria, who were celebrated (and exploited by the Europeans) for their custom of pre-nuptial prostitution and their sensuous dances. Almost a rite of passage for adolescent girls in the West, the reading of romantic fiction in secret places concealed from parental oversight changes the way they feel about themselves on account of their access to "adult" reading materials. Djebar and her companion had a similar experience: "Nous nous imaginons surgir d'une région interdite; nous nous sentions plus vieilles" (20).

The incidents of reading French-language fiction and vicariously experiencing the adventures of Colette's heroines afforded the girls a "window" through which they could view the outside world. Because Djebar and her cousins felt that they were overstepping certain proprieties by reading romantic fiction, the French-language became more for her than the means by which she could avoid the harem: it became a "magic carpet" capable
of transporting her far away from the stifling world of
traditional constraints. "Quand j’écris et lis la langue
étrangère: il [mon corps] voyage, il va et vient dans
l’espace subversif, malgré les voisins et les matrones
soupçonneuses; pour peu, il s’envolerait!" (208).
Djebars use of the verb "s’envoler" evokes the verb
"vole" and its usage by French feminists to describe the
relationship between women and language. As "voleuses de
langue," Djebar and her cousins are doubly guilty: they
are not only usurping written (hence "masculine")
language; they are also "stealing" the Other’s language.
Furthermore, the verb "vole" also suggests the act of
"flying." "S’envoler" thus implies that the French
language can serve as a means of escape. By reading and
writing in French, the young women succeed in maintaining
the illusion that they are taking the first step toward a
new freedom.

The theme, "l’amour s’écrit," also underpins other
segments in the fugue-like structure in L’Amour, la
fantasia, highlighting the ways in which the French
language (as written discourse) affected the self-
knowledge of Algerians who were exposed to it. If the
French language empowered Djebars cousins by allowing
them access to a written discourse in which they could
act out their defiance of tradition, it also, as Djebar
learned, enabled two of her cloistered cousins to engage in a secret correspondence with male pen pals from all over the (French-speaking) Arab world.

Like Djebar, the girls had been sent to the French school by their father, who had to ask one of them to verify the French-language bills and financial statements for the family farm. But even though his authority had permitted the young women to learn how to read and write in French, their adolescent rebellion was against him and his efforts to deprive them of their mobility in the outside world. Ironically, in reacting against him, they are using the language that was "given" to them by him.

Djebar's cousins pursue their epistolary revolt despite the risks of exposure, and when they share their secret with Djebar, all of them experience a sense of solidarity and trust:

Lors des veillees, la benjamine et moi, nous ne parlions plus des romans lus durant les longs après-midi, mais de l'audace que cette correspondance clandestine nécessitait. Nous en évoquions les terribles dangers. Il y avait eu dans nos villes, pour moins que cela, de nombreux pères ou frères devenus 'justiciers;' le sang d'une vierge, fille ou soeur, avait été versé pour un billet glissé, pour un mot soupiré derrière les persiennes, pour une médisance... Dans cette maison, désormais une révolte sourde s'était infiltrée. Nous la vivions avec une insolence de gamines." (21).

The act of "seizing" la parole écrite made the young girls susceptible to punishment. When a woman allows her (written) desire to circulate outside the harem, she is,
in a sense, "unveiling" her body, expressing her sexuality in such a way as to assert her control over it. But she is also rejecting the identity that the patriarchal society seeks to impose on her—the identity of women as a "passive" sexual object.

In retrospect, Djebar realizes that the young girls’ writing was in part a normal adolescent rebellion against paternal authority, similar in some ways, to the vitriolic rejections of the father’s religion in novels such as *La Statue de sel* and *Le Passé simple*. However, there is also a deeper, more lasting significance in the young women’s experience, one that explains the tension between the freedom implied in French-language literacy and the confinement that is inflicted on young Algerian women to satisfy a father’s or a brother’s preoccupation with the family’s honor. Although the educated, middle-class women in Djebar’s fictional works do not have to confront this situation, she displays in her autobiography a genuine sympathy for Algerian women who do not have the opportunity to express their individuality or to explore alternatives for personal development.

In the episode that details the youngest cousin’s reasons for continuing her correspondence with young men despite the potentially dangerous consequences, Djebar
empathizes with young women like her cousins who were not permitted to continue their education after the age of puberty. At night, in the large bed they shared, Djebar’s cousin often repeated her refusal to accept the fate that awaited her in an arranged marriage:

_Jamais, jamais, je ne me laisserai marier un jour à un inconnu qui, en une nuit aurait le droit de me toucher! C’est pour cela que j’écris! Quelqu’un viendra dans ce trou perdu pour me prendre: il sera un inconnu pour mon père ou mon frère, certainement pas pour moi! (22-3)_

The girl’s words reveal the seriousness with which she wrote to her pen pals; for her, correspondence was not merely a flirtatious game. It was a life line to the outside world, enabling her to resist suffocation by boredom and solitude in her imposed seclusion.

"... Ecrire vers l’inconnu devenait pour elles une manière de respirer un nouvel oxygène. Elles trouvaient là une issue provisoire à leur clausturation" (56). As an adult autobiographer, Djebar realizes letter-writing could not really alter her cousin’s situation, but she also sees it as an affirmation of her right to _la parole_, a right vouchsafed her by her father, who then deprived her of it. Looking back on this summer of forbidden novels and subversive correspondence, Djebar understands how writing (for her and her cousins) became a symbolic way "out" of the harem, a gateway to the environment that was forbidden to them. For Djebar, the learning of
French culminated in a career as a novelist and an opportunity to live independently; in a sense, the French language did serve her as a "magic carpet" that transported her out of the harem. For her cousins, however, the French-language correspondence was merely a provisional échappatoire, for they apparently did not escape the fate that awaited them.

Djebar continued to spend summer vacations at her maternal uncle's farm, and when she was seventeen-years old, she herself embarked on a secret correspondence with a young man, although her letters were less like epistles of desire for an absent Other than fragments of a narrative in the form of a diary. She refers to it as a "journal de rêveuse cloitrée" (71). With an autobiographer's hindsight, she understands that her objective was not to bring her closer to the loved-one, but to experience the danger inherent in the act of engaging in an illicit correspondence. Writing letters in French to the absent suitor (did he really exist?) eventually brought Djebar back to her situation as a cloistered young woman who was spending three months shut away from the outside world in which she lived during the other nine months of the year. As she explains, her letters became symbolic sorties into the outside world, where her words could occupy spaces that she herself
could not enter. Writing was her way of circumventing the closed doors of the harem, and she sees herself in the company of an entire sisterhood of cloistered women who write about their desire to the outside world—women like Marianne (the Portugese nun in Les Lettres portugaises), Roxanne in Les Lettres persanes, and even Suzanne in La Religieuse:

Je dis le temps qui passe, les chaleurs d'été dans l'appartement clos, les siestes que je vis en échappées. Mes mutismes d'enfermée provisoire approfondissent ce monologue, masqué en conversation interdite. J'écris pour encercler les jours cernés...Ces mois d'été que je passe en prisonnière n'engendrent en moi nulle révolte. Le huis-clos, je le ressens comme une halte de vacances. La rentrée scolaire s'annonce proche, le temps d'étude m'est promesse d'une liberté qui hésite. En attendant, mes missives en langue française partent pour ailleurs. Elles tentent de circonscrire cet enfermement. Ces lettres dites "d'amour," mais à contresens, apparaissent comme des claies de persiennes filtrant l'éclat solaire. (71)

Djebbar's "correspondence" was actually a monologue, one in which she writes to and of herself as a means of expressing her desire for herself—i.e., the autobiographer's "amour de soi," a passion whose subtext is the narcissistic "je." Writing the self as the desired Other was obviously not the project Djebbar undertook when she was a seventeen-year old school girl, but in retrospect she recognizes the rebellious character of her gesture—entering into contact with men and writing about "love" and about feminine desire. The
French language enabled her to carry out this early effort at "self-writing." Her journal was the space in which she could enjoy an imaginary excursion—the space to which she could "s’envoler" from her confinement. More significantly, it was the setting for her first meditation on her own relationship with the French language. When she refers to her letters as window blinds that filter the glare of the sun’s light, she is suggesting that French-language writing had already become a means of simultaneously expressing and "veiling" her true self and her most intimate desires.

The opening incident of this section, "L’Amour s’écrit," occurs when Djebar’s father intercepts and destroys the letter that had been sent to her by the unknown young admirer; it becomes a narrative thread that, woven through the entire section, suggests the seductive and transgressive power of the word for an Algerian woman. The letter (or journal) writing in which she engaged as a retaliation for the destruction of the proto-"lettre d’amour" thus figuratively becomes an effort to reconstitute the original, mutilated letter.

Writing in French was an adolescent attempt to overcome clausturation and her father’s proscription against communicating with the male Other, but the father’s mediating presence proves unavoidable, because
it exists even in the relationship between her "moi" and the French language. Any "desire" she wished to communicate in French had to pass through the filter of the paternal language. Because feminine desire must be "veiled" in this way, the written form of expression also served an alternative purpose for her: it expressed subjectivity in an objective fashion, without communicating a sense of intimacy.

L'émoi ne perce dans aucune de mes phrases. Ces lettres, je le perçois plus de vingt ans après, voilaient l'amour plus qu'elles ne l'exprimaient, et presque par contrainte allègre: car l'ombre du père se tient là. La jeune fille, à demi affranchie, s'imagine prendre cette présence à témoin:— Tu vois, j'écris, et ce n'est pas "pour le mal," pour "l'indécent!" Seulement pour dire que j'existe et en palpiter! Ecrire, n'est-ce pas "me" dire? (71-2)

The father's mediating presence inscribed in the French language causes her to feel that she must address him as an interlocutor and explain that there is nothing indecent in her act of writing. In this passage Djebar describes this need to write to her father. Writing is a means of existing, of affirming her identity, her subjectivity. She advocates an écriture féminine that is transgressive (not pornographic) in the sense that it accords women a "voice" with which to express their desire to live freely and to experience life for themselves. In essence, she is appealing for a rejection
of the old order that had sought to maintain women in silence and in "objectivity."

The adult autobiographer Djebar reviews the incidents in her past to unearth the significant episodes in her constantly evolving relationship with the paternal and maternal languages that shaped her identity. She retraces her "venue à l'écriture" and analyzes the reasons why French proved capable of fostering some kinds of self-expression but not others. As she resurrects the scenes of her adolescence when she began to write and to become aware of her sexuality, she gradually comes to understand the problematic nature of her relationship with French as a vehicle for "writing" feminine desire. How can she "write love" if she is a woman from an oral culture, educated in a language whose use constantly resurrects political and aesthetic dilemmas for her? "La langue française pouvait tout m'offrir de ses trésors inépuisables, mais pas un, pas le moindre de ses mots d'amour ne me serait réservé..." (38).

In writing her desire in a language from which she remained detached on the innermost level of her consciousness, she was again "veiling" herself from desire. She did not write to communicate desire, but rather to envelop herself in the secure cocoon of the paternal/Other's language:
Dès lors, quels mots de l'intimité rencontrer dans cette antichambre de ma jeunesse? Je n'écrivais pas pour me dénuder, même pas pour approcher du frisson, à plus forte raison pour le révéler; plutôt pour lui tourner le dos, dans un déni du corps dont me frappent à présent l'orgueil et la sublimation naïve. (72)

Djebar the autobiographical narrator realizes that her wish had actually been to hide from desire by writing about it in a language that could never directly touch her. Nevertheless, this first step in her "coming to writing" was highly significant because it represented her first attempt to discover her own voice—to develop a language that could serve as a space in which the Other's language could encounter the maternal language that had no written form.

Throughout L'Amour, la fantasia, Djebar refers to an "aphasie amoureuse." This image evokes not only the silence in which many Algerian women existed; it also draws attention to her ambivalent emotions towards the two languages that shaped her subjectivity. For Djebar, the loss of speech occurs as a result of the attempt to "write love." She herself resorts once again to the metaphor of veiling, when she suggests that what is concealed from outsiders is at the same time blocked from one's own view. In this sense, the veil of the "langue adverse" becomes a gag that inhibits speech rather than facilitating it.
In the chapter entitled "L'Aphasie amoureuse" Djebar explains that, as a child, she had observed how the women of her family displayed little concern if a French man happened to glimpse their faces. Women were permitted to leave the house to go to the hammam or to visit a local saint's shrine as part of their religious observances. The region of Cherchell is known for its Roman ruins, and they have attracted foreign tourists for several centuries. When the women of the household went on a small pilgrimage to the local marabout's tomb, small boys accompanied them to keep watch for any men who might be passing when the ladies wished to rest along the road and take off their haïks and veils in order to eat and chat more freely. When a warning rang out that a man was approaching, veils and haïks were quickly pulled up around their faces. If the passer-by happened to be a European man, a different attitude manifested itself among the women:

Le passant, puisqu'il est Français, Européen, Chrétien, s'il regarde, a-t-il vraiment un regard? Face à elles, qui ont mission, leur vie entière, de préserver leur image, de considérer ce devoir comme le legs le plus sacré, face à elles toutes, mes tantes, mes cousines, mes semblables, l'étranger en s'arrêtant, en les dévisageant, les voit-il lorsqu'il croit les surprendre? Non, il s'imagine les voir.... […] Son regard, de l'autre côté de la haie, au-delà de l'interdit, ne peut toucher. Aucune stratégie de séduction ne risque de s'exercer... (142)
The European man who gazes at an Algerian woman across a gulf of the "forbidden" does not pose a threat because his glance cannot "touch" her (143). He is impotent in his effort to seduce her because he lacks the language to do so. Because the adversary language evokes subconscious and conscious memories of the colonizer's pillage of the mother country, his foreign tongue arouses hatred and scorn in the women, not desire.

In her search for traces of Algerian women in texts written by European soldiers, Djebar discovered that, even in the years before the conquest, Algerian women felt themselves to be immune to the gaze of the foreign Other. The Chevalier d'Aranda, a Christian knight captured by Corsairs during the seventeenth century, noted that the woman of Algeria considered the gaze of their Christian slaves to be impotent and insignificant. "Les femmes ne sont pas scrupuleuses devant les esclaves chrétiens, car elles disent qu'ils sont aveugles" (145). According to Djebar, the foreign Other is not a potential seducer because he lacks the power to arouse desire in Algerian women.

Djebar relates her own aphasia to the women's heedlessness of the Frenchman's gaze. The "distance" that separates them becomes the "no-man's land" that exists between her innermost self and the French
language. This separation guarantees that she will be protected by an invisible barrier that allows her to be seen through and in the French language. At the same time, this separation prevents her from being seduced by the French language or fused with its expressive possibilities. "La langue étrangère me servait, dès l’enfance, d'embrasure pour le spectacle du monde et de ses richesses" (143). In this passage, Djebar's use of the word "embrasure," or portal, suggests that French can be seen either as providing a gateway to another world or as placing her in the position of an immobile observer whose gaze is fixed on some distant object.

Djebar's "amorous aphasia" is a function of the central paradox in her relationship to writing about desire in the French language: How can one use a language to write intimately about one's self if this language evokes the conquest of the mother('s) tongue by the foreign occupier? As a language that has been imposed on her people from the outside, French will always remain alien to her at some profound level of her own consciousness:

Cette impossibilité en amour, la mémoire de la conquête renforça. Lorsqu’enfant, je fréquentai l’école, les mots français commençaient à peine à attaquer ce rempart. J’héritai de cette étanchéité; dès mon adolescence, j’expérimentai une sorte d’aphasie amoureuse: les mots écrits, les mots appris, faisaient retrait devant moi, dès que
This passage provides an illuminating glimpse into the ambiguities of the (ex-)colonized, bilingual consciousness. Djebar senses that she is caught between two languages; no matter how well (de)colonized intellectuals master the adversary language, they will never be able to fully express the colonized self in it because a part of that self remains embedded in the mother(‘s) tongue. Like the foreign man whose gaze cannot seduce an Algerian woman, "his" language is incapable of offering a channel between the outside world and the inner self of an Algerian woman. The French language is thus simultaneously a veil, a filter, and a gag.

Because French cannot provide her with an appropriate vehicle for communicating love, Djebar turns to the orality of the mother tongue to establish a sense of intimacy:

Lorsqu’un homme de ma langue d’origine pouvait, me parlant en français, se permettre une approche, les mots se transformaient en masque que, dans les préliminaires du jeu esquissé, l’interlocuteur se résignait à prendre. C’était lui, en somme, qui se voilait, pour oser avancer vers ma personne.

Si je désirais soudain, par caprice, diminuer la distance entre l’homme et moi, il ne m’était pas nécessaire de montrer, par quelque mimique, mon affabilité. Il suffisait d’opérer le passage à la langue maternelle: revenir, pour un détail, au son de l’enfance.... (145-6)
By examining her relationship to the French language from different perspectives and by questioning its ability to express sexual desire, Djebar succeeds in presenting readers with a portrait not only of the (French-language) writer but of the Algerian woman as well. Intimacy cannot flourish for her within the realm of the French language because her maternal language alone is capable of sustaining physical and emotional communion. It alone resuscitates a collective past that can be shared by potential partners: "...la voix renvoie à la voix et le corps peut s'approcher du corps" (146). As Djebar notes, the seductive power of a passion that is transmitted in the language of the other is lost before it reaches its intended recipient. "Le message de l'autre se gonfle parfois d'un désir qui me parvient, mais expurgé de toute contagion. La passion, une fois écrite, s'éloignait de moi définitivement" (72). The reason for this evaporation of passion is the fact that, once foreign words are put into written form, they no longer have any substance for her. Contrary to a Western tradition in which written words have more "weight" than spoken words, Djebar's psychological embeddedness in the oral parole maternelle has convinced her that only the spoken (dialectal) word is capable of truly touching her. Within this context, the usual power-language
relationship is reversed, for the man, she implies, must enter into or "steal" from the realm of feminine language if he truly wants to reach her with his words of love. The Algerian man who wishes to touch the most profound part of her being must first make himself vulnerable by taking off the mask that the French language enables him to wear.

According to Khatibi, the bilingual writer is acutely aware of the mother tongue’s presence, even though it might be submerged and supplanted by the other’s tongue. The bilingual text subtly, sometimes even unconsciously, manifests the overlapping of the two tongues as they entertain "une traduction permanente et un entretien en abyme, extrêmement difficile à mettre au jour" (Maghreb 179). (De)colonized, bilingual writers appear to be haunted by the question of "identity," he argues, precisely because the multiple modes of thought engendered by the bilingual situation impel them to search for a single point of origin, an illusory unity of being (Maghreb 200); autobiographical narrative textualizes this quest. In Djebar’s case, the situation is even more complex because she is seeking to situate her subjectivity in each of the (four) languages that shaped her identity as an Algerian, French-language, woman writer. In order to reconcile the competing
demands of French and dialectal Arabic, she set out to retrace her "venue à l'écriture" so that she could better understand the role that the maternal language played in her desire and in her unwillingness to express herself fully in writing. Like other bilingual autobiographers, she was obliged to recognize that, although the self-writing project might be accomplished in the other('s) tongue, the maternal language makes itself "heard" as a result of the autobiographer's "aphasia."

In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Djebar seeks to create a language capable of serving her as a viable means of affective communication, a language capable of mediating between her paternal and maternal tongues. Urged forward in this project by her need to unveil or to cast off the gags that triggered her aphasia, she first bridged the gap between them in a cinematic narrative that focuses on Algerian women's orality. By the end of her autobiography, she realizes that French will remain her primary means of written expression. In the text itself, she has demonstrated that she can manipulate it and "cleanse" it of the stigma of the Other's, colonizing presence by introducing a mélange of Algerian women's orality and the suppressed feminine presence in the Other's descriptions of the Algerian conquest.
To overcome her "aphasie amoureuse," she enacts a symbolic return to the mother's tongue and acknowledges its importance in the evolution of her own self-concept. Thus her autobiographical act not only depicts her own "coming to writing" and "coming to desire;" but it also resuscitates the muted voices of the women's collective that she had known as a child and as a participant in Algeria's struggle for national liberation. The result is an "autobiographie plurielle" that gives voice to an Algerian female subjectivity that had often been silenced in the past:

Djebar's desire to overcome her own aphasia drives her to understand the condition of silence which she considers to be the single most detrimental aspect of the feminine condition in Algerian society. In L'Amour, la fantasia, she reveals how her French education and her writing in the French language proved to be both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, it has freed her from the harem; on the other, she never disassociated herself from Algerian women who were not as fortunate as herself. Some of them who remained secluded and lacked any chance of gaining access to la parole, actually tell their own
stories in Djebar's autobiographical narrative. By according them this opportunity, she hopes to overcome her own (metaphorical) aphasia, while at the same time ending the siege of silence that had been imposed upon her "sœurs disparues."
CHAPTER III

Collective Autobiography: Algerian Women and History

—Où as-tu entendu raconter cela? reprend-elle avec
impatience.
—Je l'ai lu! rétorque-je. Un témoin le raconta à
un ami qui
l'écrivit. (188)

L'Amour, la fantasia is a collective autobiography
in which the author seeks to return to the atmosphere of
the female collective of her childhood in order to join
her voice and her personal narrative to those of other
Algerian women. Given the cultural proscription against
women's first-person narrative ("Comment dire 'je,'
puisque ce serait dédaigner les formules-couvertures qui
maintiennent le trajet individuel dans la résignation
collective?" 177), Djebar recognizes that in order to
facilitate her act of life-writing, she must renew her
ties to the female collective and situate her discourse
within the circle of Algerian women. The result is a
polyphonic text in which Djebar has transcribed the oral
narratives of several women from the Chenoua region of
her maternal ancestors.
She and the women who tell their stories struggle against cultural factors that conspire to maintain the silence of Algerian women. Only through a harmonious arrangement of exchanged and shared paroles can a collective female identity be expressed, both textually and orally. Djebar's quest for an individual and collective sense of self begins with a valorization of Algerian women's history and of the vital role they have played in the historical development of their nation since 1830.

During the past decade feminist critics have repeatedly drawn attention to the underlying assumptions behind much of modern Western thought in the areas of history and autobiography. Domna C. Stanton, Sidonie Smith, and Shari Benstock have brought a new level of critical understanding to women's (autobiographical) writing. Although their analyses focus on the concerns of European and North American women autobiographers, their research advances several hypotheses that can also be applied to women writers from developing nations.

According to Smith, for example, many theorists (e.g., Georg Misch, Georges Gusdorf, Karl Weintraub) consider autobiography as the narrative of a "Great Man's life." The only women's writings analyzed in Gusdorf's or Misch's studies are those of "Great Women" (queens,
saints, etc.)—women whose lives were publically known or who had themselves experienced notoriety during their lifetimes. Smith points out that these androcentric readings of autobiography fail to consider whether men and women (in any cultural context) experience "individuality" in exactly the same manner. Working from the theories of Nancy Chodorow, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva, Smith expresses the belief that women's writing demonstrates how men and women express their selves in different ways. She contends that "feminine" writing, characterized by "entry into the symbolic," is "plural, continuous, interdependent, nonsensical, roundabout, a narrative of ruptures, gaps, wordplay, and jouissance fundamentally different from the forward drive of logocentric individuality" (13). According to her, the dissimilarities between male and female autobiography are apparent at both the narrative and structural levels of the text. Men's self-writing, in her view, insists on the forward evolution of the subject, whereas women's self-portraits follow a circular or even a maze-like narrative path.

For this reason, they tend to have a pluralistic and non-linear quality. To call autobiography pluralistic would at first glance seem to be a contradiction in terms because autobiographical writings in the Western
tradition have usually been regarded as the clearest expressions of an ego-centered perspective, of "individuality." However, James Olney and Franz Rosenthal have demonstrated that autobiography is not an exclusively Western genre and that non-Western cultures have produced autobiographies based upon quite different concepts of individuality. In fact, Smith's contention that feminine writing is characterized by a plurality of meaning and discourse seems to be corroborated by the fact that much of women's autobiography from third world areas focuses upon a pluralistic subjectivity. In order to understand this plurality in women's autobiographical writing, we need to develop reading strategies that take collective as well as individual modes of self-expression into consideration.¹

Smith contrasts the "alternative language of fluid, plural subjectivity" (13) in women's (autobiographical) writing with the obsessive linearity of men's self-writing. She specifically draws attention to women's autobiographies that interweave the life history of one individual with elements not usually found in autobiography: for example, poetry, fiction, and historical chronicle. Because women's writing is characterized by fluidity, she argues, there are no artificial generic boundaries to limit women's
autobiographies to the narration of a single life story
told in a rigidly chronological order. Traditionally,
autobiographers have created illusions of "truth" and
"objectivity" by basing their narratives on "real-life"
incidents that contribute an air of authenticity to their
self-portraits. According to Smith's readings of women's
autobiography, however, the symbolic language of écriture
féminine defiantly rejects the "forward drive of
logocentric certitude and individuality" (13). The work
of feminist critics such as Smith make it possible to
understand the specificity of women's autobiography and
how it explores female subjectivity in alternative forms
of discourse.

In her essay "Is there a Feminist Auto/Biography,"
Liz Stanley notes that, because feminist/women's
autobiography is a conscious process of self-
construction, it is also a "self-confident traversing of
the conventional boundaries between different genres of
writing" (65). In L'Amour, la fantasia, Djebar practices
such generic transgressions, mixing her own recollections
and her own life-story with two forms of historical
chronicle: excerpts from the diaries and letters of
French military officers who participated in the
nineteenth-century conquest of Algeria, and oral
narratives recounted by contemporary Algerian women who
relate their experiences during the Algerian revolution. The polyphonic and inter-generic nature of her autobiographical narrative is suggested by the work's title. The term "fantasia" is trans-culturally evocative; it is also a rich metaphor for several structures and themes in the text. The (Western) musical imagery of the term (i.e., a musical composition lacking a rigid, fixed form) suggests the fluidity and mélange of structures that characterize feminine writing in general and her autobiography in particular. Djebar's narrative at first appears syncopated, jumping from anecdotes about the author's personal life, to diary entries by foreign travellers, and then to oral narratives told by women from the region in which Djebar's maternal ancestors had lived; all these materials are presented in rhythmic patterns that evoke the sense of a musical composition. In actuality, the divisions in Djebar's text reflect a carefully planned underlying structure that harmonizes the various women's voices into an orchestrated whole.

In the context of the Maghreb, fantasia also has another meaning: it is the festive display of horsemanship and shooting traditionally performed to celebrate victories or holidays by the tribes of the Atlas and Kabyle mountains. Mention of the fantasia calvalry dredges up images of the fierce warriors who
participated in the nineteenth-century defense of Algeria. More specifically, however, Djebar’s text reminds readers that the fantasia never takes place without the trilling cries, the tzarl-rit, of the female spectators. These cries signal triumph and joy (or sorrow on other occasions), and Djebar wishes to transcribe them in her autobiography.

The women’s wordless cries signify a range of emotions and mark a feminine presence in the masculine world of horses, battle, and guns. Throughout L’Amour, la fantasia, the narrative is punctuated by the tzarl-rit which, for Djebar, constitutes the most traditional expression of the Algerian (and Maghrebian) women’s voice. Denied access to a more formal parole, the ululation is interpreted an expression that replaces words or speeches of joyful exclamation. In Djebar’s text, it is presented as a primordial women’s language, one that facilitates communication between women of the past and women of the present—women whose echoing cries Djebar seeks to resurrect in her collective autobiographical work. In an interview with Mimi Mortimer, Djebar explains that, if it were not for the cries of the fantasia, her own words—written or oral—could not exist because her reticence to speak out alone as a single individual would prevent her from doing so:
Je rappelle rapidement que les oreilles étrangères ne vont pas comprendre si ces cris sont cris de joie ou de deuil. En réalité, il s'agit des deux. Or, une fantasia n'existe jamais sans un youyou. Au fur et à mesure que les cavaliers tirent, elles font monter leurs voix. Ces choeurs se faisaient entendre pendant la guerre également. Cette structure "en fantasia" me permettait d'entrelacer ma propre voix avec les voix des autres femmes. Cela m'a donné [un] peu de courage pour parler de moi, intimement.

Djebard admits that it is only within the feminine collective that she can raise her own voice and break the silence that surrounds women's first-person discourse. Her avowal suggests that she herself is articulating an écriture féminine as she returns to realm of women's silence, for the emotions and desires communicated in their cries constitute an alternative, wordless form of language. She goes on to say that this form of maternal language enabled her to speak about herself in French, the language she refers to as the "father tongue." By writing women's stories into the paternal language, Djebard hopes to reconcile the disparate spheres of male and female discourse (see Mortimer Assia).

French feminist theories about the relationship between the self and language suggest that a woman situates her discourse through the mother's language, the pre-Oedipal, symbolic language. The obstacle Djebard confronted before she could write her autobiography was her own need to work her way back to and through the mother's language. In order to "discover a language
appropriate to her own story" and "having returned to her origins in the mother and the silent and silenced 'culture' she shares with all women, the autobiographer manifests a different relationship to story-telling as a woman" (S. Smith 57, 58). The "father's tongue" is not always be adequate to express the "unrepresentability" of women's subjectivity. According to Smith, this linguistic shortcoming motivates women autobiographers to develop a different relationship to language—a relationship that is reflected in her quest for a new narrative discourse capable of filling the "gaps," the silent void of female subjectivity that the paternal language cannot re-create. In this sense, the collective nature of Djebar's autobiography also has its origins in her search for a way to reconcile a feminine autobiographical writing space with her use of the "father tongue" to express her own subjectivity and that of the female collective.

In L'Amour, la fantasia Djebar's sub-text is specifically motivated by the desire to re-inscribe women into Algerian history. A great deal has been written about the relationship of colonized peoples to their own history, but little effort has been made to include colonized women in texts that purport to renew the colonized subject's ties with the past. Albert Memmi's
and Frantz Fanon's theories about the (ex-)colonized intellectual and history point out that the first step in "decolonizing the mind" is the construction of a positive historical and cultural heritage in response to the denigration perpetrated against indigenous institutions and attitudes by the colonizer. In their essays, Fanon and Memmi assume that the "colonized intellectual" is a male colonized subject; they might mention the role women have played in revolutionary struggles, but they do not envision the possibility that colonized women have specific concerns in regard to their relationship to history.

Western feminists have justified the need to "restore" or "re-inscribe" women into history, since all too often historiographers have interpreted the past as a sequence of events experienced and brought about by men. In a post-colonial context, feminists face a doubly difficult task: they need to restore the presence of women to a past that was appropriated as ethnographic data by the West, and they need to restore a voice to women who have been reduced to silence by indigenous institutions and attitudes that prevailed both during and after the colonial period.

In her autobiographical project, Djebar hopes to make Algerian women more aware of the ties that link them
to Algerian women of the past. Because an individual's sense of identity is linked to an understanding of past history, she seeks to make Algeria's history an integral element in the contemporary Algerian woman's search for identity:

...l'histoire est utilisée dans ce roman comme quête de l'identité. Identité non seulement des femmes mais de tout le pays. (...) J'aborde le passé du dix-neuvième siècle par une recherche sur l'écriture, sur l'écriture en langue française. S'établit alors pour moi un rapport avec l'histoire du dix-neuvième siècle écrite par des officiers français, et un rapport avec le récit oral des Algériennes traditionnelles d'aujourd'hui. Deux passés alternent donc; je pense que le plus important pour moi est de ramener le passé malgré ou à travers l'écriture, mon écriture de langue française. ("Entretien" 201)

History and autobiography are presented as interdependent in this work because Djebar wants to demonstrate that both are integral components of the quest for a viable Algerian postcolonial identity. She offers Algerian women an analysis of their relationship to the history of their country to convince them that they too have a stake in the historical evolution of their nation. The women who will recount their experiences of the Algerian revolution need to understand that they too have played a role in the history of their country. They need to understand that their oral narratives are just as valuable as the chronicles that have been written down by men and passed on to posterity.
In *L'Amour, la fantasia*, Djebar actually seeks to reconcile the two historical discourses that are at play in her text: male, French-language accounts of conquest and Algerian women's personal, oral narratives of the activities that took place during the war. As she herself comes to recognize, the key to the fusion of oral and written, paternal and maternal, language is the Algerian woman herself. Her own readings and interviews enabled her to discover that the Algerian woman's body has served as a symbolic, bilingual text upon which the historical events of the 1830 conquest and the 1954 revolution were inscribed. Because Algerian women have suffered and been reduced to silence, they have only recently found the courage to examine the "scars" on their bodies and to relate the tales that these wounds signify.

In Western accounts of the French conquest of Algeria, there are accounts of failed diplomatic missions, battles, resistance leaders such as Abdelkader, but there is no mention of Algerian women. Men who write history have all too often presented women as an invisible presence, implying that the lives of women failed to influence evolution of history. Djebar herself is a trained historian, and the focus of her research has been North Africa; thus, if her self-writing project is
an investigation into her own past, it also leads her to search for the traces of Algerian women in her nation's past. In cultures where women have experienced a double repression (as the result of both colonization and indigenous institutions), their silence and invisibility in the annals of their nations' past mean that someone must undertake a thorough investigation of archival materials if their lost presence is ever to be unearthed.

Muslim feminist scholars have begun this search, and the results of their research indicate that women's history in the Arab world has suffered the same neglect as it has in the West. To rectify this situation, feminist scholars such as Fatima Mernissi have begun to restore women to history and to uncover the active roles they played in the development of Islamic society. Her studies refute the stereotype (held both in the West and the Arab world) that Arab women have always been cloistered, passive, and historically insignificant.

Nevertheless, women writers such as Djebar and Mernissi have encountered obstacles to their revisionist projects because of the way that history tends to be conceived in Arab-Islamic cultures. In "Women in Muslim History: Traditional Perspectives and New Strategies," Mernissi observes that modern Arab nations rely on historical tradition as it is conceived in an Islamic
context (i.e., the traditions established by the word of God as transmitted through Mohammed). Despite the active roles played by women during the first decades after the death of the Prophet, few histories of Arab societies mention women's contributions. According to Mernissi, conservative political and social institutions seek to control the dissemination of new ideas in the Muslim world.\(^2\) Her observation could apply to any culture, but in societies governed by Islamic tradition, she points out, history is an especially powerful weapon because historical progression is regarded as a manifestation of Divine will: "History, the recorded memory of a culture, is never consumed directly like other products. Historical material goes through highly complicated processes, often tightly controlled and censored by those in power, before it is presented to citizens for selectively oriented consumption. (...) Contrasting the wealth of historical evidence favorable to women with their lowly status in Muslim society leads to the inescapable conclusion that the forces shaping image-making in the Muslim world discriminate against women" ("History" 342). According to her, negative views of Muslim women have been perpetuated because the male-dominated society has a vested interest in denying women access to information that would contradict many commonly
accepted assumptions. Djebar's research into Algerian women of the past and her transcriptions of women's accounts of the Algerian war challenge the notion that women have contributed little to the history of their nation.

There is a direct relationship between women's reticence to speak about their personal histories and their society's assumptions that women's lives have not contributed to the shaping of their culture. If women's access to positive accounts of their own history continues to be controlled by men in Arab-Muslim society, then an Arab woman autobiographer might understandably be hesitant about making her life story public. It would require enormous personal courage to brave the tradition of women's silence and invisibility by publishing her own life story. Within the prevailing climate of opinion, many people might consider an Arab woman to be arrogant for assuming that her life story contained anything of value for the rest of society. In Muslim-Arab society, the autobiographical act of a woman thus entails great risk. Because traditional Algerian society has often censured women who declare themselves to be "different," Djebar identifies with such women and decides to create a life-history that includes the lives of other Algerian women from the past and present. In this way, she
sidesteps some of the traditional objections to autobiography because it is the collective, not the individual, set apart as unique in *L'Amour, la fantasia*. Having researched her nation's past from a feminist perspective, Djebar rewrites the history of the French conquest of Algeria and the history of the war for independence by making women's narratives known to the public. *L'Amour, la fantasia* presents the fruits of her search for a neglected feminine presence in Algeria's past. By examining French soldiers' accounts of the conquest of Algeria, she comes to an understanding of the power exercised by a "masculine" written discourse about war. Algerian women were victimized by the invasion just as men were, but afterwards, she points out, a second violation of women took place when the conquest was described in "writing."

Djebar interprets the letters, diaries, travel narratives, and memoirs published by soldiers and other visitors to nineteenth and early twentieth-century Algeria in such a way as to illuminate the French male obsession with recounting their contacts with Algerian women. These men encountered local women as prisoners of war, prostitutes, and opponents in battle. In a subversive interpretation of the "writing/knowledge as power" paradigm, she suggests that there is a link
between her cloistered cousins' mania for writing and the "writing-fever" that affected these French and European men.\textsuperscript{3} In one sense, writing about the conquest after the fact sanctioned the French victory in the eyes of the West. The conquest was thus inscribed into an historical discourse that sanctioned the French colonial expansion into Africa and the Middle East as part of its "manifest destiny."

When Djebar compares her cousins' love letters to the French accounts of the capture of Algiers, she evokes the transgressive nature of writing for Algerian women and the empowerment that the written word accords to those who use it. Her cousins' writing was an act of forbidden rebellion; for the French conquerors, writing about the siege and pillage was a way of possessing Algeria, of prolonging the rape of this North African nation and its inhabitants. Her cousins' "writing" the female body's desires for free movement, love, and seduction finds its terrible, distorted reflection in the men's metaphoric desire to possess Algerian women through the violence of their texts, which would be eagerly devoured by the Parisian reading public:

\begin{quote}
Une telle démangeaison de l'écriture me rappelle la graphorrhée épistolaire des jeunes filles enfermées de mon enfance (...). Mais que signifie l'écrit de tant de guerriers, revivant ce mois de juillet 1830? Leur permet-il de savourer la gloire du séducteur, le vertige du violeur? Ces textes se répandent dans
\end{quote}
un Paris louis-philippard, loin d’une terre algérienne où la reddition a légitimé assez vite toutes les usurpations, des corps comme signes. Leurs mots, surgis d’un tel séisme du passé, me paraissent queue de comète éclairant un ciel définitivement troué. (56)

In an ironic twist of fate, the language used to immortalize the conquest later became the language used by Djebar’s cousins in their attempt to free themselves from the confines of patriarchal tradition. The French mania for writing about Algeria reinforced the idea that the colony should be regarded as the exclusive domain of soldiers, settlers, historians, ethnographers, sociologists, and linguists. From this perspective, Djebar was quite right when she observed that "le mot" (in French) actually won the battle that included the 1830 capture of Algiers. Used to justify conquest in numerous accounts of battle, the French language later became the "weapon" that was employed by the colonial institutions (i.e., schools, civil administrations, religious missions) to maintain the French presence in North Africa.

More than a century after the French conquest, Djebar puts "le mot" to a different use, transforming it into her own "arme par excellence" (56). When Djebar subjects the French texts of conquest to her own critical reading, she deconstructs their original goal of immortalizing the French (male) triumph by reading (often
between the lines) for lost traces of her Algerian sisters. In this way, she hopes to resurrect their presence and to ensure their immortality in the face of the brutality and neglect imposed on them by history. The terms Djebar uses to refer to the process of reading for traces (and corpses) of Algerian women in the French texts are "exhumation" and "spéléologie." The images of "unearthing" and "uncovering" evoked by these two words are essential components of her autobiographical project. The quest for meaning in her own life is juxtaposed with her restorative readings that resurrect the presence of Algerian women in her nation's past. Djebar's need to uncover the lives and experiences of the Algerian women who encountered the French soldiers during the nineteenth century reveals the interdependent relationship between an autobiographer and history. Her attempt to revive the presence of lost Algerian women parallels the conscious recollection and recreation of her own personal past. Because her own life-history is embedded in the historical past, she embarks on a "speleological" expedition to uncover women's lives with which she needs to identify, if she hopes to retrace her origins in the mother's language and to establish meaningful links with the women of her past.
The men whose texts provided Djebat with the most fertile sources of information concerning the conquest and "pacification" of Algeria include the generals Louis Lamorcière, Jacques Saint-Arnaud, Aimable Pelissier (later Governor of Algeria) as well as Baron Barchou de Penhoën, the newspaper publisher J.T. Merle, and the artist Eugène Fromentin. In their war memoirs and travel accounts, they describe the bodies of Algerian women who at first glance appear to be no more than the marginalized elements of history—picturesque details that add local color to the invader's accounts. In Djebat's reading, however, the women's corpses assume an overwhelming significance because they symbolize the results of the European colonialist scheme: the plunder and rape of Algeria.

In Baron Barchou's memoirs, for example, he describes the fierce battle that took place on the Staouéli Plateau near Algiers several weeks after the initial attack on the capital. French forces had fought against Berber cavalrymen who had come down from the mountains in the company of their wives and children; it was as if they were all going to participate in a fantasia. The French overwhelmed the Algerians and killed thousands of them. Barchou describes his tour of the battlefield the following morning; he carefully
catalogues the bodies, the weapons, and the plundered belongings that had been taken as booty from the victims. He notes with astonishment that women had accompanied the Algerian riders and participated not only in the fighting but also in the mutilation of the French corpses. Two bodies in particular attract his attention. The first is that of a dead Algerian woman who is lying next to the body of a French soldier; she had been killed while ripping his heart out of his body, and she still clutches the gruesome trophy in her hand. The second is that of a woman who was trying to flee with her infant in her arms when she was mortally wounded. Rather than allow her child to fall into the hands of the French soldiers, she had crushed the baby's head with a rock in her dying act. She had been given a "coup de grâce" by French bayonets.

Djebar transmits these scenes of unspeakable terror and violence to contemporary readers in order to resurrect the memory of them. Her comments on the Barchou passages establish a link between these early victims of French brutality and the subsequent generations of Algerian women who metaphorically re-enact the second woman's gesture:

...ces deux héroïnes entrent ainsi dans l'histoire nouvelle. Je recueille scrupuleusement l'image, deux guerrières entrevues de dos ou de biais, en plein tumulte, par l'aide de camp à l'œil incisif. Annonce d'une fièvre hallucinatoire, lacérée de folie... Image inaugurant les futures "mater
Djebar uses the verb "recueille" to imply that she is (in a metaphorical sense) physically present on the field in the battle's aftermath, searching for her own kind of plunder: the images of women's bodies that tell their own stories. The "life/death story" of the second corpse evokes a nightmarish link between the infant whose face has been crushed by its mother and the children who will be born to a "faceless" existence in the colonial world. For her, there is a bond between the dead mother and the anonymous mothers-to-be who will give birth to generations of "faceless" Algerians (i.e., colonized children without a sense of national identity). Parents subjugated to French rule will be deprived of a patrimony to pass on to their children.

When Djebar asserts that these two women have entered into a new history, she is suggesting that, although they might have been forgotten in a purely Algerian historical discourse, their immortalization in the memoirs of a French officer allows them to be resurrected in a new Algerian, feminist history— one that unearths the ties of bravery, sorrow, pain, and sacrifice that unite Algerian women throughout the ages. Although the women can no longer give their own testimonials about their actions, Djebar's research revives their presence.
by "exhuming" their bodies and by reversing the original intention of passages that were written to illustrate the barbaric nature of the Algerian people. Djebbar's reading, however, restores the humanity and the emotions of two women who no longer have the capacity to express themselves.

Despite their obsession with inscribing Algerian women into recollections of conquest, French officers and travelers did not know the women as individuals. For them, Algerian women were enigmas—seductive and mysterious when encountered as dancers or prostitutes, vicious and savage when fighting alongside their menfolk and against the French. In a sense, they were blank texts upon which French soldiers could project their own fantasies about "exotic" Algerian women. Although Djebbar cannot recover the true individuality of these women, she can recreate their presence by analyzing the traces they have left behind. Sometimes these women are merely mutilated corpses that signify a lost life, an anonymous presence for Frenchmen who stumble across them, but Djebbar's archeological reading/excavation reinscribes these lives into her own "collective" autobiography. In this manner, she reaffirms the feminine presence in Algeria's past and forges a link among the twentieth-
century women who speak out in the attempt to end their invisibility and silence.

Another soldier, Marshall Bosquet, wrote a great many letters to his mother and to his friends in France during his tour of duty in Algeria. In these letters, he describes the color of the landscape, the costumes of the natives, and the atrocities of war. In one particular letter he recounts that, earlier in the day, he had stumbled across the amputated foot of a woman. It had undoubtedly been hacked off so that someone could steal the gold or silver anklet she was wearing. Bosquet only mentions the incident in a passing remark, but it reveals a great deal about the treatment of women during the Algerian conquest and about the French officers' mania for recording its consequences. Because Djebar realizes that she cannot reconstitute the woman's story on the basis of a dismembered body part, she focuses on the discourse of conquest---a discourse that belies the French obsessions to possess not only the land of Algeria, but also a fantasy world that exists only in their own imagination and reinforces male-female relationships based on violence and domination. According to Djebar, the soldiers' discourse reveals a desire to prolong the violence of battle by preserving it in written form. As hemorrhaging blood is translated into flowing ink after
the war, the corpses and body parts of Algerian women "float" to the surface of the text: "Revivre, par réminiscence, le halètement du danger [...] Parmi ces relations fiévreuses, des scories surnagent: ainsi ce pied de femme..." (68). The women's bodies cannot be erased from the battle accounts, as Bosquet's passage demonstrates. For Djebar, his offhand comment about the woman's foot metonymically represents all the officers' accounts of the war: the Algerian woman's body stands for Algeria itself, dismembered and distributed in the form of trophies for the conquering soldiers and settlers.

Bosquet's letters and diaries prompted Djebar to observe that "notre capitaine s'adonne à l'illusion de ce divertissement viril: faire corps avec l'Afrique rebelle, et comment sinon dans le vertige du viol et de la surprise meurtrière?..." (68). As she points out, his letters are couched in the language of sexual obsession. In actuality, the French thirst for natural resources and lands translated into the rape Algeria, but it also played itself out on a psychological level when Frenchmen attempted to write about the enigmatic Algerian woman.

A reporter for Revue des Deux Mondes informed Parisian readers that the women prisoners who were forced to march in French victory parades would cover their faces with mud or excrement--whatever was at hand--in
order to conceal their faces, to veil themselves from the foreigner’s gaze. The journalist’s interpretation of this gesture bespeaks his Eurocentric ignorance, for he sees their actions as proof of their "backwardness." Djebar corrects this superficial interpretation by hypothesizing that the women’s actions constituted a silent rebellion, a rejection of the colonizer and his presence. "L’indigène, même quand il semble soumis, n’est pas vaincu. Ne lève pas les yeux pour regarder son vainqueur. Ne le ‘reconnait’ pas. Ne le nomme pas. Qu’est-ce qu’une victoire si elle n’est pas nommée?" (69). The women’s refusal to meet the gaze of the foreign invaders illustrates that their reaction to the conquest of their homeland was by no means passive. In fact, Djebar cites it to corroborate her thesis that Algerian women have maintained a line of resistance that stretches from the conquest of 1830 to the revolution of 1954-1962.

The women described by the French journalist were communicating their nationalism and their desire for freedom by refusing to return the victor’s gaze. Similar episodes of voiceless, female protest haunt the archival materials that Djebar examined during her quest to restore the female presence in history. Despite their military victory, the invaders were, she realizes,
constantly frustrated in their desire to possess Algerian women: "...ces lettres parlent, dans le fond, d'une Algérie-femme impossible à apprivoiser. Fantasme d'une Algérie domptée: chaque combat éloigne encore plus l'épuisement de la révolte" (69). With each battle, with every incident of atrocities, the women's resolve grew stronger, Djebar believes, and with the start of the resistance activities in 1954, Algerian women once again took up the struggle alongside their husbands and brothers, despite the conviction expressed by many men (on both sides of the battle) that the women's socialization and religious beliefs would render them innocuous.

Djebar obviously does not read the nineteenth-century French texts as they were meant to be read by contemporary readers in France. Because military officers wrote with an eye toward glorifying and legitimizing the French invasion, Algerians depicted in their descriptions were meant to appear as faceless, barbaric masses who could only benefit by being subjected to the French "civilizing mission." However, the report of an incident that took place during the conquest did generate a great deal of criticism from opponents of the government.
This incident was described in Pélissier’s memoirs. In June 1845, a tribe loyal to the rebel leader Abdelkader took refuge from pursuing French forces in a series of caves linked by a network of underground passages. After several days of negotiation with Pélissier and his troops, the refugees agreed to surrender, but at the last minute they hesitated because they feared imprisonment. At this point, the order was given to light a bonfire at the cave’s entrance; the other opening to the cave was blocked. After the smoke had cleared, it became evident that over fifteen hundred people had been killed. Entire families had suffocated along with their cattle and sheep. News of the tragedy reached Paris, and a public outcry ensued.

Djebar notes that, although Pélissier’s memoirs describe the massacre, he himself feels no remorse for his fatal decision to undertake the enfumade. Nevertheless, she is "grateful" to him for having immortalized these corpses and allowing her to complete her revisionist reading of the French discourse about the conquest of Algeria.

J’oserais presque le remercier d’avoir fait face aux cadavres, d’avoir cédé au désir de les immortaliser, dans les figures de leurs corps raidis, de leurs étreintes paralysées, de leur ultime contorsion. D’avoir regardé l’ennemi autrement qu’en multitude fanatisée, en armée d’ombres omniprésents. (92)
His insistence on having the bodies brought out of the caves one by one enables her to "unearth" the lost and now forgotten victims of this catastrophe. Even though the names of the victims remain unknown, the counting of the bodies obliged Péllissier to consider his victims as individuals. Neither he nor those who read his description of the enfumade could simply dismiss the victims as an anonymous mob of fanatical Algerians. If "official" French discourse pictures them as mere "casualties of war," Djebar resuscitates them as real, living people.

By interrogating other contemporary reports of the massacre, Djebar "rewrites" the military operation that Péllissier had intended to immortalize in the tradition of Caesar and Napoleon. Transforming it into a tribute to the victims of French aggression, she describes how family groups died together, how their bodies (becoming macabre autobiographical texts) told the story of their last few seconds of life. For example, a father's corpse was found in a position indicating that he had been wrestling with a steer to protect his wife and child from the smoke-crazed animal. She even appropriates the nineteenth-century French military reports and inscribes her message in their margins and interstices: "Péllissier, l'intercesseur de
cette mort longue, pour mille cinq cents cadavres sous El Kantara, avec leurs troupeaux bélant indéfiniment au trépas, me tend son rapport et je reçois ce palimpseste pour y inscrire à mon tour la passion calcinée des ancêtres" (93). The palimpsest is a text with several layers of writing upon it, and Djebar uses it as a metaphor to suggest how women’s bodies, presented in the French accounts as trophies and as symbolic representations of the nation of Algeria, can be reinterpreted to reveal the tragedy of their individual fates. By exhuming the "calcified passion" of her ancestors, she brings back the glow of human life to the faceless corpses of Algeria’s past. She ressurects their subjectivity as much as possible in order to refute the judgments that were passed on them in French textual representation of the conquest.

Djebars’s speleological reading of these texts facilitates her own autobiographical act because she sees a link between her life and the chain of women’s lives that have remained unrecorded in the past. Their life stories actually become part of the collective portrait she is creating in L’Amour, la fantasia; in fact, the palimpsest theme provides her with the key to her heritage. By retrieving the suppressed textual presence of nineteenth-century Algerians from French accounts of
the conquest, she is renewing her ties with her own past and with her own ancestors. Making the past live again also enables her to renew her ties with the feminine collective in the present. Djebar’s education had equipped her to conduct the research by means of which she unearthed the lost presence of Algerian women. However, her investigations do not merely serve to gratify her own personal needs, for she in turn transmits the knowledge she has acquired to the illiterate women of her tribe, sharing it with them orally when she returns to Algeria to make her first film.

The tale that Djebar relates to one of her listeners comes to her via Eugène Fromentin’s memoir, Un Été au Sahara, which details the painter’s trip to Algeria in 1853. It is a story in which dead women’s bodies tell a narrative about their last few seconds of life at a moment when their voices have been stilled. While on a voyage to southern Algeria, an area still not completely under French control at the time, Fromentin visited the small oasis town of Laghouat in the company of an officer who had been with the French troops when they had laid siege to the town six months earlier. It had only been captured after a fierce house-to-house combat. Two Ouled Naylette girls (dancer-prostitutes) had lived in the town, and Fromentin’s companion had been the lover of one
of the girls. After the battle, the officer had gone to the dancers' house, but he was too late. Two French soldiers were fleeing the place, clutching jewelry in their hands. The officer tells Fromentin exactly how he had found the two women's bodies. One girl was already dead and lay at the bottom of the stairs. The other girl was dying on the ground in the courtyard and later expired in his arms. Both had been raped, stabbed, and stripped of their ornaments.

Although Fromentin never painted this scene, he did record it in his travel account, enabling Djebar to retell the story a hundred years later for the benefit of her illiterate listeners. The officer had informed the painter that, as the young woman was dying, she dropped a military uniform button that she had been clutching, a button torn from the jacket of her murderer. Before Fromentin left Laghaout, the officer gave him the button as a souvenir. Djebar imagines the dying girl's outstretched hand passing on the button to the officer, who in turn hands it to Fromentin; Djebar herself picks up the button again and extends it to her listener and to the reader of her autobiographical text. Fromentin only appears to be telling the story; in truth, he is merely the middle-man. The dying girl is actually extending her hand to Djebar, who tells of the girl's tragic tale and
thus passes the button to forge another link in the chain of the feminine narrative of Algeria’s past.

To reintegrate herself into the feminine collective of her childhood, Djebbar must take part in the communal telling of stories; in fact, that is why she relates the French officer’s tale of ill-fated love to an elderly female relative. This return to the oral tradition within the feminine collective reflects her belief that she can facilitate the writing of her own autobiography by orchestrating a "fantasia" of women’s voices, including those that she herself had recorded during her visit to the region of her maternal extended family.

"Dire à mon tour. Transmettre ce qui a été dit, puis écrit. Propos d’il y a plus d’un siècle, comme ceux que nous échangeons aujourd’hui, nous, femmes de la même tribu" (187). She realizes that collective orality operates on the principle of exchange, and she contributes by giving her listeners access to the lives of their anonymous ancestors—an access that she had acquired by virtue of knowing how to read and write in the language of the Other. Like the button, passed from hand to hand, the narratives about the women’s lives that Djebbar had encountered in her research are transformed into oral narratives. Translating from paternal/other tongue to the maternal tongue, she creates a narrative
space in which she can bring the two languages together in a meaningful manner: "Je traduis la relation dans la langue maternelle et je te la rapporte, moi, ta cousine. Ainsi je m’essaie, en éphémère diseuse, près de toi, petite mère assise devant ton potager" (189). By becoming a "diseuse," Djebar once again participates in the feminine collective of her youth. Since the relationship between the women within the collective is one of exchange, no single voice monopolizes the discourse. Not wishing to raise her voice above those of the other women, Djebar inserts their personal narratives along with her own in L’Amour, la fantasia. In this way, her life story is not privileged above the other women’s lives that are recounted in her text; in fact, it becomes an extension of the feminine collective.

The oral tradition of exchanging and sharing narratives creates a sense of solidarity among the members of the collective. When Djebar interviews the women whose stories she later recounts in her autobiography:

Pendant que j’écouteais les récits des paysannes qui me parlaient de la guerre d’Algérie, il me semblait que l’échange devait se faire. J’ai commencé à leur raconter ce que j’avais lu. Elles avaient une espèce d’étonnement et l’air de me dire: "mais comment tu sais tout cela?" Evidemment la femme qui connaît tout oralement a une mémoire peut-être plus dense et tenue que ceux qui s’appuient sur l’écriture, mais il est évident qu’elle ne peut assumer que sa propre expérience et celle de sa mère
et de sa grand-mère. Si on commence à lui raconter, par petits détails, des choses qui se sont passées il y a plus d'un siècle, elle a un étonnement d'enfant. ("Entretien" 204)

Her response highlights the shortcoming of women's reliance on orality. Although the oral exchange that is an integral part of the Algerian female collective has many positive qualities, one of the most serious limitations placed upon women who cannot read and write is their inability to acquire information about their distant past--information that could prove useful to them in their struggle to improve their daily lives.

Djebar's revision of history through the writing of her autobiography is only possible because she can read and write both French and Arabic. An illiterate woman has limited access to information about her nation's past; she might know the life stories of her mother and aunts, but she faces severe obstacles in her quest to understand her origins if she wants to trace them further back than the generation of her grandparents. According to Djebar, knowledge of the past and familiarity with the personal experiences of other Algerian women are necessary, if women are to establish a chain of bonding and communication based on the active roles they have played and continue to play in their struggles for social justice.
Within this context, the label "plural autobiography" is not an oxymoron, for as Doris Summer points out:

The protestations of collectivity, then, do not necessarily argue that the testimonial "I" can slip uncritically from identifying itself in the singular to assuming that she is typical enough to stand in for the "we." Instead, her singularity achieves its identity as an extension of the collective. The singular represents the plural not because it replaces or subsumes the group but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole. [...] a lateral identification [...] which acknowledges the possible differences among "us" as components of the whole. (108)

Rather than speaking "for" Algerian women, Djebar joins their narratives with her own and with those of Algerian women who had, until she resurrected them, survived only in androcentric, French accounts of battles and conquests. Djebar believes that Algerian women must begin their march toward equality by reviving the exchange of words and narratives traditionally associated with the female collective: "La solution se cherche dans des rapports de femmes" ("Entretien" 205). Only when Algerian women recover the force of their solidarity and of their capacity to communicate with each other, will they be able to make their voices heard as the single expression of the collective will.

*L'Amour, la fantasia* can be regarded as a "plural autobiography" because it presents the stories of other Algerian women as well as her own. The voices of these
women are like distinct melodies that are juxtaposed and harmonized to create a fugue-like narrative of Algerian women's experiences. The testimonials of rural Algerian women from the Chenoua region of Djebar's maternal family are reminiscent of the atmosphere of the women's gatherings that Djebar remembered from her childhood. By coming together, by raising their voices together, the women experienced a cathartic release: "Chaque femme, écorchée au-dedans, s'est apaisée dans l'écoute collective" (176). Djebar's polyphonic autobiography thus rejuvenates the healing power of the women's gatherings where each woman had the opportunity to break her silence. Djebar's return to the Chenoua region also gave the women the chance to end their silence and to find solace in a collective "hearing" because she had come to interview them about their experiences during the Algerian war.

The female collective also serves another healing purpose in the sense that it provides the women with a space in which they can speak in the first-person. To counter prohibitions against women proclaiming their "difference" from others in the group, Djebar intends to ask them direct questions about what they suffered during the war; she realizes that the women will be more at ease if they are speaking within the group, and not setting
themselves apart from the collective. This is what she means when she claims that the fantasia structure of her autobiographical narrative allows her to join her voice with all the other women who speak in it. The collective setting enables them to find the courage to "unveil" their life stories.

Dejabr focuses on women's personal testimonials of activism during the Algerian revolution because she desires to refute stereotyped notions about their lack of involvement in the struggle. She wants to "rewrite" Algerian women back into the discourse about the war for liberation, just as she had sought to resuscitate the presence of Algerian women who had fought and suffered during the nineteenth-century French conquest. By recounting their activities and sacrifices in revolutionary struggles, women can, she believes, reclaim their right to participate in postcolonial discourse about development in their own countries. She is also creating a discursive space in which Algerian can honestly answer the question about whether or not the revolution brought them its promised rewards.

Feminists in developing nations have found it difficult to raise their individual voices against men's betrayals of nationalist struggles. The most frequent criticism leveled at them is that they are seeking to
imitate Western women when they claim the right to work or to the same political rights as men. Evelyne Accad writes about her own first-hand experiences with a common form of anti-feminist attack in Arab countries. "Traditional" (i.e., Islamic) values are equated with nationalism and patriotism, whereas the concept of women's liberation is deemed "foreign" or "neocolonial." Accad complains that she has often been reprimanded with comments such as: "Do you want to become like Western women, copying the degenerate society that is our enemy?" Such comments are meant to make Arab women's criticism of their societies weaker, by playing with the political forces at stake, setting them against each other in a tactic of 'divide and conquer'" (14). Accad is suggesting that men who want to maintain the status quo recognize that, as long as women do not organize into groups that can speak in a collective voice of protest, they will remain weak. Women in the Arab world who speak out individually are likely to be co-opted or suppressed by regimes and social institutions which portray them as "aberrants" or "deviants." As the writings of Accad and Djebar demonstrate, women's voices of protest and gestures of rebellion are more effective when they are fused with the female collective.
A single voice is too easily censured and reduced to silence. For political and personal reasons, Djebar and the heroines of her narratives find strength in the female collective where they can share their personal experiences with each other in a supportive environment. *L'Amour, la fantasia* is not her first work to depict women's first-person narration as a vehicle for sharing experiences within a female circle. Since the publication of *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* (1980), Djebar's fiction has demonstrated an increasing concern for the lack of communication among Algerian women, as well as between Algerian men and Algerian women. She has voiced her concern that women will never achieve equal status in post-revolutionary Algeria until they can speak freely about themselves and their experiences, until they can discard the internalized veils that inhibit direct communication. When Djebar sets out to write a collective autobiography that relates her own life history along with the stories of other women, she is creating a circle of female narrators and narratees who overcome their inhibitions against directly referring to themselves. The polyphonic nature of *L'Amour, la fantasia* thus represents Djebar's conscious attempt to move toward an uninhibited, first-person discourse.
Feminists often condemn the "science" of history for having neglected women's contributions and for having appropriated historical space as an arena for allegedly "male" activities such as war, diplomacy, and politics. When Djebar reinscribes a feminine presence into nineteenth-century French texts about the conquest of Algeria and into twentieth-century nationalist discourse about the Algerian revolution, she is repudiating the view that women have had a negligible affect on the course of Algeria's history. The testimonials that she records in L'Amour, la fantasia prove that women were active in the events of the revolution and that they had a direct impact on the historical outcome of the struggle. In fact, their contributions to the struggle for independence deserve to be recorded for posterity just as much as those of the soldiers who fought on the battlefield or those of the politicians who subsequently formed the government.

History has generally been legitimated by its inscription in written discourse. In developing countries with extremely high illiteracy rates, women are less likely than men to learn how to read and write. Illiteracy is certainly one of the primary reasons why the female presence is missing in Algerian historical discourse. Because the women Djebar interviewed might
not have been able to write about their experiences, Djebar translates their words from dialectal Arabic into written French. Lest anyone interpret her gesture as a desire to "speak" for or "in place of" these women, she defends her project by stating that: "Ecrire ne tue pas la voix, mais la réveille, surtout pour ressusciter tant de soeurs disparues" (229). Paradoxically, then, writing in the paternal language can preserve women's oral narratives by giving them a more permanent form than they would otherwise have. Her use of the verb "ressusciter" in this context recalls the "spéléologie" that enabled her to locate the bodies of Algerian women in the nineteenth-century French texts. By transcribing the women's accounts of their lives into French, Djebar forestalls the need for any future exhumation of these Algerian women's bodies. The collective and polyphonic nature of L'Amour, la fantasia is thus an act of "life-saving" because Djebar's transcription inscribes their tales into a chain of women's voices and actions that stretch from 1830 until the present.

The fluid, oscillating rhythm of the fantasia structure that Djebar adopts in L'Amour, la fantasia foregrounds the polyphony of women's voices and relegates images of war and men's activities to the background; in fact, the contemporary women's narratives--presented in
brief sections of direct, first-person narration are not obscured by the mediating presence of an interviewer or commentator. Their accounts stand out in stark contrast to the acts of male violence that has all too frequently touched the lives of the Algerian women.

All of the women who tell their stories in Djebar's text have rural backgrounds. Several were very young when they joined the maquis; others were already elderly women with sons in the resistance when they contributed to the struggle by feeding fighters on their way through the village, by sewing uniforms, by hiding weapons in their homes, and by sending information about the positions of French troops to the mountain hiding places of the maquis. The farms and homes of all people suspected of aiding the resistance were burned by the French troops. Each of the women interviewed by Djebar had been subjected to this punishment; each of them was obliged to leave home with their children and with no more than the clothes on their backs. They all describe how they had to survive alone since their husbands and sons were either in prison or in the mountains with the resistance fighters. They relate their struggles in the face of nearly insurmountable obstacles, yet each of them found the strength to continue and to save her family while awaiting the return of the male members of her
family. The fact that many rural Algerian women had survived in this fashion, frequently assuming responsibility for their entire clan during the absence of the patriarchs, was virtually ignored at the end of the revolution. After independence, Algeria's constitutions placed women in a legal state of dependency upon men.

Despite the hardships suffered by Djebar's interviewees, they recount their stories in voices that betray little emotion. For example, Chérifa tells her narrative in a detached manner, displaying no hatred for those who had inflicted pain on her. She had followed her two brothers into the maquis when she was thirteen years old. Her younger brother had been killed before her eyes, and she later returned to the spot to bury his body. Captured by the French, she was tortured and placed in solitary confinement. The sobriety and terseness of such oral récits contrast with the more inflammatory tone of nationalist discourse. As transcribed by Djebar, the women's narratives present a syncopated, broken rhythm due not only to the fact that she wished to maintain dialectal Arabic speech patterns in written French, but also, one senses, because the women chose not to betray emotion in their voices. In accordance with tradition, they "veiled" their feelings
and the depth of their suffering in order to present an "objective" and dispassionately narrated story.

Djebar herself denies that this neutral tone results merely from the translation/transcription of these récits from Arabic to French:

Non, j'ai voulu une sobriété du style quand il y avait rappel de la souffrance. Quand j'écouteais des femmes de ma région, j'ai remarqué que plus les femmes avaient souffert, plus elles en parlaient sous une forme concise, à la limite presque sèchement. Pour moi la voix de ces femmes est l'opposition voulue à tout le style officiel. Que ce soit en Algérie ou ailleurs, après une guerre, il y a une manière "ancien combattant" avec des discours très pompeux sur la souffrance et la mort des autres. Mais ceux qui ont souffert eux-mêmes et qui vingt ans après en parlent--d'abord en générale ils n'aiment pas en parler--s'ils en parlent, c'est par allusion. ("Entretien" 202)

The paradox of women's oral histories is that the more an individual has suffered, the more she adopts an objective tone in alluding to her experiences. Djebar interprets the difference between the style of the women's accounts and that of the "official" (men's) discourse on war as a reflection of the antithetical way that men and women experience war. The fact that the women display no emotion in their voice suggests that the voice itself is meaningful: stark, nue, and cold. When the female voice is transcribed into French (the adversary language), Djebar maintains this emotionless tone. By drawing attention to the woman's speaking voice (as opposed to the contents of her tale), Djebar metaphorically
"protects" the women from a second "invasion." She prevents the adversary language from gaining access to the deepest core of the women's being—the place where she still preserves her most intimate emotions about the most traumatic period in her life. Just as the French language obscures and yet reveals (some of) Djebar's "moi," it enables her to transcribe the narratives of Algerian women, while protecting them from the indignity of being totally "exposed" and vulnerable in the other(‘s) tongue.

The extent of the personal suffering implicit in Chérifa’s narrative causes Djebar to reflect on the underlying assumption behind her project of recounting women’s lives in L’Amour, la fantasia. She asks herself: can her own use of the French langue, the language of Chérifa’s enemies, really convey the self of such a woman to readers? Is she herself simply veiling the woman’s autobiographical narrative in the same opaque fabric of the "langue adverse" that had allowed the dead and mutilated bodies of nineteenth-century Algerian women to be "written" into French history:

Chérifa! Je désirais recréer ta course: dans le champ isolé, l’arbre se dresse tragiquement devant toi qui crains les chacals. Tu traverses ensuite les villages, entre des gardes, amenée jusqu'au camp de prisonniers qui grossit chaque année... Ta voix s'est prise au piège; mon parler français la déguise sans l'habiller. À peine si je frôle l'ombre de ton pas!
Expressing her doubt that the French language can convey a true portrait of the Algerian female subject, Djebar points out that, despite her efforts to remove the veil, it will remain in place because a linguistic bastardization results from her efforts to fuse the mother tongue and the other tongue. It will also remain in place because many Algerians still have ambivalent feelings toward the French language. She recognizes that the presence of Algerian women's bodies in the nineteenth-century French accounts have become an inescapable sub-text of any subsequent attempt to use French as a vehicle for describing any allegedly "feminine" Algerian reality. Consequently, the women's narratives in her text are not exactly a "pure" translation. When Djebar transcribes the dialectal Arabic narratives into French, her translation will necessarily be a "métissage" that disguises more than it communicates.

She herself understands that the French language acts as a shield that places a certain distance between her and her fellow Algerian women. Although she sincerely desired to find a common ground with the women
she interviewed, she eventually recognized that the French language is a double-edged sword. On one level, it provides a forum for presenting the women's stories to a larger audience. On another level, her own bilingual condition separates her from the world of oral narrative and the female collective into which she had hoped to re-integrate herself. Djebar describes the resultant sense of alienation: "Mots torches qui éclairent mes compagnes, mes complices; d'elles, définitivement, ils me séparent. Et sous leurs poids, je m'expatrie" (161). The adversary language thus once again proves to be a boon and a curse. It allows Djebar to "write" women back into Algerian history, but it also prevents her from completely recuperating the mother tongue and the world with which it is associated. Once again she is obliged to confront the fact that her "difference" separates her from the female collective she remembers from her childhood. Ironically, this difference between herself and illiterate Algerian women was precisely what she had hoped to overcome by interviewing them and by recording their stories in her autobiography.

Nevertheless, L'Amour, la fantasia is a collective autobiography that forges bonds of shared communication between Djebar and these women. The chain of female narratives that she presents in this work is held
together by a common thread: the women raise their voices in unison to tell about their lives without inhibition and fear of recrimination. The chapter entitled "Tzarl'rit (finale)" ends the symphony of oral and written recollections underscores the importance of the text's title, "fantasia."

Scenes of love and violence are interspersed throughout the work. The final incident, retold by Djebar, who found it in Fromentin’s memoirs of his journey to the Sahara, is the tale of a young woman whose jilted lover purposely rides his horse into her during a fantasia and kills her. She had rejected him because she was having an affair with a young French soldier stationed in a nearby village. The final image of the woman calling out to her love with her dying breath suggests to Djebar the fate of so many Algerian women whose cries at the fantasia have often been the only release for the pent-up feelings that have been denied a voice. This incident symbolizes for Djebar the tragic fate of so many Algerian women whose love stories have ended tragically. She links it with her own efforts to portray Algerian women who must suffer for having dared to claim control over their movements and their bodies. She considers the dying dancer as the "première Algérienne d’une fiction en langue française à aller et
venir, oiseusement, première à respirer en marge et à feindre d'ignorer la transgression..." (253). Like the woman in Fromentin's travel narrative, Djebar's heroines seek to breathe more freely and to transcend the limits that have been set up to restrain their actions. The fantasia was the sole public gathering where women could raise their cries to be heard above the din of the men's shooting, but her reading of Fromentin's anecdote reveals the danger that women face if their cries fail to remain within the prescribed boundaries.

By using the fantasia structure to underpin her polyphonic autobiographical work, Djebar comes to understand the significance of the "cri de la fantasia" and its ability to express many different levels of meaning. In a deeply personal scene, Djebar describes her own first-hand experience with the cathartic release of the wordless ululation, which is capable of communicating an intensity of feminine emotion that no traditional language can translate. Wandering the streets of Paris in a moment of depression, she suddenly cries out. Her cry is a release of frustration, sorrow, and joy; it is the primordial expulsion of pure feminine "essence" as it was understood within the context of her maternal ancestors. In this brief passage, she comes to terms with herself and with her exile: "Tandis que la
solitude de ces derniers mois se dissout dans l’éclat des teintes froides du paysage nocturne, soudain la voix explode. Libère en flux toutes les scories du passé. Quelle voix, est-ce ma voix, je le reconnais à peine” (131). The cry that erupts from her is the release of her pent-up emotions. Even though she feels herself to be exiled from the maternal language and from the female collective, her instinctive use of the tzar1’rit demonstrates that she remains rooted in the mother(‘s) tongue in the sense that the fantasia cry signals her (at least momentary) reintegration back into the women’s world of orality that she left behind when she was still a child.

Djebar’s release through the cry illustrates the thesis that sustains her entire self-writing project. The sharing and exchange that takes place within the Algerian feminine collective is translated into a collective self-portrait. As she seeks to give back to Algerian women a sense of their participation in history and a means for making their own stories known, the Algerian women in turn, give her a sense of continuity. The chain of women’s voices and gestures that she unearths in French texts and discovers in contemporary oral accounts enable her to situate her own voice and her own life story within a harmonious collective.
The notion of sharing and exchange with past and present Algerian women emerges clearly in another brief anecdote that Djebar appropriates from Fromentin's travel narrative. He describes how he stumbled across a severed female hand while walking in the oasis town of Laghouat. For Djebar, the amputated hand is like the extended hand of the dying Naylette dancer; both become symbols of the outstretched hands of long-dead Algerian women who are reaching out to the women of the present. Djebar considers the amputated hand as the missing link in the chain of women's narratives that she is seeking to recover in her autobiography. "Je me saisie de cette main vivante, main de la mutilation et du souvenir et je tente de lui faire porter le "qalam" (255). The hand is "living" in the sense that Djebar, by resuscitating the lost lives of Algerian women, is placing the "qalam" (pen) in the anonymous women's hand so that she becomes the actual author of both Fromentin's memoir and Djebar's own text. Women's hands reach out to tell or to pass along their stories; they all symbolically participate in the writing of L'Amour, la fantasie. Djebar is the woman holding the pen, but through her "spéléologie" and "exhumation," she metaphorically passes the writing tool on to Algerian women of the past and present so that they
too can "inscribe" their narratives unto her autobiographical palimpsest.

NOTES

1 There is of course some overlapping of collective or individualistic modes of expression among autobiographical writings by men and women from the "Third World." James Olney's *Tell Me Africa* gives several examples of how collective self-identity is depicted in African autobiographies. Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight's Children*, parallels the creation of modern India with his own birth and his coming of age, essentially combining India’s autobiography with his own. Furthermore, not all women's autobiographies are "collective" in nature. Those written by Fadhma Aït Amrouche (*Histoire de ma vie*) and Zoubida Bittari (*O Mes Soeurs musulmanes, pleurez!*), for example, are highly ego-centered, emphasizing how a particular individual's "difference" alienates her from the collective.

2 Mernissi's *Le Harem politique* (1987) is now banned in Morocco, her native country and current place of residence. According to the Moroccan novelist Abdelhak
Serhane, the book had initially been available at bookstores in Morocco. When an article condemning the ideas expressed in it appeared in a nationally distributed, Arabic-language newspaper, Le Harem politique was withdrawn from sale and banned. The censorship encountered by Le Harem politique illustrates the point that Mernissi makes in her article with regard to the institutionalized control of information about women's active participation in society during the early years of Islam.

3 Djebar notes that of the 37 published accounts by eyewitnesses to the 1830 capture of Algiers, only two were written by Algerians, the rest were written by Europeans.

4 Other Maghrebian writers have also developed the image of colonized people as "orphans." Some protagonists in Maghrebian novels written before the 1960s do not feel that they have a "father" because his role as patriarch has been usurped by the colonizer. In Mohammed Dib's novel La Danse du roi (1968), for example, a character who is raving in a fever declares "Du jour où le Français est entré dans ce pays, plus aucun de nous n'a eu un vrai père. C'était lui qui avait pris sa place, c'était lui le maître. Et les pères n'ont plus été chez nous que des
reproducteurs. Ils n'ont plus été que les violateurs et les engrossseurs de nos mères, et ce pays n'a plus été qu'un pays de bâtards. (…) mêmes les autres, les Français qui sont nés ici: ils ne sont que des bâtards aussi! Des bâtards que leurs pères ont eu avec l'Algérie" (159). The violence of the character’s words expresses the alienation of a colonized subject who feels that he has been robbed of his birthright. The quest for identity in many autobiographical Maghrebian novels begins with a rejection of the father, who is viewed as a false patriarch, a travesty of a traditional paternal figure. The preoccupation with "re-naming" in these novels indicates a recognition of the protagonist’s status as a "bastard" of history.
CHAPTER IV

Abdelkébir Khatibi: Decolonizing Maghrebian Autobiography

Pour profaner le sanctuaire somptueux d’une langue il faut y déposer une partie de soi—offrande mémorable et tatouée, ce livre! (author’s preface to 1979 edition of La Mémoire tatouée)

Abdelkébir Khatibi is one of Morocco’s leading intellectuals. His writings range over many genres, including the novel, poetry, theater, political and sociological commentary, and literary criticism; his autobiographical narrative La Mémoire tatouée marks a turning point in the development of Maghrebian literature of French expression. Khatibi’s récit autobiographique consciously engages in an inter-textual dialogue with previous North African autobiographical writing such as Mouloud Feraoun’s Le Fils du pauvre, Driss Chraibi’s Le Passé simple, and Albert Memmi’s La Statue de sel, while at the same time seeking to deconstruct them.
His "autobiographie d’un décolonisé" thus breaks new ground in the sense that it adopts a post-modernist perspective to explore the relationship between the (ex)colonized writing subject, his or her language of expression, and the possibility of autodecolonisation through self-writing.

Khatibi is also one of the most important Maghrebian critics of French-language North African fiction and poetry. His 1968 study Le Roman maghrébin remains a significant contribution to the field because it was one of the first studies to go beyond biographical and thematic modes of criticism in order to situate North African literature in its political and cultural context. It was also the first study to undertake a comparative examination of narrative techniques in French-language and Arabic-language fiction from the Maghreb. After opening his discussion with a thematic analysis, Khatibi specifically comments upon the relationship between self-analysis and the personally cathartic nature of many Maghrebian novels from the 1950s and early 1960s:

Le roman maghrébin a posé le problème de l’acculturation parfois d’une manière vigoureuse et avec une volonté d’analyse remarquable. L’autobiographie a été souvent l’expression même de cette acculturation; c’est ainsi que l’écrivain colonisé s’analyse, se vide de ses obsessions, se met en question, dresse des bilans. Déraciné ou déchiré, il raconte comment il devient étranger à sa société, combien il éprouve une violente nostalgie de l’identité. Bien plus, dans le roman maghrébin,
Khatibi focuses primarily upon the self-reflexive, self-dissecting nature of fictionalized autobiography in the colonial context. He argues that the autobiographer's stance of becoming the object of his or her own critical gaze, is a characteristic element of the déchirement of the colonized self. According to him, the fact that the acculturation process incites the ego to split (culturally and linguistically) predisposes writers to see themselves as, or through, the "Other"—a process that is at once the cause and the enabling factor of the self-reflexive, self-dissecting text. Becoming a spectacle to oneself, Khatibi suggests ironically, appears to be a more "civilized" way of suffering one's alienation—as if this narrative/psychoanalytic technique was yet another benefit to be derived from the colonizer's "mission civilisatrice."

Memmi's La Statue de sel and Chraïbi's Le Passé simple provide Khatibi with his primary examples in the opening section of his study. The most salient feature of early North African French-language fiction of this type is, according to him, the "regard dédouble" of the narrator/author. His own and Memmi's (early) Sartrian-influenced modes of analysis obviously influenced his
contention that the standard model for Maghrebian autobiography was characterized by a "dialectique permanente entre l'exigence esthétique et l'analyse du personnage en situation" (75). Conscious of being an object in the gaze and discourse of the Other, the unhappy victims of acculturation unflinchingly observe their own behavior, tracing (in a quasi-scientific manner) the itinerary of rupture, self-torment, and displacement that result from the colonized experience. Historical and social factors are directly implicated in the creation of such texts, which, he concludes, reveal the profound, seemingly inescapable alienation that has been induced by acculturation.

Khatibi's analysis of the sociological and historical factors that influenced the evolution of the Maghrebian autobiographical narrative was published three years before the appearance of his own first novel, *La Mémoire tatouée: Autobiographie d'un décolonisé*. This work clearly exists in an inter-textual relationship with *La Statue de sel* and *Le Passe simple*; however, Khatibi's sophisticated *récit* also deconstructs the model of Maghrebian autobiography as he had defined it in *Le Roman maghrébin*. The subtitle of his novel announces his intention to explore the relationship between self-writing and decolonization, and although he pays hommage
to his predecessors in the first half of *La Mémoire tatouée*, the dialogue at the end of the novel culminates in the implosion of the myth that autobiography can be truthful or that self-writing can be sincere. The verbal duel that he depicts between A. and B. (the narrator and his alter-ego) effectively demolishes the assumptions upon which an autobiographer's claim to accurate self-portraiture rests, thus revealing the self-delusional framework of "telling the story of one's life."

At the end of his essay on the Maghrebian novel, Khatibi had reflected on the future of North African fiction in French and on the role that this literature might play in the recently independent nations of the region—nations that were struggling with the difficult realities of political and economic underdevelopment. Already in 1968, Khatibi observed that the vanguard themes of Maghrebian literature (i.e., alienation and protest "tel quel") had been growing stale. Writers such as Mohammed Dib and Mostafa Lacheraf, among others, openly proclaimed their acceptance of their dual heritage as Algerian writers who wrote in French. They provocatively abandoned stereotyped themes and critically examined the new socio-political order that had replaced French rule. As Frantz Fanon had pointed out earlier, "Le jeu européen est définitivement terminé, il faut
trouver autre chose" (cited by Khatibi, Maghreb 11).

Echoing Fanon’s challenge, Khatibi criticized Maghrebian writers for their reluctance to seek out new themes and modes of narration.

While Khatibi did not dismiss the value of autobiography in a postcolonial context, he did urge Maghrebian novelists to become more conscious of their reasons for undertaking the autobiographical act. He acknowledged that the genre of self-writing offers opportunities for reevaluating commonly accepted assumptions about the relationship between language and the writing self—opportunities seized, for example, by Jean-Paul Sartre, whose *Les Mots* (1964) effectively deconstructed several different models of twentieth-century French autobiography:

Mais que peut-on faire si on emploie l'écriture comme un moyen de lutte, sinon se lancer dans une aventure sans fin? Gonflés de signification, les mots ne parlent pas le même langage que l'écrivain. On peut interpréter la rage ou la diplomatie figolée de certains romanciers maghrébins de faire scrupuleusement leurs autobiographies comme le nœud même de ces contradictions.

Dans le roman, l'autobiographie sert à se dire, à se raconter, à affirmer la présence d'une personnalité (individuelle ou sociale), mais ne dit jamais pourquoi cette présence s'est faite sur le mode de l'écriture. Un palier manque. Sartre a bien compris cette complexité et son livre *Les Mots* n'est qu'une longue volonté de se détruire en tant que créateur et de désirer s'affirmer en tant qu'homme. (111)
Above all, Khatibi continues, the Maghrebian novel should not remain a prisoner of its historical context. For him, the missing ingredient for successful autobiographical writing in North Africa is a recognition of the need to develop new techniques and new themes capable of doing justice to the linguistic and social issues of the post-colonial era. Significantly, he does not attribute the staleness of Maghrebian literature to the continued use of the French language. He does not claim that innovations can be achieved simply by switching to Arabic as a means of literary and poetic expression. In this respect, his aesthetic concerns still reflected the preoccupations of the mid-1960s in Morocco.

By then, a small group of young poets and writers had already formed around the journalistic and academic institutions in Casablanca. The members of this group were interested in a wide ranging list of social and literary issues related to the poetics of national literatures and cultures in postcolonial North Africa. Khatibi himself had referred to "le palier qui manque," and this "stage" was created with the founding of Souffles (1966-1972), a cultural and literary review that revitalized Moroccan French-language writing. A major concern of the publication's founders (the poets
Abdellatif Laâbi and Mostapha Nissaboury) and early contributors (Mohammed Khaiir-Eddine and Khatibi) was to develop a new understanding of the North African writer's relationship to his or her language of choice, whether it be French or Arabic. In response to Fanon's challenge to go beyond "le jeu europén," this generation of writers critically examined issues such as cultural and national identity, bilingualism, and the neo-colonial implications of "Francophonie."

When Khatibi came of age as a sociologist, writer, and literary critic in the mid-1960s, the "generation of 1952" (i.e., Driss Chraibi, Albert Memmi, Mohammed Dib, and Mouloud Feraoun) were already well established in European literary circles as representative Maghrebian writers. His entry into this scene in 1968 coincided with what was then interpreted as a "crisis" of North African French-language literature, the early demise of which had been predicted some years earlier by Memmi and Malek Haddad. In fact, critics in the metropole and in the Maghreb still anticipated it as imminent.

The editors of Souffles dispelled this image of a literature in decay by, for example, publishing new interpretations of Kateb Yacine's Nedima and of Driss Chraibi's controversial Le Passé simple. These two works were hailed by the editors of the review as the most
innovative Maghrebian texts that had been published up to that time; Yacine's and Chraibi's revolutionary use of semantic manipulation, narrative structure, and social critique, as well as the overall sophistication of their novels were held up as models for future writers. Laâbi and his collaborators condemned many of the region's previously published works as unimaginative imitations of European realist writings; such works might have served a useful purpose at one point, but according to Laâbi, their ethnographic or doggedly revolutionary overtones prevented them from appealing to a wider audience.

Morocco proved to be a more fertile ground for literary and poetic innovation during the years immediately following independence because, unlike Algeria, it freed itself from colonial dependency in a much less violent and agonizing fashion. The government's relative stability after 1956 fostered an atmosphere of considerable tolerance and mutual respect between proponents of Arabization and those who favored continued economic ties with France.

The self-proclaimed goal of Souffles was to provide a meeting-ground for "la nouvelle génération poétique et littéraire" (1,6)—a meeting ground that would serve as a non-partisan forum for the discussion of issues related to post-independence society. The primary aesthetic
objective of the review, as stated in Laábi's prologue to the first issue, was to call for a "mise en question" of the previous generation's choice of narrative style, its use of a "classical," "rationalist," "transparent" discourse, and its ethnographic treatment of life under French colonial rule. The editors challenged Maghrebian writers to develop a new literature that would be capable of addressing the problems engendered by self-rule and neo-colonialism. They criticized what they regarded as the bourgeois, reactionary values of the new Maghrebian ruling classes who sought to maintain political and economic control over the largely illiterate masses through political repression and exploitation of religion.

Souffles was a French-language publication, but an Arabic-language offshoot soon appeared under the name Anfas and ran for eight issues. The decision to create an Arabic-language version of the journal was an expression of the fraternal spirit that existed between Maghrebian writers who wrote in French and those who wrote in Arabic. Laábi's prologue to the first issue of Souffles downplays the language issue, which he characterized as a false problem. According to him, poets and writers should be primarily concerned with "appropriating" whatever language they chose as a vehicle
for transmitting their subjective experiences of reality: "Le tout est d’arriver à cette adéquation de la langue écrite au monde intérieur du poète, à son langage émotionnel intime. [...] La langue d’un poète est d’abord ‘sa propre langue,’ celle qu’il crée et élaboré au sein du chaos linguistique, la manière aussi dont il recompose les placages de mondes et de dynamismes qui coexistent en lui" (1,5). The editors of Souffles intentionally did not privilege one language over another, and Laâbi’s remarks draw attention to concerns that were also important to Khatibi: bilingualism and the necessity of shaping the language of one’s choice to suit the needs of an authentic self-expression.

Laâbi’s essays trace the evolution of the group’s and the journal’s political and aesthetic concerns. Several of Morocco’s most prominent writers and critics, including Khair-Eddine, Tahar Ben Jelloun, and Khatibi, contributed essays or creative works to the review, which also published works by the Algerian writers Mostapha Lacheraf and Malek Alloula. In issue number 4 (1966), Laâbi published one of the most influential essays he ever wrote for the review. "La Culture nationale, donnée et exigence historique" became a "manifesto" for the younger generation of Maghrebian authors. It set forth their proposed itinerary toward a "décolonisation
culturelle" based on a rejection of existing literary and poetic models.

In this particular essay, Laâbi argues that the first step in the decolonization of French-language Maghrebian literature should entail a "going beyond" the surface level of language, a "marking" of language with the writer's own presence, an appropriation of it, a violation of it if need be, so that the demons of the language (or of the writer) can be exorcised:

J'affirme personnellement que l'on ne décolonise pas avec les mots. Seul une refonte mentale, une redécouverte de notre patrimoine, sa remise en question et sa réorganisation peuvent mettre en branle cette reprise en main de notre personnalité et de notre destin d'hommes. Nous aurons à ce moment-là entamé notre propre itinéraire et serons rentrés dans la phase effective, concrète, de la décolonisation.

Il faut absolument entretenir au départ une méfiance vis-à-vis de la langue d'expression qu'on emploie. Que cette langue soit le français, l'arabe ou n'importe quelle autre. [...] Or, l'écrivain de race est celui qui fait un usage singulier et irremplaçable de la langue. C'est celui qui nous propose et impose un langage nouveau, marqué de sceau de son univers créateur. A l'écrivain de chez nous de désarticuler cette langue qui est sienne, de la violenter pour lui extirper toutes ses possibilités. Encore faut-il qu'il possède cette faculté organisatrice et exorcisante que seul l'apprentissage des réalités profondes peut lui conférer. (4,11-12)

Laâbi underscores the role that innovative syntaxe and narrative structure will play for writers of the Souffles generation. More significantly, however, he contends that merely writing about "revolutionary" themes cannot
lead the way to decolonization; a complete change in the
writer's attitude towards his or her language of
expression is required. In fact, Laâbi's own words
demonstrate the relationship between a process of
psychological decolonization and language. He proposes
that the writer appropriate the Other's language in such
as way as to make readers feel like strangers in their
own language. This "alienating" effect can be achieved
if bilingual writers maintain a vigilant and highly self-
conscious relationship with the language in which they
chose to express themselves. The poet Khair-Eddine
referred to this method as "guérilla linguistique"
(Gontard 21).

Laâbi's essay on the revitalization of national
culture does not advocate a return to indigenous
languages as a means of achieving a "décolonisation
culturelle." The Souffles' group defended the rights of
writers to chose their own language of literary
expression, announcing that both Arabic and French-
language texts could be part of the "patrimoine
culturel." According to Laâbi, a Maghrebian writer's
authenticity derives from a transformation of the chosen
language into a personalized discourse that challenges
and stimulates readers of all backgrounds.
The political and aesthetic agenda of *Souffles* changed during the course of its brief existence, for it eventually adopted a more militant stance against the hegemonic "Francophonie" promoted by the French government during the early 1970s. Laâbi referred to the review's new attitude toward the metropole as "la formule de co-existence non-pacifique, empreinte de vigilence" (18, 36). In the later issues of the journal, this shift in the editors' attitudes became apparent; French came to be regarded as a temporary means of communication in the Maghreb, the assumption being that Arabic would eventually replace it as a national language. Predictions of this kind have not come to pass, and even Laâbi himself continues to publish in French. At that time, however, it was politically expedient to promote Arabization. Also, the group's growing disenchantment with the Moroccan government mirrored a widespread feeling among opposition groups that the regime's close economic and cultural ties to France were manifestations of the regime's elitist, bourgeois policies and its lack of concern for the mass of monolingual, illiterate citizens. The editorials in *Souffles* became increasingly Marxist-oriented, shifting from literary analysis to social and political critique, including anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian polemic.
Two failed assassination attempts against King Hassan II in the early 1970s, as well as a general climate of chaos and political repression, contributed to the government’s decision to eliminate leftist opposition. *Souffles* was banned in 1972 after twenty-two French-language issues and eight issues of the Arabic-language *Anfas* had been published. Along with several hundred members of the Partie de la Libération et du Socialisme, Laâbi was arrested and imprisoned. Despite its short-lived existence, the review’s innovative philosophy had a lasting impact upon a generation of Moroccan writers and poets.

Khatibi’s own participation in the group’s projects was not extensive. During the early years of the review’s existence, he contributed literary essays on Maghrebian texts, including a 1966 piece entitled "Justice pour Driss Chraibi," calling for the rehabilitation of that writer. In an unpublished interview, Khatibi explained that the change in the magazine’s politics and sense of purpose after 1968 had made it impossible for him to continue to collaborate with its editors. He justified his rupture with them by noting that "Nous n’avons pas eu la même manière de voir les choses [...] Il m’a paru dérisoire, la position qu’ils avaient eu. Ils voulaient retourner ‘un défi.’"
Moi, ce n'est pas le défi qui m'intéresse—c'est la transformation" (Appendix, 358). For Khatibi, his conception of "transformation" was more in harmony with the early aesthetics of Souffles because he was primarily concerned with establishing his own unique discursive space in French—one that remained, however, within a tradition of Arabic-language poetry and writing.

The Souffles experiment made it clear that, if Maghrebian writers hope to bring about decolonization on the national level, they must begin by decolonizing their own psyche and their own language. In Khatibi's introduction to Le Roman maghrébin, he points out that the Algerian Revolution failed to inspire a comparable revolution in Algerian literature, whether it was written in French or in Arabic. The only exception, he felt, was Kateb Yacine, whose complex novel Nedjma demonstrated an understanding of the fact that "un écrivain révolutionnaire ayant choisi de combattre par la plume doit être révolutionnaire aussi dans son propre domaine, celui de l'écriture" (15). His remarks echo those of Laâbi concerning the necessity for a total mental transformation that manifests itself on a textual level. According to both critics, the fundamental component of intellectual decolonization is an aesthetic revolution
that situates the Maghrebian writer at the forefront of a movement to create a rejuvenated national culture.

Even before Khatibi embarked upon his own career as a novelist, he remarked upon the need for Maghrebian writers to go beyond the familiar and the safe: the novel of protest, the ethnographic novel, and the novel of acculturation. Otherwise, he contends, they risk being "enfermé," or fossilized, along with their work. He himself ends his 1968 study of North African literature by reminding readers and potential writers that the socio-historical context of colonization and independence should not be a prison-house. Writers ought to explore new areas of creativity and linguistic experimentation, he argued, instead of bemoaning an alienation that results from historical factors beyond their control:

Dans ce sens la littérature ne peut être ni révolutionnaire, ni conservatrice, elle possède son propre rythme qui passe par en dessous la vie. Après tout, on ne libère pas un peuple avec un langage qui lui reste incommunicable et qui plane au-dessus de ses préoccupations. Pour ce peuple maghrébin, la littérature orale demeure l'expression pendant ses loisirs. En fait, cette situation n'est pas particulière à l'écrivain maghrébin, elle est celle de l'intellectuel qui n'arrive pas à se situer dans une société en grande partie analphabète et dans un monde en pleine transformation. (116)

The thematic impass that Maghrebian novelists faced during the late-1960s could not be overcome by any single solution. All Maghrebian writers must find their own methods for dealing with the ambivalencies of the
postcolonial, bilingual, and diglossic situation in which they were living. Khatibi believes that part of the solution lies in the articulation of a poetics that takes their "situatedness" into account, while at the same time recognizing the possibility of dealing with allegedly "universal" themes. The passage cited above also raises another issue that Khatibi faces everyday: what purpose can European-language writers serve in a culture with a high illiteracy rate? Their position is inherently ambiguous and can only be reconciled on a personal level by their choice to employ indigenous forms of expression or to disregard them. Many writers of the Souffles group, as well as others from all over North Africa, never successfully reconciled their choice of language with their own origins in a predominantly oral culture; their ambivalence toward their choice of language is a recurring theme in their works. Some Maghrebian writers chose exile in Europe, while others, like Khatibi, continued to reside in their countries of birth and to write in French, despite the fact that they must repeatedly respond to critics who accuse them of pandering to foreign audiences and of being alienated from the people of their homeland. A number of Maghrebian writers of French expression have recently attempted to resolve this ambiguity by striving to insert
dialectal Arabic structures and idioms into their French-language texts. In this way, they seek to compensate for diglossia by creating a fusion of the two tongues.

Khatibi has consistently answered his own 1968 exhortation to find the missing "palier" by envisaging a new era in which such universal themes as alterity, sameness, and the relationship between self-writing and language can be explored. In this way, he hopes to transcend the issue of the alienated, colonized self. Although the psychological results of colonialism continue to be a major consideration in his work, his own self-writing project moves beyond an exclusive concern with the ego. His autobiographical narrative *La Mémoire tatouée* promotes an intellectual decolonization through the deconstruction of the paradigms that characterize French-language Maghrebian autobiographies. He goes beyond the psychological aspects of the split or doubled self of the colonized subject in order to explore duality on the linguistic and narrative planes. In this process, he frequently returns to two tropes: the autobiographer's "regard dédouble" and the palimpsest.

The complex, interwoven patterns of Khatibi's thought have evolved during his twenty-year career as a writer, and they continue to evolve today, but their origins are already clearly discernible in this
autobiographical narrative. During an interview in 1977, he himself admitted: "On trouve dans ce texte [La Mémoire tatouée], la plupart des thèmes qui m’habitent, en particulier la question si essentielle de l’identité et de la différence, les notions de différence sauvage et d’identité aveugle, le thème du propre et du nom propre dans la symbolique islamique, le thème de l’être bilingue, la question de la pensée nomade et du désert" (27). The wide-ranging interests reflected in this passage betray the influence of both Western and Islamic philosophy. His writings on identity and difference are informed by G. W. F. Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche, and contemporary French philosophers such as Gérard Genette and Jacques Derrida; the influence of Islamic mystics and poets (e.g., Ibn Arabi) can be traced in Khatibi’s predilection for the desert as a symbol of man’s fascination for the void and as the mythic point of origin for all Arabic speaking peoples.

The unique structure of La Mémoire tatouée distinguishes it from previous examples of Maghrebian autobiography that followed the linear pattern common to Western autobiographies, although the first half of Khatibi’s text does appear to adopt a chronological sequence. The book opens with the story of the narrator’s birth, his naming ritual, and his first
recollections of childhood. But the reader is disconcerted from the start by the fragmented and digressive narrative flow. Arabic interjections are transcribed into French and sprinkled throughout the récit. A greater obstacle to comprehension for many readers, however, is the onirique quality of the entire text. Superstitions, dreams, and ironic allusions to political and historical events undermine the illusion of verisimilitude that the work's "autobiographie" subtitle would seem to encourage. Furthermore, the second half of La Mémoire tatouée differs from the first in that it consists of an interior dialogue (actually an imaginary monologue); stage directions are included to evoke the impression of a theatrical performance, as if the author's doubles, named A. and B., were performing a "one man show" in front of the reader. This dialogue enables Khatibi to deconstruct the first half of his autobiography, for the verbal duelists actually discuss whether or not the autobiographical act is possible. In this part of the text, Khatibi becomes the critical reader of what he had written in the first half of the book. Lahcen Mouzouni observes that Khatibi's technique obliges the readers of La Mémoire tatouée to confront the autobiographical "subterfuge," thereby deconstructing the first half of the text (131).
The autobiographical illusion permits Khatibi to situate his own discourse on self and language within a narrative space that at first appears reassuringly familiar. He proceeds to explore his own "coming to writing" in the language of the Other; he meditates on having been "different" from his colon classmates and on having exploited this "difference" to seduce young women. In the dialogue section at the end of the narrative, however, Khatibi exposes the fictitious, self-created aspects of these episodes in his autobiography. By collapsing the structure of the text into itself, he decolonizes the genre of Maghrebian autobiography and liberates it from its previous obsessions with the Father and with the quest for identity. In the final analysis, La Mémoire tatouée asserts that the unified, transcendent self is a fallacy, thus effectively destroying a fundamental premise of autobiographical discourse.

The subtitle of Khatibi's work, "autobiographie d'un décolonisé," establishes a link that the author considers essential to the relationship between autobiographical narrative and decolonization. In Le Roman maghrébin, he argues that autobiography, grounded in a polemics of protest and in the cathartic nature of the roman d'acculturation, had served a vital purpose during the years just before and immediately following the
independence of Maghrebian countries from colonial rule. In his own autobiographical narrative, Khatibi consciously employs the fictional and thematic structures of earlier novels such as La Statue de sel and Le Passé simple as his point of departure. However, he refuses to achieve closure by drawing up a bilan, or inventory, of alienation and cultural schizophrenia. On the contrary, he utilizes the Maghrebian autobiographical paradigm to initiate a reflection on the internalized dualities of the decolonized, bilingual writer.

Instead of a reductionist, Manichean "self-other" vision of the world, La Mémoire tatouée develops an idea that Khatibi expressed elsewhere when he declared:

L’autre est inscrit en moi, d’abord en tant que passé, que mort, nos ancêtres, arabes ou non, que nous avons oubliés. C’est donc par rapport à nous-mêmes, par rapport à ce qui est passé, qui nous travaille encore d’une manière ou d’une autre, que l’Occident vit en nous, constitue une partie de nous-mêmes [...] L’essentiel c’est d’une part, de ne pas oublier cette multiple identité qui compose notre être, et d’autre part, il s’agirait de penser l’unité possible de toutes ces composantes, mais une unité non théologique qui laisse à chaque part, sa part et à l’unité la plasticité d’inspirer l’ensemble des éléments. ("Véritable" 29-30)

For Khatibi then, the unique nature of Maghrebian identity—whether individual or collective—derives from the region’s multiple heritage. The Maghreb’s plural identity is manifested in the region’s cultural and linguistic potential for métissage. Khatibi often evokes
the dynamic heritage the area has acquired because of its geographic location as a bridge between Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Another dominant theme in his writings about métissage and the plural nature of the Maghreb is his concept of linguistic and cultural "hospitality." Since the pre-Roman era, North Africa has been a meeting ground for many cultures, races, and religions. For this reason, no reductionist "self-other" model can do justice to Khatibi's understanding of the multiplicity of identities that have formed Maghrebian subjectivity. According to him, authentic autobiographical writing in the Maghrebian decolonization process implies a coming to terms with the region's multiple identities, and such an enterprise challenges the model of the alienated, embittered narrator in Memmi's and Chraibi's texts. It also repudiates the overly objective, self-dissecting gaze and favors the creation of a plural self (as illustrated in Khatibi's polyphonic narration and in his dialogues with personal alter egos à la Diderot). In his own work, this plural self clearly reveals the way in which the mother tongue and other('s) tongue have formed the multiple identity. The bilingual subject's intellectual decolonization can only occur as the result of an anamnesis in which the individual reconstructs la mémoire tatouée--i.e., the
psyche that has been indelibly inscribed by a diglossic reality.

In Khatibi's opinion, linguistic and cultural doubling cannot be broken down into two diametrically opposing facets of the same identity; the real complexity of the Maghrebian, bilingual intellectual's self-perception appears as an intricately woven pattern with merging strands that represent separate yet connected elements in the writer's conscious and unconscious mind. Writing a decolonized self becomes Khatibi's ultimate goal in *La Mémoire tatouée*, and because the self does not exist in isolation from either French or Arabic, the influence of both languages must be acknowledged. In his *autoportrait*¹, Khatibi posits the polemics of self and other in a new dialogical relationship that is not always presented in a strictly chronological, linear fashion. This relationship is also diglossic in the sense that it acknowledges the untranslatability of spoken dialects into writing. Retracing the itinerary that culminated in his own "coming to writing," he describes the French education he received in Morocco and in France, the virtual nervous breakdown he suffered as the consequence of it, and his gradual insight into the possibility that his dual identities could serve as the basis for a "pensée autre"—a mode of thought that does not represent
the world as a series of oppositions between, for example, the Orient and the Occident, or sameness and difference (see Bensmaïn).

In the tradition of the Souffles group and consonant with the spirit of Khatibi's philosophy on the absolute necessity to rethink existing polarities that shape our perceptions of the post-modern, post-colonial world, he writes about the need to recognize the common bond that links decolonization with modern French thought, including deconstruction (see Maghreb pluriel). He freely acknowledges his intellectual debt to Jacques Derrida, who was born in the Maghreb, a region that, as Khatibi suggests, might well serve as the catalyst for radical new ways of thinking because of its geographical and psychological location—between the West and other parts of the world, between European visions of the world and those of Africa and Asia. Like Derrida, Khatibi is seeking a "pensée de la différence," a means of challenging accepted notions about language, about the mythical unity of the self, and about the mythical "différence sauvage." It is no accident, he argues, that deconstruction occurred at about the same time as the decolonization of European colonies. The change in the world order that shifted (some) power away from the center to the (geographical and cultural) peripheries
created a discursive space that provided a more hospitable environment for minority voices to be heard from within the dominant discourse.

As an intellectual from the developing world and as a sociologist-philosopher trained in a modern European educational tradition, Khatibi finds himself in a position that enables him to define with particular acuity the intersections of deconstructionist and postcolonial thought. He argues that, if decolonization simply means administrative and (allegedly) political liberation, it will never yield its anticipated benefits to a formerly colonized people without a comparable move toward a deconstruction of European power. He challenges not only the economic and technological dominance of the West, but also the assumption (held both in the metropole and in the peripheries) that the West is the sole source of worthwhile knowledge. According to Khatibi, the "decolonized" intellectual-writer must establish a new center of power in an ailleurs, a somewhere that is neither "West" nor "East," neither Euro- nor Afrocentric, but a "somewhere" that is somehow in between them all.

What he desires to create is a subversive mirror, one whose surface is capable of sending back a distorted image of the Other; he hopes to write a text that can
return a provocative parole of difference, purged of Manichean reductions, back to the "center:"

Du point de vue de ce qu’on appelle encore le Tiers Monde, nous ne pouvons prétendre que la décolonisation a pu promouvoir une pensée radicalement critique vis-à-vis de la machine idéologique de l’impérialisme et de l’ethnocentrisme, une décolonisation qui serait en même temps une déconstruction des discours qui participent, de manières variées et plus ou moins dissimulées, à la domination impériale, qui est entendue ici également dans son pouvoir de parole. Oui, nous ne sommes pas arrivés à cette décolonisation de pensée qui serait, au-delà d’un renversement de ce pouvoir, l’affirmation d’une différence, une subversion absolue et libre d’esprit. Il y a là comme un vide, un intervalle silencieux entre le fait de la colonisation et celui de la décolonisation. Non point que ça et là n’éclatent ni s’élaborent des paroles subversives et responsables, mais quelque chose d’étranglé et de presque perdu n’arrive pas à la parole parlante, à se donner ce pouvoir et ce risque. (Maghreb 47-8)

The concerns expressed in this passage highlight the difficult transition from the revolutionary stance engendered by the struggle for liberation and the next phase of a battle that cannot be won until an intellectual decolonization is achieved.

Khatibi is not, of course, suggesting a rejection of everything from the West, nor a return to pre-colonial, tradition-inspired metaphysics. He is calling for the creation of a new discourse that partakes of both worlds. His own autobiographical narrative delineates how he himself experienced an intellectual/psychological "decolonizing" process that freed him from many of the
"demons" faced by ex-colonized writers. In this sense, 
La Mémoire tatouée is a subversive text that fills the "silent interval" between decolonisation and the establishment of a true "pensée autre" capable of sustaining a new dialogue between the West and those who were formerly situated ailleurs.

For him, as for many other Maghrebian autobiographers, education in the colonizer's school was the original source of alienation. At the school, the other's language begins to supplant the one that had been used in the family environment, and when Maghrebian autobiographical narrator-authors reflect upon the time they spent in the French school, they invariably interpret these formative years as the time when the seeds had been sown for a later emotional and psychological break with their religious and cultural heritage.

The Maghrebian autobiographer's analysis of the role that écriture (in French or in Arabic) played in his or her life also focuses on the French school as its point of origin. The awareness that the acquisition of superior skills in the colonizer's language is the key to obtaining a dreamed-of assimilation into the colonizer's culture has been present in Maghrebian autobiography from the beginning, as can be seen in Feraoun's Le fils du
pauvre and Memmi’s La Statue de sel. Generally, the children at the center of such autobiographical narratives enter the French school with little knowledge of the language being taught there. Their fears of being humiliated by the teachers and by the other students are so great that they resolve to succeed at any cost. The narrator of La Mémoire tatouée also experiences this burning desire to master the French tongue and to become even more proficient than the colon children who are enrolled in classes with him. For Khatibi’s narrator, this early blossoming of an obsessive love affair with the French language effectively shaped his subsequent destiny as a poet and writer.

Extremely poetic in places, Khatibi’s autobiographical narrative deals with his childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in a thematic rather than in a purely temporal fashion. The chapter entitled "la mémoire tatouée" defines the young boy’s relationship with his parents and with the rest of his family as well as his awareness of death and the fragmentation of his world as he is weaned and subsequently forbidden to visit the hamman with his mother. The significance of Khatibi’s title is explained by references to the tattoo as a means of inscribing meaning, for the indelible traces that are etched in the child’s memory will remain
with him for his entire life (see Scharfman and Chefrouni). The succeeding four chapters, including "ainsi tourne la culture" and "adolescence à Marrakech," focus upon the narrator's schooling in French-administered institutions and upon the awakening of his interest in literature.

Khatibi's description of family members is unlike that in autobiographical texts such as Chraibi's Le Passe simple or Memmi's La Statue de sel, where the parents' presence, especially that of an authoritative Father, is central to the character's development and later plays a significant role in the rejection of his family. In La Mémoire tatouée, the father is absent, and the narrator consciously draws attention to the difference between his autobiographical project and those of his predecessors: "Aucun règlement de compte à demander aux parents. Je ne veux massacrer ni père ni mère" (12). By distinguishing between his own situation and the virtually standard father-son tension in works by Chraibi, Memmi, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Rachid Boudjedra, and Abdelhak Serhane, Khatibi reveals the uniqueness of his autobiographical act by consciously removing his self-writing text from the "roman familial" context that invariably predisposes readers toward psychoanalytic, oedipal interpretations (see Gafaiti).
Having died while his son was still very young, the father in *La Mémoire tatouée* bequeathes the young boy a French education and a faded photograph marked with a pair of smudged finger-prints. Although the older man’s decision to send his third son to the French-Moroccan school was a casual one that was arranged for him by his cousin, the nonchalance with which the decision is made contrasts sharply with the impact that French schooling subsequently has on the young boy’s life. Looking back upon his life, Khatibi regards his entry into the "gueule du loup" (as Kateb Yacine referred to the French school) as the cause of the break that later separates him from his mother tongue and his Arabic cultural heritage. Although his acquisition of the language of the Other is an alienating experience, it also offers him the opportunity to explore his alienation through the act of writing. In fact, his decolonization of the French colonial education imposed on him at school began during his first encounter with it. From the autobiographer’s perspective, he retrospectively understands the importance of self-writing with all its inherent ambiguities and impossibilities, but he also sees its potentialities for the colonized subject.

The problematic nature of autobiography is acknowledged in the narrator’s doubts about the
possibility of understanding his earlier development.

Defining his existential situation, he muses:

Cet homme qui effleurait à peine ma mère s'acharna sur le fils aîné. J'arrivais en troisième position: mon père accepta de m'expédier à l'école franco-marocaine, je devins la conscience dégradée, donnée à la mécréance. Orphelin d'un père disparu et de deux mères, aurais-je le geste de la rotation? Est-ce possible le portrait d'un enfant? Car le passé que je choisis maintenant comme motif à la tension entre mon être et ses évanescences se dépose au gré de ma célébration incantatoire, elle-même prétexte de ma violence rêvée jusqu'au dérangement ou d'une quelconque idée circulaire. Qui écrira son silence, mémoire à la moindre rature? (16)

The narrator questions the appropriateness of reconstructing a childhood portrait for the purpose of self-psychoanalysis. In his own case, since he refers to himself as an orphan, he is clearly warning the reader that a standard Freudian model of analysis cannot be applied to his early development. Although fatherless, he did have two "mothers," a situation that defies categorization in terms of the usual evolutionary stages of the "moi."

Furthermore, the notion of authenticity in colonized autobiography is challenged in La Mémoire tatouée by the unstable, constantly shifting identity of the narrator. Linked to the phrase "mon être," the word "évanescences" suggests the transitory, ever-changing nature of the author's identity and thereby undermines the illusion of the self's fundamental unity. Narrating an autobiography
is always problematic, he argues, because the writer invariably selects which events to include and which events to omit. He himself is intensely aware of what is left in "silence." Particularly for the (ex-)colonized subject, the act of writing about one's memory necessitates a different paradigm, perhaps a non-traditional or non-Western one—one that scrutinizes the absences of the mother('s) tongue and the cultural gaps in the colonized's memory. This observation is germane to Khatibi's ultimate project of "decolonizing" Maghrebian autobiography, for one of the ways in which he proposes to liberate it is to free it from an over-emphasis on descriptions of abusive family situations and cultural-linguistic rupture.

Among the "phantasms" that haunt Khatibi's psyche, "l'intraduisible" is one of the most complex. It provides the inspiration for his narrative Amour bilingue (1983) and for his essay "Bilinguisme et Littérature" dealing with the Tunisian writer Abdelwahab Meddeb's Talismano. "L'intraduisible" refers to his concept of bilingualism, a concept according to which the mother tongue is imagined as being "asleep" in the subconscious of the bilinual subject. The untranslatable is not just a meaning that cannot be completely rendered in another language; it also is the silent presence of the mother...
tongue making itself felt in the creative processes of the poet. It is essentially a psycho-linguistic mechanism that Khatibi describes as "un travail du sommeil et d'insomnie donc, hallucinant toute traduction" (Maghreb 197). The untranslatable can only be recognized when one is in a semi-conscious state that is neither sleep nor wakefulness, but a combination of the two. During the creative process, the imagination, the unconscious, and the analytical capacities of the mind work together to realize a text; at this time, the untranslatable allows itself to be noticed. According to Khatibi, the bilingual text must be approached in a way that allows the reader to unearth the subtle ways in which the suppressed mother tongue makes her presence known in the text that has been written in the other(‘s) tongue.

At the end of the passage in which he questions autobiographical authenticity, Khatibi lays down another challenge to Maghrebian autobiographers when he asks: "Qui écrira son silence?" (16). This query is intended to provoke other Maghrebian writers. At the same time it directs the reader’s attention to the "non-dit" of the bilingual text. In La Mémoire tatouée, Khatibi attempts to write the silences—to write or speak of "l’intraduisible" and "l’innommable" that mark the mother
tongue's presence in the colonized memory and in his use of the other's language. By doing this, he creates a unique language, a "different" space in which ex-colonized, bilingual writers can express themselves. His commitment to this project helps explain the importance he attaches to the grapheme, to signs such as Berber tattoos and calligraphic designs that interweave Arabic letters into abstract patterns (see Bensmaïa). These "other" ways of conveying meaning fascinate him as ways of arriving at new discursive loci. His quest for discourses that fuse graphemes and figurative representations reflects his belief that all languages are bilingual. In "Nationalisme et internationalisme littéraires," he states that diglossia is a mechanism that drives every language, and in this sense, every tongue is split between the written and the spoken. In the textual space opened by this schism the interlangue comes into play (148). Calligraphy and tattoos are interlangues: they communicate a plurality of meaning without restricting themselves exclusively to either written or verbal forms of expression.

Khatibi has spoken of La Mémoire tatouée as an autobiographical text that is centered on "l'évenement," but he has also described it as "une élaboration de l'écriture [...] on montre comment on devient un
écrivain, comment un sujet écrivant se constitue..." (Appendix, 336). As he retrace his "coming to writing," he places less emphasis on the way that events or people have touched his life than on the intellectual and creative growth that he experienced as a young boy who learned French and developing into a voracious reader of "les poètes maudits," novels, and, later, philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Karl Marx. Furthermore, he does not attempt to constitute his autobiography as a faithful mirroring of lived reality. If readers of the first edition of the work had any doubts as to the spirit in which Khatibi undertook his autobiography, his preface to the second edition revealed his irreverent, desperation-tinged attitude toward the genre of self-writing: "Mais la plus belle histoire est de se faire raconter sa propre vie en mourant de rire..." (9).

Throughout the text he makes ironic references to the purported capacity of autobiographies to communicate truthful portraits of individuals. In his view, the importance of Maghrebian autobiography lies in its capacity to create a textual arena in which the process of intellectual decolonization and the nature of the (de)colonized's double (multiple) identity can be explored.
From this point of view, colonized autobiography becomes a conscious "calling to mind" of memories associated with the child’s loss of cultural and linguistic unity as a consequence of his exposure to a French education that caused him to internalize a linguistic situation characterized by diglossia and bilingualism. In his essay "Nationalisme et internationalisme littéraires," Khatibi describes this situation as an anamnesis that helps reconstitute silent gaps in the autobiographer’s subconscious and conscious mind. Reminding us that all cultures are, in reality, pluralistic, he points out that writers often experience difficulty in recognizing and dealing with the fact that every element in this pluralistic situation does not receive equal treatment:

Prenons un exemple du Maroc. D’une part, la composition linguistique réelle est à la fois arabe, berbère, française et marginalement espagnole. D’autre part, la langue arabe est très diglossique, séparée entre deux généalogies, celle de la mémoire écrite et celle du récit vocal fondateur. C’est la reconstitution d’une anamnèse entre la diglossie et la pluralité des langues qui appelle l’écrivain marocain à donner forme à sa mémoire (151).

If the self’s ability to conceive of and express itself as a unity is dependent on language, as Benveniste and autobiography critic Paul John Eakin remind us, then the colonized autobiographer’s task (as understood by Khatibi) is to explore all the facets of one’s identity
without attempting to fuse them into a single unified self, which is, in his view, a chimera.

Khatibi’s thoughts on the importance of writing as a means of exploring the (ex-)colonized’s multiple identity through the subject’s exposure to several languages and signifying systems are illustrated by his own encounters with French, with classical Qur’anic Arabic, with tattoos worn by childhood Berber friends, and with his mother’s magical signs and talismans. In the chapter “Ainsi tourne la culture,” for example, the narrator reflects upon his own experiences with diglossia and upon the absurdity of being required to master several languages in their written form despite the fact that he did not speak them:

A l’école, un enseignement laïc, imposé à ma religion; je devins triglotte, lisant le français sans le parler, jouant avec quelques bribes de l’arabe écrit, et parlant le dialecte comme quotidien. Où dans ce chassé-croisé, la cohérence et la continuité? (52)

The child’s confusion is understandable and the effects of the triglossic context undoubtedly had lasting effects on his emergent self perception. Split between three languages, he himself did not know which one would bond with his sense of self and become the vehicle for giving concrete expression to it.

Ronnie Scharfman analyzes this passage and interprets it as a manifestation of three distinct
registers of language and of their relationship to the child’s ability to conceive of himself as Other. Her insights recall the manner in which many Maghrebian writers associate one language or the other with the figures of the mother and father. "Le dialecte représente la langue maternelle, se trouvant ainsi en rapport avec l'Imaginaire. L'arabe est la langue du Koran, la loi paternelle. Et le français, celle de l'impossible réalité au-delà. Les trois langues sont loin d'être interchangeables" (67). Although not interchangeable, the three languages do affect each other in various ways both on a textual level and in terms of the writer’s concept of self. Scharfman believes that, within Khatibi’s narrative of "autodécolonization," he reinstates the triglossic nature of his personal discourse (67), thus making possible an exploration of the "silences" that are often neglected in any self-writing, "mémoire écrite" project.

The young boy’s introduction to French literature and culture actually do have a marked effect on his development. Like other Maghrebian autobiographers, he later realizes that writing—even in the Other’s language—provides an outlet for expressing the intolerable situation of the colonized. As Khatibi relates, he learned French not only to succeed at school
but also to enter into a dialogue with the colonizer and to demand "son droit à la différence." He appropriates French as his own, carves out his own personal discursive space within the dominant one of the colonizer, and this space becomes the locus of psychological salvation for him. Writing and especially self-writing allow him to assert and to explore his multiple identity while rejecting the over-simplification of interpreting himself in terms of "la différence sauvage" (i.e., of reducing self and other to absolute polarities).

His recollections about his first experiences with the French language describe the fear he felt in "coming to writing" from a safe, essentially feminine environment. His instinctive fear of the written sign points to an impediment in his crossing over to what Kristeva calls "la langue du père"--to the world of rational discourse where the feminine world of oral tradition and the imaginary would be left behind. Khatibi's narrator recalls that he had, at first, been a mediocre student who could not even write in a straight line. No longer permitted to run wild in the streets, however, he gradually became adept at creating order out of chaos. The narrator suggests that his earlier difficulties with mastering written characters anticipate the adult writer's repulsion/fascination with the blank
page. Within this context, he came to define writing as a means to structure chaos and to create matter from a void.

In recalling his childhood terror in the face of writing, he remarks upon the fear he felt at the time: "Comme inceste miroitant, cette peur devant l'écriture, peur d'être dévoré par elle, le plus loin possible, et de mourir en conspirateur à la fin d'un interminable monologue" (53). His fear of being devoured by writing can also be understood both in terms of Kristeva's theories of femininity and as a function of the marginalized position of the Maghrebian, (de)colonized writer within the symbolic order represented by (French and Arabic) patriarchal written language. The colonized child recognizes that he or she occupies a position of marginality; the underlying assumption of the French education system in the colony is that most local children will never fully assimilate the French language; only a select few are supposed to be capable of mastering it. Consequently, the colonized pupils feel marginalized; the message they receive is that they will always be outsiders to the dominant discourse. For this reason, as Khatibi recalls, the child's initial emotion is a fear of the written language, a fear of
transgressing the boundaries that define the marginalized position of the colonized.

The association of writing with incest ("Comme inceste miroitant...") is puzzling in the sense that Khatibi repeatedly refers to his mother's illiteracy and to her reliance on proverbs, talismans, and folk cures. Nevertheless, the written sign, which he associates with tattoos, is, for him, an example of a feminine-based imaginary, for the tattoo is both a sign of recollection (hence the work's title) and the trace left on his subconscious mind by it. Khatibi also conceived of the tattoo as a protective symbol indelibly etched into the woman's skin and representing a sort of feminine calligraphy: "Me saisit la même fascination devant toute Bédouine tatouée. Quand celle-ci ouvre la main ancestrale, j'épouse ma fixation au mythe. Toute calligraphie éloigne la mort de mon désir, et le tatouage a l'exceptionnel privilège de me préserver. Aucun point de chute dans le chaos..." (11). Writing thus became associated in his mind with the protective, magical powers of the woman's talisman or tattoo. By attributing to the grapheme the power to stave off chaos, he comes to rely on writing as a cathartic means of projecting order into his schizophrenic and triglossic universe.
Fascination and fear remain the two predominant emotions that guide him along the path to writing.

His fear of being consumed by the French écriture in turn motivates him to seek control over the language of the colonizer. When he expresses a fear of being annihilated in a monologue, he is expressing his anxiety in the face of the monolingual. This anxiety helps explain his fascination with interior dialogue as a means of exploring the various sides of any single question. His own aversion to ascribing a single, absolute meaning to any word also emerges in this passage. In Khatibi’s view, the bilingual writer remains constantly aware of the presence of the two languages in his conscious mind. However, as the "Exergue" of Amour bilingue reveals, the complex inner workings of the two languages can never be completely analyzed because much of their interaction occurs on a sub-conscious level:

Se lever? Il ne pouvait pas: à la place d’un mot en débris, plus de lieu pour aucune chose visible: la mer elle-même avait sombré dans la nuit. Et en français—sa langue étrangère—le ‘mot’ est près de la mort, il ne lui manque qu’une seule lettre: concision de sa frappe, une syllabe, extase d’un sanglot retenu.

Pourquoi croyait-il que la langue est plus belle, plus terrible pour un étranger?

Il se calma d’un coup, lorsqu’apparut le ‘mot’ arabe ‘kalma’ avec son équivalent savant ‘kalima’ et toute la chaîne des diminutifs, calembours de son enfance: ‘klima’...La diglossie ‘kal(i)ma’ revint sans que disparût ni s’éffaçât le
Tous deux s'observaient en lui, précédant l'émergence maintenant rapide de souvenirs...(10)

The two words— one French, one Arabic (actually three words when the dialectal Arabic word is brought to mind by the more erudite Arabic form)— are present in the writer/narrator's conscious mind, where they affect and "call out" to each other. This diglossia is a unique gift, but it is also a burden because the language of the Other can never be a single, unified source of creativity for the bilingual writer.

Although repressed, the mother tongue becomes present in other ways as well. In La Mémoire tatouée, its presence surfaces in the narrator's problematic relationship with French-language writing. Even before he began to attend the French school, the power of la parole écrite (in Arabic) had been firmly established in his mind by the Koranic school and by his father's recitation of verses from the Qur'an before the entire family. The young boy's limited understanding of the world predisposed him to conceive of the written word in terms of a sacred-profane duality—a tendency that caused him some confusion during his first years at school. In fact, it induced a sort of "double vision" that attributed immense powers to the sacred text while acknowledging its absence from the school administered by
the French—the supposed representatives of a higher order of authority.

Puzzled by this apparent contradiction, the young boy continued to look for elements of comparison between the two languages he was learning:

De là à comparer mon français à la langue du Coran exige un autre parchemin, qui arrivera le jour où rien ne m'empêchera de sauter de page en page, eu égard à mon doublement furieux, et le livre que j'écrirai sera alors pensée religieuse. Arbre de mon enfance, le Coran dominait ma parole alors que l'école, c'était une bibliothèque sans le Livre. (55)

With the advantage of hindsight, Khatibi's narrator/autobiographer is already anticipating the effect that the sacred-secular (i.e., Arabic-French) duality would have on his subsequent career. At the moment of writing his autobiography, he understands that his earlier "doubling" did not separate the two "texts," but, on the contrary, enabled him to "fuse" the elements of this dichotomy in his own creative writing. The "book" he promises to write will be filled with "religious thought" in the sense that it will contain many Koranic paraphrases and borrowings. Khatibi's goal in this enterprise is not to parody or to blaspheme his religious background, but to offer a textual equivalent of the fusion of the two discourses in his conscious and unconscious mind—a fusion that resulted from the duality
of the education he received in the traditional Koranic school and in the secular tradition of French schooling.

His reference to jumping from page to page also suggests the oscillation between French and the transposed Arabic of the altered Koranic verses. He implies that this technique is appropriate to his overall objective because it points the way toward a liberating, creative method of reading and writing. It empowers him, he asserts, to actively assume his bilingualism; each time a word (in either language) comes to mind, he opens his mind to the conjuration of its mate in the "Other" language. To accept the "double vision" made possible by his familiarity with two different languages and to parlay this "double vision" into a creative force is, according to Khatibi, the hallmark of a "colonisé-décolonisé" intellectual/writer. His own use of these adjectives reinforces his sense of "cette identité double [qui] est simultanée, non pas successive" (Scharfman 62)—an identity in which one element cannot exist without the other.

From such a perspective, Khatibi sees writing—even in the former colonizer's language—as a means to personal, psychological salvation. This theme can, of course, be found in other Maghrebian autobiographical novels as well. Like the autobiographers in La Statue de
sel or Le Passé simple, Khatibi's narrator recalls his introduction to the works of French literature in the mandated school curriculum. He reflects upon the ambivalent situation of indigenous students who have been asked to memorize and to digest cultural artifacts that are completely alien to them. Unlike the Qur'an, whose importance was vouchsafed by the ritual sacrifice of a lamb and by family celebrations such as the ones that took place when the boy's older brothers finished their education at the m'sid after having memorized the sacred book.

French literary "classics" were not anchored in real-life experiences for colonized children. In French schools during the colonial era, Maghrebian children read works that had been written with French children in mind; for example, it was not unusual for them to read about events and places that they were incapable of relating to points of reference in their own lives. More significantly, the narrator remembers that his own family's emphasis on a single book induced in him an inferiority complex regarding the apparent lack of a well-developed written tradition in his Arabic heritage:

Le musée des morceaux choisis d'ou partait le discours suivant: parler dans nos rédactions de ce qui se disait dans les livres, du bois brûlant dans la cheminée, sous le regard malin de Médor, partir dans le neige quand on imaginait difficilement son existence. Médor s'abritait sous un nom arabe.
Cela ne changeait rien à notre culpabilité, on se
sentait des enfants conçus en dehors des livres,
dans un imaginaire anonyme. Et de cours en cours,
disparaître derrière les mots, en prenant soin
d'élimer toute trace suspecte. Chacun est le flic
de ses mots, ainsi tourne la culture. [...]
Recracher dans les rédactions l'essence des morceaux
choisis, telle quelle, quand, en flèche brisée,
l'esprit de l'enfant se colonise. (55-57)

Khatibi's itinerary of "autodécolonisation," must begin
at the point of transformation--when children are brought
face-to-face with the implied inferiority of their own
heritage, which, according to the colonialist orthodoxy,
lacks any great tradition of written literature. He
himself recalls having felt a sense of guilt when he
considered the possibility that his own people existed in
a cultural void and that they should be grateful for the
chance to "put down roots" in a "superior" foreign
tradition.

Because the French educational system ignored the
achievements of Arabic philosophers, writers, and poets,
and because the narrator had been raised by his mother
and by his aunt (i.e., women without formal schooling),
he came to the French language virtually illiterate in
his own written tradition. In the passage cited above,
the autobiographer translates this commonplace theme
about the alienating impact the colonial school into an
exploration of his youthful relationship with words. The
abstract concept of words and the concrete examples of
the other's printed and spoken language contrast sharply
with the orality of his mother tongue. During his days at school, he went from class to class, trying to dissimulate what he mistook for the "defectiveness" of his dialect. He felt that the "suspect traces" (of his difference? of his mother tongue?) needed to be erased. The colonized child's sense of shame toward his maternal language had thus been induced by the colonial school, which assumed the superiority of French on the basis of its allegedly more valuable written tradition.

Khatibi's autobiographical narrator repeatedly refers to the "morceaux choisis" that supposedly distilled the essence of the "great" tradition of secular French writing. Excerpts from classical works and bits of children's songs were presented as representative samples of the colonizer's "superior" civilization. Academic exercises were assigned on these excerpts, and students were expected to squeeze out the essence of selected passages in an explication du texte style. Students who successfully mastered this technique were promoted to higher levels of the academic system. The French system ranks students by merit, and those colonized students who reached the top echelons were considered to have almost become French. In Scharfman's essay on La Mémoire tatouée, she hypothesizes that Khatibi's references to classwork and "les morceaux
choisis" reflect an emphasis on fragmented texts that parallel the colonized adolescent's split and divided moi:

... le français s'enracine à travers la greffe d'une espèce de plante très spécial--"le morceau choisi"--flore la plus vivace dans la serre culturelle française, le jeune intellectuel, déjà hanté par une notion du moi comme "corps morcelé," trouve dans ce modèle littéraire comme première séduction, l'illusion d'une valorisation positive, à l'intérieur de la civilisation de l'autre, du partiel. Car la perception du moi en tant qu'unifié, intégral, n'est presque pas possible dans le contexte colonial... (68).

Autobiographical narrative thus provides an outlet for exploring the origins and aspects of the fragmented ego because it textualizes the subject-object dichotomy and the double gaze by means of which the writer sees himself mirrored, or recreated, in the text. Colonization, as promoted by the colonial school, engenders the need for self-writing that can serve as a safety valve for the cultural and psychological tensions and anomalies (e.g., doubling, breaking with one's family, abandoning one's religious heritage) that characterize the colonized intellectual's youth.

In his chapter, "le corps et les mots," Khatibi examines his earliest encounter with writing when he was still an adolescent, living apart from his family at a boarding school in Marrakech. The title of this chapter suggests the personal rapport between the writer and the
words he learns in school. The epigraph to this chapter is the only one in *La Mémoire tatouée*, and it evokes both an auto-eroticization of language and the writer's primeval fear of being swallowed by his text. Even more explicitly, it suggests the autobiographer's hallucination of becoming the textual self, of not existing as a flesh and blood person outside of his text: "J'ai rêvé l'autre nuit, que mon corps était des mots" (77). Does the autobiographer write the text, or is he created--inscribed into existence--through the text? Posed in Khatibi's one-sentence epigraph, this implicit question problematizes the writer's relationship to any text in which a self-portrait is being sketched. In his desire to decolonize Maghrebian autobiography, Khatibi thus introduces an issue that must be examined in light of differences between decolonized autobiography and autobiography that has been written in the socio-historical context of the colonizing powers.

Returning to Khatibi's proclamation concerning the need for colonized writers to go beyond a description of themselves as alienated individuals caught between two cultures and languages (*Roman* 111), this epigraph demonstrates Khatibi's desire to explain the writer's presence in the text and to analyze the relationship between the self and the language(s) that constitute it.
Scharfman suggests that the epigraph is a key to understanding the complex ties that link Khatibi's language with his autobiographical narrator ("l'autoportraitiste"), "pour qui le livre est le vrai corps, et dans ce cas, pour qui le corps tatoué est le livre" (72). At issue here is whether the autobiographer manipulates the language to create his own image in the text, or if language controls and shapes the finished self-portrait in defiance of the writer's attempts to determine the manner in which the "portrait" will be seen/read. He himself refers to La Mémoire tatouée as "une constitution du sujet écrivant" (Appendix 350), a type of narrative that feigns the Western "portrait of the artist as a young man." Khatibi's project is thus comparable to that of Sartre in Les Mots, where the philosopher undermines the model of "the writer's childhood" (as in the autobiographical writings of Marcel Proust and André Gide) by reversing it to "unbecome" a self (see Eakin).

When the French language is assimilated by the colonized individual, it becomes a weapon to be used in the struggle to undermine the other's authority and to salvage the fragmented colonized identity. With a friend in his lycée years, the adolescent Khatibi devoured difficult texts and strove to write the best essays:
"Nous régnions sur la littérature. Ecrire, bien écrire, devenait notre technique terroriste, notre lien secret" (77). This passage echoes the objectives of the Souffles project in terms of the writer’s need to appropriate language so as to control it from within. To decolonize the writer’s assimilated language, a rapt (a syntactically and linguistically violent appropriation of the Other[’s] tongue) was necessary in order to claim a newly independent, "decolonized" discursive space.

During weekends at the boarding school, the young Khatibi served as an "écritain public" (77) for his classmates, who requested his services in the composing of passionate love letters. His willingness to performing this service is a measure of the control he desired to exercise over the French language. Demonstrating his assimilation of techniques employed by the Balzacian narrator, he recalls how a sense of power over the "plots" in his letters made him feel as if he were a master storyteller: "Entouré de mes dictionnaires, j’étais exalté, multiple à travers ces passions épistolaires. Je gérerais ainsi, jusqu’à midi, la sensibilité du monde" (78).

Words began to obsess him; he felt attracted to strange and eclectic terms. His fascination with the acquisition of a sophisticated language is illustrated by his earliest encounters with the works of Baudelaire,
Mallarmé, Racine, Corneille, and Rimbaud, who offered him models of written expression. As a "decolonized" adult, the narrator reflects on his adolescent infatuations and understands how he had conformed to the colonizer's unwritten objective: the transformation of indigenous youth into "simulacres" (a recurring word in Khatibi's idiolect) of metropolitain youth, whose assimilation of the hierarchical values embedded in art and literature helped prepare them to play prescribed roles in society. Just as Benillouche in Memmi's La Statu de sel feels that he has earned his place in the inner sanctum of French civilization when he can identify the most Racinian verse of Andromaque, Khatibi's narrator (perhaps parodying the earlier novel) recalls that he too felt he had gained access to a privileged "assimilé" status when he had absorbed the French classical tradition and mastered the use of Alexandrians in his own poetry:

Maniaque dans les imitations, se racontais la suite de l'histoire en alexandrins laborieux, torchés. Je voulais plaire au professeur français, puisque par Corneille je serais entré dans l'éternité de l'Autre. L'Occident nous offrait ses paradis. (84)

The paradise that can be gained through a mastery of the French classical tradition is, however, no more than a mirage for the colonized student. The canonization of French writers guarantees their "immortality" and reinforces the cultural doctrine of the colonizer's
mission. Writers whose works have become part of the
canon are eulogized as examples of a "superior" French
civilization, and they came to symbolize the power of the
written word for the indigenous students.

At first, the narrator hopes that his imitation and
manipulation of the discursive and generic conventions of
the French canon will protect him against the self-
splitting alienation of someone who had been born into a
civilization which, he had been led to believe, lacked a
viable literary tradition. By assimilating and parodying
the language of the Other in its most complex form, he
thought he could neutralize the power of the colonizer's
discourse and then acquire it for himself. He regarded
his control over the French language as a step toward
decolonization because it allowed him to inscribe his
presence in that language; it allowed him to reverse the
nightmare of being inscribed, of being etched by words;
instead he could act upon them. "J'avais viré carrément
vers la parodie que je croyais décolonisante" (84-85).
If his earlier obsession with the imitation of French
lyrical styles had been repudiated as a sign of
colonization, he also came to the realization that parody
reinforces the belief that French models are central to
any writing project undertaken by colonized individuals.
A true decolonization of the writer's relationship to
language must, he concludes, be more than parody; it must initiate an active reformulation of the writer's participation in the communication of a unique inner vision through language.

Khatibi describes himself as having been haunted by words—both French and Arabic—ever since adolescence. His interest was not exclusively focused on French, for an older brother's influence had motivated him to study classical Arabic for a while. At this time, he came to feel as if he were existing in limbo, in a linguistic no-man's land. When he left Morocco for an extended stay in Europe and came face to face with the Other, he began to understand that his own imitation and parody of the other's language had merely transformed him into a simulacre—a second-rate copy of a free or "decolonized" man. At this point, he realized that a total and radical autodecolonization requires a decolonization of one's language—a goal that could only be accomplished by creating his own space within the language of the Other.

To find his own discursive voice, he had to accept the interaction of two tongues in order to establish a second self through an écriteur that would be capable of transforming (or even breaking apart) the literary models he had once so admired. Within this context, self-writing opened a space in which a rebirth could take
place—not necessarily his own rebirth as a whole, unified subject embodied in the autobiographical text, but his rebirth as a "sujet écrivant." Conscious of a dual identity, this "writing subject" would experience a creative rejuvenation in attempting to realize its project:

Je flottais. Quelle histoire orpheline ou agressive pouvait me dessaisir? J'attendais que se dénouât le temps, que commençât ma vraie vie dans l'exaltation d'une nouvelle naissance. [...] J'écrivais, acte sans désespoir et qui devait subjuguer mon sommeil, mon errance. J'écrivais puisque c'était le seul moyen de me retrancher du chaos, de m'affûter à la solitude. (85)

The self that had previously been "flou" and in limbo, thus becomes anchored through writing in a cathartic experience that resembles that of other colonized autobiographers. The writer who was linguistically "orphaned" as the result of the loss or absence of the mother(’s) tongue finds rebirth in the autobiographical text, where, metaphorically, he "gives birth" to a new self.

The Moroccan critic Soraya Choufani describes Khatibi’s symbolic rebirth as a struggle between two linguistic presences in his conscious and subconscious mind. Both seek ascendency, according to Choufani, but the "true" line of Khatibi’s inheritance is marked by his name, by its link to the feast day of Abraham, and by the rites to which he was subjected during his first hours of
existence. These inscriptions are, she believes, more "real" in the narrator's memory than his acquisition of the French language and the "tattoos" etched in his memory by this experience. Nevertheless, she concludes that the French language rules over the narrator's imaginary faculties and fuels "représentations fantasmatiques élaborant le code des images auxquelles [il] tente de s'identifier" (17). Both rebirth paradigms exist in the text, posing the fundamental question that Khatibi explores in La Mémoire tatouée: what is the nature of his multiple identity, and which literary tropes (e.g., autobiographical narrative, imaginary dialogue) can best express its diverse forms?

If the image of a rebirth through writing parallels the implicit "regard dédouble" of the autobiographical act, other figures of the double haunt Khatibi's work as well--the androgyn, the simulacre, bilingualism, and the palimpsest. Imaginary dialogues such as those in La Mémoire tatouée and Maghreb pluriel allow Khatibi to turn his project on its head and to undermine his own arguments by creating "alter egos" to express the "other" sides of issues. The double as a narrative and thematic trope thus demonstrates the underlying reality of Khatibi's dual/multiple identity, which is also brought to the surface by a narrative voice that oscillates among
the uses of different personal pronouns, moving from "je" to "tu" and "il," while still referring to the same person.

Doubling and the figure of the simulacre are the psychological results of the colonized writer's dual linguistic and cultural situation. Memmi's Sartrian analysis of the colonizer-colonized relationship had defined the dialectical and polemical nature of the situation that exists between the colonizer and the colonized. Focusing upon the attraction-repulsion conflict that characterizes the two participants in this dialectic and hypothesizing that the desire for assimilation produces a schizophrenic reaction in the colonized subject, Memmi ascribed the resultant sense of loss and alienation to French education:

Tel est le drame de l'homme-produit et victime de la colonisation: il n'arrive presque jamais à coincider avec lui-même. La peinture colonisée, par exemple, balance entre deux pôles: d'une soumission à l'Europe, excessive jusqu'à l'impersonnalité, elle passe à un retour à soi tellement violent qu'il est nocif et esthétiquement illusoire. En fait l'adéquation n'est pas trouvé, la remise en question de soi continue [...] persiste le douloureux décalage d'avec soi. (154-5)

Despite the best efforts of the colonized to reintegrate a split identity into a coherent whole, he or she remains, in Memmi's view, continually divided from within. Aspirations to return to one's origins are futile, he concludes, because once colonized subjects
have been cut off from the "natural" historical evolution of their own people, there is no longer a "lost paradise" to be recovered.

For Khatibi, however, the splitting or doubling of the colonized subject is not a source of anguish. On the contrary, it is a source of creative energy, the point of departure for a challenging exploration of the "decolonized" intellectual/subject. In his epilogue to the 1979 re-edition of La Mémoire tatouée, Khatibi explains that: "C'est le déchirement de ce corps imprononcé qui me fascine quand j'écris--perte infinie" (206). He implies that the loss experienced by the self induces a distanciation, or a "detachment" that accompanies the "double vision." This distancing in turn enables (de)colonized writers to consider themselves and their writing projects with a certain neutrality, freeing them to perform a sort of self-analysis (or auto-autopsy). Not being able to "coincide" with himself is, for Khatibi, a springboard that can propel (de)colonized writers into an examination of other doubling and "bifurcation" tropes.

Khatibi's theories on identity and difference revolve around the figures of the simulacre and the palimpsest. In discussing Frantz Fanon's Peau noire, masques blancs, Homi K. Bhabha observes that the nature
of the colonizer-colonized dialectic of oppression and racism is inscribed onto a "perverse palimpsest of colonial identity." The images of the palimpsest and of the parchment (the French word parchemin, used several times in Khatibi’s narrative, relates both to the palimpsest and to the idea of the journey suggested by the word chemin) are highly evocative in terms of defining the colonial experience. In a colonized context, the palimpsest metaphor draws attention to the fact that indigenous languages and cultures are submerged beneath those of the foreign colonizer. In La Mémoire tatouée, the palimpsest actually becomes a metaphorical weapon that can be used in the decolonization struggle. On one level, it is a textual manifestation of the bilingual writer’s situation; on another, it symbolizes the efforts of the colonized to rewrite their stories and their presence into the French-language discourse that "writes" the text of colonialism. Khatibi himself develops the palimpsest trope as a means of carrying out a self-reflexive analysis that enables him to recast, or rewrite, his own story by alluding to narrative models of previous Maghrebian autobiographies or even to those contained in the sacred scriptures.

Beginning his "autobiography" under the signs of the double and of the palimpsest, the narrator of La Mémoire
tatouée describes his birth in a manner that grafts, or reinscribes his story onto that of Abraham and his son. His eyes were "opened" by a ritual that insured his future ability to "see:"

De ma naissance, je sauvegarde le rite sacré. On me mit un peu de miel sur la bouche, une goutte de citron sur les yeux, le premier acte pour libérer mon regard sur l'univers et le second pour vivifier mon esprit, mourir, vivre, mourir, vivre, double à double, suis-je né aveugle contre moi-même? (7)

By asking this rhetorical question, Khatibi is drawing attention to the self-reflexivity of a genre whose status as "non-fiction" is being called into question. For (de)colonized writers, autobiographical "truth" is particularly problematic because they have experienced cultural and linguistic dualities that undermine the possibility of their own unified subjectivity. Khatibi's term "double à double" also invokes the dual focus necessary for the self-writing act.

A reader unfamiliar with the Qur'an might pause at the series of verbs "mourir, vivre, mourir, vivre," assuming that it is merely a colorful rhythmic pattern. However, this exact series of four verbs is repeated on two other occasions in La Mémoire tatouée. In actuality, it is a veiled reference to the second sura ("The Cow") of the Qur'an: "How do you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead / and He gave you life, then He shall make you dead, / then He shall give you life, then unto Him you
shall be returned?" (II, 32). No footnotes explain this and other Koranic allusions in the text, but he himself freely acknowledges his borrowings from the sacred text: "Islam vit en nous, nous devons l'assumer de l'intérieur, sans ambiguïté et sans ambivalence" (Daouad 26). The repetition, "mourir, vivre, mourir, vivre," is particularly significant in La Mémoire tatouée because it suggests the fundamental nature of autobiographical writing as a recurrent birth and rebirth of the self. The creation of a textual alter ego is, in one sense, an attempt to stave off death's annihilation of the self. In the second sura, God's infinite power over man's fate is revealed, whereas Khatibi's autobiographical narrator is creating his own existence anew, and, possibly, even giving it a different shape through textual self-representation.

Khatibi's second reference to the sura's pattern of birth, death, and rebirth occurs at the end of the chapter "deux villes parallèles." At the end of this section, the narrator passes from childhood to adolescence, and the recurrent phrase draws attention to this experience:

Un pas dans l'impasse, un autre dans une autre, je frappe à la porte, personne ne répond, je marche, un caillou dans la main, je jette, je roule, ainsi va le monde, par petites secousses, l'enfant que j'étais se brisait, à tout hasard, mourir enfin,
vivre enfin, mourir enfin, vivre contre soi-même dans l'écartement de la mémoire. (49)

Mirrored in the Koranic reference to death and rebirth, the child’s passage into adolescence corresponds to a symbolic death. For a colonized writer, childhood is often represented as a time of innocence when the colonizer’s negative image of the indigenous culture has not yet been encountered.

As the Moroccan critic Zakya Daoud points out, La Mémoire tatouée is also a transcultural artifact that is symbolically/textually engaged with other artifacts from the languages and cultures that shaped the writer’s development. She calls it "un dialogue avec d’autres livres, et, en premier lieu, le Livre, le coran, puis les poètes ante-islamiques, puis tout ce que la culture arabe a produit de plus achevé et de plus raffiné, puis enfin, les poètes français, surtout Mallarmé." (26). Viewed from this perspective, Khatibi’s Koranic references are palimpsests--cultural and literary reinscriptions of the author’s multiple identity. As Khatibi himself explained, any text by a bilingual writer can be read as a palimpsest, for when the tongue of the Other is used as a means of expression, the mother(‘s) tongue does not simply disappear. Barely visible traces of the maternal language can be found between (or beneath) the text written in the adopted tongue.
The palimpsest actually does exist as a physical object in Khatibi’s Arab-Muslim context. It is the polished wood board upon which young boys (and sometimes girls) at the m’sid (Koranic school) write the verse that is to be memorized for the day’s lesson. After the verse has been learned, the board is erased; another verse is written on its surface, and the process begins again. Fascinated by the notion that layers of writing build up on the tablet’s surface and that traces of one text appear through the gaps of the new one, Khatibi exploits the trope of the palimpsest as a model for the writing of Maghrebian autobiography. Inscribing his own text into the canon of colonized autobiographies, he himself becomes a cultural "hybrid" unto whom a foreign culture has been grafted. As Scharfman observes, he has also become a "palimpseste[s] culturel[s]" (68) himself.

Along with a description of the rituals that prepare the new-born infant to assume his role in Arab society, the prologue presents a palimpsest/re-inscription of the narrator into the Islamic tradition. This event occurs when he is named in honor of the feast that celebrates both Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son and his subsequent deliverance from this terrible command:

Né le jour de l’Aïd el Kébir, mon nom suggère un rite millénaire et il m’arrive, à l’occasion, d’imaginer le geste d’Abraham égorgeant son fils. Rien à faire, même si ne m’obsède pas le chant de
l'égorgement, il y a, à la racine, la déchirure nominale; de l'archet maternel à mon vouloir, le temps reste fasciné par l'enfance, comme si l'écriture, en me donnant au monde, recommençait le choc de mon élan, au pli d'un obscur dédoublement. (7)

Not the father's violence, but the child's naming in commemoration of a potentially violent event colors the narrator's feelings toward his name. The image of the palimpsest is suggested by the fact that the narrator's story is itself being inscribed unto the Qur'an's depiction of Abraham as the original father of all Muslims. If the naming of the child honors a patriarchal tradition, it also causes a break with the past, what Khatibi calls "la déchirure nominale." Within this context, writing gives birth to the narrator a second time and transforms his text into a doubling of the sujet écrivant.

In La Mémoire tatouée, the "double naissance" of the narrator is repeatedly stressed as a metaphor for the act of autobiographical writing and for the narrator's dual cultural-linguistic heritage. Because his father had died when he was still young, Khatibi's circumcision rite is organized by his female relatives. Instead of marking the child's passage into a masculine world, the women's presence undermines the boy's full acceptance of the ceremony's religious and social meanings:

On me suspend à une multitude de bras en fête, et l'on crie victoire. Je m'évanouis une première
fois. Le cri de ma mère me réveille. Elle fait semblant de m'accoucher une deuxième fois et elle pleure; je bifurque vers l'énigme des femmes: sur les convives l'eau de rose à disperser, un fragment de vision, je mords de l'œil, tout s'éteint. Non point la mort du petit juste! Ne crois-tu pas qu'on t'a élevé à la dignité du patriarche? Sois digne de ton sang, sois patriarche! Epouse une, deux, trois, quatre femmes et passe! (27)

Rather than confirming his membership in the patriarchy, this particular circumcision rite seals his dédoublement, for it gives him the impression of simultaneously belonging to both feminine and masculine worlds; it creates a schism in his psyche and pushes him into "bifurcating" towards the enigmatic qualities of women, whom he associates with the grapheme and with the tattoo. Hence, the boy's unconscious mind forms a link between écriture and the double birth; however, this association only became clear to him as a result of reconstructing it in his memory.

The title of Khatibi's autobiographical narrative establishes a link between tatouage, graphie, and memory; in fact, it is itself a variation on the themes of doubling and of the palimpsest. Writing the colonized memory, is thus, for him, a necessary step in the colonized subject's pursuit of a viable sense of identity. It is also a way of establishing the legitimacy of the act of writing:

Ce n'est pas un hasard si des écrivains maghrébins sont captivés par l'autobiographie. Ecrire dans une langue qui était étrangère, est une façon de fonder
la légitimité de l’acte d’écrire. Cet écrivain dit d’abord: voici ma naissance, voici mon nom, voici mon terroir et voici "mon cœur qui ne bat que pour vous." ("Nationalisme" 151)

Khatibi here recalls the theories of other critics who speak about the colonized’s use of memory to reconstitute a lost sense of historical participation in the development of their nation. By recreating the past and a "coming to writing" in the language of the Other, the (de)colonized autobiographer legitimizes his or her use of this language. Self-writing thus becomes a means of filling in the gaps that exist in conscious and subconscious mind of the colonized individual--gaps that have been created by French education and by the colonial dialectic of attraction/hatred.

In his Portrait du colonisé, Memmi notes that the colonized are condemned to live in an eternal present because the colonizer denigrates the history and cultural achievements of their people. Severed from their past and unable to project a positive self-image into the future, they suffer, according to Memmi, from cultural amnesia:

Interrogeons le colonisé lui-même: quels sont ses héros populaires? Ses grands conducteurs du peuple? Ses sages? A peine s’il peut nous livrer quelques noms, dans un désordre complet, et de moins en moins à mesure qu’on descend les générations. Le colonisé semble condamné à perdre progressivement la mémoire. (122)

In Khatibi’s view, cultural amnesia is as pervasive as Memmi suggests. In fact, he sees it more as a personal
void that stimulates writing, which in turn represents an attempt to fill the emptiness. He contends that gaps in the colonized’s individual and collective memory do not result exclusively from a socio-historical reality, but from the inter-woven patterns of the languages (spoken, written, maternal, other) that sometimes obscure each other in their fusion and overlapping.

By means of writing and especially self-writing, the bilingual writer can, according to Khatibi, overcome the amnesia induced by the suppression of the mother(‘s) tongue. If the displacement of the maternal language produces a psycho-linguistic amnesia, the figure of the palimpsest symbolizes the interrelatedness and the simultaneous presence-absence that characterizes the relationship between the two languages in the writer’s conscious and subconscious mind. On a narrative level, the palimpsest—a text which one can read "between the lines" for the presence of a hidden subtext—also suggests the linguistic mechanisms that operate within the bilingual writer’s text. Self-writing in a bilingual (and diglossic) context is thus a conscious attempt to reconstitute the fragmented moi (and its avatars in two languages) by retracing the subject’s path ("[par]chemin") to writing as a means of controlling the diglossic situation.
Amnesia, then, is not purely the result of a colonized situation; it is also affected by the diglossia of the maternal language which is further divided into a sacred (paternal-authoritarian) discourse and secular (feminine, oral) discourse. For this reason, the Maghrebian writer’s bilingualism cannot be reduced to a linguistic dichotomy that obliges him to choose between two languages. In La Mémoire tatouée, the author explores his own relationship to language and writing in a manner that sets his autobiographical project apart from other Maghrebian autobiographical narratives. Instead of a work whose goal is to "faire le bilan" of alienation, Khatibi’s autobiography is an autodecolonization that at the same time serves to decolonize the existing model of Maghrebian autobiography. He does not deplore the loss of the unified self, which he regards as a myth in any case. In fact, his dual linguistic and cultural heritage becomes a source of great creativity for him. By developing the themes of doubling, the simulacre, and the palimpsest, he succeeds in analyzing his situation from the perspective of a bilingual writer who rejoices in his multiple identity because it allows him to formulate his theories on alterity, "double critique," and the "pensée autre." As a decolonized intellectual/writer, he has come to view
the cultural, linguistic, and geographic plurality of the Maghreb as the appropriate locus for a decentered approach to the problematic polarities issues of self and other, identity and difference. Because he desires to situate himself in this discursive and philosophical space, his autobiographical text can serve as the portrait of a decolonized artist, but it also goes beyond the individual identity inscribed within himself. In Khatibi's view, autobiography in the Maghreb can reformulate stale metaphysical positions on the self-other dichotomy. Because the identity of the Maghrebian subject that is reconstructed in the text is pluralistic and hospitable to its multiple identities; it is capable of becoming a self-writing project that actually "decolonizes" the polemic of identity-difference.

NOTES

1 For a discussion of autoportraiture and autobiography in La Mémoire tatouée, see Ronnie Scharfman's essay "Autobiographie maghrébine."

2 The title of Derrida's essay in which he discusses the coincidence of deconstruction and decolonization is "Structure, Sign and Play."
"L'autre est inscrit en moi," Identity and Difference in La Mémoire tatouée

L'originalité de Khatibi au sein de sa propre ethnie, est donc éclatante: sa voix est absolument singulière, et par là-mêmes absolument solitaire. Car ce qu'il propose, paradoxalement, c'est de retrouver en même temps l'identité et la différence: une identité telle, d'un métal si pur, si incandescent, qu'elle oblige quiconque à la lire comme une différence.

C'est en cela qu'un Occidental (comme moi) peut apprendre quelque chose de Khatibi. [...] Nous pouvons nous "décentrer," comme on dit maintenant. Et c'est là que les livres de Khatibi nous donnent une suite subtile et forte de signes tout à la fois irréductibles et expliqués: de quoi nous permettre de saisir l'autre à partir de notre même.

Roland Barthes, "Ce que je dois à Khatibi"

Maghrebian writers of French expression, whether in a colonial or in a post-colonial context, find themselves in the ambiguous position of having constantly to explain their identity. Writing in the other's language, often publishing their works in the other's
country, and having a readership based largely outside of their homeland, these writers are attacked for being "inauthentic" by some readers, even though they derive their inspiration from their culture and heritage. The nature of the Maghrebian identity, with its dual heritage of Arab-Islamic civilization and the French colonizing presence, propelled many writers from the region into undertaking an obsessive, but elusive quest to define themselves in relationship to it.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, autobiographical writing allows Khatibi to initiate a process of "autodécolonisation" by re-working standard Maghrebian models of the autobiographical "roman d’acculturation" into an analysis of the (de)colonized writer’s relationship to self-writing and to the two languages that inform his own sense of identity. Consonant with his desire to deconstruct/decolonize Maghrebian autobiography in La Mémoire tatouée, Khatibi also overturns the Manichean dichotomy of self/other as it had been expressed in previous autobiographical texts from the Maghreb. In the past, the point of origin of the narrator’s quest for identity was generally a desire to distance and differentiate the colonized self from the colonizer "other." After having realized that assimilation into the dominant group is impossible,
protagonists such as Driss Ferdi in *Le Passé simple* and Benillouche in *La Statue de sel* decide that their authentic identity is really fluid and undefined. Rejecting an identification with their own culture and religion, these two characters feel equally alienated from the West, whose acceptance they had formerly sought to obtain.

Just as Khatibi's autobiographical narrative deconstructed the paradigm of revolt and acculturation, it also reveals his belief that the unified self is a myth. In fact, *La Mémoire tatouée* lays the foundation for his conception of identity and difference by referring to them as "deux mots pour nommer le même noeud" (*Lutteur de classe* 62). This aspect of Khatibi's open-ended, dialectical, and non-polemical notion of alterity and "le même" intrigued Roland Barthes, whose comments about Khatibi's "decentering" the self-other question implies the refusal to adopt any single metaphysical or ideological construction of an "Occident"-"Orient" dichotomy.

The innovative aspect of Khatibi's positing of the identity-alterity duality resides in the fact that he pursues "autodécolonisation" by reformulating his own quest for identity to reflect an acceptance of his dual heritage as a source of creativity rather than as a curse.
imposed by historical circumstances. For him, it is a gift that permits him to situate his discourse in a new space that has been liberated from the sterile polemics of "moi" versus "autrui." The splitting of the colonized ego is interpreted by Khatibi as a phenomenon that allows the individual to be "transformed" in such a way that he can distance himself equally from both of the cultures that shaped his identity, thereby creating a space in which it is possible to imagine a new way of thinking about old dichotomies. Khatibi refers to this transformed ideological locus as a "pensée autre" or "pensée de la différence." By re-thinking (or thinking "other-"wise), he becomes convinced that he is progressing toward "autodécolonisation:" "Le propos est, plus que de faire le procès de l’Autre, de montrer ce qui lie, de saisir le noeud entre l’identité et la différence des cultures. Le propos est une analyse d’autodécolonisation" (Lamalif 48, 27).

During the past several years, Khatibi has elaborated his theories about a "pensée de la différence" in a number of essays and interviews. Heavily grounded in his readings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Marx, his ideas on this subject also reflect his experiences as a "colonisé-décolonisé" intellectual. The subtlety of Khatibi’s thought and its inspiration in the various
forces that have shaped his identity clearly emerge in an autobiographical text that is a creation/self-representation not only of the "sujet écrivant," but also of the internalized "other" that exists in the psyche of the (ex-)colonized subject, where, because of its dual linguistic and cultural heritage, it is closer to the surface. However, because this internalized "other" exists in every human subject, he insists that polarization of identity and alterity is a false dichotomy. According to him, they are actually two sides of the same reality.

Western readers usually think of autobiography as an individual act. Their expectations about a text that is labeled "autobiography" derive in part from the assumption that it will enable them to become (intimately, perhaps) acquainted with a single, unique consciousness. However, as Khatibi points out, autobiography in the Maghrebian context is linked to a quest for identity and self-definition in opposition to the colonizer and as a means of rediscovering lost origins, of articulating a positive self-image in the face of the colonizer’s negative view of indigenous culture and society. Instead of a single consciousness being illuminated in the text of a Maghrebian autobiography however, there is a second, subtly
interwoven presence that makes itself known even in autobiographical texts that pre-date Khatibi’s discussion of "multiple identity." This presence is the Western (usually French) Other—the objectifying, colonizing force with which the autobiographical narrator engages in a dialectic that oscillates between recrimination and the nostalgia for a lost love. This dialectic is, of course, not directly observable on a textual level, but it is intra-textually present. Within this context, the attempt to define the colonized identity is inseparable from the fact of difference(s)—that of the colonized (revealed to him as a negativity) and that of the colonizer (manifested as a putative superiority).

The dialectic of identity and alterity is responsible, according to Khatibi, for the constant seesawing motion of the autobiographical narrative, but it is also inherent in all first-person narration. Like any other autobiographical narrative, Maghrebian autobiographical fiction is characterized by the use of the first-person singular pronoun, suggesting that it too is seeking a dialogue with the Other. As Emile Benveniste demonstrates in his essay, "De la subjectivité dans le langage," the subject, as a conscious, psychological unity, can only exist in contrast to another consciousness. According to him, the ego either
recognizes and accepts the reciprocal subjectivity of the other, or, as in various forms of racism, colonialism, and imperialism, it denies the subjectivity of the other. "La conscience de soi n'est possible que si elle s'éprouve par contraste. Je n'emploie je qu'en m'adressant à quelqu'un, qui sera dans mon allocution un tu. C'est cette condition de dialogue qui est constitutive de la personne ..." (260). If autobiographical discourse is indeed the textual representation/creation of a sujet, then the "je" can also evoke the presence of a "tu." This other presence might be the reader, the colonizer-Other (in opposition to whom the colonized-sujet strives to define itself), or simply, as in Khatibi's case, an internalized alterity.

In the 1979 preface to a new edition of La Mémoire tatouée, Khatibi echoes Benveniste's ideas and argues for the dialogic nature of his decolonized autobiography by insisting on the interdependent nature of self and other as manifested in the link between the "je" narrator and his implied "tu" interlocutor: Comment transcrire, sans trembler, en une autobiographie singulière, le récit de sa vie et de sa mort? N'est-ce pas toujours l'Autre (les dieux, le destin, la fatalité, la mort, la beauté et toute grandeur supérieure à la pensée de l'homme), qui te révèle ton histoire, comme un événement inouï? Et
He observes that the autobiographer’s subjectivity (or consciousness) is never a unified entity with a single origin in the values of the Western tradition. In Khatibi’s view, the supposed uniqueness of individuals who have forged their own identities is an illusion because the contribution of the "Other" (i.e., another human being or a set of abstract, exterior forces that shape consciousness) must always be acknowledged. In other words, any "sensibilité pensante" (Appendix, xxx) is acted upon by contacts with an otherness that reveals the moi’s identity with the subject. At the same time, such contacts illuminate the ego’s "difference" within and outside the boundaries of the self.

The new discursive space that Khatibi creates for dealing with alterity and identity sets itself apart from traditional Muslim as well as nationalist-revolutionary thought, both of which he characterizes as being grounded in the notion of an "identité aveugle," that posits the illusion of a "moi absolu," links it to the myth of a pure origin, and sets itself in direct, even hostile opposition to a "différence sauvage." Such worldviews also sustain a belief in the "altérité absolue" that reinforces the idea that the colonizer/occidental
represents an untransformable, untouchable "otherness" (Lamalif, 85,30).

Although based on "l'identité aveugle," the identity/alterity dichotomy in previous Maghrebian fiction, did, according to Khatibi, serve a useful purpose at the inception of liberation and nationalist movements. A strong sense of identity, based on traditional values and heritage, was often necessary to inspire the revolutionary struggle (c.f., Fanon, Memmi). This strong sense of identity, sought as a form of opposition to the colonizer's negative definition of the colonized's identity, was expressed in Maghrebian autobiographical literature of French expression during the 1950s and early 1960s. Khatibi wanted to move beyond this position, to open new avenues for seriously reflection upon the identity of the Maghrebian individual in light of the changes that had taken place in post-colonial North Africa:

Ce qui est important aussi pour nous, dans cette période, c'étaient des textes beaucoup plus proches pour moi, en particulier Nedjma de Kateb Yacine, et Le Cahier d'un retour au pays natal de Césaire. C'étaient donc, des portraits... des autoportraits d'une sorte, et des autobiographies. Le contexte donc, de l'époque, c'était de se préciser par rapport à l'ancien dominant... Donc, moi, j'avais proposé un travail sur soi. C'est à dire, quand la colonisation est terminée à un certain niveau de gestion administrative....les effets de cette colonisation ne sont pas du tout terminés et il s'agit de travailler pour se clarifier, soit à sa propre rapport à la vie, soit par rapport à
Khatibi thus describes the primary factor that marks the turning point between previous models of the self-other polarity and his own self-writing project (i.e., writing the self-as-other).

Like Rimbaud's claim "je est un autre," the internal alterity of the colonized ego transforms the autobiographical act into a process that blurs the boundaries between self and other. When analyzed and textualized in autobiography, the (de)colonized writing subject becomes the "object" of that discourse and of the dissecting gaze, becoming an object whose alterity is apparent to the autobiographer. Initially instilled in the colonized subject's conscious mind by the linguistic and cultural dédoublement caused by the colonial school, the self's own otherness becomes the focal point for Khatibi's self-analysis cum self-writing in La Mémoire tatouée.

The Moroccan critic Lahcen Mouzouni describes Khatibi as a writer whose treatment of the identity-alterity problem distinguishes him from most other North African writers. Mouzouni, whose analysis parallels the evolution of Khatibi's own views on the subject, places Ahmed Sefrioui in the category of those early writers who were influenced by a traditionally Muslim (and
"nationalist") way of viewing the West and its "differences" as harmful to the fundamentally "good" values of Arab-Islamic society. Those who, like Sefrioui, defended this view found corroboration for it in the devastating effects of colonialism, which had caused indigenous social institutions to stagnate and to become corrupt. Another of Mouzouni's categories includes writers such as Chraibi and Memmi, who initially felt that the West was "different" in a positive sense. Their protagonists wholeheartedly embraced the supposedly superior values and lifestyles of the Occident; they regarded the "évolué" as superior to those who remained mired in their own traditional heritage. A category that Mouzouni doesn't explore is one that Khatibi has described, and it would include writers like Rachid Boudjedra and Mohammed Khair-Eddine. These men are representative of those who rejected any value system, whether Islamic or Western, that seeks to shape and control the intellectual's creative impulses. Revolt without a well-defined goal has never been a part of Khatibi's philosophy. He himself states that:

"Je n'ai pas l'intention de me révolter contre la société. Finalement, c'est trop facile. J'ai au contraire, un désir profond de réhabiliter cette société, pour aller au fond, pour mesurer la force de son conditionnement, pour la juger de l'intérieur. [...] J'essaie, à dessein, de le [le système de valeurs] traiter par une démarche progressive, une violence ironique" (Daouad 27).
His project is thus one of dialogue and exchange—of transformation and growth.

Whereas many post-colonial writers struggle to balance their political commitments and their involvement with Francophony, Khatibi sees no inherent contradiction in adopting the Other's language as long as it has been assimilated to suit the writer's inner vision. An (ex-)colonized writer's identity need not be compromised or defined exclusively from the standpoint of his or her choice of language. Identity and alterity are fluid constructions, he concludes; their rhythm and evolution must be considered in light of the dynamics of transcultural exchange and communication, which can themselves be the hallmark of the decolonized writer:

Ainsi l'identité ne se définit pas par une structure éternelle, mais, d'après notre propos, elle est régie par des relations dissymétriques entre le temps, l'espace et la culture structurant la vie d'un groupe, d'une ethnie, d'une société. Traduction du mouvement d'être et de sa flexibilité, de son adaptation aux événements, à sa propre énergie de renouvellement. "Hospitalité" veut dire ici une écoute de l'autre en tant qu'autre. Lui prêter l'oreille pour l'accueillir dans sa singularité. Parole venant d'ailleurs et de loin, apprentissage initiatique à ma propre prétention à l'universalité, qui que je sois, muni ou démuni de force, de stratégie et de puissance sur les autres. ("Francophonie" 5)

This commentary by Khatibi underlines what he considers to be the potentiality of a Francophony that opens boundaries between cultures and among the French-
influenced identities that exist in different parts of the Francophone domain. Linguistic hospitality necessitates an openness that can sustain the ever-changing patterns of individual and national identities. "Si nous acceptons l'idée d'une identité qui n'est plus fixité au passé, nous pourrions aboutir à une conception plus juste, celle d'une identité qui est en devenir..." ("Francophonie" 5). Reliance on an "identité aveugle" (or "sauvage") as a substitute for an authentic, open, and "hospitable" national identity can only serve, he asserts, to render national and individual identity stagnant, freezing it into reductive categories.

Mouzouni places Khatibi and Mohammed Dib in the same category as writers who set out to analyze "soi et l'Autre sans tomber ni dans l'apologie, ni dans la critique systématique et le dénigrement" (137). According to him, these two writers differ from many others in the sense that they transform the exploration of self into a dialogue with the other—a dialogue that refuses to waste time upon recriminations for past wrongs. The existing model of anti-colonialist discourse was thereby altered to reflect changing realities in a post-colonial world in which a mutually beneficial cultural and linguistic exchange can occur on various levels. In speaking about the nature of his own "travail
sur soi," Khatibi suggests that writing in the so-called "Other" tongue helps him to achieve the "distance" necessary for a critical and introspective self-analysis:

...se regarder de l'extérieur, c'est impossible ce regard complètement de l'extérieur, mais essayez donc! C'est ça le travail sur soi, c'est un travail intérieur. C'est peut-être d'ailleurs ce que j'ai proposé le plus pour le devoir de l'écrivain: de ne pas s'endormir sur la nostalgie de la perte, sur la plainte, du crime contre l'autre, à qui est la responsabilité pour la souffrance... (Appendix, 341).

What he is saying is that writers must maintain a certain self-awareness with regard to their choice of language and to the way they use that language to communicate a personal vision of the world or of the self. Only in this way, he argues, can they view their subjectivity from the outside (i.e., in the analytical, dissecting manner of self-writing) as well as from within themselves. By "working" on the self, Khatibi is repudiating the mode of diatribe and moving toward a reconciliation with his own "difference."

The exploration of Khatibi's double/multiple identity also encompasses the side of his identity that is actually "other." By proposing a new way of thinking about Muslim-Maghrebian identity and its opposition to a Western other, he creates what he calls "la double critique," the basic goal of which is, as he explained to Abdellah Bensmaïn, to "démanteler toute théologie
d'origine. Elle est double, parce qu'elle s'inscrit dans deux langues, deux sols historiques et métaphysiques. C'est peut-être entre deux langues qu'une pensée nous est possible aujourd'hui" (Pro-culture 10).

Just as the bilingual context of the (de)colonized writer allows for the creation of a new discursive space in which to examine the relationship between self-writing and the writer's dual linguistic heritage, "la double critique" provides a new approach to the theoretical understanding of alterity and identity. It also opens new possibilities for a dialogue between East and West, as well as for a "third course" that can be followed by countries in the Third World. The plurality of the parole and the decentered discursive space that can be found outside the boundaries of the East and the West (i.e., the First and Second Worlds) suggests the possibility of a decolonized metaphysics that represents a "dé-liaison de la raison occidentale, dans ses sciences et ses techniques" (Maghreb 51). The subversive nature of Khatibi's project of "double thinking" resides in the fact that the "third voice" calls out from the margins to challenge the hierarchy of the established order that has divided the world into three (or more) categories of wealth and power.
The dialectic of transcultural and translingual communication that Khatibi hopes to initiate can be experienced for the first time in La Mémoire tatouée, which presents not only Khatibi’s own identity, but also a text that explores his "difference." This difference is contained within the ego, and it enables him to declare, "l’autre est inscrit en moi" ("Véritable" 29). His awareness of such a double identity explains, in part, why Barthes believes that Western readers have so much to gain by becoming acquainted with Khatibi’s project. They can of course recognize the Moroccan writer’s "difference" by following his autobiographical itinerary, but they can also become more intensely aware of their own "enfermement idéologique"--the characteristically occidental tendency, as Barthes says, to define the self-other issue in reductionist terms. In his essay on Khatibi, he argues that "decentering" the foundations of Western, post-modern thought implies a much-needed shift away from hegemonic discourse and traditional Western approaches to the "study" of the foreign other by means of ethnographic appropriation. At the same time, he concludes, it constitutes a movement toward a transformed metaphysics that takes into account our own "otherness."
In "Pour l'homme total," Abderrahman Tenkoul writes about the "mouvement dialectique" of "identification et différenciation." This movement, he contends, shapes the thoughts of writers such as Laâbi and Khatibi about identity and difference. Tenkoul himself believes that, rather than simply enabling writers to assert their subjectivity, the dialectical and decentering actions that break down boundaries between the moi and l'autre will allow for a more authentic "réappropriation de l'Etre" (42). For this reason, the exploration of self and other has always been a prevalent theme in French-language autobiographical writing from the Maghreb, whether or not the writers themselves are aware of it. The earliest examples of Maghrebian autobiography in French (both purportedly non-fictional texts such as F.A. Amrouche's Histoire de ma vie and Zoubida Bittari's Pleurez mes soeurs musulmanes! as well as texts that present themselves as novels) were most likely to be read by French-educated Maghrebians or by Frenchmen, for the vast majority of Maghrebian French-language texts were published in France. What relationship can be posited between Maghrebian autobiography and the author's others/readers under such circumstances? In what way is self-writing an attempt to set oneself apart from the colonizer/other? To what extent does it engage the other
in a dialogue that reveals the relationships of difference and sameness that exist between the author and the reader?

Christopher L. Miller’s *Theories of Africans*, focuses upon the ambivalent aspects of "difference" as metaphysical and cultural concepts that arise when Westerners are reading works by African writers. Whereas much of post-colonial theory centers on re-evaluating otherness and difference in abstract, philosophical terms, Miller’s study goes to the heart of the issue and asks an important question: what happens when "difference" is removed from the abstract context of deconstructive theory and placed into the concrete context of non-Western literatures being read by Western readers? "But suppose we had to care what the difference is [...] Suppose that we could no longer afford the mandarin detachment from messy differences in the plural; that the matter of difference were simply too urgent to be glorified and homogenized as differance-with-an-A" (8). Miller implies that difference can become a highly charged political and racial issue when one discusses Western readers’ interpretations of African literature. To ignore the deliberately political implications of such works and to treat their dominant thematic concerns in an esoteric and abstract fashion, is to perform a neo-
colonialist "white-washing" of the African text—one that attempts to "cover up" the fact of the African writer's "difference." Both Western readers and African writers ask themselves whether the African writer's identity, as presented in the text, can be understood for its "difference" and in a non-demeaning manner by the Western reader.

Can the reader come to "know" the other by reading fictional or autobiographical texts? James Olney's studies of African autobiography assume that the Western reader, armed with nothing more than a sympathetic and sensitive frame of mind, can approach African others as they textually present themselves in autobiography (ix). He does not consider the possibility that, since autobiography is associated with "Western" values of "individuality," it might be a contradiction in terms for Africans to choose this particular literary genre to portray their close sense of identification with a community. The theoretical implications of a Western readership for African autobiographies are not seriously considered in Olney's book. However, Jacqueline Kaye's recent study of French-language Maghrebian literature does discuss the ambivalent situation created by the disjunction between this literature and its readership. Although she does not specifically focus upon
autobiography, she contends that writers such as Driss Chraïbi and Tahar Ben Jelloun permit Western readers to engage in "voyeurism" because their autobiographical novels (Le Passé simple and Harrouda) reveal too much of their intimate, true life experiences (28, 34). Her comments cast doubt on the ability of European languages to serve as vehicles for the communication to Western readers of authentic self-portraits by (ex-)colonized writers without precipitating them into the "traps" of exhibitionism and ethnographic appropriation.

In the Western, post-Enlightenment tradition, autobiography is considered to be especially well suited to reveal the true, "human" essence of the self, its psychological motivations, and the realities it has experienced. But when autobiography presents a self that has been shaped by a language, a culture, and a religion which had previously been categorized as "foreign" or "exotic," what new way of reading is required for Western readers to understand "what is different" about a particular (ex-)colonized individual’s experiences? Miller’s anthropological reading of African literature takes cultural difference into account, while avoiding the temptation to possess or totalize that difference. A Western reader of Maghrebian autobiography is initially
struck by the cultural and religious differences that have shaped the subject’s childhood and adolescence. But writers such as Khatibi are not interested in providing readers with an ethnographic description of life in the Maghreb. On the contrary, in *La Mémoire tatouée*, he presents and "dissects" his "difference" because it has become an internalized element of his own identity, and because it offers him a rhetorical stance from which he can distinguish himself from the European other.

In most earlier Maghrebian autobiographies, the tone of the narrator’s discovery of alterity is bitter and accusatory; to go beyond this tone, Khatibi gives textual form to his notions of "pensée de la différence" and "double critique" by moving toward what he calls "la pensée" or "le savoir orphelin(e)." For him, these terms imply a metaphysics that is not grounded solely in either a Muslim or a Western tradition, but rather in a transformed ideology that fuses elements of each as well as Zen, Tao, and other metaphysical systems that fascinate him. Khatibi’s difficult, novella-length poem, *Lutteur de classe à la manière taoïste* (1976), parallels the structure of Liou Kia-Hway’s *Tao-Tō-King* (see Gontard, ch.5). Khatibi was particularly intrigued by the concept of *yin* and *yang* as represented in Taoist thought by the two-color, circular diagram of the *Tai-ki*.
This representational figure of disparity within unity is comparable to Arabic calligraphy, in Khatibi's view, because it too successfully fuses an ideogram with a grapheme. Gontard points out how Khatibi's concept of the unnameable and incommunicable are related to his predilection for representational figures that transmit meaning both as "writing" and as "designs." The particular figure of Tao that symbolizes the essential unity and interrelatedness of the universe is in harmony with Khatibi's own notion of the "couple antonymique" (82). One of these antithetical couplings, that of "identité/différence," is fundamental in his own thought. It is also the basis for his Taoist-inspired poem, "Le lutteur de classe à la manière taoïste":

Identité différence  
deux mots pour nommer le même noeud  
dénouer ces mots c'est tracer une spirale  
tracer en son corps une spirale élastique  
c'est se mouvoir en exil  
s'exILER sauvagement à l'autre  
c'est s'ouvrir à la différence sans retour (62)

The image of the spiral evoked in the third line is reinforced by the stanza's structure. The poet employs a word and then repeats it in a slightly different form in the line that follows. Thus, "noeud" reappears in the word "dénouer;" "tracer" and "spirale" are repeated; "exil" is echoed in "s'exiler." Both the semantic context of his words and the rhythms they evoke, create
the impression of a spiral-like pattern of motion which, in turn, connotes the dialectical pattern of Khatibi's own thought.

The phrase "sauvagement à l'autre" calls to mind Khatibi's notions of "identité sauvage" and "différence sauvage." In his conception of the identity-difference dichotomy, these two elements do not represent opposite poles of an absolute dichotomy, but rather interwoven threads of the same "noeud." In his thinking, "sauvage" evokes the illusory attribute of an absolute "otherness" that Enlightenment man postulated as the opposite of his own "civilized" identity. As the first verse of the poem cited above demonstrates, Khatibi does not distinguish between two such poles of identity and difference. The "knot" of identity-difference echoes the Tao figurative representation of yin and yang--a representation in which black and white, masculine and feminine are fused yet separate elements of the same whole. For Khatibi, the Tao ideogram translates his belief that identity and alterity are two words that name the same "knot." Within the unity of the "moi," difference and sameness exist together; each element contributes to the formation of a spiral that evokes the kinetic model of the subject's self-definition, which takes place in opposition to and by means of a fusion with the "Other."
Khatibi's fascination with non-Western ways of thinking such as Tao, Zen, and Indian philosophy illustrates his dedication to the creation of a discourse that is neither completely Arab-Muslim nor Western in origin. Although often defined as "Eastern" or non-Western, Muslim thought has been strongly influenced, for example, by ancient Greek philosophy. In his essay "Le Maghreb comme horizon de pensée," Khatibi seeks to negate the myth that all Islamic thought is characterized by a divinely ordained unity of origin and inspiration. In fact, he reminds his imaginary interlocuter that:

...la pensée du divin comme présence de l'Étre, comme advenir... N'a-t-on pas dit et redit que la philosophie arabe est grecque en son essence!
— Oui, selon une certaine direction de pensée. Je dirai par exemple que le Dieu d'Aristote est entré dans l'Islam, avant l'arrivée de l'Islam.
— C'est un indice qui montre pourquoi les Arabes avaient inventé la fameuse Théologie d'Aristote, pour brouiller en quelque sorte le paganisme grec et confisquer à ce peuple sa différence intraitable par le monothéisme. (10-11)

He observes in this passage that no civilization is "pure" in its origins; no group of people can remain untouched by any other culture. His belief in the "hospitality" of cultures and languages actually reflects the fact that Islam and Arab civilization have come into direct contact with many "other" races and cultures during the past twelve centuries. Islam has both borrowed from and given to these other civilizations.
When Khatibi raises the issues of alterity, sameness, and hospitality, therefore, he is calling for a reevaluation that can discredit commonly held illusions of unity. His statements in works such as *Maghreb pluriel* reiterate his belief that civilizations, like individuals, possess internalized alterities that result from contacts with others and with "different" cultures.

For this reason, Khatibi continues to speak about the need for Islamic theology and philosophy to reject a Manichean aesthetics and to welcome the contributions of other cultures and other ways of seeing the world. In the past, he points out, Islamic thought has repeatedly been enhanced and strengthened by a willingness to learn from Greek, Chinese, Persian, Indian, and other cultures. However, contemporary nationalist currents (often the result of an intense involvement in liberation struggles) have infused Islamic thought with a tendency to see all world events through an "us-vs.-them," Orient-vs.-Occident perspective (*Maghreb pluriel* 28-31). As a means of autodecolonization, the (ex-)colonized subject must, he believes, recognize the illusory nature of either absolute alterity or pure sameness. By practicing a "double critique" in his autobiographical text, Khatibi retracts his own first discovery of "otherness" and his need to confront the "otherness" of his own identity.
The first section of *La Mémoire tatouée*, "Série hasardeuse I," follows the linear trajectory of a colonized child's growth into adolescence and adulthood. When the child is sent to the Franco-Moroccan school, he is obliged to confront the foreign other. As a result of the "doubling" endured by any bilingual subject, he must also later confront the "difference" that has been engendered inside himself. The negative image of the colonized is subtly woven into the education of colonized children, and when they encounter it for the first time, they begin to reflect on their own identity. The colonizers who reside in their country, live in ways that differ from those of their own families, and this difference motivates them to analyze their own identity.

In *La Mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi's adult autobiographer recalls how he and his childhood companions observed the daily activities of the French--activities that were so different from those that were conducted in their own homes. The children viewed these activities as external manifestations that attested to the "difference" of the *colons*: "les parties de tennis ou de boules près d'un petit bar de la France éternelle: un coup de Martini, le béret rituel, et puis la partie interminable" (43). The irony of his tone in recollecting the stereotypical images of French
civilization as it was transplanted to Moroccan soil demonstrates his consciousness of the forces that condition people to think in terms of artificial distinctions between themselves and others.

The racial, religious, and cultural differences between colonizer and colonized were often invoked to justify the spatial and administrative divisions that were imposed upon the colony. The narrator's understanding of the assumptions behind colonization emerge clearly when he reflects on the colonialist mania for dividing cities into French and Arab quarters. Colonizers sought to protect their "otherness" by refusing to live in the same neighborhoods as the indigenous inhabitants. In *Les Damnées de la terre*, Frantz Fanon describes the way in which racist ideology is projected into the design of colonial cities. Compartmentalized sections for administrative services and for secure residential enclaves were constructed in European architectural style; their very existence served to create and preserve order (7). According to Fanon, the assumption behind this spatial organization is that the colonial system can only function if the alleged "differences" between the colonized and the European settlers are legitimized through the design of the environment. Because the colonized are associated with
"barbarity," "chaos," and "violence," the colonizers felt they must keep these tendencies in check by isolating the colonized in areas that are separate from their own. The colonizer’s refusal to live in the same sorts of dwellings or in the same neighborhoods as the colonized merely reflected their belief that they must not become too much "like" the colonized if they wished to maintain their dominant status. In the Maghrebian cities, the Arab quarter usually consisted of labryinth-like medinas that had existed for centuries; their apparently incomprehensible and haphazard design corroborated the colonizers’ stereotyped assumption that Muslim culture lacked a fundamental sense of order.

Khatibi plays on the alleged differences between colons and Arabs in terms of an order-vs.-chaos distinction when he recalls how the French areas ("zones interdites" for himself and for his companions) were geometrically arranged clusters of villas, parks, and administrative buildings. The French sense of order was particularly apparent in the parks, where he and his friends felt themselves to be alien. Yet he was not intimidated by the colonizers’ implicit claim to control the space they had occupied:

Voici le Parc, voici un petit musée de fleurs et de plantes, dont les parfums se perdent dans la géométrie maniaque. Traînez vos pieds, reposez vos fesses, puis regardez au travers, en travers, dedans
et par-delà. Sachez que le Parc est une douceur qui habitue à la tombe. Voici, mon lecteur, la fraîcheur de l'esprit cartésien qui se morfond sous l'ombre des arbres, et voici la vierge intouchable. Interdit de cueillir la pointe de ses seins, il faut laisser au vent l'arôme de ses quatre saisons (43)

Playing upon the cultural difference between colonizers and Moroccans by hypothesizing a link between the colonialist's appropriation of land and his obsession with transforming "Arab" chaos into order, Khatibi adopts a tone of nostalgic teasing. The interdiction of Arab "trespassing" in the neighborhoods reserved for Europeans parallels another sort of "trespassing" that haunts the colonizer's imagination. In an ironic metaphor, he compares French parks to (European) women, intimating that he understands one of the real reasons why Muslims are kept out of French neighborhoods: the fear of sexual transgressions.

Fanon observed that one of the biggest fears in the colonizer's mentality is that the original inhabitants of the colony will one day dispossess him of his land and of his wife (8). When Khatibi refers to the park as a "vierge intouchable," he is tacitly recognizing that the differences between colonized and colonizer were posited as absolutes in order to prevent any intercultural (spatial or human) métissage.

In the passage cited above, the narrator's ironic tone suggests that permanence and continuity are
stereotypically characteristic of the other’s differences. When he employs the words "éternelle" or "interminable" in reference to them, he is actually turning the colonizers’ accusations of stagnation and historical rigidity against themselves. The colonizer-colonized dichotomy seemed impervious to change, and it was inscribed in his memory like a tattoo, the central image in his autobiographical text:

Je jouais parfois avec des copains dans ce lieu, nous allions regarder les parties de tennis ou de boules près d’un petit bar de la France éternelle: un coup de Martini, le béret rituel, et puis la partie interminable. N’est-ce pas que le temps se détruit dans une répétition fissurante! Je me retrouvais, perdu dans ce montagne d’images baroques, défilant dans le désordre d’un enfant colonisé. Que pouvions-nous faire, écrasés dans nos corps, sinon, Bel Occident, déflorer ta nature, sauter sur tes zones interdites et attraper les petits poissons rouges frétillant dans ta matrice? (43-4)

The rhetorical questions that he asks in this passage draw attention to the static quality of the colonizer/colonized duality.

Each side regards the other as an absolute alterity because each sees the other from a distance; there is little interaction between the two groups, except in individual cases. The child cannot understand why the barriers are in place. Why should he not freely visit the city’s parks and cafes. The Muslim children assume that the Europeans are "different" because they see
external signs of difference (e.g., the beret, the alcohol, the lawn games). But they are also tempted to cross the boundaries that separate them and to violate the supposed sanctuary of the other. Penetrating the "zones interdites" and becoming voyeurs of the other's activities represent transgressive acts that are later mirrored in the colonized subject's appropriations of the other's language in the transgressive act of becoming a writer.

The ironic tone of the narrator's recollections about his "coming to knowledge" of the other and about his growing awareness of the difference between himself and the Other reflect the autobiographer's retrospective attitude toward his own earlier uncertainty about his own identity. Like Memmi, Feraoun, and other colonized autobiographers, he learned about the history of his own people as it was filtered through the world view of the foreign occupier. Seeing one's culture in this way produces a "double vision" that parallels the linguistic and psychological dédoublement of the (ex-)colonized subject:

... par le glissement dans le vide, je me rencontre dans le regard louche d'un double. [...] Certes, le Maroc, dans ces textes, sous la forme joyeux folklore, tuniques blanches, babouches vif écarlate, pastèques ensanglantées, et que dire? Un muezzin mécanique, enfourchant une humanité endormie et qui ne se réveillait que pour se mouiller le bout de doigts, ébauchant quelques génuflexions. La prière,
c'était parler au vide. Étonnées par cette image de nous-mêmes, nous gloussions, un peu honteux comme lorsqu'on va voir un film un peu canaille en mâchant du chewing-gum, pour faire passer une émotion larvée. (57)

The narrator’s recollection of the emotion felt by the young students at being presented with such patently false images of their own culture exemplifies the insidious processes at work in the colonial educational system. The students are conditioned to regard their own people in terms that are defined by the foreign occupier.

The result is that Khatibi’s protagonist (like Benillouche, Driss, and the major characters in earlier Maghrebian autobiographies) becomes an outsider to his own group; he becomes an allegedly "superior" person because he can now recognize the deficiencies of his own culture. The embarrassed chuckling that accompanies their attempt to repress their true feelings when confronted with such images of their culture also reveals how the students are being emotionally coerced into seeing themselves as "different" from the rest of their group. The resultant "doubling" cannot help but influence the way in which the children view themselves and their relationship to their own language and culture. As Khatibi’s narrator recalls, the children learned to "mask" their real emotions and to act as if they had been convinced by the indoctrination process.
Seduction by the colonizer's promise of assimilation is another significant element of the colonizer/colonized dialectic. The colonial school seduces indigenous children into believing that the culture and language of the other are superior to their own. It also holds out the promise of great rewards for those students who succeed in mastering the foreign language and in leaving their origins behind them. However, part of Khatibi's "autodécolonisation" involves the recognition that seduction works both ways, for it affects both partners in the colonized/colonizer relationship. The masters of the Franco-Moroccan school were themselves seduced by the reflection of their culture as it was mirrored in the successful students' assimilation of it. Impressed by the students who mastered the French language, for example, they desired to see their indigenous pupils as incarnations of the values associated with their own "civilizing mission." In *La Mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi's narrator describes how this game of seduction became increasingly important to him and to his teacher, who willingly participated in it by directing class discussions into areas where his star pupil could demonstrate his successful assimilation.

At the secondary school he attended in Casablanca before leaving for Paris, the majority of his classmates
were young French women, and in this situation he became obsessed with the idea of seduction. The seduction of the colonized by the colonizer's language becomes reversed, for the young Moroccan now uses the French language as a weapon with which he seduces the feminine (cultural, religious) other. His mastery of the Other's language enables him to be particularly seductive because he can present himself as being "different:" "La séduction devenait ma passion. Je travaillais pour éblouir et je parlais une langue introuvable dans les livres, puisque, m'écriais-je par procuration, 'la chair est triste et j'ai lu tous les livres'" (111). His motivation to master the French language is thus heightened by his desire to increase his power to seduce the foreign women at his school. In any case, he views language as a means for attaining a goal. The assumption that the other's language can serve him as a tool of seduction is actually rooted in the assumptions behind the colonial educational system, for colonized children are conditioned to believe that the key to their acceptance into French society is their ability to assimilate the French language and the French culture. By extrapolating from this line of reasoning, the colonized young man naturally assumes that, by impressing
French women with his linguistic abilities, he can legitimately expect to be accepted by them as a lover.

The passage cited above also reveals how literary models of the other's culture are internalized by the colonized adolescent. The narrator's account of his earlier intimate identification with Mallarmé (related in a slightly ironic tone) betrays his awareness of the absurdity of his situation; he has become a simulacre of himself. He attempted to live by "proxy" in the sense that he imitated the literary models that had been taught to him in the colonial school. But as the adult autobiographer understands, his earlier game of seduction had required him to wear a mask. If the colonized subject is going to seduce the Other, he must never reveal his true identity (i.e., that he is merely the "copy" of a true Frenchman). No traces of his Muslim, colonized identity can be visible; there must be no tell-tale accent to betray his origins; otherwise, the illusion of being "the same" as the other will be lost. When the narrator explains that he had cultivated the identity of a "poète maudit," he is revealing that, at that time of his life he felt constrained to wear a mask—to appear to be the other—if he hoped to seduce the feminine other.
With the hindsight of an autobiographer’s perspective, he understands the psychologically equivocal situation in which he had placed himself by playing at seduction. The game of seduction between colonizer and (ex-)colonized revolves around the question of identity and otherness. By trying to assimilate, he was only playing a role, becoming a simulacre (of himself and of the "ideal" Frenchman). The French women in his classes, in turn, appreciated him for his "difference" from other Moroccans. Accepted into the other’s group as a curiosity, he experienced an ambivalent pleasure that merely heightened his internalized "otherness:

Car ces filles que je désirais profondément me caressaient de loin. Elles disaient que je différais de mes compatriotes. On m’acceptait parce que j’étais semblable, annihilant d’avance toute mon enfance, toute ma culture. Devant un tel plaisir complexe, je me mis des moustaches et une cravate de sole bariolée. Le personnage se donnait un certain air dévergondé. J’apprenais aux autres à écrire leur propre langue. On applaudissait, sans plus. Je souhaitais une victoire irréversible, ce furent le sourire, la surprise. Passion déréglée qui me convainquit de la solitude. Toute la place était pour la poésie, ma contrée criminelle où s’inscrivait ma blessure. Je m’attaquai aux auteurs difficiles, Mallarmé, Valéry, sans oublier la douceur si proche d’Eluard. M’ouvrir ainsi à une existence voilée, et par les mots j’étais mon propre dieu, au-delà de Casablanca, ville quelque peu détestable qui m’a volé ma parole. (112)

The narrator’s report of the girls’ appreciative cooing, "you’re ‘different’ from the others," recalls the perpetual dilemma of identity and alterity in the
colonial situation. The assimilé and the évolué only receive the praise and acceptance of the colonizer if they are perceived as being other than they really are.

In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Fanon recounts an anecdote that demonstrates the ambiguous identity of the colonized subject. After a lecture in which he himself had spoken (in French) about the parallels between black and European poetry, he was congratulated by a listener who complimented him by remarking "Au fond, tu es un blanc" (30). The message is clearly similar to the one received by the young Khatibi: "You're different; you're one of us." Homi Bhabha describes this ambivalent use of the adjective "different" and claims that it reveals the insidiousness of the way in which identities are assigned to the colonized other: it is, he argues, "the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body" that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness ("Interrogating" 188). Khatibi's narrator reveals that his seductions took place only on an intellectual level. From the female students, he received applause for his brilliance but no other manifestations of admiration or respect. In fact, the term "de loin" reinforces the idea of the "zones interdites" that separate female colon classmates from their male, Moroccan counterparts. The "blessure" that he suffers is more than alienation and a
break with his origins; it is linked to the tattoo—the painful scar, the indelible trace of the memories that constitute his identity.

Only words, poetry, and an escape through his imagination could save his divided ego, torn between seducing the other and finding his own unique discursive space. The passage cited above occurs at the end of the chapter "par gestes décrochés" and prepares the way for his departure to Paris at the beginning of the next chapter. Before describing this departure, the narrator accuses Casablanca of having "stolen" his words, his identity. His confusing experiences in the French secondary school had blurred the boundaries between self and other. In his desire to be accepted by the other's group, he had abandoned his identity by donning the mask of the simulacre—a mask that he hoped would lessen the differences between himself and his French classmates. This image is echoed in the next chapter when he describes his mother's sadness at his departure, "car elle me savait devenir un peu plus simulacre" (114). Indeed, the trip to France only exacerbated his confused sense of identity. Looking foward to truly engaging the Other in the land of the Other, he repeatedly encounters reminders of his difference.
In the Maghrebian autobiographical novel, the departure for France is a predictable stage in the account of a "coming to writing." In La Mémoire tatouée, Khatibi's autobiographical narrator situates his departure for Paris within the context of a continuing quest for self-knowledge and for a knowledge of the Other as well: "Je partais à Paris sans autre histoire que celle d'un étudiant ombrageux, à la recherche d'une autre image des autres et de moi-même. [...] Ce vol, rencontrer l'Occident dans le voyage de l'identité et de la différence sauvage" (113). He believed his trip would confirm his sense of identity and his belief in an absolute alterity. Instead, his experience of France during the period when its people were forced to re-evaluate the identity of their country as a colonial power prompted him to reformulate the self-other dichotomy by adopting the decentering perspective of the "pensée autre."

In the chapter "Rive gauche," he sets out to meet the other on a new ground from which he will be able to examine the noeud of identity/alterity. In describing his studies at the Sorbonne, his outings to the cafes and jazz clubs of Paris, and his meetings with young avant-garde writers and muscians, he subverts the paradigm of the European explorer in exotic lands and he himself
becomes an "ethnographe démusclé de l'Occident" (122). Living on the margins of Parisian society, he observes everything from an outsider's perspective. Like an ethnographer, he reflects on the nature of cultural difference. His stance as analytical observer later makes it possible for him to dialogue with the other from a position of "power" because he too has visited the other's country and transformed it into an object of study.

At that time, Paris was the site of a rapidly changing social and aesthetic order; the rise of the new novel and the birth of the nouvelle vague cinema roughly coincided with the start of the Algerian revolution. Khatibi's encounters with the French were colored by a general atmosphere of fear, intolerance, and an indiscriminant desire for vengeance against the North Africans. Several times he was mistaken for an Algerian and detained. The dormitories of Moroccan students were watched by the police—a precaution that did not prevent some of them from helping Algerian students in the underground escape from the authorities. For him, it was a time of discovery, a time when he came face-to-face with the other's blind, racist hatred of anyone with Arab features: "en pays étranger, avais-je le droit de regarder en face le dégoût de l'autre?" (125). His true
identity proved to be of no consequence to many French people because his features marked him as an "Arab." His subjectivity and his individuality were rejected. Categorized according to the rules of "la différence sauvage," he is relegated to the status of the "other," a featureless being reduced to an absolute alterity. His confrontation with this situation leads him to re-think his ideas about the relationship between self and other and about the possibility for a genuine dialogue between them.

Travel and the discoveries he makes about himself and about others lead him to question the assumptions he had previously held concerning his identity and the other's "difference." He frequented cafes and attended lectures in order to participate in discussions about topics such as New Wave cinema and Robbe-Grillet's novels. The cultural life of Paris during the early 1960s captivated his imagination. The narrator describes his encounters with fellow students, with young writers, and with actors. It seemed to him that many intellectuals at that time were searching for ways to circumvent traditional literary and artistic styles. Successful artists were those who offered a supposedly "new" vision. His experience of avant-garde literature and cinema prompted him to re-examine his previous
understanding of poetry and art. As a result, he began to develop his own theories about the need for a new mode of thought that avoids past dichotomies of self and other, of Orient and Occident. Such considerations invariably led him back to the fundamental question of his own identity: "Inexorablement, Paris apparaissait comme une inépuisable parole où je devais déchiffrer ma propre énigme..." (123). Although he thoroughly enjoyed himself during his student years in Paris, he became increasingly aware of the fact that he would only be able to find the self-knowledge for which he was searching if he looked inside himself. He began to see Paris as a cultural vortex: every political and theoretical position that originated on the margins was eventually sucked into the mainstream and transformed into something that would be consumed there. With this insight in mind, he refuses to abandon his identity and his sense of "difference" to the co-opting forces of the Parisian avant-garde.

Before he himself actually became a writer, Khatibi discovered North African French-language authors whose works, published in Paris, were being avidly read by a public that was eager to learn about other cultures. In La Mémoire tatouée, he reflects on the way in which "difference" and cultural "otherness" became a sort of commodity in Paris during the early 1960s. Certainly the
Algerian war had fostered this interest in the Maghrebian other, but the Maghrebian writers themselves were, he thinks, guilty of "mauvaise foi" in their belief that they could overcome their internalized "otherness" by claiming to have a "hyphenated" identity:

La guerre d'Algérie déchirait par-ci, par-là. Ecrivain sans dossier, je discutais avec passion culture nationale, identité ou pas, révolution et Islam, et comme chaque groupe français avait son Arabe de service, on écoutait d'interminables confessions. L'Arabe de service disait: "Je suis un trait d'union entre l'Occident et l'Orient, le christianisme et l'Islam, l'Afrique et l'Asie," et que sais-je encore! Pauvre Arabe, où étais-tu, réduit à une série de traits d'union! J'en voyais qui mendiaient l'image de leur identité dans les kiosques à journaux, agglutinés à la moindre rature de reconnaissance.(126)

Casting the ambiguous position of these Maghrebian writers in a negative light, Khatibi's narrator accuses them of having "prostituted" their identity by refusing to explore their "otherness." In their attempts to assimilate and to serve as a link between the self and the other, they had failed to re-evaluate or revolutionize the context of this dialectic; as a result, they had not, in Khatibi's view, moved beyond a monologue of protest or of idealized ethnography. In their works, the issue of identity remained at a stunted "perte de..." stage, for they never sought to find a new space that was neither Occident nor Orient.
Khatibi himself ironically alludes to the ex-colonizer's attitude toward such writers:

"Allez, disait le pharisien, insultez-vous dans notre langue, on vous saura gré de la manier si bien" [...] Le déchiré faisait sa petite confession, et l'on appelait cela cri libérateur. Pire qu'un couteau inattendu, le rapt de l'esprit. Ainsi l'intellectuel colonisé luttait, abrégé dans ses racines les plus vivantes. (127)

According to Khatibi, the "difference" of Maghrebian French-language writers was co-opted by the publishing industry, which engaged in another form of colonization by refusing to dignify their works with the label of "universality." If these early writers thought they were freeing themselves from the other's oppression, they were, according to Khatibi, actually stagnating in the same assimilationist aspirations of rejecting their "difference" in the hope of becoming accepted into the other's group.

The only writer whom he did not characterize in this way was Kateb Yacine. The narrator relates that *Nedjma* (1956) had affected him like no other Maghrebian novel of that time because its author had clearly broken with the novel of acculturation and ethno-autobiographical portraiture. Kateb had explored the "otherness" of Algerian society and history by revitalizing mythological materials and by developing a revolutionary way of using the French language. Khatibi was fascinated by the
innovative, labyrinth-like quality of Kateb's thematic and narrative structures, which bewilder and disorient readers who are obliged to follow the itinerary of a "délice poétique" (Roman 107). According to Khatibi, Kateb challenges the (French) reader in a manner that proclaims his appropriation of the language of the Other. His texts do not seek approbation; on the contrary, they defy and invite readers to enter the poet's labyrinth as guests--guests who must recognize that only the host has the power to lead them out again. In this sense, the novelist proves that he is in control; the other/reader cannot anticipate a comfortable, passive reading experience in which he or she recognizes a shared set of symbols and myths. The writer's "otherness" is exposed, and the readers' "difference" is shown to be incapable of preparing them to comprehend fully what they find in Kateb's text.

Khatibi's understanding of Kateb's project motivated him to seek innovation in his own use of the French language. However, he does not want merely to "turn the other's language against him." In the preface to La Mémoire tatouée, he discounts the naive claims of Maghrebian writers who believe they have "violated" or "desecrated" the colonizer's language by using it to express their recriminations. The inescapable truth is,
in his view, that language’s "write" and "destroy" the poet, not the contrary. "...[R]ien n’est moins dérisoire que ce faux sacrilège. Car, une langue ne peut être dérobée si légèrement aux morts qui veillent sur elle. [...] Elle lui [le poète] indique par un labyrinthe souterrain, la survivance de son être oublié..." (12-3).

Kateb and Khatibi have both understood that the relationship between writers and their language of expression is infinitely complex; writers who use the other tongue to express their difference and to engage in a dialogue with the other must recognize the ambivalence of their situation and act accordingly within the limits of that language. The internal, hidden maze of a language will inevitably reveal a means of salvation, a crystallization of the meaning of existence to the cautious, respectful writer. When "writing" their difference, Maghrebian writers cannot hope to subjugate language; they can only enter into a dialectic of "give and take" into which the reader/other is drawn and where he or she exists (even in the mother language) "entre le chaos retenu et l’aventure blanche" (128).

"Série hasardeuse I" ends with the narrator’s decision to return to Morocco in the company of his European wife. This return, presented in Khatibi’s work under the guise of what he refers to in *Maghreb pluriel*
as "l'impossible retour au Même" (196), demonstrates that
the dream of returning to one's origins is an illusion.
In Maghrebian fiction (e.g. Memmi's Agar and Chraibi's La
Succession ouverte), the return to the native land is
often evoked as the final confrontation between the
protagonist and his family, between the protagonist and
"traditional" culture. In La Mémoire tatouée, the
narrator's awareness of "l'alterité irréductible" (the
inescapable otherness as an internalized facet of his own
identity) makes it impossible for him to overcome the
"doubling" of his identity by seeking a mythic unity in
the land of his origins:

La différence est une femme et la différence sauvage
une séduction larvée. Belle illusion est le retour
au pays! On ne revient jamais chez soi, on retombe
dans le cercle de son ombre. Qui m'attendait
pourtant? Ma mère aux grands yeux et le vouloir de
tout transformer. (143)

His comprehension of the fact that he cannot rid himself
of his internalized duality causes him to seek some means
of at least reconciling the two (or more) sides of his
identity. Rather than attempting to bridge the schism,
he transforms his doubling into a textual exercise in
which both sides have the opportunity to speak. By
giving the usually repressed side of his consciousness a
chance to be "heard," Khatibi is drawing attention to the
untranslatable, which he often evokes in his works by
adopting the form of an imaginary dialogue.
After the first section of *La Mémoire tatouée*, the straightforward autobiographical *récit* becomes a dialogic, polyphonic meditation on his experiences and the *rencontres* he has had with his various cultural "others." For example, he asks himself:

Qu’avais-je retenu de ce long séjour de six ans en Europe? Question oiseuse si l’on en retient le vol. Je parle de mon passé comme s’il s’agissait chaque fois d’un temps à expulser. Soit! Je donne la parole à un autre double. (143)

He suggests that an individual’s past might be more than a linear series of events recounted by an autobiographer who wishes to unburden himself of them. For this reason, Khatibi himself allows other facets of his identity to speak, because he understands that, in the "self-writing" project of a bilingual, decolonized subject, no single "voice" can express his own identity.

The chapter that begins "Série hasardeuse II" is entitled "Fugue sur la différence." It marks a departure from the first part of *La Mémoire tatouée*, and it also constitutes an innovative variation on the traditional format of the Maghrebian autobiographical text. In it, Khatibi presents an alter ego whose travels lead him to various parts of Europe and Asia, where he attends conferences on the "Third World" (viewed as the neo-colonial, ideological substitute for "the Orient") and often engages in a sort of intellectual tourism. His
travels motivate him to expand his exploration of otherness by establishing a dialogue not just between himself and "the West," but also between himself and the "Others" of Asia, North America, India, and Eastern Europe. He comes to the realization that alterity is many-faceted and offers the sujet dédouble a myriad of possibilities for self-discovery and for the further exploration of its own otherness.

Khatibi's theories about identity and difference are grounded in his belief that a reductionist, Manichean vision of self and other is incapable of sustaining the hoped-for recovery of a unified, monovocal identity in the wake of the turmoil that has gripped post-colonial North Africa. As he states in Maghreb pluriel, a new discursive space is necessary—one that decenters and continually questions the old dichotomies while fostering an ongoing fertile exploration of difference. His point is that neither the West nor the Orient exist as metaphysical absolutes. Indeed, just as the West is an assimilated facet of his own multi-faceted, protean identity, the Orient is another aspect of it:

Quoi qu'il en soit, cet intime de notre être, frappé et tourmenté par la volonté de puissance dite occidentale, cet intime qui est halluciné par l'humiliation, la domination brutale et abrutissante, ne peut être résorbé par une naïve déclaration d'un droit à la différence, comme si ce "droit" n'était pas déjà inhérent à la loi de la
vie, c'est-à-dire à l'insurrection contre sa propre aliénation.

Un droit à la différence, qui se contente de répéter sa revendication, sans se mettre en question et sans travailler sur les lieux actifs et réactifs de son insurrection, ce droit-là ne constitue pas une transgression. Il en est la parodie. [...] Tout reste à penser en dialogue avec les pensées et les insurrections les plus radicales qui ont ébranlé l'Occident et continuent à le faire... (11-12)

If "difference" is vital for the creation of a sense of identity, simply claiming the right to be different is pointless. One needs to engage, as Khatibi suggests, in a "double critique" that offers the possibility of a fruitful dialogue about identity and difference—a dialogue that can have far-reaching consequences for a restructuring of fundamental metaphysical assumptions in the West and in the Orient.

One way of activating Khatibi's "pensée autre"—knowing oneself as an Other—is to travel. Unlike European travelers who explore the exotic differences of the Other to reconfirm their "superior" conceptions of themselves, Khatibi journeys with the knowledge that the other is ultimately "imprenable." In contrast to the European desire to appropriate "difference" according to the post-Enlightenment tradition of "writing the savage other," Khatibi discovers that he is left with himself; he experiences no fusion with the identity of the other. In essence, he comes to realize that the other is already
present within "le Même," that, in other words, "l’autre est inscrit en moi."

In "Célébration de l’exôte," Khatibi discusses the life and writings of the French poet-traveler Victor Segalen. His reading of this "exote" complements his own belief in a "pensée autre:"

C’est lorsque l’autre est maintenu dans sa distance que je peux être l’autre de l’autre, le poète de mes doubles, de mes sosies, de mes frères irréductibles. Il n’y a aucun miroir, aucune transparence absolue, aucune réduction. L’autre est mon face à face, toujours lui-même, toujours imprenable à la source de son être. [...] Je voyage vers l’autre, toujours tourné vers sa présence énigmatique. Présence de peuples, de contrées et de paysages devant ma vision inversée du monde. C’est pourquoi l’autre m’est impénétrable: il est une part de moi, et l’autre de mon autre. Ainsi est scandée cette écriture, au rythme de son déchiffrement: je ne peux jamais poséder l’autre, le réduire dans son réel, encore moins dans son imaginaire. (366-7)

The traveler recognizes that the other resists assimilation because the other is already present with himself, but if that is the case, what does he learn from his travels? According to Khatibi, he comes to understand that the other cannot be possessed or reduced to stereotypical proportions. "Otherness" in some form or other is always already inscribed unto the bilingual subject. The traveler’s experiences thus prompt him to regard the identity/difference issue in a new light, just as Khatibi himself came to recognize that the West is a part of him—a part that he now accepts.
Within this context, he explains that the "pensée autre" actually originates in the schism of the subject:

Il faut regarder de près l'autre comme trait, comme trace, comme troisième terme de soi-à-soi...qui est inscrit dans une séparation de moi-à-moi. [...] C'est dans cette séparation...que jaillit l'étranger...l'autre. Donc, je vais loin, l'autre est inscrit dans la division du sujet" (Appendix, 353).

The "third term" that he mentions in this passage is a marginal, alternative discourse that contrasts with the two more dominant discourses: that of the West and that of the Orient. This "third term" exists in the psychological "no man's land" created the splitting of the ego. Within this neutral space, the "difference" of the subject is inscribed, enabling bilingual, decolonized autobiographers to remain conscious of their foreigness, while focusing a dissecting gaze both within and outside themselves.

Before the bilingual, decolonized ego can assimilate its own alterity and exploit it as a source of greater creativity and self-knowledge, the demons of "l'identité aveugle" and "la différence sauvage" must be exorcised by finding the locus for a new dialogue with the other. In "Variation sur la différence," Khatibi's autobiographical narrator returns to the "jeu de séduction," which is an inherent component of the colonizer-colonized dialectic.
In this chapter, his recollections of seduction by writing and by the other's language are transformed into a seduction of "l'occident" (represented in terms of the female body). The corps scriptible of "l'Occident" is violated by the narrator's desire to inscribe his own presence and his own bitterness unto the "white page" of her body: "Occident, tu m'as écharpé, tu m'as arraché le noyau de ma pensée. Occident, j'allongerai ton corps d'albâtre, vrai de vrai, rien, néant de rien, rien" (169). In this instance, the colonized seduces the "West" by means of the power that his writing gives him. This vengeful fantasy recalls his earlier attempts to seduce the European girls in his class by drawing upon his impressive linguistic manipulations. But in this case, an event from his past is not presented as part of a linear sequence; on the contrary, it is evoked in a dream fragment that is textualized in such a way that it illuminates his relationship with his own alterity.

In the passage cited above, the narrator reverses the "jeu de séduction" as a way of rejecting the West's supposed power of total attraction over the "colonisé-décolonisé" intellectual. He is also affirming his rejection of the Manichean self-other perspective by proclaiming that his salvation lies in the acceptance of his multiple identity: "Certes, Occident, je me scinde,
mais mon identité est une infinité de jeux, de roses de sable, euphorbe est ma mère, je suis protégé, Occident!"
(171). He ascribes a talisman-like quality to his multiplicity and discovers that his doubling is a source of empowerment, not a sign of weakness. By invoking the desert as his place of origin, he further intimates that the discovery of his mythic origins has saved him from a complete loss of self. In Khatibi’s fiction, the desert is usually depicted as a space within which "la recherche du Même" occurs. Conscious of the belief that the desert is the legendary point of origin for Arab civilization, he also portrays it as a vast emptiness within which the self questions its identity and origins "jusque dans son effacement." As Gontard points out, this insight is itself a liberating act of decentering (Violence 107).

Instead of psychologically crippling him, the narrator’s dédoublement proves to be his salvation, for doubling actually creates the multiple identity that he perceives as a source of creativity and insight. Once he has acknowledged the beneficial qualities of his situation, he plays on the theme of his own difference—"la différence barbare" that Westerners advanced to support their stereotyped notion that he and his culture needed to be colonized because they lacked a "civilization." At this point, however, the seduction
takes place in the opposite direction, and the Other looks to the bilingual writer as a source of new creative life in a language that had once been offered to the colonized as a vehicle of expression that was supposedly superior to his own. Rejecting both the idea that the West is "un mal absolu" and the belief that the West is the sole guardian of truth and goodness, he accepts his double heritage, his two mothers, and invites their embrace.

The final image of "Variation sur la différence" is that of writing, which is again linked with the image of the tattoo, the indelible trace of myth and symbol that evoke both the feminine presence and a particular system of transmitting meaning. "Je tatoue sur ton sexe, Occident, le graphe de notre infidélité, un feu au bout de chaque doigt. Point nodal, crac!" (173). The violence of this image signals the narrator's appropriation of the West. In effect, he is marking his presence in the other('s) tongue. By tattooing his mark unto the body of the West, he is also, as Scharfman points out, affirming his right (and by extension that of any other Maghrebian writer) to "possess" the language of the other (72-3).

The final chapter of La Mémoire tatouée demonstrates Khatibi's multiple identity as well as his utilization of
"la double critique." Two interlocutors--A (himself) and B (the critical, challenging voice of an alter ego)---engage in a dialogue about the preceding autobiographical text and its meaning. This chapter serves to undermine the reader’s faith in autobiography by "decolonizing" the genre. In it, the two voices engage in a duel over the nature of the narrator’s self-proclaimed double identity. Such self-deconstructing mechanisms obligie readers to reexamine their own earlier impressions of the overtly autobiographical section of La Mémoire tatouée. They also enable the writer to focus the reader’s attention on language and structure as opposed to the content of the récit, thereby emphasizing the fact that the work is (as the subtitle suggests) a decolonized autobiography, not merely another Maghrebian self-portrait.

The doubles in Khatibi’s final chapter also comment upon the nature of the narrator’s multiple identity. A replies to B’s suggestion that a multiple identity "confuses" and thus weakens knowledge by declaring that, "la musique ne dérange pas le savoir. Elle suggère, au contraire, sa dialectique voilée. La pensée dysharmonique ne nous intéresse pas. (silence) Tu m’écoutes?" (178). Thought that exists on its own—thought that is not in dialogue with other metaphysical
systems, including those from other parts of the world—is of no interest to Khatibi or to his alter ego A. In fact, his entire autobiographical project is based upon his recognition of the need to destroy the myth of the unified self, even if it reinforces the old "colonisé-décolonisé" distinction. In his view, the future of the relationship between the Orient and the West depends upon the creation of a new dialectic that is multiple in its perspectives and origins. As he has shown in his own autobiography, individual identity is an expression of linguistic and cultural pluralism. Although he knows that self-writing will undoubtedly continue to be the genre in which one express the self, he also realizes that a "pensée autre" can only be created by undermining the (ex-)colonized’s faith in an "identité sauvage" and by recognizing that there is neither an absolute moi, nor an absolute autre: "Identité hautement diaphane qui se posa là où se souviennent les parfums, tel est son destin à tout jamais, identité en dessous de laquelle rien ne se reflète, seulement l’archet maternel ou le chant immémorial de la mer. Qui jamais usurpa de force et de mort l’ultime signe?" (179). The ethereal quality of his multiple identity evokes a transcendent brightness that is "flou." The self is not easily captured in language; when the self in question is a (de)colonized, bilingual
one, capturing its substance in textual form is rendered more difficult because he recognizes that there are no absolute signs with which to evoke its nature.

The imaginary dialogue format is a manifestation of Khatibi's belief in the need for a transformed sense of identity in the post-colonial world. In fact, the dédoublement of the colonized subject in this section of La Mémoire tatouée actually displays this transformed identity in action; it also enables the bilingual, decolonized writer to engage in a new dialectic of difference and identity with the (former) "autre irreductible:"

On se voit comme un Marocain, mais un Marocain transformé par l'histoire, par l'autre. Il n'y a pas d'identité, c'est une identité transformée. On est plus ou moins Marocain, mais on ne se sent pas tout à fait Marocain comme celui qui n'a pas été transformé (qui n'existe pas vraiment, d'ailleurs, mais...), qui est resté dans son identité d'origine. [...] La figure du double vient s'enraciner dans cette identité transformée. Dans la Mémoire tatouée il y a un jeu de retrouver le double contre double. C'est la scénographie de l'identité avec ses différents rôles...cette double identification provoque des doubles... (Appendix, 345)

The "transformed identity" thus becomes a source of creative energy for Khatibi. His acceptance of his double/multiple identity allows him to create his own discursive space and to overturn the sterile self-other polemics that characterized much of the early anti-colonial discourse.
The foundation of this transformed identity is not merely the acceptance of his dual heritage, but the knowledge that decolonized intellectuals must remain vigilant—refusing any assimilation or appropriation of their work and thought by any single ideology. In one sense, Khatibi’s decolonized thought is a "pensée orpheline," one that rejects all claims of parentage by either Orient or Occident; as a bilingual, post-colonial writer, he jealously guards his independence and the decentered discursive space that he has finally won after a long and difficult search for a transformed identity:

Aimer l’Autre, c’est parler le lieu perdu de la mémoire, et mon insurrection qui, dans un premier temps, n’était qu’une histoire imposée, se perpétue en une ressemblance acceptée, parce que l’Occident est une partie de moi, que je ne peux nier que dans la mesure où je lutte contre tous les occidents ou orient qui m’oppriment ou me désenchantent. (106)

Neither the Orient nor the West is authorized to lay claim Khatibi’s work. His thought and his writings defy ideological and geographical boundaries in his attempt to situate himself in a "pensée autre."

In the end, the identity he claims for himself is his own creation. It is based on an acceptance of his multiple identity and of the internalized alterity that he acquired as a result of historical circumstances. Ironically, he transformed this doubling into a fertile
source of creativity. In "Nationalisme et internationalisme littéraires," he rejects such labels as "Francophone writer" or "Moroccan author of French expression" because he has created a separate place from which he can pursue his "double critique." Having undertaken a successful "autodécolonisation" and aided by the act of self-writing, he concludes by presenting a passport of his own making: "je suis moi-même, un étranger professionnel, dans la mesure où l'écriture ne me préoccupe maintenant que comme exercice d'altérité cosmopolite, capable de parcourir des différences" (152). By virtue of being a "professional stranger," Khatibi can pursue his project of seeing things "otherwise." Writing from a position that is neither totally marginal nor at the center, he situates his discourse in a locus of "difference" that enables him to interact with various "Others" in a post-modern dialectic concerning the issues of alterity and identity.
CONCLUSION

Autobiographical narrative has remained a preferred form of expression for many contemporary writers from the Maghreb. Since the publication of Mouloud Feraoun's autobiographical novel Le FILS DU PAUVRE in 1950, however, French-language autobiography from the region has undergone a remarkable evolution. At the beginning, North African autobiographers tended to stress a linear, ethnographic depiction of childhood; later, they produced texts in which they retrace their "coming to writing." Since then, Maghrebian autobiographical narrative has continued to evolve; for example, Assia Djebar and Abdelkébir Khatibi have made significant contributions to this form of writing by consciously assuming their roles as bilingual, decolonized autobiographers. Both have explored their multiple identities in ways that seek to reconcile their own subjectivity with the region's new postcolonial order: a sort of cultural métissage.
Khatibi’s text has been especially influential upon the post-1962 generation of writers who followed his example and published autobiographical narratives that challenge earlier models of the genre. Among the works in this category are Tahar Ben Jelloun’s Harrouda (1973) and Abdelhak Serhane’s Messaouda (1983). Like Khatibi, these writers remain acutely aware of the ambivalencies inherent in their auto-decolonizing, self-writing project. No longer satisfied with merely describing a sequence of events from their past, they and other contemporary Maghrebian autobiographers often feel compelled to re-examine their relationship to the act of self-writing and to the language in which it is done. They, like Khatibi, have discovered that the use of the Other(‘s) tongue in such an undertaking is fraught with paradoxes that undermine their assumptions about autobiography and the relationship between "self" and language.

In recent years, an increasing number of North African women have published autobiographies and autobiographical novels, including Jelila Hafsia’s Cendre à l’aube (1975) and Nadia Ghalem’s Les Jardins de cristal (1981). Djebar’s L’Amour, la fantasia is, however, one of the first Maghrebian women’s autobiographies that consciously situates women’s self-writing in an Arab-
Islamic context. Her project is particularly innovative in the sense that she highlights the ambivalencies of an Algerian woman's relationship to autobiographical narrative in the "langue adverse." As her work reveals, the problems encountered by Algerian women who engage in the autobiographical act are often not the same as those facing male writers.

Originally employed as a device for bringing about an intellectual "auto-decolonization," autobiographical discourse continues to be seen as a vehicle for writers who desire to situate themselves in the world and to develop a style of writing that attests to their particular identity. An analysis of the evolution of self-writing in the Maghreb demonstrates that, during the period of colonization, autobiographical narrative was characterized by the nostalgia for a lost unity of self. As the result of a reconsideration of how French-Arabic bilingualism (and diglossia in general) affects the development of the writer's "moi," Maghrebian writers gained considerable insight into the way in which a pluralistic cultural and linguistic heritage shaped their own identities.

How have the pluralistic identities of the Maghreb fostered the development of a penchant for autobiographical discourse? Both Djebar and Khatibi
attempted to undermine the myth of the unified self by emphasizing the many-faceted heritage of the region and the frequently neglected historical fact that Islamic-Arabic civilization has been both an agent of cultural "hospitality" as well as a recipient of it. The very fact of métissage has encouraged the growth of self-writing in the Maghreb. In the Maghrebian context, the existence of several languages or identities (some of them imposed by former colonizing powers) often induces individuals to view themselves from the outside. In this way, they become aware of a dual or even triple heritage. The perspective of "seeing" oneself simultaneously from within and without is, in fact, the hallmark of the autobiographer's self-dissecting gaze. Maghrebian autobiographers such as Djebar, Memmi, and Khatibi have even exploited the theme of "otherness" (as it is internalized by the bilingual, decolonized writer) to demonstrate how the self's recognition of its own alterity provokes a desire for minute, textual self-analysis.

One of the most innovative elements in Djebar's and Khatibi's self-writing project is to explore the nature of their relationship to each language and dialect that shaped their intellectual development. Their narratives depict an anamnesis that reconstructs their past to
portray their adolescent awareness of how the acquisition of the Other(‘s) tongue affected their self-perception. By examining their relationship to the language in which they are undertaking the self-writing project, they come to the conclusion that the acutely self-conscious relationship of bilingual autobiographers to each of the languages in which they express themselves constantly reminds them of the fundamental inability of language to communicate the self in its entirety.

In *La Mémoire tatouée*, Khatibi deconstructs the autobiographical paradigm that he presented in the first section of his text. In this way, he suggests that the recreation of the individual’s past through writing is ultimately impossible because identity is a "noeud entre deux vides" (176); thus, for him, the ethereal quality of the self can never be completely anchored in textual form. As a Maghrebian, woman autobiographer, Djebar demonstrated that total, textual self-revelation is unattainable in French because the "langue adverse" can never gain access to her innermost self. By describing her own relationship to the French language, she reveals that, when a historically-based association with rape and pillage is inscribed in a language, the feminine self draws back from it and refuses to assume a vulnerable position.
Both Djebar's and Khatibi's texts point to the interdependent relationship between self and language. For decolonized autobiographers, the nature of this symbiosis is rendered even more ambivalent by the fact that the bilingual self actually depends upon both languages to achieve self-expression; sometimes the two (or more) tongues function together simultaneously, whereas at other moments, they remain separate processes. In this respect, autobiographical voices from the Maghreb, speaking from a place where the West and the Orient meet, offer new insights into theoretical issues that have intrigued the "center" for the past several decades: in particular, into the question about whether the self uses language or is used by it.

These autobiographies can also provide Western readers with new perspectives on the ways in which language can express or veil self-knowledge. Writing of Khatibi, Roland Barthes noted that the métissage of cultural perspectives characteristic of the contemporary Maghrebian psyche rendered him more conscious of the "weight" of the West's concept of its own identity (8). By reading texts that originate "en marge," we can, according to Barthes, blur our self-imposed boundaries of identity and difference—boundaries that imprison many
Westerners in an endless round of questions concerning
the nature of the self and of the other.

Djebar and Khatibi illustrate Barthes’s theory in
the sense that they speak out from the periphery,
challenging readers to recognize the dubious assumptions
upon which Western conceptions about the unity of the
self and about the relationship between the self and the
other are based. When Western readers examine
decolonized, Maghrebian autobiographies, they enter into
contact with individual subjectivities that are split
between opposing self-perceptions. The plural identity
of the bilingual, decolonized subject obliges them to
reevaluate their understanding of the way in which their
own past has shaped the development of their egos and to
ask whether or not this myriad of influences and events
could ever successfully be communicated in a linear,
autobiographical narrative. Decolonized self-writing
inevitably brings the reader to the conclusion that all
self-writing is ultimately a fiction, no matter how
sincere an author’s desire for truth and accuracy might
have been.

The dialogue with the European other that began with
the first Maghrebian autobiographical text in 1950
continues to the present day. In the autobiographical
narratives of writers such as Djebar and Khatibi, Western
(as well as Maghrebian) readers are still being challenged to open themselves to innovative perspectives on self and language, on identity and difference. Whether or not they intended to do so, writers are participating in the reformulation of a French literary canon that is becoming increasingly "hospitable" to minority voices from within France and outside its boundaries. Although some critics contend that European audiences only seek confirmation of their own preconceived ideas about the North African "Other" when they read fiction by Maghrebian authors, most readers and writers view the continued existence of French-language writing in the region as proof of an ongoing desire to create an environment propitious to true inter-cultural exchange and debate.

Western readers of North African French-language autobiographical narrative are invited to share in the lived reality of the decolonized subject as it has been presented in Djebar's and Khatibi's works. Although Western readers might not always identify with anecdotes and events recounted in these texts, they can experience a dialogue with the "Other" by engaging in a critical reading of such self-portraits. In fact, self-writing from the Maghreb reminds us that textual self-creation is a process that requires a reader's active participation.
This is true not only because the autobiographer's "je" presupposes a "tu" who is the extra-textual reader as well as an imaginary interlocutor, but also because the "autodecolonization" that operates in Maghrebian autobiographical narrative requires the presence of a reader/Other. The (de)colonized subject affirms his or her "droit à la différence" through a process of continual "becoming," a process of eternal self-creation that rejects the fixed limitations and objectifications of the colonizer's gaze/discourse. By calling on the reader/Other to recognize and participate in this process of self-decolonization, Khatibi and Djebar effectively challenge Western readers to "decolonize" (i.e. liberate from Western hegemony) their own limited knowledge, their own preconceived notions about the identity of the Maghrebian Other.
Interview avec Abdelkébir Khatibi
Rabat, le 4 décembre 1990

P.G. Pourquoi, à votre avis, est-ce que l’autobiographie, ou le genre du "roman autobiographique," est une forme romanesque préférée pour tant d’écrivains maghrébins? Et vous-même, qu’est-ce qui vous a inspiré à donner un caractère autobiographique à votre premier texte de fiction?

A.K. Oui, on peut se poser la question—[...] mais peut-être il faut les comparer avec d’autres, comme dans votre pays—pourquoi ils écrivent et veulent présenter le contexte dans lequel ils vivent, la société, leur culture, et leur histoire, comme si une histoire, leur propre histoire personnelle, était de représenter l’histoire de ce pays, de cette culture. Moi, je pense qu’on ne veut pas se séparer de sa propre histoire, il y a une continuité.
Ils croient en somme, qu’il y a une continuité, et on se présente [...] dans un texte d’autobiographie avec tout le background, l’arrière-plan social, et culturel, comme si on présentait une pièce d’identité. C’est le problème d’identité, parce qu’on a peur de se séparer peut-être, de s’arracher de tout ce passé. Qu’alors, il y a autre chose, il y a plusieurs sortes d’autobiographies qui ont été écrites dans la littérature dite "maghrébine." Il y a ces autobiographies plus ou moins ethnographiques qui présentent le contexte [...] des caractéristiques, et les présentaient comme un travail sur soi, pas simplement une description, une narration de soi. Il y a un choix de certains événements, une mise en forme de ces événements mais tout en disant très nettement que c’est un travail sur soi et le travail sur soi d’ailleurs, aboutit à une transformation du texte. Par exemple, La Mémoire tatouée, comme je vous ai dit l’autre fois, dans une première partie on présente certains événements personnels ou historiques dans lesquels on a le sujet qui écrit et s’inscrit, et puis dans un deuxième ton, il vient un passage, un "pur récit" [...] qui se réfère à certaines questions, mais vues d’un point de vue plus abstrait qu’a été présenté dans la première partie. Par exemple, la question de la trace, la question du rapport de l’écrit de la trace, la mémoire, le signe—on parle
beaucoup du signe—la question du double, la figure du double, la différence, l'identité, tout ça, c'est traité dans la deuxième partie à un niveau extrêmement théorique.

Donc, dans cette autobiographie il y a une partie événementielle, il y a une partie d'élaboration de l'écriture comme si on est là, on montre comment on devient écrivain, comment un sujet écrivant se constitue, c'est ça. Donc, il y a un travail comme j'ai dit et il y a deux caractéristiques: un travail sur soi presque analytique parfois, et un travail donc, une constitution du sujet écrivant.

Alors, vous dites là que c'est mon premier texte littéraire, mais j'avais écrit des poèmes qui ont été publiés quand j'avais quatorze, quinze, seize ans dans les journaux. Donc, ma formation est une formation poétique. Mais dans le sens poétique que je veux dire par là, entre la prose et la poésie, il n'y a plus de différence; il y a ce qu'on peut appeler une "sensibilité pensante"... C'est cette sensibilité pensante qui m'intéresse dans la littérature, on pense à partir de ses émotions et de sa sensibilité. La pensée est suggérée elle-même par les sensibilités, les émotions. Il y a une écoute [...] écouter ce qui vibre dans sa propre sensibilité, mais disons il y a, ce que je pense, une
écoute de sa propre émotion, de sa sensibilité [...] 
Voilà, pour ce qui concerne l’autobiographie.

P.G. Le sous-titre de La Mémoire tatouée est "autobiographie d’un décolonisé." Est-ce qu’il existe un rapport entre l’écriture de soi et la décolonisation?

A.K. C’est-à-dire que, ça a été écrit après une période de "portraits" qu’on a laissé, soit des portraits, de ce type écrit par Sartre (portrait du Juif, de l’antisémite) des rapports donc de dominant et de dominé de Memmi sur le colonisé. Ce qui est important aussi pour nous, dans cette période, c’étaient des textes beaucoup plus proches pour moi, en particulier Nedima de Kateb et Cahier d’un retour au pays natal de Césaire [...]. Alors, il s’agit des autoportraits d’une sorte, et d’autobiographie. Il y a là, un autre côté, une autre opération. Le contexte de l’époque, c’était de se préciser par rapport à l’ancien dominant—c’est ça le plan. Moi, j’avais proposé un travail sur soi, c’est-à-dire que la colonisation est terminée à un certain niveau de gestion administrative, de la colonie à la métropole, mais les effets de cette colonisation ne sont pas du tout terminés et il s’agit de travailler pour se clarifier soit à sa propre rapport à la vie, soit par rapport à l’autre, aux autres (d’une
façon générale). Je crois que ce que j'avais proposé c'est donc un travail sur soi. C'est très net et je continue à le faire. En ce sens là, évidemment, j'ouvre des portes, je bouge. Voilà, disons que je travaille sur moi. Si un écrivain s'endort sur des questions, s'il s'assouplit, il va dormir.

Donc, il y a à la fois, la mise en jeu de soi, dans ce qu'on écrit. Je pense que cet interrogatoire a permis jusqu'à un certain point bien sûr, de faire une mise au point et au même temps de programmer—il y a un programme, presque un programme d'écriture pour un écrivain—certaines choses qui ont été réalisées: la question du signe, dont parle tout un travail de moi sur la calligraphie, la question de l'histoire, de la révolution, de la violence, ça j'ai traité certaines de ces choses dans *Maghreb pluriel*. [...] Ce n'est pas à dire qu'on est conscient complètement (ce serait impossible) de l'enjeu qui travaille quelqu'un.

La production dans une période déterminée de l'histoire, on n'est conscient qu'à un certain point. De toute façon, c'est le rapport de tout écrivain par rapport à sa période on peut dire oui, dans ce cas-là, il y a un rapport entre la décolonisation et l'écriture, mais c'est un rapport historique. Il y a eu des rapports beaucoup plus fondamentaux—j'allais dire
"métaphoriques"--mais des rapports essentiels, beaucoup plus profonds. Je veux, en général, joindre à travers des situations historiques, l'essentiel que vivent tous les hommes, donc c'est pourquoi je tiens beaucoup à la sensibilité pensante, à l'émotion, parce qu'elle est proche du corps, le sang, et de dire l'essentiel de tout cela du rapport de l'homme à la nature, de l'homme aux autres.

P.G. Alors, est-elle cathartique, l'autobiographie?

A.K. L'écriture en général. Ce que je vais vous dire, c'est qu'il y a plusieurs sortes d'écriture. Il y a l'écriture qui est un pur défolement où quelqu'un veut parler, qui souffre énormément, qui soit dans l'euphorie, dans la souffrance, et il se défole. Il y a aussi le niveau d'écriture où (à la fois) on se libère de quelque chose, on transforme cela--on en donne une forme. Donner forme, c'est déjà penser ce qu'on fait--je suis de ce côté-là, comme j'ai dit, il y a une sensibilité pensante, c'est-à-dire que le défolement pur, le délire pur ne m'intéressent pas. Ce ne sont que des brouillons pour moi, cela n'atteint pas la mise en forme. Donc, catharsis, oui, jusqu'à un certain point, mais ce qui m'intéresse, c'est d'aller au-delà. Le catharsis peut
être atteint de différentes manières. Je crois que l'écriture peut aider à ça, mais ce qui m'intéresse c'est la mise en forme—de lire le monde, de lire et de comprendre, et donc de le déchiffrer par la mise en forme...c'est au-delà du catharsis.

P.G. L'autobiographie est un genre littéraire où, en général, l'auteur écrit très "proche," très intimentement de lui-même, de faire ceci dans une langue non-maternelle, y a-t-il un risque? Quel est l'enjeu?

A.K. Oui, pour cela je me suis directement et indirectement expliqué dans *Amour bilingue*. L'essentiel qu'il faut retenir, c'est que cela peut se passer chez vous en Amérique, dans une famille par exemple, où on parle une langue indienne ou bien espagnol, et dans cette famille, imaginez cela—l'enfant écrit et apprend "l'américain" à l'école et il va parler espagnol ou indien dans sa famille. On parle dans une langue et on écrit dans une autre. Dans ce sens, les écrivains dits "maghrébins" étaient dans cette situation. C'est le rapport de l'écrit et de l'orale. Alors, le rapport peut être un rapport discontinu et donc qui crée des troubles d'identité et d'identification de quelque sorte, et comme il peut être une richesse, un plus si on dépasse le stade
où on risque de mélanger les langues. Justement, le bilinguisme c’est séparer les langues, ce n’est pas du tout les mélanger.

Le vrai bilinguisme c’est que chaque langue est dans son lieu et le bilingue passe son temps à séparer les langues. Quand il est plurilangue, il risque de tomber en confusion [...].

Donc, il y a effectivement [...] des identifications et des discontinuités entre l’écrit et l’oral, des troubles comme cela effectivement peut développer, ou de développer une personnalité originale, intéressante, et ouverte aux autres langues, au monde, développer une sensibilité enrichie justement par cet effort de séparer les langues.

Je crois que oui, il y a des risques mais il y a, à part des risques, des possibilités, potentialités de richesses, ça dépend de comment on travaille. Peut-être, ce que je propose—le travail sur soi—on se met à distance [...] C’est se regarder de l’extérieur. C’est impossible ce regard complètement de l’extérieur, mais essayez donc! Le travail sur soi, c’est un travail intérieur. C’est, d’ailleurs, ce que j’ai proposé le plus quand j’ai parlé du devoir de l’écrivain de ne pas s’endormir sur la nostalgie de la perte, sur la plainte
du crime contre l'autre, de qui est responsable, la souffrance, etc. [...] 

P.G. Dans votre livre *Le Roman maghrébin* vous avez parlé des romans de Chraibi (*Le Passé simple*) et de Memmi (*La Statue de Sel*), comme la deuxième phase du roman maghrébin, à savoir, le roman d'acculturation. Est-ce que *La Mémoire tatouée* est une réponse aux romans autobiographiques? Est-ce que *La Mémoire tatouée* représente "la troisième phase?"

A.K. Oui, peut-être l'autobiographie critique est la troisième phase. [...] Comme j'ai dit au début, c'est un travail sur soi, c'est une mise à distance et ça aide au même temps la constitution du sujet, de celui qui écrit, de l'écrivain. Donc, c'est cela, elle introduit la dimension d'autocritique.

Les textes de Memmi et de Chraibi parlent justement du Paternel, la figure du père, de l'autre minoritaire, de la société musulmane, colonisée par les Français. Moi, je parle de tout cela mais, au même temps, je suis d'une autre génération. Je suis ouvert à une question même plus radicale sur le geste d'écrire. Donc, chaque fois quand j'écris un texte, ce n'est pas pour raconter des choses... certaines choses sur le Maroc, sur moi-même
et le Maroc, mais je mets en jeu le rapport de l'écriture à ce qui est essentiel pour nous, c'est ce qui m'intéresse. Oui, c'est l'autobiographie critique.

P.G. Vers le début de La Mémoire tatouée vous avez écrit "je ne veux ni tuer, ni massacrer le père..." Cela m'a fait penser aux romans maghrébins où le conflit entre le père et le fils joue un grand rôle. Mais vous semblez dire là que, "Ce n'est pas mon problème."

A.K. C'est ça, je fais l'allusion à plusieurs choses. D'abord, mon père était mort, il est mort réellement. Deuxième chose, c'est une mise à distance d'un type de psychoanalyse du roman, ou bien c'est simplement une mise à distance des romans de révolte, donc, de la figure du père comme celle de Chraïbi.

J'élargis... c'est l'espace de l'écriture, l'espace de la rue, et du labyrinthe, donc, dans lesquelles les pères, et la famille, ils sont inscrits. J'ai élargi l'espace de l'écriture par rapport à la cellule oedipienne, ou pas par la cellule familiale mais je prends le large. Les deux positions, je suis fier ce dont je parle, mais mon point de vue, il va plutôt dans ce sens-là. Et d'ailleurs, je remplace la rue, l'espace de la rue, j'essaie de décrire d'une certaine manière
cette rue, dans la mesure où la cité marocaine est inscrite dans l'espace. Le mouvement, c'est l'histoire, le rapport de l'histoire à cette rue. Donc, c'est plus tard, j'ai écrit plus tard du Stockholm. C'est déjà dans La Mémoire tatouée où il y a des paradigmes spaciaux sur le rapport entre l'espace et l'écriture. [...] Je parle d'autres pays, des voyages, donc il y a ce problème d'espace [...] qui devrait être étudié.

P.G. La tradition du "regard dédouble" du romancier autobiographique est continuée aujourd'hui par les écrivains maghrébins. Pour vous, est-ce que le bilinguisme se traduit par ce regard dédouble et le thème du dédoublement de soi? Est-ce que vous avez traduit ce thème dans La Mémoire tatouée quand vous avez terminé "la série hasardeuse I" par "je donne la parole à un autre double," et par la partie du roman qui s'appelle "double contre double?"

A.K. La figure du double est très important, elle n'est pas seulement dans La Mémoire tatouée, elle est dans d'autres (Le Livre de Sang). La figure du double est dans l'histoire de la figure de l'Androgyne qui se constitue [...] entre deux reflets de la même identité. On se voit comme une ombre de quelque chose. Il y a
effectivement, ce qu'on peut appeler la division déjà dans le geste quand on parle une langue et qu'on écrit dans une autre. Pour rester dans le cadre de la littérature, c'est déjà une division. Et on se voit soi-même par exemple, dans cette situation; on se voit comme un Marocain, mais un Marocain transformé par l'histoire, par l'autre. Il y a quelque chose, mais il n'y a pas d'identité. C'est une identité transformée. On est plus ou moins marocain, mais on ne se sent plus tout à fait marocain comme celui qui (il n'existe pas) mais disons, qui n'a pas été transformé, qui est resté dans son identité d'origine. Donc il y a une origine transformée, une identité transformée et la figure du double vient s'en raciner [...] puisqu'il y a une identité et puis il y a des doubles. Dans La Mémoire tatouée il y a un jeu de retrouver le double contre double, c'est la scénographie de l'identité avec ses différents rôles. Le risque dont on a parlé tout à l'heure, c'est qu'il y a un effacement de l'identité, c'est-à-dire qu'on s'identifie à la figure du père, à la figure de sa propre société, en même temps on s'identifie à l'autre qui est le Français. C'est cette double identification qui provoque des doubles, elle est double déjà. La figure du double est déjà inscrite dans ce que j'ai dit: on parle une langue
et on écrit dans une autre. Le jeu du doublement est là, déjà, c'est comme si on se voyait.

P.G. Et pour vous, ce dédoublement n'est pas négatif comme une aliénation, comme Malek Haddad a décrit autrefois.

A.K. Moi, à mon avis, je ne me pose pas de questions, on est là où on est. On advient et on est. On ne peut pas transformer la date de sa naissance et l'histoire dans laquelle on naît. Donc, pour moi [...] il s'agit d'être là et pour moi, c'est déjà difficile, de le penser, de libérer l'énergie par rapport à cette position [...] Pour moi, ça ne se pose pas de cette façon.

P.G. La narration dans Amour bilingue oscille entre la première personne et la troisième personne, est-ce que le "je" de ce récit est autobiographique? Si oui, dans quel sens est-ce que c'est autobiographique?

A.K. Le "je" n'est pas un moi autobiographique, ou ils le sont tous les deux. Seulement, je sais et vous savez, je crois, que Blanchot a écrit là-dessus, et Benveniste aussi. Effectivement, le "je," c'est parler d'une certaine manière. Il y a une proximité, une sorte
d'intimité. Il y a un ton, une certaine voix du narrateur "je," le narrateur qu'on ne trouve pas, le "il," c'est déjà le récit avec un regard, en effet, l'auteur, c'est le narrateur silencieux. Il parle de son "je," il dit "Bon, j'écris sur..."

C'est vrai, le "je" dans ce sens-là, plus profondément que la question... c'est un problème de temps, d'intimité, et il y a des choses qu'on dit plus facilement avec le général "je" plutôt qu'"il." Donc là, une autobiographie propose un travail sur soi, vous pouvez suivre qui est en position du "je," ou "il," sans vous préoccuper de ce qui est autobiographique dans le sens stricte. Comment eux, le "je" il est "il," et le "nous," le "tu," travaillent, se positionnent et comment ils sont entraînés à se dialoguer, à se séparer, comme un mouvement musical. Comme ça, c'est plus intéressant à mon avis. Travaillez, donc, textuellement; c'est pourquoi à un certain moment, le "je," se développe plutôt là en parlant de telles choses plutôt que de telles autres, pourquoi le "il" vient et émerge là, autour d'une phrase. […] À la fin du livre, on dit "Apprends-moi à parler dans tes langues." Qu'est-ce que c'est, cet "apprends-moi?" L'interlocuteur, même là, c'est le lecteur anonyme qui est interpellé. À la fin, […] (avec "apprends-moi...") il y a la rupture, quelque
chose a été mené jusqu’au bout et puis il y a l’ouverture vers le monde, vers les langues. Alors, pour revenir aux "je," "tu," "il," et tous les pronoms, ils sont travaillés dans leurs positions, dans la scénographie, dans le mouvement et le rythme dans lesquels ils s’inscrivent. C’est important, pourquoi certaines scènes reviennent, à savoir, sont indexées par le "il" plutôt et d’autres par le "je." Est-ce qu’il y a des ressemblances dans le système? Est-ce qu’il y a une continuité? C’est là un travail qui me paraît enfin...plus riche.

P.G. L’image, ou le symbole du palimpseste se trouve plusieurs fois chez les écrivains maghrébins (Khatibi, Meddeb, Djebar). Croyez-vous que ceci vient du bilinguisme, c’est-à-dire, que la langue maternelle est "à l’œuvre dans la langue étrangère"? Quelle est, pour vous, l’importance ou la signification du palimpseste?

A.K. Le palimpseste, d’abord c’est le tableau à l’école coranique que j’avais fréquenté. Il y a une planche sur laquelle on écrit, on efface, et il reste des traces—ça c’est le palimpseste. Il y a des traces et on écrit là-dessus de nouveau, sur la planche du bois; on écrit avec l’encre. Donc, déjà quelque chose du mouvement de l’effacement existe dans toute écriture. Alors, là, ce
qui se passe, c'est qu'une langue qu'on apprend--dans laquelle on écrit par exemple--vient transformer son propre rapport à la langue qu'on parle et qui est la langue parlée, c'est-à-dire, la langue maternelle. Ce n'est pas simplement une juxtaposition, il y a une transformation de l'une par l'autre et [...] au même temps, la langue maternelle parlée ou écrite, transforme, elle est là dans la langue écrite. Cela, c'est très intéressant d'étudier ce rapport entre les langues qui se séparent et quand ils se travaillent directement et indirectement. Moi, j'ai fait travailler parfois directement. Il y a des phrases coraniques, des contes, des dictons, et puis, ce qui est travaillé inconsciemment, ça je ne peux pas...j'en saisis certaines choses. Mais, pour revenir à votre question de palimpseste et la figure du double, le problème de la dilution et de l'effacement, et de la trace, et l'effacement de la trace, le problème de la dilution de l'identité, c'est peut-être une peur, justement, quand deux langues ne sont pas séparées, mais ça provoque une peur de la dilution de l'identité. Donc, c'est la raison pour le travail de séparation. Dans Amour bilingue il n'y a presque pas de mots arabes. Moi, en général, j'utilise peu. Dans La Mémoire tatouée il y en a quelques-uns. Je préfère séparer, pas comme les
premiers livres (de Sefrioui, des livres ethnographiques) même Feraoun et d’autres [...].

P.G. En qui concerne les écrivains maghrébins, vous avez parlé dans l’essai "Nationalisme et internationalisme littéraires," de "La mémoire écrite," et d’"écrire, réperer les traces d’une mémoire écrite." Est-ce que vous parlez de l’écriture autobiographique? Est-ce que c’est cela le sens de l’image que suggère le titre: La Mémoire tatouée?

A.K. Non, il s’agit de toute écriture [...]. L’écriture c’est la trace, [...] de la sensibilité, de l’émotion, la trace d’une traduction de notre rapport au monde. Et il y a une constitution d’une mémoire, qui se fait dans l’écriture. Mais cette mémoire effectivement, une partie devient illisible. Donc, il y a toujours une mémorisation. L’écriture à la naissance, je veux dire qu’à la naissance de l’histoire de l’écriture (analytique) était une mémorisation, on mémorisait, selon les historiens de la critique—on mémorisait les chiffres, la comptabilité [...].

Toujours, dans le geste d’écriture (de la trace), il y a de la mémorisation, la volonté de mémoriser, de parler plus haut. Donc, c’est un geste, à mon avis, qui
compte spécialement [...]. Comme ça, l'autobiographie est dans toute écriture. Les sociétés qui n'ont pas mémorisé par l'écriture—comme chez vous, les indiens, par exemple—ils ont été marginalisé, écartés par l'histoire.

Donc, l'écriture était toujours la force, et la mémorisation d'une civilisation. C'est la même chose pour l'individu, il ne veut pas oublier. Mais, ce n'est pas à dire que ce qu'il écrit c'est ce qu'il ne veut pas oublier [...], c'est plus profond. Mais en tout cas, quand on trouve au moins la trace, c'est à un lecteur ou à un analyste de voir ce qu'il y a derrière cette mémoire. Pour moi, c'est un rapport entre la situation historique particulière et le geste d'écriture. Mais à travers ce rapport, effectivement, j'essaie de rejoindre l'état de naissance, c'est ça. C'est Jacques Berque qui m'a intéressé à cela, [...] devant le temps ou l'espace qui essaie de rejoindre la mienne.

P.G. Et toujours dans ce même essai, vous avez écrit: "Ce n'est pas un hasard si des écrivains maghrébins sont captivés par l'autobiographie. Ecrire dans une langue qui était étrangère, est une façon de fonder la légitimité de l'acte d'écriture..." Quel est le rapport que vous établissez ici entre l'acte d'écriture et l'acte
autobiographique. Est-ce que c'est plus que l'établissement de la subjectivité de l'écrivain?

A.K. [...] Je souligne simplement le mot était, c'est-à-dire qu'elle n'est plus étrangère, elle était au départ, mais elle est devenue notre langue, notre langue très proche. Mais elle transforme son rapport à la langue maternelle, donc il n'y a pas une langue maternelle et une langue étrangère dans ce cas-là, il y a une relation de transformation, une double transformation.

[...] Ce qui serait intéressant, serait de traiter ce rapport-là, mais aller au bout de ce qui est dit, ce qui est réellement dit sur le monde, il ne faut pas rester sur la surface parce que ça peut cacher beaucoup de choses, surtout son propre rapport au monde. En plus, c'est une période (colonisée) qui est dépassée. Ceux qui ont parlé de cette littérature n'ont pas dit grande chose à mon avis; c'étaient des trucs superficiels [...]. Ils peuvent aller au-delà, il ne faut pas rester prisonnier de la surface, il faut voir ce qui est derrière.

P.G. Vous avez déclaré dans une interview en 1977 avec Lamalif, que "l'Autre est inscrit en moi." Est-ce que l'Autre est présent aussi dans un texte autobiographique?
Est-ce qu’il y a l’interlocuteur "tu" pour celui qui dit/écrit "je," comme a suggéré Emile Benveniste?

A.K. Pour l’Autre, il faut que je vous renvoie au texte *Figure de l’Étranger*, c’est là où j’ai parlé, c’est là où il faut regarder de près pour voir l’autre comme trait, comme trace, comme troisième terme de soi-à-soi. Et qui n’est pas simplement vue de l’extérieur, mais qui est inscrit dans une séparation de moi-à-moi. [...]

C’est dans cette séparation de soi-à-soi que jaillit l’étranger...l’autre. Donc, je vais loin, l’autre est inscrit dans la division du sujet. [...] Ce que j’introduis, c’est peut-être ce que j’analyse en particulier par rapport au Maghreb.

P.G. Vers la fin de *La Mémoire tatouée*, le narrateur dialogue avec l’Occident, avec la figure de l’Occident. L’Occident n’est pas le seul Autre pour vous, n’est-ce pas?

A.K. Oui, bien sûr, surtout dans le texte dont vous parlez. Il y a toujours un troisième terme. Il y a une ouverture sur le non-Occident, sur l’Inde, le Japon, et la Chine. Oui, de ce côté-là, l’Occident est essentiel dans la constitution du monde, mais [...] c’est limité. On ne peut pas apprendre tout, il y a une mixité
apprentissage et je pense que c’est bien d’avoir quelques pôles de référence pour comparer, pour voir ce qu’il y a de commun; je travaille de ce sens-là.

P.G. Est-ce que l’Occident dans La Mémoire tatouée est une figure féminine?

A.K. Ah oui, cela, c’est une métaphore, mais je ne peux pas dire si c’est masculin ou féminin. Certains traits sont masculins, d’autres sont féminins. Le problème c’est d’identifier la métaphore. C’est possible, mais ça n’aide pas beaucoup d’être psychanalyste, d’aller de ce côté-là, parce qu’il faut rester au niveau de la littérature et de voir les métaphores, comment elles se construisent, et de voir comment la figure du féminin jaillit de l’écriture. Oui, il serait intéressant de voir le féminin, le paternel, et tout ça, ce sera bien de voir—mais à partir de l’écriture, pas de l’extérieur.

P.G. L’autobiographie, qui implique aussitôt le "regard dédouble sur soi," est-ce qu’il y a un rapport ici avec "la double critique" que vous développez dans un essai dans Maghreb pluriel?

A.K. [...] J’essaie de développer un troisième terme, me créer un chemin, une espace entre deux identités déjà
constituées. [...] Donc, cela demande une pensée particulière et une mise en forme littéraire particulière dans sa spécificité. Que la spécificité soit un élément essentiel, oui, mais quand même, il y ait une spécificité. Effectivement, cette spécificité, c’est un Marocain, né au début de la guerre, il trouve la guerre, il trouve une société coloniale, il va à l’école, il fait ses études, il y a des troubles, les choses continuent, il y a la libération, de quoi par rapport à quoi? Il y a quelque chose qui avance... Mais il faut trouver toutes les paroles pour ça, ses paroles il ne pouvait plus les trouver d’une manière traditionnelle marocaine parce qu’il y a eu l’intervention de l’Autre. Mais non plus, on ne peut pas parler comme si on était l’Autre. Donc, il est trouvé, c’est un lieu précis, spécifique de paroles, qui rejoint effectivement, l’essentiel. Mais quand même, il y a une spécificité un peu particulière et j’essaie de l’explorer. C’est pour cela que c’est une quête, c’est une quête pour trouver une parole et une écriture plus exacte. Je ne sais qu’explorer, moi.

P.G. Est-ce que c’est aussi le sens de—comme vous avez dit: "la troisième oreille?"
A.K. Par exemple, cela peut être cela, il y a plein de trucs que je cherche. Je cherche, dans une quête et je sais que je vais trouver des choses [...]. L’essentiel pour moi, ce que je cherche, c’est trouver, ou d’inventer dans des situations particulières, une parole qui est exacte, la plus proche de ça. Voilà, cela m’intéresse, donc c’est normal que j’essaie de trouver la constitution d’un troisième terme.

P.G. Dans la lettre-préface à Violence du texte de Gontard, vous avez écrit: "La langue maternelle est à l’oeuvre dans la langue étrangère. De l’une à l’autre se déroule une traduction permanente, qui est un entretien en abyme, extrêmement difficile à mettre au jour..." Jusqu’à quel niveau, quelle étendue est-ce que l’arabe (classique ou dialectal) est présent dans votre écriture? Est-ce qu’il vous est possible d’être pleinement conscient de cette "mixité" de langues?

A.K. Comme j’ai dit: oui et non. Oui dans la mesure que je provoque la langue française par des greffes, des mots greffés, des expressions. Donc je vois l’effet, je peux l’analyser, les effets travaillés. Non, dans la mesure où il y a des niveaux, la langue que j'avais appris, elle travaille, disons, dans le
rythme donc conscient et inconscient de tout cela. Si on était pleinement conscient de ce que c’est l’écriture, on n’écrirait pas. [...] Il y a des niveaux, sans provoquer en quelque sorte, que je laisse venir un mot, et je les laisse travailler [...] et je ne fais pas attention. Richard Howard a traduit le livre Amour bilingue. Je me suis aperçu que dans la deuxième ou troisième page, je parle du mot kalma, kalima, et je parle du personnage: il se calma, mais je n’ai pas fait attention. [...] C’est Eric Sellin qui croyait que je l’avais fait exprès, mais j’ai dit non, pas du tout. [...] Alors, il n’y a pas de maîtrise.

Il y a quelque chose que j’ai failli oublier, c’est la figure du double, figure de l’androgyne, de l’ombre, du voile, etc. Par exemple, Le Prophète voilé il est son propre double. C’est effectivement une notion à creuser de près. C’est une notion du tao, du clair et obscur aussi. Il y a toute une théorisation de l’écriture, par exemple, les textes qui sont apparemment loin de la littérature, à savoir, la calligraphie. Ce n’est pas de l’écriture dans le sens matériel. Il m’a attiré, qu’est-ce que c’est que le graphe, j’en parle d’ailleurs, dans La Figure de l’étranger. Je parle souvent de la calligraphie, des formes, de ce qu’elle est [...].
P.G. Provocation, c'était le projet de la revue Souffles n'est-ce pas? Une transformation de la langue française?

A.K. Oui, je n'étais pas tout à fait dans le groupe avec eux. Je les ai aidé un peu, mais nous n'avons pas eu la même manière de voir les choses. Mais, bon, on avait des choses en commun. Il m'a paru dérisoire, la position qu'ils avaient eu. Ils voulaient retourner "un défi." Moi, ce n'est pas le défi qui m'intéresse--c'est la transformation. J'évite d'utiliser directement des expressions arabes, cela m'est arrivé, mais quand c'est nécessaire. J'écris, au contraire, dans une langue très épurée, un français très travaillé. [...] Donc, c'est une langue pleine de poésie, comme Mallarmé. De ce côté-là, c'est très clair, je ne retourne pas la langue d'une façon dérisoire, contre elle-même. Au contraire, je travaille avec la langue française [...]. J'étais assez loin de leur position. J'avais écrit des analyses critiques, littéraires de temps en temps, mais c'est tout.

Fin d'Interview
Primary Works:


---. **Ombres japonaises, précédé de: Nuits blanches.**

---. "Présentation;" "Repères." **La Mémoire tatouée.**


---. **Portrait du colonisé, précédé du portrait du colonisateur.** 2e éd. Préface de J.-P. Sartre.


**General Critical Works:**


Itinéraires et Contacts de Cultures vol. 10-11. "Littératures maghrébines: Colloque Jacqueline
Arnaud (Villetaneuse, décembre 1987)" 2 tomes. 


---. "A Propos de la littérature marocaine d'expression française." Actes 393-402.


---. "Image de l’autre dans les romans maghrébins de langue française." Droixhe 191-201.


---. "Women in the Muslim History: Traditional Perspectives and New Strategies." Kleinberg 338-55.


Oeuvres et Critiques IV. 2 (1979) "La Littérature Maghrébine de langue française devant la critique."


**Autobiography:**


Summer, Doris. "'Not just a Personal Story,' Women's Testimonios and the Plural Self." Brodzki 107-30.


Assia Djebar:


Abdelkébir Khatibi:


---. "Incipits." Bennani 171-95.


Kilito, Abdelfattah. "La langue de sirènes." Imaginaires


Interviews with Khatibi


